

Kenya rivals agree to review election

AP, Nairobi

Kenya's political rivals announced on Friday a 10-point plan to resolve their political crisis after weeks of negotiations but they remained deadlocked over power sharing.

Gaza situation 'grim', says top UN official

Islamic Jihad activist, family killed in Israeli raid

AP, AFP, Gaza City

The eight-month closure of Gaza has created "grim and miserable" conditions that deprive Palestinians of their basic dignity, the UN's humanitarian chief said Friday.

Later Friday, a powerful blast went off in the house of a senior Islamic Jihad activist, killing him, his wife and two sons and a daughter, and three neighbours, medics and an Islamic Jihad spokesman said.

flattened by the blast and six nearby homes were badly damaged, witnesses said. At least 40 people were hurt. One of Fayed's daughters and 11 others were in critical condition.

Fayed was a senior member of the Islamic Jihad military wing. Israel routinely targets top militants in airstrikes but Israel denied any such strike on Friday.

John Holmes, undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, visited Gaza during the day and urged that the territory's borders be reopened to relieve the suffering.

Israel and Egypt severely restricted access to Gaza after the Islamic militant group Hamas seized the territory by force in June.

Since then, only a few dozen trucks carrying food, medicine and other staples have been permitted into Gaza every day, while most exports are banned.

The closure has driven up poverty and unemployment, and the UN says some 80 percent of Gaza's 1.4 million people now get some food aid.

"All this makes for a grim human and humanitarian situation here in Gaza, which means that people are not able to live with the basic dignity to which they are entitled," Holmes told reporters in Gaza.

The extent of suffering in Gaza has been a subject of dispute. Palestinians and human rights groups say hardship is widespread,

while Israeli government officials have accused Hamas of trying to manufacture a humanitarian crisis for political gain.

Holmes toured Gaza's largest hospital, speaking with dialysis patients and inspecting the neonatal unit. He also visited an industrial zone that once employed 1,800 Palestinians but has been idled by the border closure.

It was Holmes' first visit to Gaza as humanitarian affairs chief, part of a four-day trip that also includes a stop in the Israeli town of Sderot which has been hit hard by rocket fire from Gaza. His four-vehicle convoy, marked by blue UN flags, drove through potholed, muddy streets without a Hamas police escort.



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli raid at the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza Strip yesterday. Eight Palestinians were killed and at least 50 wounded when Israeli warplanes launched a raid on a building in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, medics and witnesses said.



Supporters cheer as US Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama speaks during a campaign rally at the Midwest Airlines Centre Friday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Wisconsin presidential primaries are on February 19.

Obama sets sights on Wisconsin after union endorsement

AFP, Washington

Democratic White House hopeful Barack Obama, his momentum building up, sought on Saturday to maintain his winning streak in Wisconsin and Hawaii that hold primary contests next Tuesday.

Obama stumbled in the Midwestern state ahead of Tuesday's primaries hoping to ride a wave of momentum after eight consecutive victories in nomination contests across the country, handing him a slight lead in delegates over his rival, Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton, who has been forced to shake up her

campaign team. In the Republican race, the Wisconsin contest could bring front-runner John McCain one step closer to the 1,191 delegates he needs to secure the party's presidential nomination.

Obama was buoyed Friday with a key endorsement from the 1.9-million strong Service Employees International Union (SEIU), known for its political activism and deep pockets. The endorsement came a day after the 1.3 million-member United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) came out for Obama.

Bush pushes on Kenya, Darfur in Africa tour

AFP, Cotacachi

President George W Bush yesterday launched a five-country Africa swing, highlighting US-backed victories against disease and poverty and calling for action to help "trouble spots" Darfur and Kenya.

During an hours-long stop in the tiny west-African country of Benin, Bush pushed for a "robust" UN peacekeeping force in the troubled Sudanese province and threw his support behind a possible power-sharing deal in Nairobi.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, expected in the Kenyan capital on Monday, will deliver a "clear message" that Washington wants an agreement to end violence that has left an estimated 1,000 people dead, he said.

"The key is that the leaders hear from her first hand US desires to see that there be no violence and that there be a power-sharing agreement that will help this nation resolve its difficulties," said the US president.

Expelled EU diplomat defends Taliban dialogue

AFP, London

An Irish diplomat who was expelled from Afghanistan for talking to Taliban-linked insurgents defended his actions Saturday, insisting that dialogue could persuade militants to abandon violence.

"There is a critical difference between what is discreet and what is covert," Michael Semple, who was the second most senior European Union official in Afghanistan, told British newspaper The Guardian in an interview.

"What we were doing was simply discreet because that was what was required. But it was totally in line with official policy to bring people in from the cold."

Semple was expelled last year with Briton Mervyn Patterson, a UN political adviser, for threatening national security by contacting the Taliban in the volatile southern province of Helmand.

