

The Brunswick International

Stranded on islands,

Afghan refugees try to survive on Tajik

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan (AP) - As aid agencies struggle to care for Afghan refugees who have fled eastward, more than 10,000 others are stranded in a no man's land on the war-ravaged nation's northern border - largely out of reach of humanitarian help.

Scared to return home and barred from entering Tajikistan to the north, refugees from war and drought have built makeshift huts of reeds and mud on marshy islands in the Pyandzh River, directly on the border.

At least three refugees have been killed by gunfire from inside Afghanistan, and others have been wounded. The shaky security situation has forced humanitarian organizations to keep visits to a minimum.

Temperatures dip below freezing every night, and freezing rain showers lash the camps. The untreated drinking water has infected refugees with typhoid, and four died of malaria over

the last month, according to London-based Medical Emergency Relief International.

Sickness, disease or war wounds are reported to have killed 41 people since October, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees said on Monday.

The refugees are living on goats and other livestock that they brought with them, as well as food and clothes from aid agencies and the Iranian Embassy in Dushanbe, the Tajik capital.

The U.N. agency renewed its call to the government of Tajikistan to allow the refugees - including 6,000 children - to cross the border. Ten to 15 families were arriving every night, aid workers said.

The agency is ready to support the refugees for six months in Tajikistan, said Abdul Hak Amiri, local U.N. humanitarian affairs officer.

Pakistan, which also borders

Afghanistan, has seen an influx of 110,000 refugees in five months. Many are living in squalor in makeshift camps.

Inside Afghanistan, things are getting worse, aid agencies say. The World Food Program said Tuesday that half of all children under 5 are suffering from malnutrition in northern Mazar-e-Sharif, with 20 percent suffering severe cases.

New U.N. sanctions to force Afghanistan to hand over suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden have caused the Afghan currency to nosedive. The devaluation of the currency has driven up the food costs for poor Afghans, said the Taliban's Information Minister, Qadratullah Jamal.

Tajikistan has resisted admitting refugees, worried that some are armed fighters from the Northern Alliance, which is fighting Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia.

Tajikistan is also reluctant to create

a precedent that could encourage tens of thousands more refugees to try to enter. Aid workers say some 80,000 displaced people are just across the border in Afghanistan.

Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov told other Central Asian leaders earlier this month his country would not allow the refugees to enter under any circumstances.

Impoverished Tajikistan is still recovering from a five-year civil war that ended in 1997 and is suffering the worst drought in decades.

The nation is already home to thousands of displaced people, including some 4,670 Afghans who have refugee status, the United Nations says.

The first asylum-seekers arrived in 1992, after the collapse of the pro-Soviet Afghan government. The flow resumed in 1996, after the hard-line Taliban seized the Afghan capital of Kabul.



Afghan children refugees wait for transport at Jalozai camp, in Pakistan's northwest frontier province, where they have been living since escaping to Pakistan from Afghanistan, Tuesday, January 9, 2001.

Khafizullo Khalidi, a 49-year-old seller of snacks at a department store in Dushanbe, said he regretted he hadn't tried reaching the West when he first arrived in Tajikistan in 1992.

Eight years later, he depends on money from relatives in the West to

help him survive.

"It was easier then, both financially and because now Afghans have become 'untouchables' painted as terrorists and extremists," Khalidi said.

Afghan refugees, he said, are seen as "no better than rabbits."

Tamil extend unilateral cease-fire

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) - Separatist Tamil guerrillas extended their unilateral cease-fire by another month on Tuesday as the military said it has captured almost all of Jaffna Peninsula and forced the rebels into the jungles.

"Now we are in effective control of about 90 percent of the land mass and we are continuing our offensive to clear the remainder," Military spokesman Brig. Sanath Karunaratne said.

The rebels said the extension of the cease-fire demonstrated their genuine desire for peace.

"We have taken this decision in conformity with the collective will of the Tamil nation ... also in compliance with the wish of the international community which pleads for a peaceful means of resolving the conflict," said the rebel statement, issued from their headquarters in the Vanni area.

The rebel announcement came despite government troops, using night vision equipment, attacking five rebel camps on Monday and pushing closer to the strategic rebel-held Elephant Pass causeway.

Brig. Karunaratne said 20 rebels and two soldiers were killed and six soldiers were wounded.

The causeway connects the Tamil majority Jaffna Peninsula to the Sinhalese dominated mainland.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels announced the cease-fire on Dec. 24 to facilitate a Norwegian peace initiative to end the 17-year war that has cost 63,000 lives on both sides. The cease-fire was to end Wednesday.

The rebels called on the international community to persuade the Sri Lankan government to "reciprocate favorably."

The government has dismissed the cease-fire as a publicity stunt and a ploy to regroup and has made major offensives against rebel positions.

"We urge the international community, particularly the United States, Britain, European nations and India to use their diplomatic good offices to persuade Sri Lanka to renounce its hardline militaristic approach," the rebels said.

The military said its advance has forced the rebels to the jungles further south,

where the militants control large tracts of land and to their major sea base of Mullaitivu, where Tamil Tigers' leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran is reported to have his headquarters.

