

Police investigating the murder of a soldier hacked to death on a busy London street were looking yesterday into whether the two suspected killers, British men of Nigerian descent, were part of a wider conspiracy, reported Reuters.

The two suspects, aged 22 and 28, are under guard in hospitals after being shot and arrested by police following the murder of 25-year-old Afghan war veteran Lee Rigby on Wednesday in broad daylight. They have not yet been charged.

Britain's intelligence services came under pressure on Friday to explain how they let two Islamic extremists suspected of hacking a soldier to death in the streets of London slip through their net, reported AFP.

A parliamentary committee will look into the role of the security services, but communities minister Eric Pickles said even if the men had been known to intelligence agencies, it was impossible to keep tabs on everyone all the time.

Detectives were also questioning another man and a woman, arrested on Thursday on suspicion of conspiracy to murder, as they tried to determine whether those responsible had links to militants in Britain or overseas.

One of the assailants, filmed justifying the killing as he stood near the body holding a knife and meat cleaver in bloodied hands, was named by acquaintances as 28-year-old Londoner Michael Adebolajo, a British-born convert to Islam.

Little is known so far about the other man.

The murder, just a month after the Boston Marathon bombing and the first Islamist killing in Britain since local suicide bombers killed 52 people in London in 2005, revived fears of "lone wolves" who may have had no direct contact with al Qaeda.

Police chiefs said they would have 1,200 extra officers on the streets in London overnight and at key locations such as religious venues and transport hubs.

NEWSIN

brief

Highway bridge collapses in US

AP, Mount Vernon, Washington

The major highway bridge linking Seattle with Canada and the rest of the Pacific Northwest region collapsed Thursday evening, dumping at least a handful of vehicles and people into a river, the Washington State Patrol said. There were no immediate reports of deaths, and three people were taken to hospitals.

The four-lane Interstate 5 bridge more than half a century old collapsed about halfway between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, Trooper Mark Francis said.

Sweden's riots raise questions

AP, Husby

Sweden has long been a bastion of generous social welfare and an egalitarian political culture. So many people were shocked when scores of youths hurled rocks at police and set cars ablaze during rioting in several largely immigrant areas near Stockholm this week.

Few dispute that the violence was probably touched off by the fatal police shooting of an elderly man who had locked himself in an apartment wielding a knife. But some residents in the area accused police who responded to the violence of racism.

300,000 displaced in Darfur: UN

AFP, Khartoum

A resurgence of fighting in Sudan's western Darfur region has driven 300,000 people from their homes so far this year, UN humanitarian aid chief Valerie Amos said on Thursday.

She was speaking at the end of a three-day visit to Sudan during which she visited a camp for displaced people in Darfur.

In April, the United Nations said 50,000 people from southwestern Darfur had fled to neighbouring Chad because of fighting between two feuding Arab tribes -- the

Higher IQ link to good concentration

BBC ONLINE

People with higher IQs are slow to detect large background movements because their brains filter out non-essential information, say US researchers.

Instead, they are good at detecting small moving objects.

The findings come in a study of 53 people given a simple, visual test in Current Biology.

The results could help scientists understand what makes a brain more efficient and more intelligent.

In the study, individuals watched short video clips of black and white bars moving across a computer screen. Some clips were small and filled only the centre of the screen, while others filled the whole screen.

Germany most popular country: poll

AFP, London

Germany is the most popular country in the world despite well-publicised protests against its insistence on austerity measures within the European Union, an annual poll for the BBC World Service revealed on Thursday.

More than 26,000 people from around the world were asked to rate 16 countries on whether their global influence was "mainly positive" or "mainly negative".

Some 59 percent of those polled rated Germany as having a positive influence, while at the other end of the spectrum, Iran came last with only 15 percent looking upon it favourably.

Genetics of white tigers pinpointed

BBC ONLINE

Chinese scientists have acquired new insights into how white tigers get their colouration.

The researchers have traced the cause to a single change in a gene known to drive pigmentation in a host of animals, including humans.

White tigers are a rare variant of the customary orange Bengal sub-species.

