Taliban, S. Korean hostage crisis

The Taliban free two members of a group of 23 South Korean hostages abducted in Afghanistan. The two women are handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross on August 13. The Taliban say they were released partly because they were in poor health and partly as a goodwill gesture. Two of the South Korean Christian aid workers, seized on July 19, were killed earlier. It is thought the current hostage crisis is a result of South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun's decision to send troops to help US-led forces in Afghanistan.


AFP

Powerful earthquake shakes Peru


AFP

A powerful earthquake of magnitude 7.9-8.0 shakes Peru on August 15, killing at least 500 people and injuring hundreds more, according to civil defence reports. The epicentre is about 145km (90 miles) south-east of Lima, beneath the Pacific Ocean. Rush-hour traffic in the capital comes to a halt as buildings shake and hundreds of people spill onto the streets. The quake lasts for several minutes, and is followed by over three hundred aftershocks in three days ranging from 5.4 to 5.9. In 1970, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake hit high in the Peruvian Andes triggering a landslide that buried a town and killed 66,000 people.

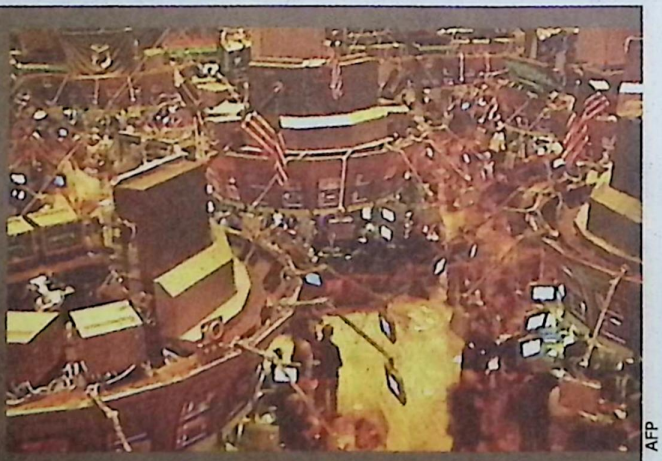
Yazidi massacre in N. Iraq


AFP

An estimated 200 people are killed and perhaps 300 injured in explosions near the northern Iraqi town of Mosul on August 13. At least four suicide bombers drive fuel tankers packed with explosives into residential areas, setting off huge explosions, and destroying buildings, say officials. The massacre is one of the worst that Iraq has seen, targeting the Yazidi minority in northern Iraq who are followers of a pre-Islamic sect and are considered to be ethnic Kurds. The Islamic State in Iraq, an al-Qaeda front group, distributed leaflets beforehand warning residents that an attack was imminent because Yazidis were "anti-Islamic."

Global stock markets tumble

Stock markets around the world tumble in August, wiping billions of dollars off the value of shares owned by individuals and institutions such as pension funds and insurance companies. The fall starts when a French bank says it will freeze three investment funds because it can no longer accurately measure their value. Markets fall around the world on fears that the problems are more widespread -- especially in relation to sub-prime mortgage lending in the US.


AFP