

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Pakistan Floods Death Toll At 1,100

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) — The death toll from massive floods in northwestern Pakistan rose to 1,100 Sunday as rescue workers struggled to save more than 27,000 people still trapped by the raging water.

The rescue effort was aided by a slackening of the monsoon rains that have caused the worst flooding in decades in Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa province. But as flood waters started to recede, authorities began to understand the full scale of the disaster.

"Aerial monitoring is being conducted, and it has shown that whole villages have washed away, animals have drowned and grain storages have washed away," said Latifur Rehman, spokesman for the Provincial Disaster Management Authority. "The destruction is massive."

The flooding, which the U.N. estimates has affected 1 million people nationwide, comes at a time when the Pakistani government is already grappling with a faltering economy and a war against the Taliban.

The United States announced Sunday that it would provide Pakistan with \$10 million in humanitarian assistance, a high-profile gesture at a time when the Obama administration is trying to dampen anti-American sentiment in the country.

Another Attempt To Plug Well Set

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The only thing keeping millions more gallons of oil out of the Gulf of Mexico right now is a rush job: an experimental cap that has held for more than two weeks but was never meant to be permanent. As soon as this week, crews will be pumping in some insurance.

Engineers are preparing to launch a so-called static kill as early as Monday evening, shoving mud and perhaps cement into the blown-out well to make it easier to plug the gusher up forever and end the Summer of the Spill.

The effort carries no certainty, and BP PLC engineers still plan to follow it up days later by sending a stream of mud and cement into the bottom of the mile-deep underground reservoir through a relief well they've been digging for months.

But the oil giant's engineers and petroleum experts say it's the clearest path yet to choke the blown-out well and make it even easier for the crews drilling the relief well to ensure oil can never again erupt from the deep-sea well, which has spewed as much as 184 million gallons since the rig connected to it blew up in April and killed 11 workers.

Obama Faces Less Afghan War Support

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the war in Afghanistan faces a loss of public and congressional support and U.S. casualties rise sharply, the Obama administration is painting its goals for the war as humble and achievable while warning there is no quick fix.

"Nobody thinks that Afghanistan is going to be a model Jeffersonian democracy," President Barack Obama said in a television interview that aired Sunday.

"What we're looking to do is difficult — very difficult — but it's a fairly modest goal, which is: Don't allow terrorists to operate from this region. Don't allow them to create big training camps and to plan attacks against the U.S. homeland with impunity," Obama said in an interview broadcast by CBS' "Sunday Morning."

July was the deadliest month for U.S. forces in the nearly nine-year war, with 66 troops killed. Military officials predict the toll will be even higher for several months to come, as U.S., NATO and Afghan forces intensify fighting in Taliban-controlled areas.

The troop surge Obama ordered last year was meant to make that expanded fight possible, but it also guaranteed higher combat deaths and a renewed focus on whether a war that remains a stalemate is still worth fighting.

Officer: U.S. Has Military Plan For Iran

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military has a plan to attack Iran, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Sunday, although he thinks a military strike is probably a bad idea.

Not long after Adm. Mike Mullen's aired on a Sunday talk show, the deputy chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guard was quoted as saying there would be a strong Iranian response should the U.S. take military action against his country.

Mullen, the highest ranking U.S. military officer, often has warned that a strike on Iran would have serious and unpredictable ripple effects around the Middle East. At the same time, Mullen said the risk of Iran's developing a nuclear weapon is unacceptable, although he would not say which risk he thinks is worse.

"I think the military options have been on the table and remain on the table," Mullen said on "Meet the Press" on NBC. "It's one of the options that the president has. Again, I hope we don't get to that, but it's an important option and it's one that's well understood."

The official Iranian news agency IRNA quoted Revolutionary Guard deputy chief Yadollah Javani as saying Sunday that security in the Persian Gulf would be jeopardized "if Americans commit the slightest mistake."

UAE Suspends BlackBerry, Messaging

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United Arab Emirates outlined plans Sunday to block BlackBerry e-mail, messaging and Web browsing services in a crackdown that could jeopardize efforts to establish the country as an international business hub.