Today, they are found exclusively in captive programmes where the limited numbers are interbred to

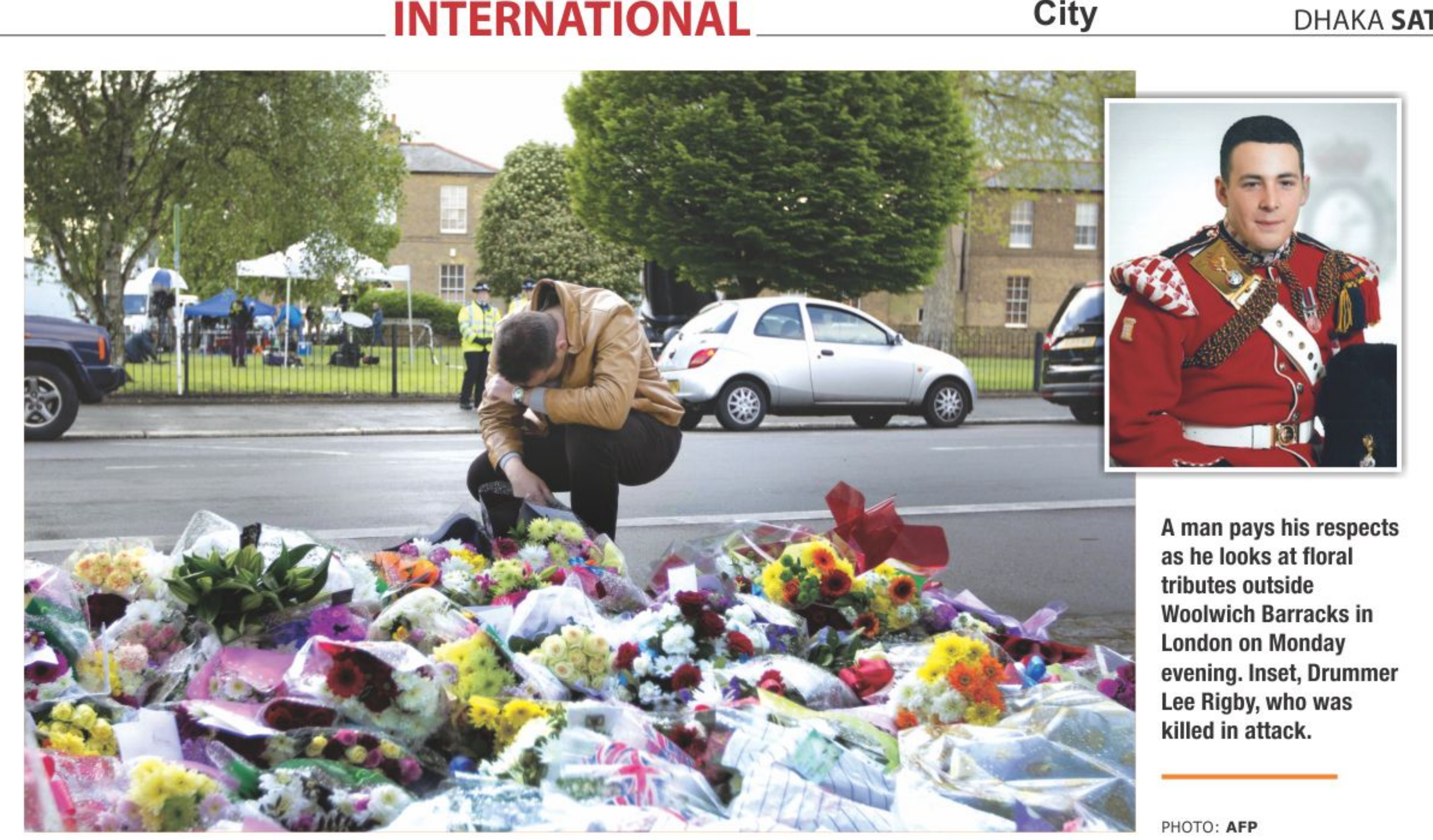


PHOTO: AFP

A man pays his respects as he looks at floral tributes outside Woolwich Barracks in London on Monday evening. Inset, Drummer Lee Rigby, who was killed in attack.

Syria opposition sceptical

Russia says regime will attend peace talks

AFP, Istanbul

Syria's divided opposition yesterday called on the regime of President Bashar al-Assad to bluntly state whether it was interested in peace talks and on what terms rather than use ally Moscow as its mouthpiece.

Louay Safi, spokesman for the Western-backed National Coalition, the main opposition group, issued the call after Russia said Damascus had agreed "in principle" to attend a peace conference in Geneva.

"We would like to hear that statement from the Assad government," said Safi, whose group is meeting in Istanbul to determine whether to attend the conference.

"This has been related to us through the Russians, I have no idea why the Syrians are silent."

