Indian flood toll mounts to 150

PTI, Dehradun/new Delhi

With skies clearing, rescue of stranded people and relief operations intensified yesterday in Uttarakhand in India where the death toll in the rain and floods shot up to 150 as thousands of pilgrims still remained stranded.

Reports suggested that the famous Kedarnath shrine, where 50 people died in the landslide that accompanied torrential rain and flash floods, is intact notwithstanding the heavy damage all around.

With rains ceasing in the last two days, there were no fresh incidents of landslides and flooding.

Accompanied by Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made an aerial survey of the worst-hit areas.

It would take one year to

restore normalcy on the road to Kedarnath from the after effects of the cloud burst which he described as a "Himalayan tsunami". 22 killed in Nepal At least 22 people have been killed in landslides and floods triggered by heavy monsoon rain in remote parts of Nepal, a government spokesman said yesterday. More than 100 homes have also been damaged by the floods.

AFP, Washington

leaked programs.

to be more transparent with users.

America safe since 2001.

Post earlier this month.

Secret US surveillance has foiled more than 50 terror plots

since 2001, including a planned bomb attack on the New

York Stock Exchange, a US spy chief said Tuesday, defending

Google, meanwhile, asked a federal surveillance court to

grant it permission to release the number of national secu-

rity requests and secret court orders it has received in order

Since the disclosure of vast government surveillance pro-

grams targeting phone logs and Internet data, Silicon Valley

firms have scrambled to respond to users angered by per-

ceived privacy violations. The government has defended the

Alexander described four thwarted plots, including a plan to

bomb the New York subway he called "the first core al-

Qaeda plot since 9/11, directed from Pakistan."

at least 10 threats were "homeland-based."

National Security Agency Director General Keith

Alexander, FBI Deputy Director Sean Joyce and others

"In recent years, the information gathered from these

defended the digital snooping, which they insisted has kept

programs provided the US government with critical leads to

help prevent over 50 potential terrorist events in more than

20 countries around the world," Alexander said, adding that

He told the House Intelligence Committee that most

The controversy over the spying programs erupted after

rogue defense contractor Edward Snowden leaked details of

them to Britain's Guardian newspaper and The Washington

details were classified and would not be made public.

programs as fully legal and vital to preventing terror attacks.

NEWSIN brief

lmran sworn in as Pak MP

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani politician Imran Khan yesterday urged the government and military leaders to build a strategy to halt US drone attacks in the country's northwest as he was sworn into parliament.

Khan, the head of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party which made a major breakthrough at the May 11 general election, couldn't take the oath on June 1 for health reasons.

Shebab attacks UN compound

AFP, Mogadishu

Somalia's al-Qaeda linked Shebab insurgents yesterday said they had attacked and shot their way into a key United Nations compound in the capital Mogadishu, the first major attack in recent years targeting the UN.

An AFP reporter said a loud explosion had been heard followed by heavy gunfire from the complex -home to UN humanitarian agencies. A UN source in Nairobi said that "all staff are in a safe room" inside the compound.

US confidence in newspapers hits new low

AFP, Washington

Confidence in newspapers has taken another hit among Americans, dropping to 23 percent, according to a new survey.

That compares to confidence levels of 25 percent in 2012 and 28 percent in 2011, said the Gallup poll.

The latest figure is just above the all-time low of 22 percent in 2007, but the downward trend has been generally steady since 1979, when it stood at 51 percent.

Assange marks 1 year in embassy

AFP, London

A year after seeking refuge at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, Julian Assange remains fearful of US "revenge" over the WikiLeaks disclosures and aware that the diplomatic deadlock over his case may continue

for months, if not years. Assange was arrested in London on December 7, 2010, on a warrant issued by Sweden, where he is wanted for questioning for the alleged sexual assault of two women.



NSA spy programs US, Taliban talks foiled 50 plots

Karzai scraps talks with US saying process not Afghan-led

draw afghan fury

emergency supplies yesterday to thousands of tourists and pilgrims stranded by flash floods that

tore through towns and temples in northern India, killing at least 150 people.

AFP, Kabul

The Afghan government yesterday lashed out at US efforts to broker peace with the Taliban, suspending crucial security talks with Washington and threatening to boycott prospective contacts with the insurgents in Qatar.

