INTERNÂTIONAL

Satellite pictures show huge eruption on sun

Reuters, Washington

A massive solar eruption, more than 30 times the length of Earth's diameter, blaste away from the sun on Monday, and a satellite captured graphic images of the

The eruption occurred at 9:19 a.m. EDT and showed up in a picture taken by one instrument of the SOHO satellite as a fiery looking "leg" in the lower-left corner of the mage, scientists said in a statement.

Pictures taken over the following 90 minutes by another SOHO instrument show a loopy-looking eruption taking place and hen dispersing. All images are visible at the

http://soho.nascom.nasa.gov. The "leg" is what astronomers call a eruptive prominence, which is a loop of magnetic fields that trap hot gas inside. As into the area around the sun and appeare

If eruptions like these are aimed Earth, they can disturb Earth's magnetosphere, but this one was not directed at our planet, a spokesman for SOHO said by telephone

SOHO -- short for Solar and Heliospheric Observatory -- is run by the National Aeronautics and Space

Philippine VP resigns as foreign minister

REUTERS, Manila

Philippine Vice President Teofisto Guingona resigned as foreign minister yesterday, settling but perhaps not ending a public row with President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo over U.S. military exercises in the south of the country.

In a joint statement, Arroyo said she had accepted the resignation with regret and that it would take effect on July 15.

Analysts said that, with Guingona out of the way, Philippine foreign policy would more closely reflect Arroyo's wishes.

But they noted that he would continue as vice president, and could pose some problems at a time when Arroyo's popularity ratings were on the wane.

"He will play the role of a loyal devil's advocate," said political analyst Alex Magno

Other analysts, however, said that since Guingona had little personal following, he would not present a major obstacle.

Meanwhile government and diplomatic sources said Arroyo might take over the Foreign Ministry post in the interim before deciding who her permanent for eign minister would be.

One name being floated was Rodolfo Severino, a diplomat whose term as secretary-general of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) ends later this

Tuesday's statement, co-signed by Arroyo and Guingona, signaled that the country's highest political leaders had come to some understanding on their differences, which have simmered for months and burst into the open last week in an embarrassing mix-up.

Pinochet unfit for trial: Chile court

AP, Santiago

Citing his health, Chile's Supreme Court ruled ageing Gen. former dictator Augusto Pinochet unfit to stand trial for the notorious "Caravan of Death" political killings more than a quarter century ago.

Monday's Supreme Court decision could set a precedent for other cases pending against Pinochet. A lawyer for hundreds of relatives of those killed during Pinochet's 1973-90 dictatorship said they would continue pursuing legal action against him.

The daughter of a communist leader allegedly assassinated by Pinochet's security forces called the ruling "unfortunate."

In the 4-1 ruling, the South American nation's highest court upheld a March 2001 lower court decision deeming Pinochet mentally unfit to stand trial. Pinochet, 86, suffers from dementia, an irreversible neurological disorder.

The ruling suspends a criminal case pursued by Judge Juan Guzman, who sought to try Pinochet in connection with mass executions carried out shortly after he seized power from then-President Salvador Allende in a 1973 coup.

His regime is accused of sending a so-called "Caravan of Death" military squad throughout Chile to execute political prisoners, the most notorious of alleged abuses during Pinochet's 13-year rule. Pinochet has denied responsibility

US, Afghan officials probe village bombing

Afghan and US officials headed to an Afghan village yesterday to investigate reports that a stray US bomb killed 40 members of a wedding party during a

major operation to track down Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. A local official said bombs had also fallen elsewhere in the central province of Uruzgan, as U.S. and Afghan forces scoured the area for traces of Mullah Omar, who was born close to the bombed village but has been on the run since late last year.

Afghan officials said wedding guests near the village of Deh Rawud were firing into the air -- a tradition in Pashtun weddings -- when they were mistak-

But U.S. officials said a ground patrol had called in air support after feeling threatened by automatic weapon fire. The planes then met sustained and hostile fire that was not consistent with a wedding party.

"Normally when you think of celebratory fire, which is something that is not necessarily uncommon, it's random, it's sprayed, it's not directed at a specific target," U.S. Colonel Roger King told reporters at Bagram air base. "In this instance, the people on board the aircraft felt that the weapons

were tracking them and were making a sustained effort to engage them," he said, adding that the planes had then dropped seven 2,000 bombs on the

Raaz Mohammad, an official in the governor's office in the provincial capital of Tarin Kowt, told Reuters 40 people were killed "We have buried the bodies in Deh Rawud...including women and chil-

"Other areas of the province were bombed during the day on Monday. We have sent people out in the area to find out about the death toll from other

A local aid agency said U.S. and Afghan soldiers were also searching houses on Monday in and around the village where the bombing occurred, some 115 miles north of the southern city of Kandahar

"Afghan and U.S. troops are conducting house-to-house searches in the village," said Razique Samadi, of the Afghan Development Association, which is running projects in the Uruzgan region. "They are especially looking

In the capital Kabul, peacekeepers from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) were on alert for possible reprisals.



