

Israel blocks roads in response to increased Palestinian violence

BY MARK LAVIE
ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — Israeli troops closed off Palestinian communities Tuesday, paralyzing life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in retaliation for deadly shooting ambushes that signaled an escalation in seven weeks of fighting.

Three Palestinians, including two boys aged 16 and 13, were killed and 15 wounded by Israeli fire in rock-throwing clashes in the West Bank and Gaza, doctors said. Since Sept. 28, 209 people have been killed, the majority Palestinians.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak cut short an overseas trip and scheduled

an emergency meeting of his security Cabinet later Tuesday to discuss further retaliation for Monday's killing of four Israelis — a teacher, a truck driver and two soldiers — by Palestinian gunmen.

Barak, who was en route from the United States to Israel, shortened a stopover in London. A planned meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair was canceled because Barak's flight was delayed. The two men spoke by telephone instead, and the Israeli leader was meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The new stage of confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians shaped up as a war over the West Bank roads. Israeli military commentators said the army was

considering further restrictions on Palestinian travel, such as banning cars with Palestinian license plates from certain West Bank roads at certain times.

Israeli Cabinet Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, who is acting prime minister during Barak's absence, said "the minute the situation is bad for us, it will be very bad for them (the Palestinians)." Ben-Eliezer said the gunmen apparently were supporters of the militant Islamic Jihad group, but claimed the attacks were carried out with the support of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

There was no immediate comment from Arafat, who was en route to Gaza from an Islamic summit in Doha.

The Palestinians, meanwhile, said

they would keep Israeli civilians and troops out of West Bank villages starting Wednesday, the anniversary of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's symbolic statehood proclamation, made in exile in 1988.

Such a step would be a direct challenge to Israel, since previous peace accords grant Israel security control over the West Bank villages.

Palestinian activists will also "cut off roads to (Jewish) settlers," said Hussein al Sheik, an official in Arafat's Fatah movement.

No Palestinian group claimed responsibility for Monday's shooting ambushes which reflected a new strategy by the Palestinians.

Strikes, protests mount as president of Philippines faces corruption charges

BY JIM GOMEZ
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MANILA, PHILIPPINES — An unusual alliance of left-wing workers and conservative business groups held a general strike Tuesday against President Joseph Estrada, who faces a Senate impeachment trial for corruption charges.

The House of Representatives sent the impeachment charges to the Senate on Monday. But business groups and workers called on Estrada to resign, fearing a prolonged trial will further damage the economy.

Tens of thousands of militant laborers, students and transport workers went on strike and joined protests in key cities, forcing many schools to suspend classes and offices to close.

About 30,000 people joined street protests in the central city of Bacolod, organizers said. Streets were empty in Davao, a bustling southern port city, as many office workers chose to stay home.

About 7,000 labor and student activists gathered near the presidential palace in Manila, carrying streamers and effigies of Estrada. They were later joined by about 6,000 other protesters who marched across the city's downtown area, snarling traffic.

In the financial districts, brokers and analysts in black shirts and armbands walked off trading floors about 30 minutes before the markets closed, clapping their hands and chanting, "Erap resign," using the president's popular nickname. They briefly joined protesters in the street.

"We want to send the message that we are mourning what is happening in our country," stock exchange Gov. Vivien Yuchengco said.

Fears of political instability generated by the scandal have caused the country's currency, the peso, and its stock market to plunge, although both rose

slightly Tuesday on bargain-hunting. Estrada and other officials tried to discourage Tuesday's strike.

"It's a mistake but what can we do?" asked presidential Executive Secretary Ronaldo Zamora. "It's their right, and the government's obligation is to make sure it is peaceful."

A provincial governor testified last month that he had given the president more than \$10 million in illegal gambling payoffs and tobacco taxes. Estrada is the first Philippine president to be impeached, although motions were raised against four others, including former dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

There was no formal vote on impeachment by the full House, which had been expected Monday. House Speaker Manuel Villar said it was unnecessary because more than the required one-third of the 218 members had signed a petition endorsing the impeachment.

It was unclear whether the process fulfilled the legal requirements for impeachment. At least one lawmaker, Assistant Majority Leader Gilbert Teodoro, said the Senate might reject the complaint because of procedural flaws.

The Senate is working to draft impeachment rules, based on those used by the U.S. Senate during President Clinton's impeachment trial. Newly elected Senate President Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said the chamber will try to finish the trial next month.

Estrada has acknowledged his old friend, Gov. Luis Singson of Ilocos Sur province, offered him a bribe. Estrada said he refused it.

