

Floods in Eastern Europe



photo: Pompierii Romani

EUROPE: Countries in Eastern Europe have experienced heavy rains and snow melt, leading to a severe flood alert warning and causing many rivers to burst their banks.

In the Czech Republic, people were forced to evacuate their homes as the swollen rivers flooded towns, despite the flood barriers which had been erected. Around one fifth of the city of Olomouc was said to be under water, and soldiers were brought in to help strengthen the remaining flood defences.

In Germany, the river Elbe flooded

eight nearby cities when it burst its banks, and 1,300 people had to evacuate their homes.

In Romania the river Danube reached its highest level since 1895 – the authorities decided to drain around 90,000 hectares (350 square miles) of farmland to reduce the danger to communities downstream.

However, the Vienna-based International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, (ICPDR), has devised a flood warning system for the Danube, trials for which are due to begin later this year.

This new system would give up to ten days' warning of anticipated floods, giving communities time to protect their homes and buildings before leaving. It will be launched as a pilot scheme on the upper and middle sections of the Danube, and later it is planned to be extended to the entire length of the river.

Until the scheme is introduced, the floods may delay crop sowing in areas such as northern Serbia and other parts of Europe, affecting farming, agriculture and the European economy.

Bomb attacks kill dozens

MIDDLE-EAST: A suicide bomber killed nine people along with himself and injured about 50 on April 17 in Tel Aviv. The bombing occurred during the festival season of Passover, and was the first suicide attack in Israel since January.

The bomb went off in the Neve Shaanan's area of Tel Aviv at around lunchtime, in a crowded street near a bus station.

The week following this incident, on April 24, a triple bomb attack in the Red Sea resort of Dahab killed at least 23 people and injured about 62.

This popular restaurant area, crowded with tourists, was hit by two blasts in quick succession at around 19:00 Monday evening. A third bomb exploded in a nearby shopping street, an area popular with tourists looking for souvenirs.

Like other towns in the Sinai Peninsula, exit and entry to the area is controlled by police checkpoints on either side of the only road into and out of the town. Egyptian authorities said that it was too early to say who was behind the attacks.

Cruise ship blaze deaths

JAMAICA: One passenger died and eleven were injured when a fire broke in the early hours of March 23, on the passenger decks of the *Princess Cruises* ship. The vessel was carrying more than 3,800 passengers and crew from the Cayman Islands to Montego Bay, Jamaica.

The cruise ship was last inspected by the Coast Guard in San Juan – no discrepancies with the ship's safety were reported. As the ship is registered in the British colony of Bermuda, the United Kingdom Marine Accident Investigations Branch will be the primary investigating agency, accompanied by the US maritime and fire safety investigators. The cause of the fire is still to be confirmed.

Guide to handling bodies

WORLD: A new manual provides step-by-step guidance for first responders on how to recover and identify victims killed in disasters while respecting the needs and rights of survivors.

Management of Dead Bodies After Disasters: A Field manual for First Responders is aimed at facilitating proper identification of victims and prevention mass burials and cremations. The book dispels the widely held misconception that dead bodies pose a serious health threat in the aftermath of disasters.

"After most natural disasters, there

is a fear that dead bodies will cause epidemics," says Oliver Morgan, honorary research fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and one of the book's three co-editors. "This belief is wrong. Most infectious organisms do not survive beyond 48 hours in a dead body and it is the surviving population that is more likely to spread disease. But authorities often feel political pressure to resort to unnecessary measures such as hasty mass burials."

Chapters cover practical information and guidance on topics including:

the true health risks posed by dead bodies; how to recover bodies; how to store them; methods for identification; long-term storage and disposal; communication and the media; and support to families and relatives. It also provides practical annexes.

Published by the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) in conjunction with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the book can be downloaded for free from www.paho.org.