"The LTTE strictly observed peace and engaged only in defensive war during the period," the militants' statement said.

The rebels' capture last year of Elephant Pass was regarded as one of the army's biggest defeats in 17 years of war.

The government's operation to retake the pass began Jan. 16, but it has slowed down due to rebel counter attacks.

If the troops retake the causeway, it will seriously jeopardize the militants' food and armaments supply route.

Karunaratne said the army had further advanced toward Elephant Pass on Monday and it was 14 kilometers (8 miles) away from the main rebel camp.

"The government has not only discredited our genuine gesture of goodwill but also unleashed major offensive operations during the declared period of peace with the intention of provoking us," the rebels said.

"We wish to reiterate that our organization is prepared to enter into peace negotiations when Sri Lanka reciprocates favorably to our unilateral declaration of cease-fire and agrees to implement the Norwegian peace project."

The rebels extended the truce as the British Home office deliberated about banning some organizations under a new anti-terrorism law that will come into force in February.

Sri Lanka, India and the United States have already banned the LTTE.

The Sri Lankan government warned Sunday of strained bilateral relations if Britain did not include the LTTE on its list of banned terrorist organizations.

The LTTE's international secretariat is in London. The Sri Lankan government has said that funds are often collected in Britain by rebel front organizations.

The rebels have been fighting to set up a homeland for the Tamil minority in the north and east of the country, saying they face discrimination by the majority Sinhalese. The government denies the charge.

World sees end of activist U.S. foreign policy

TOKYO (AP) - For the past eight years, the world has grown accustomed to an activist U.S. presidency: Bill Clinton's late-night phone calls with overseas leaders, his micromanagement of peace talks, his willingness to engage - for better or worse - in troubles beyond U.S. borders.

Things are likely to be different under George W. Bush.

Now that Bush has taken office, picked his foreign policy and security teams and switched gears from campaigning to governing, analysts and officials around the world are cautiously taking stock of how the new president and his advisers will confront the globe's challenges.

The tentative consensus: Bush's assumption of office heralds a less interventionist American diplomacy, one that is more demanding of allies to solve their own problems and more reluctant to make commitments abroad unless the U.S. stakes are high and the goal is clear.

At the same time, it also foretells a more assertive defensive posture: a harder line against suspected sources of terrorism, for example, and more forceful support for a missile defense shield that many allies - and potential rivals like China - are wary of.

The foremost expectation is that of a more inward-looking America.

"There is the possibility, the likelihood, that President Bush will be more inclined to leave countries to sort themselves out and protect what he sees as directly being American national interests," said George Jones, a professor of government at the London School of Economics.

Bush has said little on foreign policy, so observers abroad have had to divine his direction by his Cabinet choices: Secretary of State nominee Colin Powell is well-known for his reluctance to get involved in foreign crises; National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice has talked about a "division of labor" with European allies; both Powell and Donald Rumsfeld, nominated as secretary of defense, are staunch supporters of the anti-missile shield.

In Europe, these and other choices could mean the Kosovos of the future will have to be handled with less of a U.S. commitment. In Asia, the Japanese can expect more pressure from Washington to assume a bigger security role in the region, but less pressure on trade. Africans wonder if they'll be forgotten by an administration that stays closer to home, or if

they can count on Powell - the first African-American secretary of state - to make the region a higher priority.

Observers, however, have not concluded the new U.S. foreign policy will be one of neglect, and many see advantages to a more hands-off approach. Latin Americans hope Bush will put more emphasis on cutting domestic demand for drugs. Some Europeans say Bush may force their continent to become more independent, pushing the NATO alliance into a more balanced, mature phase.

The heavy U.S. intervention of the past eight years also has its critics. Clinton was personally involved with the minutiae of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, for example, only to see those efforts melt down in the violence that has engulfed the region in recent months.

"It's not the amount of attention," said Ghassan Khatib, a Palestinian political science professor at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank. "It's the quality of attention."

Some of the most complex and valuable overseas relations Bush will have to manage are with allies in Europe.

Many there have been highly sensitive to Bush's comments suggesting a withdrawal of American troops from Kosovo and Bosnia, where 9,000 U.S. peacekeepers are stationed. Some fear that could force an uncertain and ill-prepared Europe to fill the vacuum.

"If Bush really withdraws troops from the Balkans, as he has indicated, this would open up a debate on the credibility of U.S. commitment to NATO," said Sergio Romano, a former ambassador and one of Italy's leading analysts for foreign affairs. "Does Bush really want this?"

Elsewhere, the Arab-Israeli conflict presents Bush with one of his toughest foreign policy challenges - one whose linkages to vital American security interests cannot be ignored.

Analysts and officials in the region are split on what the new presidency will mean for them. For example, where some Israelis, for example, bemoan the departure of a president who took such a personal interest in their troubles, top Palestinians have said Bush would be more balanced.

While the Bush administration is expected to concentrate its diplomatic energies on more narrowly defined U.S. interests, there is one area where the new president is seen as more

aggressive: security.