The peace conference, which according to some media reports has tentatively been scheduled for June 10, is aimed at putting an end to more than two years of bloodshed in Syria that has left more than 90,000 people dead.

The conference was jointly proposed by Russia, a key backer Assad, and the United States, which supports the rebels fighting to overthrow his regime.

Russian foreign ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said Russia had received the Damascus government's agreement to take part in the Geneva conference

during a visit to Moscow by Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Muqdad.

"We note with satisfaction that we have received an agreement in principle from Damascus to attend the international conference in the interest of the Syrians themselves finding a political path to resolve the conflict," Lukashevich told reporters.

Russia is seen as the nation exercising the strongest influence over the Syrian regime thanks to years of military and other cooperation that stretches back to Soviet times.

Moscow has in recent weeks also been keen to show its diplomatic influence in the region by ensuring that Assad's representatives attended a conference agreed this month by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his US counterpart John Kerry.

But Lukashevich said reports of a date having been set for the conference in Geneva were premature and "cannot be taken seriously".

"Demands to immediately name a specific date for the conference without having clarity about who -- and with what authority -- will speak in the name of the opposition, cannot be taken seriously," Lukashevich said.

The Syrian opposition and its backers, including the United States, has insisted that any transition talks must lead to Assad's ouster. The Syrian leader, however, has said he won't leave before elections are held in his country.

IRANIAN PRESIDENTIAL POLLS

Kerry slams barring of candidates

AFP, Tel Aviv

US Secretary of State John Kerry slammed Iran yesterday for its barring of would-be candidates for a presidential election next month.

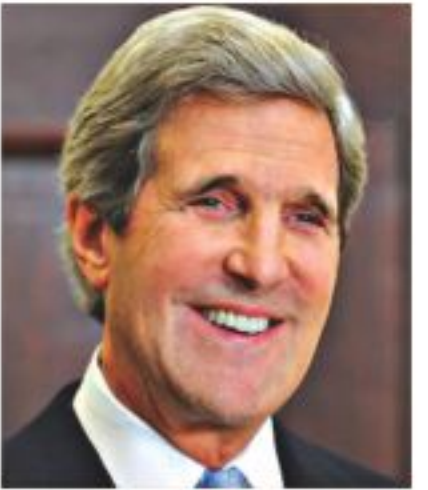
"I cannot think of anyone in the world... who would not be amazed by a process in which an unelected Guardian Council, which is unaccountable to the Iranian people, has disqualified... hundreds of potential candidates according to vague criteria," he said at a news conference in Tel Aviv.

"The council narrowed a list of almost 700 candidates down to... officials of their choice, based solely on who represents the regime's interests, rather than who might represent some different point of view among the Iranian people," Kerry said.

"The lack of transparency makes it highly unlikely that that slate of candidates is either going to represent the broad will of the Iranian people or represent a change," the top US diplomat added.

Kerry spoke at the end of a visit to meet Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem and Ramallah respectively.

Ahead of Iran's June 14 election to replace President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the conservative-dominated Guardians Council winnowed the candidate field from 686 to eight, all of whom are close to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.



I won't be soft like my mother

Says Rahul Gandhi

HIDUSTAN TIMES ONLINE

Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi sent out an unusually blunt message to his party colleagues on Thursday, promising to be tougher than his mother in dealing with factionalism and indiscipline.



"I will not be soft like my mother. I will stringently deal with factionalism," Gandhi told the state Congress leaders, party sources told HT.

Meeting Congress MPs, MLAs, councillors and party functionaries from Delhi at the state Congress office, Gandhi said he would tackle indiscipline with an iron hand.

With early Lok Sabha elections a possibility and Delhi assembly polls due in November this year, Gandhi insisted on strengthening the state leadership and better coordination between the party and the government.

"He woke up all of us. We will fight elections together," Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit told reporters after the meeting.

Gandhi's call for better co-ordination between the party and the Delhi government comes after reported differences between Dikshit and Delhi Pradesh Congress president and MP Jai Prakash Aggarwal.



Tang Zhengping with his wind-powered car

Farmer builds wind-powered car

STAR DESK

A 55-year-old Chinese farmer has come up with a unique invention that might just make him a millionaire.

This isn't the first time we've seen vehicles that run on alternative fuel sources, but Tang Zhengping's invention is really something else.

The car he built in three months is 1m high, 3m long and powered by wind.

But the best part is this -- it has the potential to reach a speed of 90mph.

