

Newborn Iraqi baby named 'Elections'

AFP, Baghdad

With many in Iraq regarding the first free vote in half a century as the rebirth of democracy, one woman who gave birth on Sunday named her baby girl "Intikhabat", Arabic for elections, a newspaper reported.

"We called her Elections because she was born on this historic day when Iraqis elected their representatives at the national assembly," the baby's aunt was quoted as saying by the Al-Sabah newspaper Wednesday.

The Baghdad daily said the baby, born at Baghdad's Al-Alwiya hospital, was in good health.

One killed as earthquake jolts Java island

AFP, Jakarta

One person was killed and four people injured when an earthquake measuring 5.2 on the Richter scale rocked Indonesia's Java island Wednesday, radio and seismologists said.

The quake also left many houses damaged in the hardest-hit district of Garut in West Java province and cut power, Elshinta radio said.

The inland quake occurred at 12:55 pm (0555 GMT), 43 kilometers (25 miles) south of Bandung, the capital of West Java, the Meteorology and Geophysics Agency said.

Elshinta radio said that one man died when his house collapsed. The report said an elementary school building in Bandung also collapsed but no one was injured in that incident.

Police could not confirm the reported casualties but said hundreds of residents in the Samarang area of Garut took to the street to protest drilling work for a steam turbine power plant which they said caused the earthquake.

"I'm trying to convince them that the earthquake was not caused by the drilling," Garut police spokesman Commissioner Edi Haryanto told AFP.

'Britain to pressure US on anti-poverty plans'

AFP, London

Britain is to pressure the United States to fully back its ambitious push to tackle poverty in the developing world at this week's G7 meeting in London, finance minister Gordon Brown said.

Britain would be seeking to persuade Washington that measures such as debt relief were not only good fiscal sense but also prevented the spread of terrorism, Chancellor of the Exchequer Brown told the Guardian.

"We will be trying to persuade America that debt relief and extra finance for development is in its interests not just because it is good economics and social policy but good for its security as well," he told the paper.

Brown is to host a meeting of the finance ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) industrialised nations' club in London from Friday, while US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is also to visit Britain as part of a European tour.

The chancellor will be trying to sell his vision of a so-called Marshall Plan for Africa, a concerted development programme named after the US scheme to rebuild Europe after World War II.

Mubarak invites Abbas, Sharon to summit

Israel to freeze hunt for militants

AFP, Jerusalem

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is hosting a summit with Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh next week, Sharon's office said Wednesday.

"Following the progress that has been made in the negotiations on security with the Palestinians, President Mubarak has invited Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the president of the Palestinian Authority Mahmud Abbas to a meeting next Tuesday at Sharm el-Sheikh," said a statement.

"The prime minister has accepted this invitation," it added.

Meanwhile Israel was set to freeze its pursuit of wanted militants Wednesday as part of efforts to bolster new Palestinian leader

Mahmud Abbas, who is struggling to prevent a tentative truce from unravelling.

As Palestinian security forces moved to uncover tunnels which have been used to smuggle in weapons to Gaza-based militants from Egypt, Israel indicated that members of the factions could soon rest easy from the threat of detention.

"We will give Abu Mazen (Abbas) a chance by suspending our operations against the wanted Palestinians, but this is a freeze not an amnesty," Amos Gilad, chief political advisor to Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz, told army radio.

"If these wanted Palestinians start up their terrorist activities again, we will resume our offensive operations against them," added Gilad.

Gilad also expressed satisfac-

tion at what he called the "dramatic fall" in attacks by Palestinian militants in the past few days after Abbas managed to persuade armed groups to observe a temporary "cooling down" period.

The Palestinian president is trying to translate the temporary truce into a formal ceasefire by ending its military activities in the occupied territories and starting to release prisoners.

A spate of Palestinian mortar attacks on Monday and Tuesday on Jewish settlements in the south of the Gaza Strip has underlined the fragile nature of the current situation.

But Gilad said Israel had to be prepared to "take courageous measures to have a credible partner".



PHOTO: AFP
Palestinian policemen destroy and close a tunnel which they say was used to smuggle in weapons to Gaza-based militants from Egypt in the Rafah refugee camp yesterday. Palestinian security forces launched an operation to search out tunnels used to smuggle weapons under the border between Egypt and southern Gaza.

Nepal Maoist chief urges people to oppose king's power grab

AFP, New Delhi

Nepal's Maoist guerrilla leader Prachanda has urged "pro-people forces of the world" to oppose King Gyanendra's dismissal of the government and seizure of power.

Prachanda, who has been leading an increasingly bloody battle to topple the monarchy, said Gyanendra's move Tuesday sought "to push the Nepalese society of the 21st century back to the 15th."

