

Passenger killed by US air marshals

REUTERS, Miami

US air marshals on Wednesday shot and killed an American Airlines passenger who claimed to be carrying a bomb in his backpack and ran off a plane at Miami International Airport after being confronted.

Federal officials said the 44-year-old American made threats and indicated he had a bomb in his bag as he was boarding a flight to Orlando in central Florida.

It was the first time an airplane passenger was shot by air marshals since the US marshals program was beefed up after the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington. Witnesses said the man might have been mentally ill.

The man, who arrived in Miami from Quito, Ecuador, was identified as Florida resident Rigoberto Alpizar.

Authorities said he was challenged by two air marshals on board the Orlando-bound plane, and shot on the passenger gangway after running off the aircraft. He ignored demands to put his bag on the ground and instead reached into it, a Department of Homeland Security spokesman said.



Iraqi policemen secure the site where a suicide bomber blew himself up on a bus in Baghdad yesterday killing 30 people, underscoring the endemic insecurity plaguing Iraq just a week before a crucial general election.

PHOTO: AFP

Bus bombing kills 30 in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

Thirty people were killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up on a bus in Baghdad Thursday, underscoring the endemic insecurity plaguing Iraq just a week before a crucial general election. Amid mounting appeals for the release of a string of foreigners abducted in Iraq, kidnappers holding four Western peace activists extended a threatened deadline for their murder until Saturday.

The so-called Brigades of the Swords of Righteousness said it had delayed by two days an ultimatum that expired on Thursday for London and Washington to release all prisoners held in Iraqi and coalition prisons.

The resurgent hostage crisis -- which has seen seven Westerners seized in two weeks -- exposes the insecurity rampant since the US-led invasion to topple Saddam Hussein in 2003 despite the December 15 polls.

In Baghdad, 30 civilians were killed and 25 wounded when a suicide bomber blew himself up as a bus was drawing out of a bus

station in the Iraqi capital en route for the southern Shiite town of Nassiriyah, officials said.

The bus was completely destroyed in the blast and two nearby stalls selling food and drinks were gutted as the explosion sent shrapnel flying into the air.

"Some bodies were charred because the bus was completely burnt," said a police official.

Blood covered the ground and pieces of shrapnel were littered across the area, as Iraqi rescue workers frantically dragged bodies out of the wreckage and a column of black smoke snaked into the sky.

With fears of mounting chaos ahead of the December 15 vote, Iraq has imposed a 30-day state of emergency in the restive provinces of Al-Anbar and Nineveh, and shut the border with Syria to all but authorised commercial traffic.

The UN chief's special representative to Iraq, Ashraf Qazi, expressed "serious concern" over election-related violence ahead of the polls.

Relatives, political and religious leaders from across the world have begged for the release of the four

Christian activists, a German mother, a French engineer and an American who have gone missing in Iraq in the past two weeks.

Late Wednesday, a grainy video broadcast on Al-Jazeera television showed images of two presumed hostages with their hands in chains.

The Arabic satellite station said they were British grandfather Norman Kember and American Tom Fox -- kidnapped in Baghdad on November 26 with Canadians, James Loney, 41 and Harmeet Singh Sooden, 32.

All four were working in Iraq for the Christian Peacemakers Team.

In the third such Iraq crisis for London following the abduction and murder of two other nationals, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw stepped up appeals for the release of the hostages.

"If the kidnappers want to get in touch with us, we want to hear what they have to say. We have people in Iraq and the region and they are ready to hear from the kidnappers," he said.

Malaysia to clamp down on terrorist publications

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian censors will tighten controls on publications that promote terrorism and Muslim "holy war", officials said Thursday.

Internal Security Ministry secretary-general Abdul Aziz Mohamad Yusof said inspections at border points would be increased to prevent militant publications from reaching Malaysia.

"The ministry has ordered officials to be on the alert so that the teachings of terrorism and armed 'jihad' do not spread throughout our society as the consequences are extremely dangerous," he told the official Bernama news agency.