This does seem too good to be true for a wind-powered vehicle, but Zhengping from Beijing, the city that hosts the largest car show in the world, has a different story to tell.

According to Zhengping, the vehicle runs on electric generators and batteries, which are recharged by the large fan spinning in the front of the vehicle.

CHINESE PM IN SWITZERLAND

Swiss-China trade deal in July

AFP, Berne

Switzerland and China could sign a landmark free-trade agreement as early as July, the Alpine country said yesterday, as Beijing seeks to underscore its growing global ties via deals with European partners.

With China's Premier Li Keqiang in Switzerland for high-level talks, the Swiss news agency ATS quoted Economy Minister Johann Schneider-Ammann as saying he aimed to ink the deal during a visit to Beijing in July.

"China is our top commercial partner in Asia," Schneider-Ammann underlined, during talks with Li and members of Switzerland's financial sector, a driving force of its economy.

Li lauded Switzerland as a "global financial centre" and said Beijing aimed to draw lessons from a formal dialogue.

China is reforming its financial sector, notably concerning interest rates and trading in its currency, the yuan.

As Beijing ponders allowing selected offshore centres to trade in yuan, the Swiss National Bank's chief Thomas Jordan said

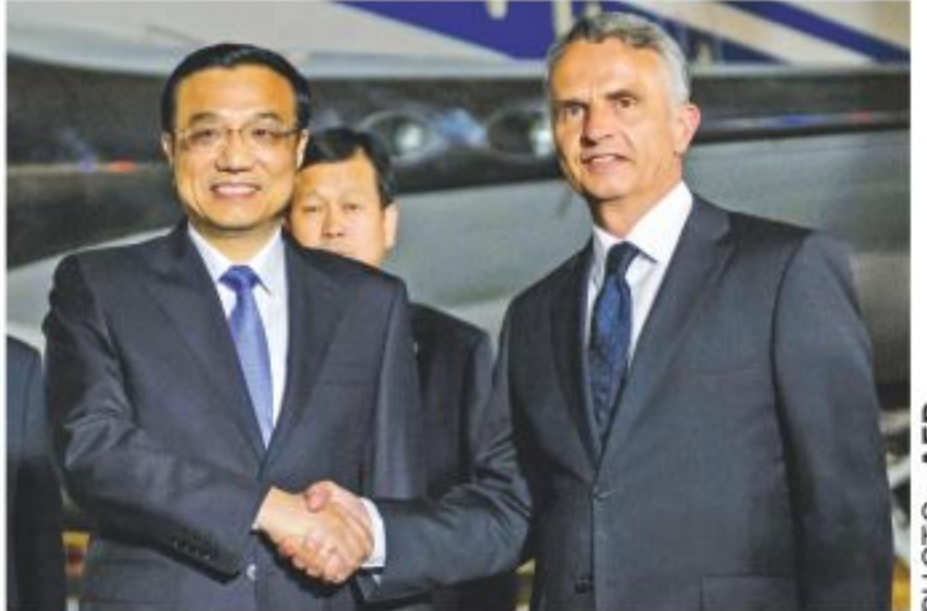


PHOTO: AFP

Chinese PM is welcomed by Swiss Foreign Minister at Zurich Airport.

Switzerland hoped to do so.

Li arrived in Switzerland late Thursday on the first stop of his debut visit to Europe since taking the helm in March in Beijing's once-in-a-decade power transfer.

On Saturday he heads to Germany, China's main European trade partner.

Unlike Germany, Switzerland is not a member of the European Union, and Li's visit comes a month after China signed a free trade deal with Iceland, which likewise stands outside the 27-nation EU bloc.

Magnitude 8.2 quake strikes Russia

REUTERS, Moscow

A magnitude 8.2 earthquake struck off Russia's eastern coast on Friday, briefly prompting a tsunami scare but causing no casualties or substantial damage, Russian emergency authorities said.

The epicentre of the quake was located at a depth of 385 miles in the Sea of Okhotsk, 244 miles west of the nearest city, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, the US Geological Survey said.

The quake was felt in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, the main city on the Kamchatka peninsula and home to a nuclear submarine base, and on Sakhalin island, where Russia's largest liquefied natural gas project is located.

Regional emergency authorities issued a tsunami warning for Sakhalin and the Kurile islands, advising residents of dangerous areas to seek high ground, but lifted the warning several minutes later.