Map of Afghanistan locating Uruzghan province, where a US bombing error killed scores of wedding guests on Monday.

Villagers mourn

AFP, Kabul

Villagers in central Afghanistan have begun mourning the deaths of 40 members of a wedding party who were killed in an apparently botched US bombing raid, local officials said Monday.

"There are preparations for the official mourning of the martyrs in Dehrawad according to the people's religious beliefs," an official of Uruzgan's provincial administration, who gave his name as Besmellah, told AFP.

Authorities in Dehrawad, a district of Uruzgan some 120 km north of the main southern city of Kandahar, were still assessing the damage of Sunday night's attack, he said by satellite telephone.

"Teams have been sent from the provincial capital to assess the damages and to ascertain the number (of casualties)," he said.



Bollywood stars Vinod Khanna (L) and Shatrughan Sinha (R) pose for photographers after taking oath as minister of state and cabinet minister respectively during a swearing-in ceremony at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi on Monday

India's much vaunted cabinet shake-up proved little more than Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP party boosting its dominance in the 24-member coalition government it heads, analysts said Tuesday.

After Monday's sweeping reshuffle, in which 12 new faces were brought into government, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) increased its number of ministers to 44 out of 77, party officials said.

"It is an ascension of the BJP over its allies," political analyst Mahesh Rangarajan said.

The Hindustan Times newspa-

the opposition Congress party's charge that Vajpayee had turned the government into one "of the BJP and for the BJP.

Local media said the only significant change as far as governance goes was the swapping of portfolios between Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha

"This reshuffle has little to do with governance, it is about politics. And about the BJP's daring attempt to reassert itself." the Indian Express newspaper said.

The cabinet reshuffle was preceded by the appointment of India's hawkish Home Minister Lal Krishna

Advani as deputy prime minister, which analysts interpreted as a shift in BJP's liberal image to its Hindu nationalist roots.

Cabinet shake-up boosts clout of BJP

Many of the new ministers are viewed as being close to Advani.

Analysts said the move also showed the BJP was clearly telling coalition allies opposed to its Hindu nationalist ideals to "like it or lump

They said BJP's losses in state elections in a number of politically strategic places had prompted the reshuffle, but added that it was too early to say whether it would reap any electoral gains from the move.

However, Advani's elevation could bring a change in political

fortunes since it was he who lifted the BJP party from the margins with a campaign to build a temple on the site of a 16th century mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya.

Of late, however, the government had checked a renewed drive to build the temple and asked religious leaders to abide by the verdict given by court on the dispute.

The BJP carried out the reshuffle with a simultaneous change in the party's top hierarchy by bringing in Venkaiah Naidu as the new party president, as well as former law minister Arun Jaitley as the party spokesman

The shift in the portfolio of Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha

was also seen as a political move as his budgetary taxation policies targeting the common man were seen as weakening BJP's voter

Newspapers dubbed the new face of the government as the "war team" put together by Vajpayee to lead the party into state elections in 10 states next year and federal elections in 2004 Analysts warned that coalition

allies of the government opposed to BJP's Hindu nationalist ideals could well break away earlier than the scheduled elections if the Hindu hardliners began calling all the shots in government decisions

Pakistani cleric warns of upheaval

Seven al-Qaida men arrested in tribal area

AP, Islamabad

A top Pakistani Muslim cleric said Monday that the fiercely independent tribesmen living near the Afghan border may resort to violent protest if the military continues a major USbacked search for al-Qaida fugitives in the mountainous area.

"I warn Musharraf to refrain from expanding operations in tribal areas where tribesmen are extremely upset." Maulana Fazle ur-Rehman. chief of the fundamentalist Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam told The Associated Press by telephone from the eastern

"I am trying my best to cool down my party in tribal areas, but things will slip out of my hands if these American-backed operations continue there," he said. "There will be riots and civil disobedience.