Kabul issued two strongly worded statements threatening to sabotage US efforts to start talks with the Taliban, just one day after its foes opened an office for dialogue in the tiny Gulf emirate. With the US-led Nato combat mission

due to end next year, US officials are determined to resume talks with the Taliban after tentative contacts limited to a prisoner swap collapsed last year.

But President Hamid Karzai, who has headed the US-backed Afghan government since a 2001 US-led invasion brought down the Taliban, opposes bilateral US-Taliban

Yesterday he broke off ongoing Afghan-US talks on an agreement that would allow Washington to maintain soldiers in Afghanistan after a Nato combat mission ends next year.

PHOTO: AFP

Hopes of peace were given a further reality check when the Taliban claimed an overnight rocket attack that killed four US troops at the largest US-led military base in Afghanistan.

In response to the talks suspension, US President Barack Obama said he always expected "friction" at

Afghan reconciliation talks but voiced hope that "despite those challenges the process will proceed".

But Karzai's spokesman Aimal Faizi told AFP there was a "contradiction between what the US government says and what it does regarding Afghanistan peace talks".

The row centred on the Taliban office calling itself the "Islamic Emirate Of Afghanistan" -- the formal name of its 1996-2001 government -- on the grounds that no such thing existed, officials said.

A follow-up statement from Kabul threatening to boycott prospective talks in Qatar unless they were "Afghan-led" exposed a wider rift and outright criticised the US involvement.

Cut nuke arms by up to third

Obama urges Russia, vows to battle climate change in Berlin

AFP, Berlin

US President Barack Obama yesterday called on Russia to agree strategic nuclear weapons cuts of up to a third and to also rein in strategic atomic

In a keynote speech in Berlin, Obama also said he would lead two new Nuclear Security summits in his second term.

"These are steps we can take to create a world of peace with justice," Obama said, addressing thousands at the city's iconic Brandenburg Gate. Under the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty negoti-

ated with Moscow during Obama's first term, the two former Cold War foes cut strategic nuclear weapons stocks to the 1,550 level. A one-third cut in the arsenals would take them to the 1,000 weapons mark.

Russia has previously resisted cuts to the number of tactical nuclear weapons stationed in Europe, and President Vladimir Putin said ahead of Obama's speech that Russia will not allow an imbalance in strategic nuclear deterrence.

A top Kremlin aide also said Russia wanted other states to commit to nuclear cuts. Obama has made cutting nuclear weapons stocks a

centrepiece of his political legacy and is in theory committed to eradicating them all together. Obama also pledged that the United States "will do

more" to tackle the threat of climate change and said the world must do likewise before it is too late. "Our generation must move towards a global compact to confront a changing climate before it is too late, that is our

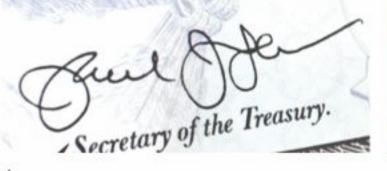
job, that is our task," Obama said in a speech in Berlin. Speaking on a blistering hot day at Brandenburg Gate, Obama said that "peace with justice means refusing to

condemn our children to a harsher, less hospitable planet". He said the United States had also doubled renewable

energies, boosted fuel efficiency in cars and brought down carbon emissions, but added: "We know we have to do more and we will do more."

ODDLYenough

Change signature to keep job!



AFP, Washington

US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew's may keep his job

Lew unveiled his new signature on Tuesday after his eight-loops-and-a-tail signature drew howls when he was first nominated in January. That led Obama, when he introduced Lew as his

Treasury pick on January 10, to say: "When this was highlighted yesterday in the press, I considered rescinding my offer to appoint him." "Jack assures me that he is going to work to make at least one letter legible in order not to debase our currency should he be confirmed as Secretary of the Treasury." The new version probably will allow him to keep the job.



Turkish people stand on the flashpoint Taksim square on Tuesday during a wave of new alternative protests. A day after Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan claimed victory over the mass demos that have defied his authority for nearly three weeks, several dozen protesters held a quiet vigil on Istanbul's Taksim Square, standing still and silent in the midday heat.

PHOTO: AFP

ROW WITH BJP OVER MODI

Nitish wins trust to ease angry vote in Bihar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Four days after snapping ties with BJP, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar of eastern state of Bihar yesterday comfortably won a vote of confidence in the state assembly amid signals of a realignment of forces ahead of next year's parliamentary elections as Congress backed Kumar.

