

Death toll of Lagos arms dump blast tops 1,000

A fire gutted the main warehouse of the Red Cross in Nigeria, setting back efforts to provide aid to victims of a munitions store blast last week, for which the official toll has risen to more than 1,000 dead, officials said Saturday.

Koizumi's popularity nosedives

Public support for Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's cabinet has crashed to 47 percent after he fired Makiko Tanaka as foreign minister, a poll showed Saturday.

4 people killed in Meghalaya

At least four people, including two Indian border guards, have been killed in a clash with tribal separatists in the northeastern state of Meghalaya, officials said Saturday.

Army defuses 6 Maoist bombs in Kathmandu

The army in Nepal Saturday defused six bombs, four of which were planted at a bus station in Kathmandu, police said.

Milosevic denies ordering atrocities

Former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic said in an interview Saturday he never ordered his military to commit atrocities in the Balkans.

5 more killed in Jakarta as floods hit city centre

Five people were killed in the Indonesian capital Jakarta as heavy overnight downpours extended floods to the city center, prolonging a crisis which has forced 200,000 people from their homes and killed 50 nationwide.

US asks Indonesia to take action against terrorists

Indonesia should follow the lead of Singapore and Malaysia in taking firmer action against suspected terrorists, US Ambassador Frank Lavin said here Saturday.

Peep at US persecution in Korean War

"We demand that the US administration reinvestigate the truth behind the No Gun Ri incident because of new evidence and testimony that counter the US investigators' conclusion one year ago," spokesman Lee Nak-yeon said last month.

A royal marriage in style



Argentine Maxima Zorreguieta (L) and Dutch Crown Prince Willem-Alexander (R) smile at each other during their civil marriage ceremony on Saturday in the Beurs van Berlage (former stock exchange) in Amsterdam.

Dutch Crown Prince Willem-Alexander exchanged vows with Argentine investment banker Maxima Zorreguieta on Saturday in a civil ceremony in Amsterdam's former stock exchange.

The bride wore an ivory-coloured silk gown made by Valentino couture with a five-metre lace train, carrying a bouquet of white roses.

Willem-Alexander wore his dark blue navy uniform into the ceremony, which was carried out by the burgmaster of Amsterdam, Job Cohen.

The couple will go on to a religious ceremony in the Protestant Nieuwe Kerk church to start at 11:30 am local time (1030 GMT).

"From the merchant to the reverend," Cohen joked.

Out on the streets the colour was royal orange as spectators crowded the area near the palace on Dam Square and cheered the couple and the royal family.

Dignitaries from round the world will attend the religious ceremony in the Nieuwe Kerk, including UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and many of the crowned heads of Europe.

Zorreguieta won over the Dutch with her Latin charm after initial controversy over her father's ministerial post in Argentina's military dictatorship.

Her father, Jorge Zorreguieta, was not in attendance at the wedding.

Zorreguieta was agriculture minister for two years during Argentina's Videla military dictatorship, when up to an estimated 30,000 people were believed to have been killed.

At the time the engagement was announced, there were calls for Willem-Alexander, 34, to renounce his right to the throne.

To allay public criticism, Maxima, 30, quickly denounced the regime her father had served and declared he would not be attending the wedding.

Pakistan claims killing 114 Indian soldiers in Kashmir

Pakistani troops have killed 114 Indian soldiers in retaliatory fire across the disputed border in Kashmir over the past two months, a senior army officer said.

At least 87 Indian soldiers were killed when Pakistani troops targeted an ordnance depot in Jallas near Poonch town on the Indian side of the divided Himalayan state in mid-December, Brigadier Mumtaz Ahmed Bajwa said.

Associated Press of Pakistan quoted him as saying at a briefing in Chir Kot, a forward post near the Line of Control (LoC) unofficial border in Kashmir on Friday.

"Due to the attack there were confirmed reports of 87 Indian soldiers killed while scores received injuries," the news agency said.

Bajwa said the attack was in retaliation for "indiscriminate firing" from across the LoC on civilians in mid-December.

He said 27 other Indian soldiers were killed in different incidents during the period, which has seen a

dramatic escalation in tensions between the nuclear neighbours following a December 13 terrorist attack on the Indian parliament.

India has demanded Pakistan end "cross-border terrorism" by stopping Islamic militants crossing the LoC to take part in the 13-year-old uprising against Indian rule in Muslim-majority Kashmir.

Some 800,000 troops are massed on both sides of the LoC, the de facto border in Kashmir, which has caused two of the three wars between Pakistan and India since they gained independence in 1947.

PFLP withdraws from PLO executive body

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is withdrawing from the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) until its leader, Ahmed Saadat, is released from a Palestinian Authority jail, the group's second-in-command said Saturday.