The cleric's warning was the latest sign of discontent among conservative Muslims in Pakistan forces arrested seven foreign al-

amid a widening government campaign of reward offers, arrests, and growing military force against

Several extremist groups in this

nation of 147 million were angered

by the decision last year of President Gen. Pervez Musharraf to back the U.S.-led war on terror. More than 3,000 troops are conducting house-to-house searches, helicopter flyovers and roadside checks in the Waziristan tribal region in a hunt for about 40 al-

Qaida fugitives who attacked a

Pakistani army unit last Wednesday,

killing 10, including a major and a Two suspected al-Qaida fighters were killed and one teenager was captured in the gunbattle near the border village of Wana, 190 miles

Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider said Monday that security Qaida operatives in the area. Soldiers said over the weekend they detained 20 suspected al-Qaida fighters there. But Rehman said no al-Qaida

fighters are in the tribal belt, where residents often voice support for Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime and occasionally refer to the U.S. and allied troops as "the enemy." Rehman's group is strong in the

tribal belt. His party espouses a philosophy similar to that of Afghanistan's defeated Taliban U.S. officials have said no American troops are directly partici-

pating in the search in Pakistan but

are scouring the Afghan side of the American officials have said up to 1.000 al-Qaida and Taliban fighters

may be on both sides of the border. But Musharraf said Monday that al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden is

"I can't say for sure whether he is dead or alive," Musharraftold reporters. "One thing I am certain about is that he can't be in Pakistan.' He said bin Laden would travel

with a large group of supporters that would be easy to spot. "He cannot be hiding in one small corner of Pakistan." he said. "Re-

maining there without being found is almost impossible. Pakistani police are also waging a crackdown on violent extremist groups nationwide.

They have arrested dozens of people in the kidnapping and killing Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl and two bombings in the southern city of Karachi: the June 14 bombing of the U.S. Consulate, which killed 12 Pakistanis: and the May 8 car bombing outside a Karachi, which killed 11 French engineers and three oth people, including the bomber



Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri (R) poses with Timorese President Xanana Gusmao (L) for photographers at the presidential Palace in Jakarta yesterday. President Gusmao arrived in Jakarta yesterday for his

first visit to Indonesia since becoming head of state.

N Korea blames US for clash

REUTERS, Seoul/Yeonpyongdo

North Korea accused the United States of staging a weekend battle between the North and South Korean navies to strain ties between the divided neighbours, but Washington swiftly rejected this as "spurious."

The United States has described Saturday's battle, in which four South Korean sailors died and 19 were wounded, as an "armed provocation" by the North and agreed on Monday to step up border surveillance with South Korea's military. The clash, just hours before

South Korea's soccer team played its last match on the penultimate day of the month-long World Cup finals it co-hosted with Japan, was a reminder that the Korean peninsula remains one of the world's potential flashpoints.

It underscored the problems President Kim Dae-jung faces when

west of Islamabad

He is expected to outline his views on the clash, which he has already said will prompt tighter defences but not stop him pursuing his "Sunshine Policy" of engaging The opposition and some news-

papers are calling for a review of Kim's Nobel Peace Prize winning policy and a halt to tourist programs which generate hard currency for North Korea. But fishermen at Yeonpyongdo, a

set of South Korean-held islands close to the battle site, shrugged off security fears and resumed fishing for blue crabs, telling a Reuters reporter they were more anxious about lost fishing time "We are not worried about a clash

even though our homes are close to the North. People living on this island are used to this kind of situation." said 46-year-old fisherman Choi

we are relieved," he said.

The timing of the incident has mystified diplomats and diplomatic analysts. In comments published late on Monday by the North's official KCNA news agency, the North Korean Foreign Ministry said it was preposterous of Washington to accuse Pyongyang of an "armed

"All facts clearly prove that the incident was orchestrated by the United States to drive a wedge between the North and South of Korea because it was displeased with progress made in the inter-Korean relations," the ministry said. The State Department wasted no

time in responding to this. "That claim is completely spurious," Jo-Anne Prokopowicz, a department spokeswoman, told Reuters in Washington. She did not

NATO troops ransack home of fugitive

NATO-led peacekeeping troops in Bosnia broke into the family home of fugitive Bosnian Serb war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic early yesterday and turned it upside

mountain village of Pale, once the "capital" of the breakaway Bosnian Serb Republic which he led, has been empty for five years, a quard who witnessed the operation told Reuters.

Helicopter-borne French troops of the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) carried out the raid on the house in the heavily wooded hills above Sarajevo, telling the guard they were looking for weapons, he said.

The wife of the former Bosnian Serb president, who is wanted on charges of genocide, showed up at the Karadzic house an hour or more after the pre-dawn raid to inspect damage

The troops had shot open one of the doors inside the house, which was strewn with items apparently overturned in their search, including Orthodox Christian icons from the walls and items of decoration and furniture.