Singson testified to Congress that the president had asked him to coordinate the nationwide collection of payoffs from an illegal numbers game called jueteng. He said he personally gave Estrada more than \$8 million from jueteng and \$2.6 million from provincial tobacco taxes.

Investigators piece together events of cable car disaster at ski resort

BY MELISSA EDDY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

KAPRUN, AUSTRIA — U.S. Army Maj. Drew Stathis and his 8-year-old daughter were running late.

By the time they reached the base of Austria's Kitzsteinhorn mountain just after 9 a.m. Saturday, other members of their ski club were headed up the slope on a cable railway that traveled nearly 2 miles through an Alpine tunnel.

Suddenly, dark smoke rose above the tree line. Sirens wailed and helicopters circled.

"Nobody knew the gravity of what was going on," Stathis said.

Inside the mountain, an inferno had engulfed the cable car. By midnight, it was clear only a dozen people had escaped the tunnel alive. At least 159 were believed to have died.

Survivors say it began as a small fire. But it ripped through the train, melding people and cable cars into a smoldering mass that burned down to the chassis. Dozens of passengers managed to get out of the train, but died trying to escape the tunnel.

Seconds after the car entered the narrow concrete shaft, passengers in the rear spotted flames. The train came to a halt.

"We had just entered the tunnel when another passenger said, 'Something is burning,'" survivor Gerhard Hanetseder told reporters.

Equipped to detect disruptions in the system, the train stopped automatically at 9:02 a.m. The conductor, in the front, called the base to say there was a fire, said Manfred Mueller, the system's technical director. Controllers told him to open the doors, then lost contact. It was 9:10 a.m.

As the base made its first SOS call, thick black smoke spread inside the train, pouring through the walls. Panic broke out.

"We tried desperately to get the doors open, but couldn't," Hanetseder said. "In the meantime, this little fire had set the whole cabin aflame. Already at that point we began to lose hope. There was no way we could get out."

A couple of passengers broke through the Plexiglas window using "a ski boot or a ski or something," Hanetseder, an Austrian, watched someone climb through the shattered window, and then grabbed his 12-year-old daughter, Christine.

"At first she couldn't get through, so I gave her a push and she fell down," he recalled. "Then I climbed after her and fell down, too. I don't know exactly how we made it out, because the hole was so small."

As the first rescue crews arrived at 9:14 a.m., flames and smoke swept upward through the tunnel, like a chimney. Noxious fumes poured out, instantly killing two tourists and an employee at the Alpine Center on top of the mountain.

Inside, a man who had escaped the burning car screamed through the dark. "We've got to go down! Everybody down!"

Identified only as Erwin G., 36, from Germany, his call is credited with saving the lives of those who survived by stumbling in their ski boots down a narrow metal stairway, back toward the valley.

Other passengers followed what psychologists describe as the natural instinct to climb. They ran right into the fire and poisonous smoke.

News of the accident spread quick-

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Maj. Drew Stathis
Ski Club Member

ly through the tiny village of Kaprun. Volunteer firefighters raced up the mountain.

By 9:20 a.m., calls went farther afield. Helicopters, medics and rescue teams arrived from across Austria and neighboring Germany.

But rescuers outside the tunnel stood by helplessly as it became clear that little could be done. By 1 p.m., police reported that three people had died. They ominously noted the train could hold up to 180 passengers.

By late afternoon, about 2,000 skiers who had taken to the slopes that day began coming down the mountain on the gondola system. They were asked to register as they reached the valley, and officials began to figure out who was missing.

As night fell, people hoping their relatives had missed the 9 a.m. cable car tried to remain optimistic. But shortly past 11 p.m., authorities confirmed everyone was off the mountain.

Those who had not returned probably had not survived.

Sonja Denk, from Lower Austria, had last heard from her 34-year-old husband, Franz, and their son Christoph on Saturday morning, when they called to say they were heading up the mountain. She had stayed home with 5-year-old daughter Nathalie.

After hours of waiting for them to call again, she headed for Kaprun. Helped

by police, she found the family's car, alone in a parking lot.

"The way that car was just standing there, I knew that it was over," she told Austrian state radio.

By midday Sunday, the smoldering remains had cooled enough for authorities to enter the tunnel. Charred bodies were trapped below the remains of the train. Others were scattered along the steep metal stairway. Most were so disfigured they could not be identified.

Authorities asked relatives for victims' toothbrushes and razor blades, hoping to find shreds of DNA that could help identify them.

Eight Americans are believed to be among the dead, including a family of four with two young children and a couple who became engaged last week. Dozens of Austrians, Germans, several Japanese and people from Great Britain, Slovenia, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic are also believed to be among the victims.