"The PFLP is withdrawing from the PLO's executive committee until we have obtained the release of Ahmad Saadat," Abdelrahim Mulaeh told a press conference in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

"The continuing detention of our secretary general strikes against Palestinian democracy," Mulaeh said.

Mulaeh is the PFLP representative on the PLO executive committee, which runs the organization's day-to-day business.

Palestinian intelligence services arrested Saadat on January 15 as one of the conditions imposed by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to allow Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to leave Ramallah, where he has been blocked by the Israeli army since December 3.

'Diabolical lovers' jailed in France

A couple of grandparents known as the "diabolical lovers" were handed long jail terms by a court here Friday for a series of rapes and sexual aggressions on nine little girls over a five-year period.

Lanfranco and Liliane Giordani, aged 65 and 52, remained impassive as they were sentenced respectively to 18 and 12 years' imprisonment. The prosecution had called for 20-year sentences for the couple.

They were found guilty of raping and abusing nine girls aged from seven to 14 between 1994 and 1999 at their home and their country cottage west of Paris.

Wake up call for NATO

US Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz said Saturday that NATO must learn a lesson from the current crisis and adapt itself to fight terrorism.

Speaking to a 43-nation security conference in Munich, Wolfowitz said "a military transformation agenda" was needed "to develop NATO's capacities in counter-terrorism."

Wolfowitz warned that the September 11 terror attack against the United States, "terrible though it was, is but a pale shadow of what will happen if terrorists use weapons of mass destruction."

"We cannot afford to wait until we have a visceral understanding of what terrorists can do with weapons of mass destruction before we act to prevent it, he said.

He said NATO had provided valuable logistics support in the current crisis but that the time has come "to launch a reform of the Alliance command structure to make it leaner, more streamlined, more cost efficient

and, above all, more flexible." NATO, founded to defend Europe against a Soviet invasion, had to change from "trying to guess which enemy the Alliance will confront years from now" to "focus on what capabilities adversaries could use against us, on showing up our own vulnerabilities, and on exploiting new capabilities to extend our own military advantages," he said.

"We are in a new era, facing new risks, and we must have new capabilities," he said.

German conservative opposition leader Edmund Stoiber picked up the theme in his address, calling on EU states to answer the US call for more defense spending.

"We Europeans must not only rely on Americans. We must do more for our own security. It is a truly European task," Stoiber said.

US President George W. Bush has this week repeatedly called Iran, Iraq and North Korea "an axis of evil," bluntly warning they could soon become targets in the US-led war on terrorism.

Karzai tackles trouble at home

Afghan interim leader Hamid Karzai returned home Saturday and immediately began confronting the threat of instability raised by bloody clashes between rival warlords in his week-long absence, officials said.

He was locked in talks with Border Affairs Minister Amrullah Zadrán on the situation at Gardez, the capital of eastern Paktia province where a fierce battle raged during the week, a senior government source told AFP.

Snow at Kabul International Airport forced Karzai's plane to land at Bagram, the former Soviet air base some 50 kilometers (30 miles)

north of the capital, around 4:00 am (2330 GMT Friday), his office said.

Zadrán was summoned soon after daybreak for talks on Gardez where Karzai's appointed governor was driven out by the forces of Saif Ullah who had seized the province in the power vacuum after the fall of the Taliban.

"They are meeting to try work out solutions," the source said. "The process may take a day or two."

The clashes occurred when the appointed governor, Padsha Khan - Zadrán's brother -- tried to take up his post through force after Ullah refused to hand over power.

Some 50 people, including about 20 civilians, were killed in the fierce exchange of mortar, rocket and

machinegun fire between the two forces.

Khan's troops were forced to retreat after two days of clashes, which ended late Thursday.

The government source said the defeat of Padsha Khan was "humiliating" for Karzai.

"It shows that his power barely extends beyond Kabul. How he deals with the problem will determine whether he will in future be known as the leader of Afghanistan or only of Kabul.

"Padsha Khan supports the deployment of international peacekeepers and is determined to end the fighting, but it seems other warlords have different ideas," he said.

Pak cops rule out death of US journalist

Pakistani police have "ruled out" the possibility that kidnapped US reporter Daniel Pearl is dead, despite an e-mail claiming he had been killed, a senior official said Saturday.

"We now rule out the possibility that he has been killed as claimed by the kidnappers," Sindh province Home Secretary Brigadier Mukhtar Sheikh told AFP.

Police have followed all information contained in the e-mail including an exhaustive search of graveyards in Karachi, the capital of Sindh, and found no evidence Pearl

was dead, Sheikh said.

US news organisations said they received an e-mail on Friday, after the execution deadline set by the kidnappers, claiming the Wall Street Journal correspondent had been killed and his body dumped in a graveyard.

The message said they were "thirsty for the blood of another American," CNN reported.

In Islamabad, foreign ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said the search for Pearl is continuing.

