

## 104 missing after boat sinks in Pacific

AP, Bogota

A small boat overloaded with 113 illegal immigrants capsized and sank in rough waters off Colombia's Pacific coast, officials said Wednesday. Only nine survivors were found, their faces scorched with sunburn after two days spent clinging to a wooden box, buoys and a gasoline container.

Ecuadorian Navy Capt. Armando Elizalde told Colombian RCN television most of those aboard "sank with the boat." The Colombian Navy said the immigrants' boat was meant to hold only 15 people.

The disaster that hit the boat whose passengers were believed to be heading for the United States occurred Friday night more than 100 miles off the coast of southwest Colombia.

"The boat, with way too many people aboard, was unable to resist a strong wave and it tipped over," Elizalde said, adding that most of those aboard were in the ship's hold when it capsized and could not escape.

When the wave struck, 17-year-old Angel Lalbay and other passengers "tumbled over each other" into the ocean. "We hung on to a gas container for two days," he told Ecuador's Channel 10 news. Four of the 13 people who emerged from the capsized boat drowned after their strength gave out, he added.

## London police chief under fire over Brazilian's shooting

AFP, London

London's police chief faced growing calls Thursday to resign over the shooting of a Brazilian wrongly suspected of being a suicide bomber, as reports emerged that he tried to stop an inquiry into the killing.

Supporters of Jean Charles de Menezes said Metropolitan Police commissioner Ian Blair must go if he deliberately lied about the police killing of the 27-year-old electrician in the tense days after the London bombings.

Adding to the sense of error, the Daily Mirror newspaper said a senior police officer in charge of surveillance had ordered her men to take de Menezes alive before he entered Stockwell subway station in south London.

Documents leaked this week contradicted Blair's initial claims about the shooting and revealed a series of blunders that led to de Menezes's death on July 22 — a day after a failed attempt to repeat the July 7 bombings that killed 56 people in the capital.

"Sir Ian Blair should resign," Harriet Wistrich, a lawyer for de Menezes's family, told ITV News.



A settler holds an Israeli flag as the Israeli army force their way into the Gaza Strip settlement of Nezer Hazani yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Gaza homes set alight

Israeli troops face defiant settlers

AFP, Netzer Hazani

Protestors set abandoned houses ablaze and hurled eggs as Israeli forces dragged hysterical residents from their Gaza Strip homes and thousands of religious Jews took refuge in synagogues to block their forcible ejection from the Palestinian territory.

"Shame on you," shrieked residents as an army bulldozer smashed its way into Netzer Hazani, the oldest settlement in the occupied Palestinian territory seized by Israel in war 38 years ago. "You don't do this to Arabs."

Israeli forces, most of them unarmed, marched into five more of the 21 Gaza settlements on Thursday, the second day of its forcible evacuation of residents from the territory, a historic operation that has pitted Jew against Jew. Police also said they were poised

to launch an assault in a synagogue in the largest settlement of Neve Dekalim where hundreds of young activists have been holed up.

Radical youths began burning down abandoned homes in Neve Dekalim as fire-fighters fought in vain to put out the fires that sent plumes of smoke spewing into the sky.

Amid scenes of chaos in Kfar Darom, one of the most defiant settler bastions, sobbing families were dragged out of homes one by one by police and soldiers who moved in after dawn. Some set fire to seats in buses laid on to transport them into Israel.

Palestinians have welcomed the pullout as a victory for the resistance to four decades of Israeli occupation, while the international community hopes it will mark a new page in efforts to bring peace to the Middle East.

Despite the high tensions, the

withdrawal is being completed more peacefully and quickly than expected, with up to nine settlements reported empty, although potential confrontations loom with diehard settlers.

In Neve Dekalim, Israeli forces gave an ultimatum to the hundreds of youths massed on the roof and balconies of the main synagogue, waving flags and protest banners.

At the hardline beachside community of Shirat Hayam, residents and supporters hurled eggs at soldiers and urged them to disobey their orders while some locked themselves inside their homes or took refuge on the synagogue roof.

As many as 70 percent of the estimated 8,000 settlers have left, public radio reported, although their numbers were swelled by around 5,000 infiltrators despite the settlements being declared closed military zones.

## US condemns Israeli settler attack

AFP, Washington

The United States sharply condemned a deadly shooting spree by an Israeli settler Wednesday while heaping praise on the Palestinians for their handling of Israel's painful pullout from Gaza. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack urged both sides to maintain calm as Israeli forces dragged the last diehard settlers from Gaza in their first evacuation of Palestinian turf occupied for 38 years.

McCormack had harsh words for the shooting of three Palestinian workers on the West Bank by a Jewish settler who gunned them down in cold blood with a weapon wrested from a security guard.

"We are deeply concerned by reports of settler violence toward Palestinians that has left several dead and wounded," he said. "We condemn this attack, condemn attacks of violence committed as part of this withdrawal process."

## Palestinians fear 'big prison' after Gaza pullout

AFP, Beit Lahiya

Not far from the evacuated Israeli settlement of Dugit, Palestinian residents of Beit Lahiya village are torn between joy and bitterness, with some fearing they may end up in "a big prison."

The pessimistic argue that Israel will maintain a grip on the land, air and sea borders around the Gaza Strip after it has completed its pullout of 21 Jewish settlements there.

"How can I rejoice when we are going to find ourselves in a big prison?" asked Abdullah Ghobn, whose 11-year-old son and six of his cousins were killed earlier this year by Israeli tank shelling fired from the

northern Gaza Nissanit settlement checkpoint.

