

US court rejects Schiavo parents' appeal

REUTERS, Atlanta

AUS court rejected an appeal by the parents of a brain-damaged Florida woman who had asked for her feeding tube to be reinserted, according to an opinion issued on Wednesday.

As Schiavo lay for a fifth day without food or water, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals acknowledged the "absolute tragedy that has befallen Mrs. Schiavo" in issuing its ruling in the middle of the night.

Schiavo's parents, Bob and Mary Schindler, had asked the appeals court to overturn a lower court's rejection of their bid to have the feeding tube reinserted.

The Schindler's attorney, David Gibbs, had told the court Schiavo was "fading quickly" and death was imminent.

A lawyer for her husband, Michael Schiavo, who maintains she had said she would prefer to die rather than be kept in a persistent vegetative state, had argued that reinserting the feeding tube would infringe on his wife's rights.

Musharraf calls for progress on Kashmir

One dead, three injured in Kashmir car-bomb blast

AFP, Islamabad, Srinagar

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf warned Wednesday that ongoing rapprochement between Pakistan and India could derail if there was no progress on the Kashmir issue.

"If progress is not made on the resolution of the real problems, the confidence building measures will lose their impact," Musharraf said as he addressed a grand military parade marking the country's national day.

"We want peace and we want to resolve problems through negotiations but we will never accept any pressure," he told the elite gathering at the military show near the parliament.

He said Pakistan and India

would have to show sincerity, courage and flexibility for the resolution of issues including Kashmir, which has caused two of the three wars between the nuclear-armed neighbour, and brought them close to a fourth war in 2002.

"We have to find options for Kashmir solution which are acceptable to India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir," he said.

The South Asian neighbours have been holding talks since January last year aimed at resolving disputes, including the thorny problem of divided Kashmir.

Musharraf is due to visit India on April 17 to meet Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and watch a cricket match.

A civilian was killed and three Indian soldiers injured Wednesday

in a car-bomb blast triggered by Muslim militants in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said.

A spokesman said rebels detonated the bomb when army vehicles were passing by in the Rawalpura area of the summer capital Srinagar.

"A civilian walking by died on the spot while three Indian soldiers were injured," the spokesman said.

He said a jeep in which the soldiers were travelling was damaged while the car used in the blast was blown to pieces.

It was the first car-bomb attack for months in Srinagar, the urban hub of Kashmiri militants waging a 15-year-old rebellion against Indian rule.

Tens of thousands have died since the unrest began in 1989.



PHOTO: AFP

Kashmiri Muslim pedestrians look at the wreckage of an Indian Army vehicle in Srinagar yesterday after a car bomb blast. One civilian was killed and three Indian army soldiers injured when a car-bomb allegedly triggered by Muslim militants, exploded in the Kashmir city.

Iraqi commandos seize rebel base, kill dozens of militants

REUTERS, Tikrit

Iraqi commandos backed by US troops and helicopters killed dozens of foreign militants in an hours-long battle to seize an insurgent training camp north of Baghdad, officials said on Wednesday.

Baghdad's Interior Ministry said skirmishes continued in the area following Tuesday's battle, which took place in a deserted region near a lake 100 miles northwest of Baghdad.

The fighting came as politicians in Baghdad pushed on with talks to decide the make-up of a govern-

ment more than seven weeks after the election, amid growing frustration among Iraqis who risked their lives to vote.

A commander of the specialist police unit that led the fighting near Tharthar lake said at least 45 militants had been killed and that the majority of them were Syrians and Saudis, according to their identity cards.

"Yesterday ... we attacked a terrorist gathering near Tharthar lake. The battle lasted for one hour and we called for American backup. Helicopters came and attacked the terrorists," Lieutenant-Colonel Sarmad Hassan Kamel told

Reuters.

"Forty five Arabs were killed, Saudis and Syrians, but there were (also) other Iraqis," he said.

The US military confirmed a battle had taken place and that US forces were involved, but a spokesman said he had no details on the number of insurgents killed or captured. No US troops were wounded or killed in the fighting, he said.

"An early assessment of the site indicates a facility for training anti-Iraqi forces," said Major Richard Goldenberg of the US 42nd Infantry Division, using the U.S. military's term for insurgents.

Red Lake in shock after freak shooting

AFP, Red Lake

Teenage gunman Jeff Weise drove a stolen police car up to his school and then randomly shot at students and teachers, authorities said as the remote town of Red Lake grieved for the victims of the latest rampage to stun the United States.

The small community based around an Indian reservation was at a loss to explain Monday's killing of Weise's grandfather and his companion, five students, a teacher and a security guard at Red Lake High School. The teenager then killed himself. Seven people were wounded.

But reports described Weise, 16, as a loner who had expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler and had used the names "Todesengel" -- German for "Angel of Death" -- and "NativeNazi" when signing on to extreme right-wing Internet sites.

Floyd Jourdain, tribal chairman of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa, said the community was "devastated" and being forced to confront "the darkest days in the history of our people."

Tearful adults and students embraced as they gathered outside the school on Tuesday. Psychologists were brought in to counsel inhabitants of the town.

2 dead, 3 injured in Beirut explosion

AFP, Beirut

Two people were killed and three injured, Lebanese television said, in a blast which devastated a shopping centre north of Beirut, in what was suspected to be the second attack since last month's killing of ex-premier Rafiq Hariri which sent the country into political turmoil.