Oklahoma mourns, rebuilds amid storms

AFP, Moore

Relief workers and clean-up crews defied thunderstorms Thursday while families and friends gathered for the funeral of one of the Oklahoma tornado's youngest victims.

Heavy rain and lightning at dawn threatened to upset Moore's long trail back to normality, with police at one point closing flash-flooded streets in the residential city of 56,000 struggling to get back on its feet.

The tornado, one of the most powerful in recent years, killed 24 people, injured 377, damaged or destroyed 1,200 homes and affected an estimated 33,000 people in this Oklahoma City suburb, officials said in their latest update.

Initial damages have been estimated at around \$2 billion.

Volunteers from the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and other charities fanned out with food, water and tools. Insurance claims adjusters tallied up losses.



Crosses were placed in memory of the 7 kids who lost their lives in the tornado.

PHOTO: AFP

N Korean envoy meets China president

AFP, Beijing

A North Korean envoy met China's President Xi Jinping yesterday and handed him a letter from leader Kim Jong-Un, Chinese state media reported, in a sign Pyongyang may be backing away from confrontation with the international community.

Choe Ryong-Hae told Xi that North Korea is willing to take positive actions to solve problems through dialogue, the official Xinhua news agency said, after months of high tensions over Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

The report did not disclose the contents of the letter.

But it quoted Choe as saying dialogue included the long-stalled six-party talks aimed at Pyongyang's denuclearisation, which are chaired by China and also bring together North Korea, South Korea, the United States, Russia and Japan.

Choe also said that North Korea needs to create a peaceful regional environment as well as developing its economy and improve its people's livelihoods.

A vice marshal and director of the Korean People's Army's General Political Bureau, Choe is said to be a close confidant of Kim, who has led North Korea for more than a year since the death of his father Kim Jong-Il in late 2011.

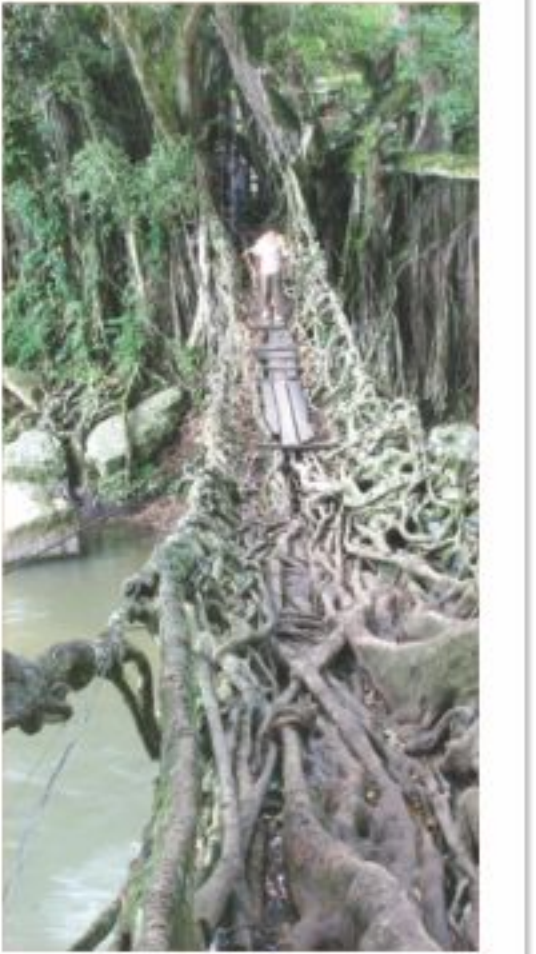
China is North Korea's key economic benefactor and diplomatic protector. Analysts had said they were watching who in the Chinese heirarchy Choe would get to meet for clues concerning the visit's ultimate success.

ODDLY enough

Tree root bridge!

STAR DESK

For the last hundred years, the residents of two tiny Indonesian villages in West Sumatra have used a 30-meter-long bridge formed from the interconnected roots of two trees located on each side of a fast-flowing river, to reach each other and trade supplies.



Today, the natural wonder known as "Jembatan Akar" has become a popular tourist attraction.

According to locals the amazing tree root bridge was built in 1890, by Pakih Sohan, a Muslim teacher from Lubuak Glare, disappointed by the fact that students from Pulut-pulut couldn't attend his classes on Islam and Quran recitations due to the Batang Bayang river that separated the two settlements.

He planted two small Jawi-jawi - a type of broad-leaf banyan tree - and started stringing their roots around a stem bridge made of bamboo.