

Car bomb kills Briton in Qatar

AFP, Doha

A Briton was killed and 12 people were injured when a car bomb exploded outside a theater near a British school in the Qatari capital Doha late on Saturday.

Authorities said the bombing was still under investigation, but the incident raised fears that violence attributed to Islamist militants was spreading in the oil-rich Gulf region.

"The explosion which occurred this evening was caused by a booby-trapped car. One person was killed and 12 people were slightly wounded, 10 of whom were discharged from hospital," the Qatari interior ministry said in a statement carried by the official QNA news agency.

It was the first such attack in gas-rich Qatar, which is home to the US Central Command and served as the operational base for the US-led war on Iraq in 2003, since a Chechen rebel leader was killed in a car bomb last year.

Chinese scaling Everest to check if it's rising

AFP, Beijing

A group of Chinese researchers have set off on an expedition to check a theory that Mount Everest is growing by about one centimeter (0.4 inch) a year, state media reported yesterday.

Twenty-nine scientists and mountaineers were taking part in the mission to remeasure the world's tallest peak, the Xinhua news agency said.

The official height of the mountain, straddling China's border with Nepal, is currently 8,848 meters (29,500 feet).

It will be China's fourth such expedition following others in 1959, 1966 and 1975.

This time, the scientists would focus on the damage caused to the area by global warming in the past 30 years, Xinhua said.

Congress intervenes to keep Florida woman alive

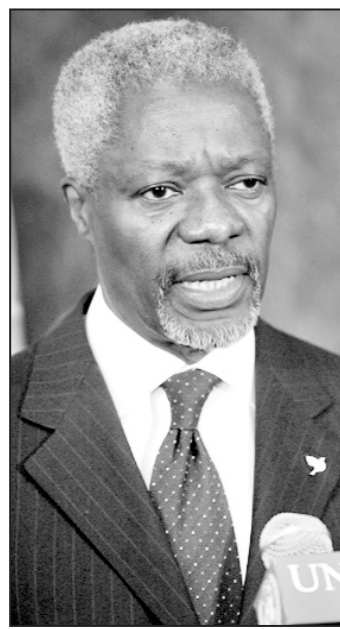
REUTERS, Washington

In an effort to keep alive a severely brain-damaged Florida woman, federal lawmakers worked out a bill on Saturday aimed at restoring her feeding tube and pushing the right-to-die case back into court.

The deal for the bill, which could be approved in the next two days, was reached 24 hours after doctors -- acting on a Florida court order -- removed the feeding tube that has kept Terri Schiavo alive for the past 15 years.

The White House said late on Saturday President Bush was cutting short a vacation in Texas to return to Washington in hopes of signing the bill.

Annan seeks Security Council guidelines on use of force



UN Secretary General Kofi Annan

AFP, Washington

Secretary General Kofi Annan is calling for the Security Council to define when to go to war, among other proposals for UN reform, The Washington Post said yesterday.

In a report recommending sweeping changes at the United Nations, to be unveiled Monday, Annan notes that the contentious and ultimately unresolved international debate that preceded the Iraq war damaged public confidence in the world body.

The new resolution would set out principles to guide the Security Council in deciding "when and how force can be used," the Post said.

Annan is also calling for an anti-terrorism convention to define terrorism as any act "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or noncombatants" in order to intimidate a community, government or international organi-

sation, according to the Post.

The UN chief will ask governments to determine the structure of a proposed enlarged Security Council, while backing efforts by aspiring council members India, Brazil, German and Japan to ensure that a single member cannot block their candidacies.

Noting that the UN Commission on Human Rights has been "undermined by its declining credibility and professionalism," Annan is proposing its replacement by a smaller Human Rights Council with members appointed by the General Assembly.

Annan said members "should undertake to abide by the highest human rights standards," according to the Post.

Annan has asked world leaders to gather for a September summit in New York to assess his plan, which is based largely on a study by independent experts released last year.

Strong earthquake rocks Japan

1 killed, 400 hurt

AFP, Tokyo

An earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale rocked the southern Japanese island of Kyushu yesterday, killing at least one person and injuring 400 others, officials and press reports said.

The quake, which occurred at 10:53 am (0153 GMT), also collapsed houses and roads, caused landslides and disrupted land and air traffic.

The government's Meteorological Agency immediately issued tsunami warnings but lifted them one hour later after detecting no significant rise in the tide.

The Kyodo news agency reported about 400 people received treatment at hospitals for injuries. Police confirmed 64 injuries, six of them serious, caused by splinters from shattered window panes and falling objects.

Glass splinters cascaded down from an office building in a downtown business district in Fukuoka, sending passersby rushing away in panic, according to television footage on the Japan Broadcasting Corp.

A 75 year-old woman died after she was crushed by a falling block wall in Fukuoka, a city official said.



This aerial view shows collapsed houses on Genkai island near Fukuoka yesterday after a strong earthquake hit southern Japan. The strong earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale rocked the southern Japanese island of Kyushu, killing at least one person and injuring some 400 others.



A South Korean student holds an effigy of US President George W. Bush during an anti-US rally in Seoul yesterday. Visiting US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed her appreciation for South Korea's dispatch of its troops to the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Europe must not arm China

Rice rules out strike option, separate talks with N Korea

AP, AFP, Beijing/ Seoul

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice suggested yesterday that European governments are irresponsible if they sell sophisticated weaponry to China that might one day be used against US forces in the Pacific.

"It is the United States, not Europe, that is defending the Pacific," Rice said. She spoke in Seoul, the penultimate stop on her weeklong tour of Asia.

South Korea, Japan and the United States are all Pacific powers and all contribute resources to keep the Asia-Pacific region stable, Rice said.