The government cited a potential security threat because encrypted data sent on the devices is moved abroad, where it cannot be monitored for illegal activity. But the decision — quickly followed by a similar move in Saudi Arabia — raises questions about whether the conservative Gulf nations are trying to further control content they deem politically or morally objectionable.

BlackBerry phones have a strong following in the region, not only among foreign professionals in commercial centers such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi, but also among youth who see their relatively secure communication channels as a way to avoid unwanted government attention.

The UAE's decision will prevent hundreds of thousands of BlackBerry users from accessing e-mail and the Web on their handsets starting in October.

Space Station System Shuts Down

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Half of the International Space Station's cooling system suddenly shut down during the weekend, forcing the astronauts to power down equipment and face the likelihood of urgent spacewalking repairs.

After huddling Sunday, NASA managers gave preliminary approval for a pair of spacewalks, the first of which would take place later this week. Two of the Americans on board were already scheduled to conduct a spacewalk Thursday for routine maintenance, though the repairs would supersede the original chores.

Officials stressed that the six occupants were in no danger, and that the orbiting complex was in a stable situation. The trouble arose Saturday night, when one of the two ammonia-fed cooling loops shut down. Alarms sounded throughout the sprawling outpost as the circuit breaker for the pump in that line tripped, causing the pump to stop working.

The cooling system is critical for on-board operations. The two ammonia lines ensure that all the station's electronic equipment does not overheat and with one of those out of commission, there is no safeguard in case of a second failure.

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Crews Gain Ground On California Wildfires

PALMDALE, Calif. (AP) — Higher humidity and lower temperatures helped firefighters nearly contain a wildfire smoldering Sunday in the high desert north of Los Angeles.

The fire charred nearly 22 square miles of brush in the Antelope Valley. It was 87 percent contained Sunday, and crews hoped to have it fully surrounded by Monday evening, Los Angeles County Inspector Don Kunitomi said.

All roads were reopened at sunrise Sunday. The fire was believed to have been sparked Thursday afternoon in the Agua Dulce area by someone working on a car wheel.

Four homes and five outbuildings were destroyed.

Los Angeles County Fire crews aided by a pair of water-dropping helicopters quickly knocked down a smoky wildfire that burned Sunday along the north edge of the 101 Freeway in Calabasas. Officials said it charred about 12 acres of heavy brush after being reported around noon. No structures were threatened but traffic in both directions slowed down significantly because of heavy smoke visible from much of the San Fernando Valley.

To the south in rural San Diego County, a wildfire sparked Saturday that has burned about 110 acres of heavy brush near Julian was nearly surrounded.



JOHN W. ADKISSON/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT
Inmate firefighters based in Acton, California, work to overhaul hot spots left from the Crown Fire in Palmdale, Calif., this weekend. The Crown Fire has burned more than 14,000 acres.

Israel Blames Hamas For Rocket Fire: 32 Dead

BY ARON HELLER
Associated Press Writer

JERUSALEM — Israel's prime minister issued a stern warning Sunday to Gaza's Hamas rulers after a weekend of rocket attacks from the Palestinian territory on Israeli communities.

Benjamin Netanyahu told his Cabinet that Israel holds the Islamic militant group responsible for the rare flare-up in violence and would retaliate for any attack against its people.

"I see the Hamas as directly responsible for any attack that comes from the Gaza Strip toward the state of Israel and the international community should see it this way as well," Netanyahu said. "Israel reserves the right to defend its citizens and we will continue to use all means to protect the people of Israel and the children of Israel."

The attacks, including a rocket fired Friday at an Israeli city six miles (10 kilometers) from Gaza, caused damage but no injuries. No Palestinian group took responsibility for the attacks.

Israel responded with a series of airstrikes on militant targets in Gaza, including one that killed a senior commander of the Hamas military wing.

Early Monday, a huge blast leveled the house of a Hamas commander in the Deir el-Balah refugee camp in southern Gaza, wounding at least



Netanyahu

32 people, according to Palestinian security officials. They said the blast was the result of an Israeli airstrike, but Israel's military denied that, saying there was no Israeli activity in the area.