"We heartily call upon the entire pro-people forces of the world to raise their voices against this autocratic step and in the favor of the Nepalese people's democratic movement," he said in a message on the Maoist website cpnm.org.

He said the Maoists, who have been fighting for nine years to install a communist republic, were prepared to cooperate with other political forces by establishing "a broad front with all that are against feudal autocracy."

Clinton named UN special tsunami envoy

Tsunami death toll crosses 289,000

AFP, United Nations, Jakarta

Former US President Bill Clinton has been named UN special envoy for tsunami-affected nations, reports UPI.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan "is confident that President Clinton will bring energy, dynamism and focus to the task of sustaining world interest in the vital recovery and reconstruction phase" following the December 26 disaster, a statement issued by the world body said.

"He (Annan) believes that no one could possibly be better qualified for this task."

Clinton, in a statement said he looked forward to serving in the post and would have more to say after visiting the tsunami-hit Indian Ocean rim nations later this month.

Meanwhile the number of people presumed dead in last month's

Asian tsunamis rose to more than 289,000 on Tuesday, with Indonesian authorities announcing a further increase in the number of dead and missing.

Indonesia was hardest-hit by the December 26 quake and tsunamis, with a total 236,012 people listed as dead or missing, the health ministry said.

A health ministry official said the missing would only be confirmed dead after one year.

Thailand's toll remained at 5,393 confirmed dead. A further 3,071 people were listed as missing, more than 1,000 of them foreigners.

The toll in Sri Lanka, which was second hardest hit by the catastrophe, stood at 30,957, according to the Centre for National Operations.

The number of people listed as missing was 5,637, but many were expected to be among those never

Iraq oil pipeline suffers new sabotage

AFP, Samarra

An oil pipeline linking two of Iraq's major refineries was attacked Wednesday near the restive Sunni city of Samarra north of Baghdad, police and oil sources said.

The pipeline linking the Baiji refinery north of Baghdad to the Dura refinery in the capital was hit by two bombs which exploded and caused a fire, police lieutenant colonel Mahmud Mohammed said.

An official at the Baiji refinery said the pipeline was one of eight conveying oil to Baghdad.

"The sabotaged pipeline has a capacity of 7,000 barrels per day," Majid Mamul told AFP, without specifying the extent of damage or how long repairs would take.

The cluster of pipelines, a crucial source of power for the capital, has been targeted by relentless attacks, which are an important part of the insurgency's activities and have slowed the country's recovery.



PHOTO: AFP
Newly-appointed Nepalese ministers take their oath of office at a ceremony at the royal palace in Kathmandu yesterday. King Gyanendra unveiled a new cabinet, a day after sacking the government and imposing an indefinite state of emergency in a move that has sparked international condemnation.

US LAWMAKERS TELL ANNAN Deal with Darfur or resign

AFP, Washington

Two key US lawmakers demanded that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan move immediately to end genocide in Darfur or resign in protest at the world body's inaction.

A UN spokesman rejected the call by Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas and Representative Frank Wolf of Virginia, saying Annan was not in a position to force action.

The two lawmakers also criticized a UN report released Monday for failing to recommend any action to stop the killing, saying the report had been sabotaged by internal UN politics.

"We cannot wait any longer for credible action on Darfur," Brownback said. "The time is now for the secretary general, Kofi Annan, to lead or leave."

The two Republican lawmakers said stopping the killing in the western region of Sudan would be a test of whether the United Nations remains relevant in the 21st century.

Some 70,000 people are estimated to have died, many from hunger and disease, while 1.5 million others have been displaced, many into squalid and dangerous camps, in two years of conflict.

"The United Nations has failed over and over to prevent genocide," said Wolf, who heads the House of Representatives subcommittee that approves US payments to the United Nations.

"If in the year 2005 the Security Council cannot deal with genocide ... I believe it's fair to ask what purpose is the United Nations serving in the 21st century."

Brownback said Security Council action "needs to happen within the next couple of weeks."

The two lawmakers said they want the council to: impose sanctions on the government in Khartoum, including a worldwide arms embargo; bar investments in Sudan; and increase sharply the number of African Union peacekeepers in Darfur.

'No alarm' over Pope's condition

BBC NEWS ONLINE

The ill health of Pope John Paul II is "no reason for alarm", a Vatican spokesman has said. The 84-year-old pontiff was rushed to the Gemelli hospital in Rome with breathing difficulties on Tuesday night after a bout of flu suddenly worsened.

But his condition stabilised after treatment including "respiratory assistance", the Vatican said.

It added that the Pope, who was last seen in public on Sunday, was able to take part in Mass on Wednesday morning.

