

Explosion kills three policemen

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — A bomb explosion at a police checkpoint killed at least three policemen on Monday, just a day after soldiers repulsed a rebel counterattack in the north that left 111 combatants dead and more than 200 wounded.

The explosion near the eastern town of Kalmunai occurred when police stopped a van to search it, said a constable at the Kalmunai police station, 135 miles east of the capital, Colombo. Three policemen were killed and six were wounded, police said.

In the northern city of Chavakachcheri, soldiers repulsed a rebel counterattack late Sunday in a battle that left 111 dead. The clash occurred in the same city that government soldiers captured earlier in the day, said Brig. Sanath Karunaratne, the spokesman. The city is six miles east of Jaffna, the former rebel stronghold.

Some of the dead included government soldiers, Karunaratne said. Most of the 228 wounded soldiers were treated for minor injuries, he said, giving no figure for wounded rebels.

The bodies of 18 rebels were recovered and handed to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Karunaratne said.

Another 75 bodies of rebels remained scattered in the area, government spokesman Ariya Rubasinghe said in his daily briefing on the war. He said a 15-year-old female rebel fighter was captured by the troops.

South Korea begins rebuilding RR for trade

IMJINGAK, South Korea (AP) — South Korea started rebuilding a railroad line across the world's most heavily armed border on Monday, saying the new link will serve as an avenue for exchanges with isolated communist North Korea and trade with fast-growing markets in China and Russia.

When completed by next fall, the railway, and a new four-lane highway running alongside it, will link the two capitals: Seoul, South Korea, and Pyongyang, North Korea.

The railway and highway will become the first direct transport link between the two Koreas since the 1950-53 Korean War and set a new milestone in improving ties between the two Cold War foes.

"Today we start reconnecting our father land..."

— Kim Dae-jung
South Korean President

South Korean President Kim Dae-jung presided over the groundbreaking ceremony in Imjingak, a village just south of the Demilitarized Zone, which has separated the two Kore-

as since the 1945 division of the peninsula and the 1950-53 Korean War.

"Today, we started reconnecting our divided fatherland," Kim said in a nationally televised speech from a platform above the groundbreaking ceremony. "For a half century, the severed rail link has been a symbol of national division and the Cold War."

Thousands of colorful balloons were released to celebrate the occasion, and firecrackers soared into the clear autumn sky with plumes of rainbow-colored smoke.

Following the historic summit meeting by their two leaders in Pyongyang in June, the two countries agreed last month to reconnect the major railway.

It continues to Shinuiju, a major city on North's border with China, and was last used commercially shortly before the Korean War started in 1950.

Until now, the only link between the two countries has been a winding, heavily guarded two-lane road that stops at the truce village Panmunjom, which serves as the sole contact point between democratic South Korea and North.

A steam locomotive whistled and rolled a 66-foot rail line laid for Monday's ceremony. Steering the locomotive was Han Joon-ki, who drove the last train that ran on the border line in late 1950, transporting military equipment for U.S. troops fighting for South Korea.

Floods take lives of over 100

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — The death toll in Cambodia's worst flooding in seven decades has surpassed 100 and fears of food shortages have increased, the country's top relief official said Monday.

Peou Samy, secretary-general of the National Committee for Disaster Relief, said 12 more people were reported killed in recent days in the southeastern province of Kompong Cham, raising the nationwide death toll since July to 109. Most of the latest deaths were by drowning during evacuations.

With expectations that the raging Mekong River will fall soon, the next worry for officials and aid workers is whether people driven from their land by the high water will have enough to eat, Peou Samy said.

"It is our biggest concern," he told The Associated Press.

Two months of floods caused by early monsoon rains have forced tens of thousands of families from their homes in Cambodia and Vietnam, affecting more than 1 million people.

At least 27 people have died in Vietnam, including 18 children, a government official said Monday. Areas of Laos and Thailand also have been hit.

Peou Samy said nearly 95,000 people were homeless and 300,000 acres of rice paddy were destroyed. About 335,000 additional acres are flooded, he said.

Acres of verdant rice paddies have been swallowed by muddy brown water. Low-lying rural roads are often swamped, despite sandbagging.

"The problems associated with this massive flooding will be with us for months," said Richard Neville of

the International Federation of the Red Cross.

He said many farming families have lost virtually everything they owned and irrigation networks built up over years have been washed away.

Last week, the Red Cross appealed for \$1.9 million for people in the two countries, with the bulk going to Cambodia. This week, officials said an additional appeal of up to \$1.5 million would be launched for Vietnam alone.

Peou Samy said the Mekong has probably peaked and pressure will be easing on villagers in several south-eastern provinces.

The government forecast Monday that the Mekong would drop half an inch by Tuesday morning in the capital, Phnom Penh, and continue going down through the week.

Opposition leader Sam Rainsy blamed the scope of the disaster on a "corrupt government" that allowed "massive and anarchic logging," which he said led to soil erosion and the resulting floods.

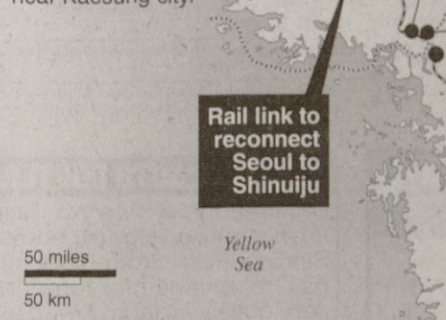
Government spokesman Khieu Kanharith dismissed the allegation as a "cynical attempt to politicize the tragedy."

He noted the floods have also hit Vietnam, where government officials say 150,000 people have been displaced in the hardest-hit provinces of An Giang, Dong Thap and Long An. More than 200,000 homes have been flooded.

Meteorologists say nearly half the three provinces are submerged, with water levels at or above those of 1996, when floods killed 217 people.

Reconnecting Korea

South Korea began rebuilding a railway line Monday to North Korea for the first time since the 1945 division of the peninsula. Seoul will spend \$50 million to rebuild the 20-kilometer (12-mile) stretch of railway between Munsan city and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ); and North Korea is expected to rebuild the 8 kilometers (5 miles) of rail line on its side of the border, between the DMZ and a train station near Kaesung city.



Source: Compiled from AP wire reports



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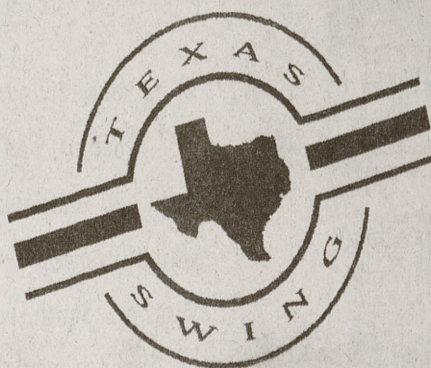
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