US Senator asks govt to cut off military aid if Pakistan polls rigged

AFP, Washington

The United States should cut off military aid to Pakistan if upcoming parliamentary elections are not free and fair, an influential US senator on foreign affairs said on Friday.

Senator Joseph Biden, a leading voice on international issues for the Democratic Party and head of the powerful Senate foreign relations committee, also forecast riots throughout Pakistan if Monday's elections were found to be "patently rigged."

The lawmaker who will observe the elections next week told reporters that Washington's "only real leverage" against the administration of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf was military aid.

Asked what would be the consequences of unfair elections, Biden said, "I would move to cut off aid to Pakistan, military aid."

Biden, who has been mentioned as a possible secretary of state if a Democrat captures the White House in the November 2008 election, specifically cited suspending the sale of F-16 fighter jets and P3

long-range maritime surveillance aircraft.

Biden, a former candidate in the 2008 presidential race, is part of an election monitoring team and will be joined by Senator John Kerry, the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, and Republican Chuck Hagel.

Since 2001 the United States has given 10 billion dollars in aid to Pakistan, most of it in military assistance to combat Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants.

The United States, for whom Musharraf is a key "war on terror" ally, is facing a dilemma amid persistent reports that the elections will be rigged.

The State Department acknowledged that there would be "some" fraud in the polls delayed by the assassination of former two-time premier Benazir Bhutto during an election rally on December 27.

Any escalating violence following Monday's polls may trigger a confrontation between Musharraf or the powerful military and moderate democratic forces that could force Washington to make a difficult choice on who to back, experts say.

13 cops killed in India Maoist attack

AFP, Bhubaneswar

Maoist rebels in eastern India have shot dead 13 police and a civilian in the worst attack by the leftist insurgents in months, officials said yesterday.

Hundreds of rebels, including women fighters, attacked two police stations in Orissa state late Friday and looted weapons before escaping, witnesses said. Fifteen people, most of them police, were also wounded.

"The security personnel were simply outnumbered," admitted the state's chief minister, Naveen

Patnaik, who also appealed for federal help.

Orissa is one of India's poorest states and part of an eastern swathe of the country where the Maoists, who say they are fighting for the rights of neglected tribal people and landless farmers, appear to be gaining ground.

The attack also took place in the mineral-rich coastal state's Nayagarh district, a mere 100 kilometres (60 miles) west of the state capital Bhubaneswar.

"The attack was sudden and in the middle of the night. They killed 13 policemen and a civilian,"

superintendent of police Rajesh Kumar told AFP.

The attack took the authorities by surprise, as the Maoists had previously not been active in Nayagarh -- although similar attacks elsewhere in Orissa have occurred twice in the past three years.

"They attacked the Nayagarh district police station and the nearby Daspalla police station," Kumar said, adding that the guerrillas had also set one of the police stations on fire, fired at a police training school and raided an armory.

Lankan civil war spreads to Colombo

AP, Colombo

As a raging civil war killed thousands in the country's northeast, Sri Lankans in Colombo and other southern cities shopped, held picnics and cheered their children at soccer matches.

Now a recent wave of bombings has brought the devastation of the civil war to the heart of the capital, and many are scared to leave their homes. The bombings blamed on