Abdul Aziz said officials had detected publications that urged Muslims to take up "jihad" by committing acts of terror, with promises of rewards in heaven.

The entry of such publications into Malaysia was not new, he said, but the rising terrorist threat around the world made it more of a cause for concern.

Malaysian extremists have come into the spotlight recently with the death of bombmaker Azahari Husin in a police shootout in Indonesia last month, and a major hunt for his com-patriot, Noordin Mohammad Top.

Rice reassures NATO allies on CIA prisons

REUTERS, Brussels

European allies of the United States declared themselves satisfied on Thursday with new assurances by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that US treatment of detainees was within international law.

The issue has dogged her European tour, with accusations that the CIA has run secret prisons in east Europe and covertly transported detainees in its war against terrorism. Rights groups say incommunicado detention often leads to torture.

Rice repeated her defense of US practices at a dinner late on Wednesday for

NATO and EU foreign ministers on the eve of a one-day NATO meeting. Several emerged satisfied after what a source described as a frank but respectful exchange.

"I think NATO and EU ministers were able to raise their concerns that we should not diverge from one another on the interpretation of international law," German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

told reporters.

"Secretary Rice promised that international agreements are not interpreted any differently in the United States than they are in Europe. That, at least, is a good statement," he told reporters as he arrived for the meeting on Thursday.

Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot, who signaled earlier this week that the Netherlands would raise the matter during the talks, said he was "very satisfied" with Rice's responses.

A source briefed on the dinner, which was tightly restricted to foreign ministers, said Rice repeated arguments made earlier on her trip that Washington had respected international law.

A NATO spokesman said the discussion had cleared the air and that those present appeared to have been reassured.

"That seems to be the flavor of the (dinner) meeting. Today's (Thursday's) discussions till now have concentrated purely on NATO business," he told a news briefing.

US under pressure at climate talks

REUTERS, Montreal

The European Union and host Canada piled pressure on the United States on Wednesday to join an international pact to curb greenhouse gas emissions and limit the predicted chaos from global warming.

But the United States defended its policy of investing billions of dollars in cleaner technology to reduce emissions, brushing aside calls for it to commit to long-term UN discussions on slowing climate change.

"One size does not fit all," said Paula Dobriansky, the US under secretary for global affairs, who leads the American delegation to the November 28 December 9 UN climate talks in Montreal.

Environment ministers from more than 90 countries met to try to break a deadlock over how to launch talks to entice the United States and big developing nations like India and China to join a system that cuts production of greenhouse gases.

"There is absolutely no excuse for any more delay in action," Canadian

Prime Minister Paul Martin told the meeting, urging the United States and other skeptical nations to "listen to the conscience of the world."

The EU also called for more action.

Adding a sense of urgency to the talks is extreme weather, including Hurricane Katrina, the world's costliest weather-related disaster, which scientists warn could be a portent of things to come.

At the heart of the Montreal meeting is how to cut emissions after 2012, when the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol climate change pact ends. Washington has rejected the pact, saying mandatory emissions cuts would harm its economy.

The US stance has angered many countries and green groups that back Kyoto, who contend that while the pact was flawed because it excludes developing nations in the 2008-12 first phase, it is still the best mechanism in existence.

Saddam's Iraqi lawyer 'threatened'

AFP, Amman

The Iraqi lawyer defending Saddam Hussein said on Thursday he was threatened by three people who tried to board his plane as he left Baghdad following the adjournment of the ousted dictator's trial.

"I know the names of the three miserable men who threatened me," Khalil al-Dulaimi told reporters on his arrival in Amman from the Iraqi capital.

"I know their names, I know them well but I will not give their names," he said, adding that the Iraqi airport authorities refused to allow them to board his plane.

Dulaimi arrived in Jordan along with former US attorney Ramsey Clark and Jordanian lawyer Issam Ghazzawi who have been assisting in the defence of Saddam.