"The two dead are an Indian and a Pakistani, and the three injured are two Sri-Lankans and one Lebanese," private television station LBCI said, quoting a source from the security services.

It had earlier reported that three people had died in the explosion, which took place in a mainly Christian area near Lebanon's port of Junnie, 20 kilometres (12 miles) north of Beirut.

Police said that a "violent explosion" had taken place at 1:30 am Wednesday (2330 GMT Tuesday), confirming only that one woman had died. The cause of the explosion has not yet been determined, it said.

The explosion comes days after an overnight bomb blast late last Friday wounded 11 people here, increasing public unease after the February 14 assassination of former prime minister Hariri.

That incident was followed by several false bomb alerts.

The explosions come at a time of political friction in Lebanon between the pro-Syrian administration and

the country's anti-Syrian opposition, which intensified after the assassination.

The explosion took place in a large shopping centre in Kaslik, where a number of shops, a night club and amusement hall can be found.

The force of the blast ripped out the shopping center, causing damage in a radius of several hundred metres, forcing false ceilings to collapse, pillars to warp and blowing out windows.

The television channel said the device which caused the explosion was placed in one of the shopping centre's stairwells.

Television showed the body of one victim lying under a blanket.

An anti-Syrian opposition deputy, Fares Boueiz, said the explosion was an attack, aimed at further heightening unrest.

The weekend blast was the first serious incident since popular Hariri and 18 other people were killed in a huge bombing, an attack that ignited public fury and stepped up the momentum for the clamour to get Syrian forces out of Lebanon.

The assassination has been blamed by the opposition on Syrian and Lebanese agents, a charge denied by authorities here and in Damascus.

"They want to destabilise the country...we must not fall into the trap," Boueiz told LBCI.

Putin to make landmark visit to Israel in April

AFP, Jerusalem

President Vladimir Putin will travel to Israel next month on the first such visit by a Russian head of state, Israeli officials announced Wednesday.

The landmark two-day trip will take place between April 27-28, officials said.

"Israeli President Moshe Katsav invited Mr Putin personally on January 27 when they met in Poland and the Russian president will be welcomed with all the honours due to someone of his status," said Katsav spokesman Ron Ben Ishai.

Putin will hold talks with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, other top Israeli officials and Palestinian leaders, he added.

Russia is one of the four sponsors of the Middle East peace roadmap plan, which has sought to create a Palestinian state by 2005 but has made next to no progress since its launch.

On Tuesday, Putin urged Israel to back the Middle East peace initiatives pushed by Arab leaders who are gathered in Algeria for a two-day summit.

IRA again rejects blame for Belfast man's murder

AFP, Belfast

The Irish Republican Army again denied involvement on Wednesday in the murder of a Catholic man in Belfast, saying it had tried to help solve the case that has sparked a major campaign against paramilitary crime.

"The IRA has spelled out its position in relation to the killing of Robert McCartney. It was wrong, it was murder, it was a crime. But it was not carried out by the IRA, nor was it carried out on behalf of the IRA," the group said.

In its traditional annual Easter message, the Catholic group -- the armed wing of the Sinn Fein political party -- said it had "moved quickly to deal with" those who had been involved in the January 30 killing.

McCartney, a 33-year-old father of two, was beaten and stabbed to death after a pub brawl in a Catholic neighborhood of Belfast. His family claims IRA members were behind the murder, that they then destroyed evidence and then intimidated witnesses, keeping them from coming forward to police.

The IRA said it had tried to help the McCartney family, referring to its offer earlier this month to "shoot" those responsible for the murder.

Laden eluded US forces in Tora Bora: Report

AP, Washington

A terror suspect held at Guant-anamo Bay, Cuba, was a commander for Osama bin Laden during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and helped the Al-Qaeda leader escape his mountain hide-out at Tora Bora in 2001, according to a US government document.

The document, provided to The Associated Press in response to a Freedom of Information request, says the unidentified detainee "assisted in the escape of Osama bin Laden from Tora Bora".

It is the first definitive statement from the Pentagon that Bin Laden was at Tora Bora and evaded US pursuers.



PHOTO: AFP

Arab League Secretary General Amr Mussa (L) and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan smile as they leave their hotel prior to the closing session of the 17th Arab Summit in Algiers yesterday.

Israel rejects Arab peace initiative

AFP, Algiers, Jerusalem

Arab leaders were to hold the final day of talks Wednesday at a summit which saw them adopt a resolution to reactivate a Middle East peace initiative, a proposal that was swiftly rejected by Israel.

A final declaration due to be issued at the end of the summit echoes the one released at last year's Tunis conference, pledging Arab support for Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians' efforts to recover land occupied by Israel.

It also calls on the international community to help back the Arab peace initiative -- a Jordanian proposal based on a Saudi plan submitted and endorsed by the 2002 Beirut summit which Israel had

spurned at the time. Israel was quick to reject the offer anew.

A senior official from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office told AFP that the Arabs were trying "to give this illusion of unity on the surface by adopting resolutions that contradict with all of the advances made, particularly by Egypt and Jordan, which is unacceptable".

"The summit proved it is out of touch with reality and in a delicate situation regarding developments in the Arab world," the official added on, condition of anonymity.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Hani Mulki expressed regret over the remarks and told AFP that Israel's "quick and negative" reaction looks as if "they are not interested in peace, and we hope this is not the case".