The regional Hamas commander, Ala Adnaf, was missing along with another person, and rescue workers were digging through the rubble. The explosion badly damaged 12 nearby houses in the refugee camp, the officials said, speaking on customary condition of anonymity.

Adnaf was known as a bomb maker. Often there are accidental explosions in bomb factories. In the hours before this blast, Palestinian security officials said there were two other explosions elsewhere in Gaza, apparently caused by an intense heat wave detonating chemicals.

Years of rocket fire from Gaza has largely subsided since Israel launched a fierce offensive in the Palestinian territory in December 2008.

The three-week war dramatically reduced the number of rockets hitting Israel, but devastated the densely populated and impoverished Palestinian territory and drew international criticism.

Most of the rocket fire since has been carried out by smaller militant

groups that do not necessarily accept Hamas authority. Hamas has largely refrained from launching attacks, apparently because of concerns about Israeli retaliation.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum accused Netanyahu of trying to "invent pretexts for new attacks" on Hamas.

"Netanyahu and his government bear all the consequences of this escalation," he said.

The violence came shortly after the Arab League authorized Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to enter into direct peace talks with Israel, a notion that Gaza militants abhor. The league endorsed the idea after President Barack Obama warned Abbas in a letter that U.S.-Palestinian relations might suffer if the Palestinian leader refused to resume direct negotiations.

Hamas' exiled leader, Khaled Mashaal, denounced American demands for direct talks. "These are dictations. These dictations were done secretly in the past but now they are done publicly," Mashaal said Sunday in Syria. "Arab and Palestinian leaders have no options because the decision was adopted in foreign capitals."

Negotiations between Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, and Netanyahu's predecessor, Ehud Olmert, broke off over the Gaza war. Indirect, U.S.-mediated talks were launched in May.

"I think the international commu-

nity, at least an important part of it, and of course the United States, expects the Palestinian Authority to put aside all the excuses and arguments and all the conditions and get into direct peace talks," Netanyahu said. "I call on Abu Mazen to take a brave decision to start peace talks with Israel."

Abbas insists he will only negotiate if Israel commits to freezing all settlement construction. Palestinians are wary of resuming talks with Netanyahu without agreeing first on an agenda, a timetable and a framework.

Netanyahu has refused to be pinned down and make concessions ahead of talks. Netanyahu has put in place a partial 10-month settlement freeze in the West Bank that is due to expire in late September.

Israeli President Shimon Peres added his voice Sunday to the growing chorus of calls for direct talks.

"We must begin the direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians as soon as possible. The timing is critical and there is a window of opportunity that cannot be missed," he said after meeting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo.

Mubarak spokesman Suleiman Awad said direct peace talks must be "serious, continuous with a fixed time limit," calling for an active and impartial U.S. role. He also said Israel should take further measures to ease conditions in the West Bank and lift its blockade of Gaza.

Grizzly Cubs From Mauling Relocated

BY MATT BROWN
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — Three grizzly bear cubs whose mother killed one person and mauled two others in a late-night attack at a Montana campground were malnourished and still in their winter coats.

The cubs have arrived at their new home at ZooMontana in Billings. Zoo executive director Jackie Worstell said Sunday the two female cubs and one male cub were underweight, possibly explaining their mother's unusually aggressive behavior.

The year-old cubs each weighed only between 60 and 70 pounds, versus a normal range of 80 to 130 pounds. Wildlife officials are investigating what caused the cubs to be malnourished. Grizzlies are omnivores and eat everything from berries and ants to fish and elk.

Kevin Kammer, 48, of Grand Rapids, Mich., was killed and two people were seriously injured when the adult bear ripped into several tents Wednesday at the Soda Creek Campground near Cooke City, Yellowstone National Park.

The 300- to 400-pound sow was euthanized Friday after DNA tests linked it to the attacks. Wildlife officials have said she appeared to be healthy, but they intend to further study the body in hopes of explaining her behavior.

Worstell said the cubs will remain in quarantine for at least 30 days to make sure they are disease-free.

The zoo has one other grizzly, a year-old male obtained from Yellowstone National Park that had been seeking food from park visitors.

The three cubs aren't expected to be available for public viewing until fall.

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