The European Union may soon lift an arms embargo on China that was imposed after the deadly 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square. Lifting the embargo would allow sale of technology and weapons that China badly wants to modernise its creaky military. China has recently gone on a military spending spree that Rice said concerns the United States.

"The European Union should do nothing to contribute," to the possibility that Chinese forces might turn European technology on Americans, Rice said after meetings with the South Korean president and foreign minister.

Earlier in Seoul she ruled out separate talks between the United States and North Korea but said

direct dialogue would take place as part of six-party nuclear negotiations.

She also called on Pyongyang to make a "strategic decision" to abandon its nuclear ambitions, but said Washington would not use its military to resolve the current nuclear standoff.

Rice has earlier said that China's recent statements about a possible invasion of Taiwan should give the Europeans pause. China passed a law this month codifying its intention to use military force against Taiwan should the island declare formal independence.

Rice said she would raise US objections to the Taiwan development with Chinese officials in two days of talks, along with long-standing concerns over Chinese human rights practices and violations of intellectual property rights.

Rice will also ask China for more help to persuade communist North Korea to return to international nuclear disarmament talks.

The Pyongyang government of Kim Jong Il announced last month what the United States has long suspected: It has already built at least one nuclear weapon.

The United States, Russia, Japan, South Korea and China began a joint diplomatic effort with North Korea last year aimed at persuading the country to give up its nuclear program.



Monica prays for asylum in Portugal

AFP, Lisbon

Bollywood actress Monica Bedi, who was detained in Portugal in 2002 for using a fake passport, appealed Saturday for the right to asylum in Portugal, saying in a newspaper interview that she fears she will be tortured if returned to her native India.

"I will certainly be tortured. Life does not exist for me in India. People want to kill me, they have carried out protests demanding that I be hung," she told the weekly newspaper Expresso.

Bedi was arrested in Lisbon in September 2002 along with her companion Abu Salem, one of India's most wanted men who is accused of masterminding a series of bombings that ripped through Bombay's commercial district in March 1993 killing more than 250 people.

Arab FMs prepare new Middle East peace plan

Summit hit by withdrawals

AFP, Algiers

Arab foreign ministers met in Algiers yesterday to fine-tune the agenda for this week's Arab summit, which includes a keenly-anticipated Jordanian proposal to resurrect a plan for peace with Israel.

But even as the meeting began Amman announced that Jordan's King Abdullah II will not attend the summit Tuesday and Wednesday in the Algerian capital because of a prior commitment to meet investors in the United States.

The king was only one of several key Arab leaders to pullout of the summit, which will also not be attended by Lebanese President Emile Lahoud and United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayyan.

Nonetheless Jordanian Foreign Minister Hani Mulki voiced satisfaction that Amman succeeded in putting back on the table the three-year-old Middle East plan for a comprehensive Arab peace with Israel based on a land-for-peace settlement.

"The objective was to make the Arab peace plan shine and we did," he told AFP.

The Jordanian proposal stipulates "the readiness of Arab countries to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and to be engaged in security and stability in the Middle East," Mulki said.

It also evokes "normal relations between the Arab countries and Israel in case a just and durable peace is achieved on the basis of international resolutions".

He insisted that its very foundations were based on "the principle of land-for-peace and the terms of the (1991) Madrid conference," which launched the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The Jordanian proposal, which was first put forward by Saudi Arabia at the Beirut summit in 2002, faced opposition from a majority of foreign ministers tasked with preparing the Algiers meeting.

An Arab diplomat said on Friday that the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon were opposed to the text and that the principal sticking points were "vague, confusing and insufficient" proposals over the future status of Jerusalem and of Palestinian refugees, the diplomat said.

INTELLIGENCE CHIEF TOLD BLAIR

US 'fixed' case for Iraq war to suit policy

AFP, London

The head of Britain's foreign intelligence agency told Prime Minister Tony Blair that the case for war in Iraq was being "fixed" by Washington to suit US policy, a BBC documentary claimed yesterday.

Richard Dearlove, head of MI6, briefed Blair and a group of ministers on the United States' determination to launch the invasion nine months before hostilities began in March 2003, the Sunday Times reported, citing the BBC programme, which was aired yesterday.

After attending a briefing in Washington, he told the meeting that war was "inevitable", according to the weekly newspaper.

"The facts and intelligence" were being "fixed round the policy" by US President George W. Bush's administration, Dearlove said.

The allegations against Blair just

weeks before an expected general election are likely to reopen a feud between the government and the British broadcaster.

The two fell out last year over allegations by a BBC reporter that Blair "sexed up" the case for war.

The documentary argues that Blair had signed up to follow Bush's plans for regime change in Iraq as early as April 2002, The Sunday Times said.

Robin Cook, Britain's former foreign secretary who resigned as leader of the House of Commons over Iraq, claimed that the threat of weapons of mass destruction was not the prime minister's true reason for going to war.

"What was propelling the prime minister was a determination that he would be the closest ally to George Bush and they would prove to the United States administration that Britain was their closest ally," Cook tells the programme.

5 cops, GI killed in Iraq

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents targeted Iraqi security forces and government buildings with gunfire, suicide bomb attacks and mortar rounds yesterday, leaving at least five people dead including a top anti-corruption official as the conflict moved into its third year since the US-led invasion.

In the north, a suicide bomber blew himself up inside a government compound in Mosul, killing himself and Walid Kashmoula, the head of the Iraqi police anti-corruption department, officials

said. Three others were injured.

A US soldier was killed and three others wounded when a roadside bomb hit their patrol yesterday in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, the US military said.

The attack happened at about 10:30 am (0730 GMT), said a military statement without giving further details.

In Baghdad, residents said saboteurs blew up a municipal building in a western neighbourhood, reducing the two-story building to rubble. No injuries were reported.