A total of 126 votes, including four of Congress and one of CPI, were cast in favour of the confidence motion while 24 voted against the motion as BJP members staged a walkout before the vote.

Those who voted in favour of the motion included ruling Janata Dal(U)'s 117 and four Independents. Besides RJD's 22 MLAs, two Independents also opposed the motion.

Significantly, Congress' support for the government comes two days after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described Kumar as secular and indicated that his party could do business with Janata Dal (U). The federal Indian government headed by Congress has

already enhanced development assistance to Bihar as a backward state recently, sparking speculation that the two parties could come together in future elections.

In his speech in the assembly, Kumar said, without naming controversial politician Narendra Modi, that the main reason for breaking the alliance with BJP was the elevation of the Gujarat Chief Minister in his party.

protesters

Brazil moves

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

President Dilma Rousseff on Tuesday sought to defuse a massive protest movement sweeping Brazil, acknowledging the need for better public services and more responsive governance as demonstrations continued in some cities around the country.

Rousseff said her government remains committed to social change and is listening attentively to the many grievances expressed at the demonstrations.

Monday's demonstrations were the latest in a flurry of protests in the past two weeks that have fed on widespread frustration with poor public services, police violence and government corruption.

Utterly inhuman

AFP, Chicago

A mentally disabled woman and her daughter were forced to live in an Ohio basement with snakes and pitbulls and were treated like slaves for more than two years, US prosecutors said Tuesday.

The case came to light after the woman was caught stealing a candy bar and told police she'd rather go to jail than go home because her roommates "were mean to her."

Three of her tormentors were arrested on human trafficking charges after a lengthy investigation.

"We are yet again reminded that modern-day slavery exists all around us," said Steven Dettelbach, US Attorney for the northern district of Ohio.

"The victims in this case endured violence, threats, sub-human living conditions and other horrific acts."

The woman, who was not named, was made to stay with repeated threats that her daughter -who is now five or six -- would be harmed or taken away from her if she didn't do as she was told, prosecutors said.

The woman and her daughter were initially forced to sleep on a cement floor in a locked basement room that also housed a roaming iguana.

They were repeatedly beaten, threatened with the pit bulls and the snakes and watched with a baby monitor to make sure the woman wouldn't untie her daughter's bound hands or sneak some food or

water to the girl. They also shaved her head into a mohawk and wrote "slut," "whore" and other derogatory words on her face and chest with a permanent marker at one point, charging papers said.

Refugees at twodecade high: UN

AFP, Geneva

War and other crises drove one person from their home every 4.1 seconds in 2012, the UN's refugee agency said yesterday, pushing the number of people forcibly displaced to a two-decade high of 45.2 million.

All told, the UNCHR's annual figures showed 1.1 million people fled across international borders in 2012, while 6.5 million were displaced within their homelands. "This means one in each 4.1 seconds. So

each time you blink, another person is forced to flee," Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, told reporters.

The total figure of 45.2 million included 28.8 million internally displaced people, 15.4 million border-crossing refugees, and 937,000 asylum seekers.

Fifty-five percent of the refugees is inAfghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, and Syria. And the largest number of refugees still comes from Afghanistan, a situation its defeat in World War I, Kim Jong-Un unchanged for 32 years.

Hitler's memoir as leadership guide! issued an order for the Third Reich to be

North Korea has angrily denied a report that its ruler used Adolf Hitler's memoir as a leadership guide, threatening to kill the authors of the report.

The article by New Focus International, an online news portal run by North Korean defectors, said Kim Jong-Un had given copies of "Mein Kampf" to his top officials, urging them to study it as a leadership skills manual.

He handed out translations of the German dictator's manifesto to select

officials at the time of his birthday in January, it said, citing an unnamed North Korean official working in China.

"Mentioning that Hitler managed to rebuild Germany in a short time following

studied in depth and asked that practical applications be drawn from it," the source was quoted as saying.

The story was picked up by all major South Korean newspapers yesterday.

But the North's police agency later Wednesday called the report a "thricecursed crime" aimed at belittling its leader and threatened to kill the "human scum" behind

It also vowed to launch "merciless punishment of justice" against Seoul and Washington, accusing the two nations of encourag-

ing the defectors to defame its ruler.

in 1924 while Hitler was languishing in a Bavarian prison before becoming a German leader, is both a vicious anti-Semitic tract

and rambling memoir.

"Mein Kampf" ("My Struggle"), written

the article.