"We are paying the price of the occupation. Our happiness will only be complete when all occupation forces and settlers have left Palestinian territory," he said morosely.

Twenty-year-old Zaki Ghobn, who saw his brother ripped apart by the same tank shelling, was equally bitter.

"How can we be glad when the soldiers are only pulling back a few hundred meters? They will still be deployed very near us. We will remain their hostages, within reach of their gunfire."

He said he doesn't believe in the pullout, saying that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon "is making fun

of us and of Arabs."

"A true pullout means a total pullout, especially from border crossings, so that we can create an independent and sovereign state on our sea and our territory," Ghobn said.

But in contrast, his neighbour, 30-year-old Amine Abu Halima, said he is happy because he was able to walk on his land for the first time since Dugit was evacuated and Palestinian security forces were deployed there.

"I am going to finally be able to cultivate the land," he said, the land which allowed his family to earn a good living in earlier times, before the settlers moved in.

## Four US soldiers killed in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Four US soldiers were killed Thursday by a roadside bomb in the northern Iraqi town of Samarra, the US military said.

A statement said the incident occurred at 11:15 am local time, without providing details.

The total US military deaths in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion stood at 1,849 on August 17, according to Pentagon figures.

Meanwhile international pressure was mounting on Iraqi leaders Thursday to wrap up a draft constitution for the war-torn country.

Fresh violence rocked Baghdad on Thursday, with a US military

convoy hit by a roadside bomb and an Iraqi judge and his driver gunned down.

Iraqi officials reported some American casualties in the bomb blast although the US military had no immediate comment on the incident.

"Our troops have seen American soldiers evacuating some of their wounded colleagues from the humvee after it hit the bomb," an interior ministry official said.

The drafting of the constitution, due to be put to a referendum in October, is a key phase in Iraq's political transition which the United States and its allies hope could pave the way to a pullout of foreign troops.



Hundreds of people take part in the funeral procession of three Iraqis killed overnight in the Ameriya district of Baghdad yesterday. According to local residents, the three men, all brothers from the Abbas family, were killed overnight during a joint US-Iraqi military raid in search of insurgents. A woman was also injured in the incident. PHOTO: AFP



Pope Benedict XVI is welcomed by German President Horst Koehler upon his arrival at a blustery Cologne-Bonn airport, Germany yesterday for his groundbreaking four-day visit to his native Germany, his first visit abroad since his election as pope in April. PHOTO: AFP

## A Porsche as tip

AFP, Stockholm

A waitress in Sweden thought her elderly customer was joking when he offered her his Porsche as a tip, but he kept his word and gave her the keys to the car, daily Aftonbladet reported on Thursday.

"I thought at first he was joking with me," 19-year-old Josefin Justin told the paper.

Justin was waiting tables at the Njuraanger Cafe in Sundsvall in central Sweden when the man, who had recently retired and was dining with a group of gentlemen, asked her age.

When she told him, "he said I would get his Porsche as a tip."

"At first I was a little suspicious but I didn't get the feeling he was hitting on me or anything, he just seemed really nice," she said.

## Russia, China launch first major wargames

US express concern

AFP, Vladivostok

Russia and China launched their first-ever joint wargames in a show of military might they insisted was not aimed at any other country after the United States expressed concern.

Washington, which has indicated unease over the pace of China's military build-up, is not attending as an observer but said it is closely monitoring the drills, warning they should not undermine regional stability.

The week-long exercises involving 10,000 troops, naval ships, bombers and fighter planes began in the Russian city of Vladivostok and will later move to the Yellow Sea and the area off the Jiaodong peninsula in eastern China.

Chinese defence officials said they would focus on the ability of Russian and Chinese forces to fight

separatism and terrorism, while strengthening mutual trust between two of the world's major powers.

"The exercise will be carried out in the framework of the fight against international terrorism and extremism, to respond to new threats and challenges," said Liang Guanglie, chief-of-staff of China's armed forces.

China faces challenges from separatists in its Muslim-populated Xinjiang region in the northwest, and Russia from Muslim separatists in Chechnya.

"This first joint military exercise in (our) history... does not threaten the interests of other countries," Russian chief-of-staff Yuri Baluyevsky said.

Under the scenario of the exercises, a fictive state torn by massive ethnic unrest has asked the United Nations and neighbouring

countries to assist in restoring order, Russian officials said.

Chinese and Russian troops under UN mandate are sent to separate the combatants and quell the unrest.

Defence ministers from countries in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which groups several Central Asian countries besides China and Russia, have been invited to watch, China's Xinhua news agency said.

Leading military officials from Iran, India and Pakistan are also on hand, the state-run agency quoted Russian diplomats as saying.

The drills, known as "Peace Mission 2005," started with political and military consultations between Russian and Chinese military delegations, headed by each country's chief-of-staff, a Russian Pacific fleet spokesman told AFP.

## Anwar vindicated by million-dollar libel award

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim said Thursday that a 1.2 million dollar damages award over a book that triggered his 1998 sacking had cleared his name and proved he was the victim of a conspiracy.

The author of "50 Reasons Why Anwar Cannot Be PM", Khalid Jafri, has already been sentenced to jail for accusing Anwar of sodomy, corruption and an extra-marital affair that resulted in an illegitimate daughter.

"The defendants' main purpose in publishing the book was to destroy the plaintiff's reputation and political career," said High Court judge Mohamad Hishamudin Mohamad Yunus in a strongly-worded decision.

The judge noted the book was distributed to delegates at the general assembly of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in May 1998.