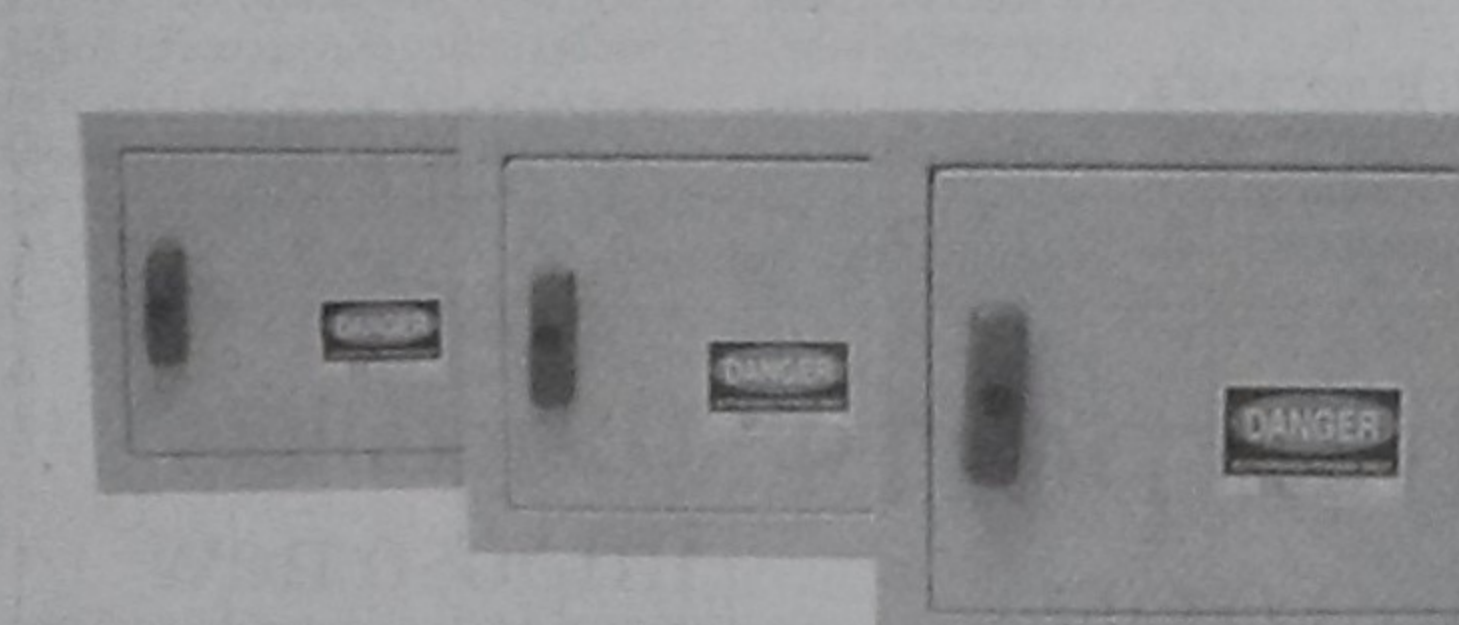
Tamil Tiger rebels have ripped through passenger buses and a department store and killed half a high school baseball team in a packed train station.

Normally overflowing buses travel half empty, parents whisk their children home after school and the government has appealed for tens of thousands of volunteers for a new civilian security force aimed at preventing more attacks. "A bomb could go off at any

time," said Colombo resident Dilhar Gunasekara. "Everyone is scared."

The rebels, listed as a terror group by the United States and the European Union, have been fighting since 1983 for an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the north and east. For years, they were discriminated against by governments dominated by the Sinhalese majority.

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Advertisement for 'STUDY IN AUSTRALIA SPOT ADMISSION'. It features the logo for abec (Australia Bangladesh Education Consultants) and SIBT (Sydney Institute of Business and Technology). It mentions Sarah Hatton as Sales & Marketing Manager and provides contact information for the Head Office in Dhaka and Dhanmondi Office. The ad also includes a 'Hot-Line' number and a website URL.



Supporters of Pakistan's Muttahida Qaumi Movement party (MQM) hold a campaign rally in Karachi on late Friday night for tomorrow's election.

Canada extradites Nazi to Italy

AP, Rome

An 83-year-old former SS prison guard who was sentenced to life in prison in Italy for Nazi war crimes was jailed near Naples Saturday, hours after he was extradited from Canada.

Michael Seifert arrived shortly before dawn at an airport near Rome aboard a military jet from Toronto. He was taken to a prison near Naples, where he was having a routine medical exam, said Bartolomeo Costantini, the military prosecutor who pursued the case.

"His legs were a little wobbly after he got off the flight" likely due to the stress and the long journey, Costantini said.

Seifert has a pacemaker but otherwise is apparently healthy, he said. If doctors deem it necessary, Seifert could be incarcerated in a hospital ward in the prison.

If someone is willing to host him, the former SS officer eventually could be allowed to serve his sentence on house arrest because of his age.

4 Ulfa rebels killed in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Four separatist rebels were killed in a gunbattle with security forces on Saturday in India's insurgency-hit northeast, police said.

The gunfight in Assam state erupted when police raided the house where suspected militants of the separatist outfit United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) were hiding.

"The encounter lasted for about an hour in which four militants were killed," said a senior police official who did not want to be identified.

Security forces have stepped up pressure in recent days on Ulfa, which has been fighting for an independent homeland since 1979.

Thirteen rebels have been arrested in the past two weeks.

Advertisement for Mirror Aviation Academy. It features the text 'First time in Bangladesh' and 'Mirror Aviation Academy Complete Airhostess Training School'. The ad lists various courses offered, including 'Diploma in Professional Cabin Crew Services' and 'Diploma in Professional Ground Staff Services'. It also mentions 'A concern of Mirror Media & Production Ltd. (Bangladesh-India Joint Venture Company)' and provides contact information for the academy in Dhaka.

Advertisement for 'The Pink City' model town. It features a large photograph of a modern residential complex with multiple buildings and green spaces. The text includes the name 'The Pink City' and 'XENOVALLEY MODEL TOWN LIMITED'. It provides contact information for sales and inquiries, including phone numbers and a website URL. The ad also mentions the location of the project in Dhaka.