Members of the ski clubs from Army bases, mostly in Germany, sadly boarded buses Sunday.

"In the Army, you enter situations of hostility where you expect this kind of thing," said Maj. Stathis, who stayed behind to handle official matters. "But not when you're going skiing. At most, you expect a broken leg, but not this."

Police arrest suspect for shooting death of Maryland trooper

Manhunt ends as immigrant faces murder charges

BY JAMES H. LUDWIN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A Ghanaian immigrant wanted in the shooting death of a Maryland state trooper was arrested early Monday in New York City after evading a massive police manhunt for nearly two weeks.

Kofi Orleans-Lindsay, 23, was charged with murder in the Oct. 30 slaying of Cpl. Edward Toatley during a drug sting operation in the District of Columbia.

A federal magistrate in New York ordered Orleans-Lindsay held without bail pending an extradition hearing Friday. Andrew Carter, his court-appointed attorney, indicated he planned to argue the suspect was misidentified.

A court affidavit indicated police surveillance and a videotape recovered from Toatley's truck clearly show the man firing the shot that killed the undercover officer. A police officer who has known Orleans-Lindsay for more than 10 years positively identified the Silver Spring, Md., man as the person on the tape with Toatley, the affidavit

said. The suspect, who bragged to associates he would never be caught, was arrested around 1 a.m. Monday during a traffic stop in the Brooklyn borough of New York City.

"Kofi, the joke's on you," Maryland State Police superintendent, Col. David Mitchell, said during a news conference held outside Washington, D.C. police headquarters.

Toatley, 37, a 16-year veteran who received his promotion posthumously, was working with a task force to reduce drug trafficking in neighborhoods along the District of Columbia-Maryland line. He had just given Orleans-Lindsay several thousand dollars for drugs, police said.

During the manhunt, up to 200 police officers cordoned off neighborhoods and conducted a room-by-room search of a 14-story hotel in Silver Spring. Investigators now believe Orleans-Lindsay fled to New York within 24 hours of the shooting, said Barry Mawn, Assistant FBI Director in charge of the New York office.

Wilma Lewis, U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, said it would take time to determine whether to seek the death penalty, noting, "It will be up to the attorney general to decide."

House removes language about government leaks from vetoed spending bill

BY JIM ABRAMS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The House gave in to President Clinton on Monday and removed language from a major intelligence spending bill that would have made leaking of government secrets a criminal act.

The president vetoed the bill, which authorizes an estimated \$30 billion in spending by the CIA, National Security Agency and other intelligence agencies, because he disagreed with the provision on classified data leaks.

Clinton, in his veto message, said he agreed that such leaks "can be extraordinarily harmful" to national security. But he agreed with misgivings that the new penalties could silence whistle-blowers.

"We must never forget that the free flow of information is essential to a democratic society," Clinton said.

Rep. Porter Goss, R-Fla., chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said the controversial provision was removed in its entirety and the bill will be returned to the president after the Senate signs off on it. The House approved the revised version Monday by voice vote.

"It is worth noting that the president accepted a share of the blame for the administration's failure to apprise Congress of the concerns" he expressed in his veto message as the bill was making its way through the legislative process,"

Goss said.

The crackdown on government officials' leaking of classified material had some support within the administration. Attorney General Janet Reno said it would have no dramatic increase in the number of prosecutions and would close what she called a "very narrow gap" in existing laws.

The language drew criticism from news organizations, however. They said it could jeopardize seriously their ability to obtain information vital to the public.

Four of the nation's largest news organizations, CNN, The Washington Post, The New York Times and the Newspaper Association of America, appealed to Clinton to veto the bill.

The provision would have extended penalties that now exist for leaking classified national defense information to the leaking of nondefense classified data that could harm the United States if made public or given to foreign governments.

Opponents said it amounted to the nation's first ever official secrets act, and even members of Congress would be subject to criminal charges for leaking classified information.

Currently, disclosure of classified material that does not directly harm national security generally is dealt with through administrative action such as firing, but the new language would have made such an act a felony punishable by up to three years in prison.

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which threatens to slow economic growth in the majority of the group's economies that are net importers of energy.

Chinese Trade Minister Shi Guangsheng and Mexican Commerce Minister Herminio Blanco met for 90 minutes Tuesday to try to resolve issues preventing China from entering the WTO.

Blanco said the nations remained

at odds over dumping, the practice of selling goods in another market too cheaply, but added that he remained hopeful.

China has been fighting for years to get into the WTO and has reached necessary deals with all other key trading partners, including the United States and the European Union.

APEC members are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam.

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