The Polish-born pontiff is also suffering from Parkinson's disease and painful joint conditions.

"I think everyone has to be calm because there is no reason for alarm today," spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls told reporters outside the hospital on Wednesday morning.

The Pope was forced to cancel all engagements for several days after coming down with flu on Sunday, although he made his regular midday appearance at his window overlooking St Peter's

Square. The pontiff will miss his weekly audience on Wednesday for the first time since September 2003, when he had an intestinal ailment.

The Pope was taken by ambulance to the Gemelli hospital at about 2300 local time (2200 GMT) on Tuesday.

"The flu which has been affecting the Holy Father for three days was complicated with acute inflammation of the larynx and laryngospasm," Mr Navarro-Valls said in statement at the time.

Laryngo-spasm is a closure of the larynx that blocks the passage of air to the lungs - a condition where one cannot catch one's breath.

The Pope is being cared for in the same room at the hospital where he has been treated several times before.

It is the same hospital where he recovered from an attempt on his life in 1981, when he was shot in the abdomen.

Vatican sources say a contingency plan was made for the Pope to be taken to hospital if he fell victim to the current flu epidemic sweeping

India. A set of rooms is always reserved for him on the 10th floor.

The appointment of Karol Wojtyla as the first Polish Pope in 1978 was in many ways seen as a groundbreaking move for the Roman Catholic Church.

The first non-Italian Pope in 455 years - and at 58, the youngest Pope of the 20th Century - he was little known outside Vatican circles, and few experts tipped him as successor to Pope John Paul, who died after only 33 days in office.

John Paul II is now in the 27th year of his pontificate which makes him almost the longest-reigning Pope in history.

A 19th Century Pope occupied St Peter's throne for more than 30 years and no-one knows exactly how long the first Pope, St Peter, lived.

John Paul II - the leader of the world's estimated one billion Catholics - has visited more than 100 countries, and is estimated to have effectively circled the globe 27 times.

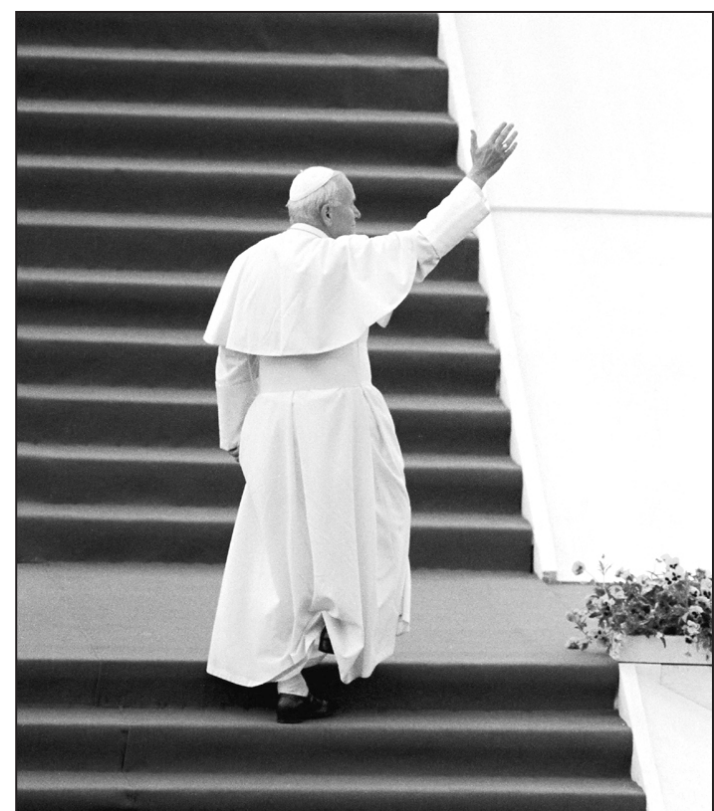


PHOTO: AFP
This file picture taken 11 June, 1987 in the northern Polish harbour of Gdynia shows Pope John Paul II bidding farewell to "people of the sea" as he climbs the stairs of the altar.

DNA test for tsunami baby

BBC NEWS ONLINE

A Sri Lankan court has ordered a DNA test on a "miracle baby" who survived December's tsunami to determine who his parents are.

The order upset a couple who say the child is their son. "Baby 81" was found alive under a pile of debris after the deadly tsunami.

Nine couples have claimed him as their son although police say only one couple, the Jeyarajahs, have made a formal legal claim.

Murugupillai Jeyarajah and his wife Junitha broke down in tears after the order was announced in a packed courtroom in the eastern town of Kalmunai.