LTTE using truce to recruit child soldiers

The Tigers had intensified conscription following the unilateral truce they have been observing since Christmas. The ceasefire has been reciprocated by the government.

Military officials too have reported stepped up recruitment drives by the rebels who have openly entered government-held areas under cover of the truce.

The problem was acute in the multi-ethnic eastern province, the UTHR said.

"In areas... where the LTTE's movements were hitherto inhibited, the LTTE came in and started

demanding children and money to set up offices.

"Where the children were extremely young, the LTTE often demanded a written declaration from the parents that they would give the first child that comes of age -- reportedly 12 years," the UTHR said, adding childless couples were asked to pay money to the LTTE.

When residents complained to the army and the police they were told that the new government would take offence if they tried to stop the LTTE's activities, the UTHR said.

Terror stalks Americans

The US State Department cautioned Americans travelling abroad and living overseas that they remain at risk of retaliation, including kidnapping, following the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan.

According to Friday's statement, US citizens and interests "remain at increased risk of terrorist attacks, including by groups with links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida organisation."

Those are individuals that "do not distinguish between official and civilian targets," the statement reads.

The State Department also has "unconfirmed reports" that US citizens "may be targeted for kid-

napping or other terrorist actions," noting the January 23 abduction of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in Karachi, Pakistan.

In light of Pearl's abduction, US government sites around the world "remain at a heightened state of alert."

Those sites "may from time to time temporarily close or suspend public services as necessary to review their security posture and ensure its adequacy," the statement notes.

The State Department "remains deeply concerned about the security of Americans overseas," and urges Americans abroad "to review their circumstances carefully and to take all appropriate measures to ensure their personal safety."

The announcement supersedes a worldwide caution issued on October 23 by adding concern over possible kidnappings.

Meanwhile, a communist insurgent spokesman Saturday warned his forces were ready to fight US troops in the Philippines but was evasive on an incident in which a US airforce plane taking part in a military exercise was fired upon.

Gregorio Rosal, spokesman of the communist New People's Army (NPA), said in a statement read over the radio that the communist guerrillas were the next target of US soldiers deployed in the southern Philippines for joint operations against the Abu Sayyaf Muslim kidnapping group.



Indonesians escort a makeshift-raft in a flooded area in Jakarta on Saturday. The midnight rain brought more misery to almost 200,000 Jakartans who have been forced to evacuate their homes since the massive flooding hit the capital. The death toll from flood-related incidents in Jakarta and satellite towns since Tuesday stands at 24.

5 more killed in Jakarta as floods hit city centre

Five people were killed in the Indonesian capital Jakarta as heavy overnight downpours extended floods to the city center, prolonging a crisis which has forced 200,000 people from their homes and killed 50 nationwide.

"The bodies of four men were found floating in rivers in south and central Jakarta this morning," Edi Susanto, an official at the flood relief center, told AFP on Saturday.

Another man was found dead outside a high-rise building in downtown Jakarta, apparently of electric shock, the official Antara news agency reported.

The midnight rain brought more misery to almost 200,000 Jakartans

who have been forced to evacuate their homes since the massive flooding hit the capital and other regions on Tuesday.

The death toll from flood-related incidents in Jakarta and satellite towns since Tuesday now stands at 24. At least 26 more people have died elsewhere in the archipelago, according to officials and media reports.

A woman was killed by a landslide that hit a neighbourhood in West Java province, Antara said.

Jakarta's main thoroughfares and the National Monument landmark near the presidential palace were 50 centimetres (one foot eight inches) under muddy brown water early Saturday, causing heavy traffic jams.

US asks Indonesia to take action against terrorists

Indonesia should follow the lead of Singapore and Malaysia in taking firmer action against suspected terrorists, US Ambassador Frank Lavin said here Saturday.

Lavin said it was "disturbing" to read reports that some of the suspected terrorists who had planned to attack American targets in Singapore, including the US embassy, had fled to Indonesia.

The envoy, speaking before diplomats, academics and businessmen, said there was a need for greater border controls in Southeast Asia to reduce the ease with which suspected terrorists move to evade security forces.

He said Washington has asked Singapore to tighten controls at its main port to curb any attempts by terrorists to use the world's busiest

harbour to smuggle contraband, and was assured of the passage of legislation for that purpose when parliament convenes next month.

"I think it's a little unclear what the nature of the challenge is in Indonesia," Lavin told the United Nations Association of Singapore.

"We saw a substantial number of arrests in Singapore, we saw equally aggressive ... moves in Malaysia, (but) we have not seen that kind of response yet in Indonesia and it is a matter of concern," he said.

As the head of the embassy that was reported to be a key target in the attacks, Lavin said: "It is very disturbing to read the news reports that these planners are now in Indonesia and we do expect the Indonesian government to take action."



A large number of Afghan families wait for the opening of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border at Tourkham on Saturday for returning to their homeland.