The most salient, early sign of that is the firm support in the administration for constructing an extensive defense shield against missile attack. Both Rumsfeld and Powell defended the idea in Senate confirmation hearings.

U.S. allies, however, are uneasy. And the proposal especially ranks China, which fears an extension of the shield to East Asia could blunt its ability to use the threat of military force to push Taiwan into unification and deter U.S. intervention.

There are other signs of a more tense relationship with Beijing. Republican conservatives are urging Bush to boost military ties with Taiwan. Colin Powell recently told the Senate that the administration intended to provide for the defense needs of Taiwan, and discarded the notion that China was a strategic partner of the United States.

Some see a greater division of the East-Asian into two opposing camps coming, with China, North Korea and Russia on one side, and the United States, Japan and South Korea on the other.

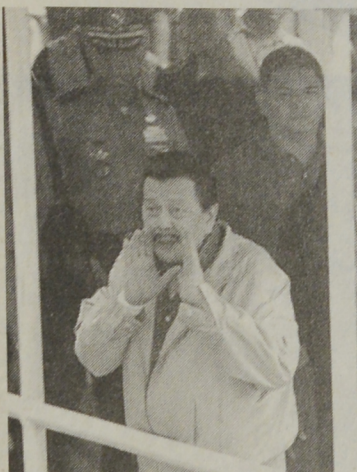
The new approach could also bring Washington into conflict with Moscow. Yevgeny Volk, the head of the Heritage Foundation's Moscow office, said Bush is likely to resent Russia's superpower ambitions and President Putin's attempts to engage regimes in Cuba, North Korea, Iraq, Iran and Libya.

"The Kremlin has been under a false impression that it would be easier to deal with the new Republican administration," Volk said. "In fact, relations are likely to become more tense."

Some parts of the world wonder if Bush's definition of U.S. interests will leave them off the map entirely.

Most of the African continent is among them. The continent's ills - AIDS, crushing poverty, a perpetual cycle of war and bloodshed - is in dire need of attention. But with little to compete with the strategic importance of Europe and Asia or the oil of the Middle East, many expect a low profile under the Bush regime.

"On the other hand, Africa tends to be low on the totem pole ... whether it's a Democratic or Republican administration," said Francis Kornegay of the South African Institute of International Affairs in Cape Town.



Estrada shouts 'Thanks' to the media after he and his entourage boarded a barge to leave the presidential palace in Manila, Jan. 20, 2001.

Phillipine government bars Estrada from leaving

MANILA, Philippines (AP) - The Philippines on Tuesday barred ex-President Joseph Estrada from leaving the country while recovering his trial on charges he stashed away millions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks.

Senate President Aquilino Pimentel said he and the supreme court's chief justice decided to restart the impeachment trial by early next week to "wind up the proceedings."

The trial's derailment on Jan. 17 led to massive protests that forced Estrada from office on Saturday, though he never officially resigned.

On Tuesday, the Justice Department issued a "hold departure" order on Estrada, his wife, one of his sons and several other

suspects. It bars them from leaving the country.

Tax collectors said they were ready to freeze bank accounts linked to Estrada. More than 100 protesters gathered outside two Manila banks, vowing to prevent him from gaining access to accounts he allegedly has there.

Estrada is under investigation on suspicion of plunder, misuse of funds, graft, perjury, bribery and possession of unexplained wealth.

Estrada made a point of not signing a resignation. In a letter to Pimentel, dated Saturday but not delivered until Monday, he claimed he was temporarily incapacitated and turned over power to Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. She has been sworn in to succeed

him.

The U.S. State Department on Monday noted the transfer was achieved through democratic procedures, and said it looks forward to working with Macapagal-Arroyo.

Television coverage of his impeachment trial gripped the nation for 22 days. It was derailed last week after the entire prosecution team resigned to protest an 11-10 vote by senators, sitting as judges, to bar access to bank records.

The reconvened impeachment trial will be mostly moot, said House prosecutor Joker Arroyo.

"The impeachment court has served its purpose," Arroyo said. "The fact of the matter is that the president is now a deposed

president, with or without a resignation."

Nelson Aspe, an officer of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, said his agency expected orders Tuesday to freeze bank accounts linked to Estrada.

They would prevent him from accessing accounts registered in his name as well as accounts that his political opponents say he used to hide as much as \$67 million with at least four aliases.

Ombudsman Aniano Desierto said two of those named in the order - businessman Charlie "Atong" Ang, a close friend of Estrada, and Yolanda Ricaforte, accused of helping Estrada receive bribes - already have left the Philippines.

The Justice Department denied

a request for a hold order on Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis Singson, Estrada's former gambling buddy who sparked the scandal in October by accusing him of pocketing illegal gambling payoffs and tobacco tax kickbacks.

Singson said Tuesday he would cooperate with a criminal investigation against Estrada. The government said he will be kept in a witness-protection program.

Also Tuesday, the Philippine stock exchange fell as the euphoria over the weekend ouster of Estrada began to fade and investors took profits from the previous day's record gains.

Traders said they were concerned over signs that Estrada may contest his removal and attempt to stage a comeback.

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