"There is no need for a DNA test, this is our son," Mrs Jeyarajah said as her husband threatened to kill himself. "This is not justice."

The couple and a large crowd of supporters then marched to the local hospital where the baby has been kept, demanding to see the child.

Earlier the Jeyarajahs said they were confident of being united with the four-month-old boy.

The court had ordered two weeks ago that the baby be handed to his parents as soon he was well enough. Doctors said then he was too ill to be discharged from hospital.

The couple visited a Hindu

temple before arriving at court, reports say.

"We could not sleep the whole night. We were talking about our baby," the Associated Press quoted Junitha Jeyarajah as saying.

"We have told our God [to]

please give us back our baby."

"Baby 81" - so named because he was the 81st patient to be admitted to the hospital on the day the tsunami struck - has become a visible symbol of the disaster that hit Sri Lanka and other Asian countries on 26 December.



PHOTO: AFP
A nurse tries to get back a baby who survived December's tsunami disaster as Junitha Jeyarajah, a woman claiming to be the baby's mother grabbed the child after breaking into the hospital in Kalmunai yesterday.

2 US soldiers admit to Abu Ghraib abuses

REUTERS, Fort Hood

Two US soldiers pleaded guilty on Tuesday to charges of abusing Iraqi inmates at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison by stomping on fingers and toes, and, in another incident, humiliating naked rape suspects.

Sgt. Javal Davis, 27, admitted to stomping on the fingers and toes of a group of seven bound and hooded inmates during an episode of late-night abuse in November 2003. Other guards then undressed the prisoners and stacked them into a naked human pyramid. In a separate case also heard at the military base in Fort Hood, Texas, military intelligence soldier Spc. Roman Krol pleaded guilty to pouring water on Iraqi prisoners as they crawled naked on the floor and throwing a football at them.

The military judge sentenced him to 10 months in prison, reduced his rank to private and gave him a bad conduct discharge. "I want to apologize to all Americans for the embarrassment I have caused this country," Krol, 23, a Russian immigrant who spoke with a slight accent, told the court.

Davis is one of seven reservists from the Army's 372nd Military

Police Company charged with abuses at Abu Ghraib, photos of which caused a worldwide uproar. Two from that unit, including Pfc. Lyndie England, who was pictured holding a leash tethered to a naked prisoner, still face trial.

Several witnesses at another Abu Ghraib trial last month testified about abuses from Davis and Krol at the notorious prison that once served as a torture center under Saddam Hussein.

Davis argues he and other guards roughed up prisoners at the behest of intelligence officials who wanted to extract information from the prisoners.

"Basically, when the intelligence personnel, when they bring them down there, anyone that comes in there with intelligence value, they want to interrogate them and they want to ask you to loosen them up," Davis, formerly of Roselle, New Jersey, told ABC News last year.

Under the plea agreement, expected to result in a sentence lower than the original 8 1/2 years he faced, Davis admitted his guilt on three charges: dereliction of duty, making a false official statement, and battery.

Kidnapped boy in Bihar rescued ahead of polls

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian schoolboy abducted in India's lawless eastern state of Bihar was rescued Wednesday on the eve of regional polls, sparking accusations police and the local government had colluded with the kidnappers.

Fourteen-year-old Kislay Kaushal was abducted on January 19 while waiting for a school bus in Bihar's capital, Patna, where criminal gangs wield formidable influence.

Although appearing thin and unkempt, Kislay said his abductors had not physically harmed him.

"I am very happy to be back. I was not beaten up or anything," he told reporters at his home, surrounded by family and well-wishers.

Asked if he could identify his kidnappers, he said he had contact only with the man who came to feed him.

"I was confined in one room all the while," he said. Kislay's abduction gained nationwide notoriety after school-



PHOTO: AFP
Indian schoolboy Kislay Kaushal (L) with his mother yesterday in Patna after being released from captivity for a month.

children from across Bihar launched campaigns - boycotting school, undertaking fasts and holding demonstrations and protests - to pressure the government to find him.

The kidnapping of children has turned into a controversy in the lead up to state elections in Bihar.

Police said last week that seven children had been kidnapped in a 10-day period in January.

The main opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) voiced suspicions at the timing of Kislay's release and accused the Bihar government of having known where he was all along.

"From the very beginning the Bihar government and police knew about Kislay's whereabouts," BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi told the Press Trust of India news agency in New Delhi.

"His safe release a day before the first phase of assembly elections in the state exposes a serious nexus between the kidnappers and the Rabri Devi government," Naqvi said.

Police registered 32,085 cases of kidnapping from 1992 to September 2004 in Bihar which accounts for 26.5 percent of India's total reported crimes.