Radio B-92 who was on the scene said the garden gate and front door were shattered and the house left in complete chaos.

Chemical factory blast in Japan

70 residents flee homes

AP, Tokyo

A blast tore through a chemicalproducing factory in southwestern Japan, forcing 70 residents nearby to flee their homes, police said. Two women were treated for possible inhalation of poisonous gas.

The explosion at the Nankai Chemical Industry Co. plant occurred around 10:50 pm Monday (1950 BST) in Kochi, located on Japan's southern island of Shikoku. a police spokesman said on condition of anonymity. There were no workers in the plant at the time of the blast, he said

Two women driving a car near the plant at the time of the blast were taken to a hospital after complaining of breathing problems, said

local fire department spokesman Takahiko Ishikawa

Ishikawa said three more residents living nearby visited the hospital on their own after complaining of throat pain. None of the five who received treatment had life-threatening conditions

Ishikawa said. Yoshifuii Nozu, a police officer with the Kochi prefectural (state) police, said 70 residents living in the vicinity of the plant were temporarily evacuated due to fears of possible

chlorine gas poisoning. The cause of the explosion at the plant was still under investigation.

Osaka-based Nankai Chemical makes chemicals, pharmaceutical products and agricultural chemi-

Peru's ex-spy chief found guilty

AP, Lima

Vladimiro Montesinos, once one of Peru's most feared men, was convicted Monday of usurping office the first of more than 70 criminal charges ranging from arms smuggling to homicide that the exspymaster faces.

Montesinos, accused of orchestrating a vast network of corruption during former President Alberto Fujimori's rule, was sentenced to nine years in prison for seizing control of the National Intelligence Service while serving as an adviser to the agency.

The charge comes 19 months after a bribery scandal involving the former spy chief triggered the collapse of Fujimori's decade-long authoritarian rule.

Judge Saul Pena fined Montesinos. 57. the equivalent of \$2.8 million along with a prison term of nine years and four months a stiff sentence for a relatively minor charge. Prosecutors had requested only a seven-year sentence.

Montesinos, wearing a black windbreaker and dark slacks, reacted coolly as a court secretary read the verdict in a makeshift courtroom at a naval base outside Lima where he is being held in a

maximum-security prison. When asked if he had anything to say, Montesinos said quietly that he would exercise his right to appeal.

Under Peruvian law, minor charges like usurpation of office are prosecuted in expedited trials without public hearings. A judge rules based on closed-door testimony and evidence gathered.

Judicial authorities hope later this year to begin a series of public trials that will cover the dozens of other accusations against Montesinos, Pena said last week

Most of the charges are for corruption. A handful are for drug trafficking, arms smuggling and homicide, including accusations that Montesinos directed a paramilitary death squad.

US bombing blunder likely to backfire AFP, KABUL The latest deadly blunder to blight US military operations in Afghanistan will fuel fears that support for Islamic extremists will be bolstered rather than diminshooting" strategy.

ished by what Washington claims is its most accurate ever air campaign, analysts say. At least 40 people were killed and 70 injured in the central Afghan province of Uruzgan when a US B-52 bomber apparently targeted a wedding celebration,

The United States was quick to offer condolences but the incident comes at a bad time for the Americans already facing severe criticism for several high profile mistakes that have killed civilians and friendly troops. Even firm US ally Britain was quietly sharpening

according to local officials.

helping the very al-Qaeda extremists it targets. News of the latest tragedy came as senior British officials accused US forces of a "blundering" gung-ho approach to the hunt for remnants of Osama bin

daggers as fears grew that the military campaign in

Afghanistan -- and the fatal mistakes -- were actually

London's Sunday Telegraph quoted a senior aide in Prime Minister Tony Blair's government as saying US troops engaged in searches in tribal areas along the Afghan-Pakistan border had adopted a "march in

The official said the US action was "backfiring." alienating tribal leaders in the wild and remote area marking the porous border between Afghanistan and A spokesman for the US Central Command rejected

the accusations of blundering, insisting US forces were

"sensitive to regional issues" and had not been directly

engaged in operations in the tribal areas However, analysts said the rising number of "accidents" despite US claims of 75 to 80 percent accuracy in their aerial strikes could bring pressures on the government of newly elected President Hamid Karzai.

The Afghan leader acted swiftly to stem public criticism against him by appointing a high-powered committee to investigate the bombing and pay compensation to victims' families



Karadzic

REUTERS, Pale, Bosnia

down in a thorough search. The Karadzic house in the

A reporter for Belgrade-based