Blasts kill

7 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

INTERNATIONAL

2 killed in blasts near US embassy in Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

A schoolgirl and a policeman were killed in a bomb attack against a girls' school near the US embassy in the Yemeni capital yesterday, police said, describing it as a criminalincident.

About 15 children and four policemen were also wounded, a police official told AFP.

"It is a purely criminal incident," the official said, suggesting that the attack was not linked to the US embassy which is located about 500 metres (yards) from the school.

Yemen, one of the world's poorest countries, is awash with weapons, the scene of frequent incidents of violence and the ancestral homeland of Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

Ultra-nationalist rabbi stabbed near Jerusalem

AFP, Jerusalem

An ultra-nationalist Israeli rabbi was lightly wounded yesterday after being stabbed near the Damascus gate into annexed east Jerusalem's Old City, police said.

The 49-year-old is a member of the Ateret Cohanim organisation and teaches at a yeshiva religious school in the Old City, a police spokesman said, without giving other details.

Ateret Cohanim is an organisation that aims to populate Arab neighbourhoods of Jerusalem's walled Old City with Jews.

Earlier another police spokesman said the wounded man had been hospitalised while his attacker escaped. "It seems that the attacker was Arab and acted out of nationalist motivations," Micky Rosenfeld told AFP.

Iraq begins national unity Conference

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's feuding sectarian factions yesterday began a conference aiming to resolve their differences amid international concern that insufficient progress has been made toward national unity.

The two-day national unity | Party, said in a memo to voters. conference comes ahead of Last week, amid mounting baptized his two daughters, has row over Wright -- but it has been Thursday's fifth anniversary of the launch of the US-led invasion and as one of its architects, US Vice President Dick Cheney, visits Iraq for talks with the rival leaders.

The conference opened in Baghdad and was attended by Iraqi leaders like Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and parliament speaker Mahmud Mashhadani, and several other leaders from the three Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish factions, an AFP correspondent reported.

German Court upholds ban on headscarf

AFP, Berlin

A German court yesterday upheld a regional ban on teachers wearing the headscarf in public schools, rejecting the complaint of a convert to Islam.

The Baden-Wuerttemberg state administrative court in the southern city of Stuttgart ruled that teachers may be kept from covering their heads in the classroom if they do so for religious reasons.

The decision overturned a ruling by a lower court in July 2006, saying that the teacher had a right to wear the headscarf because Roman Catholic nuns elsewhere in the state wore habits when they taught at a public school.

The plaintiff, who has taught at a joint elementary and secondary school for more than three decades, converted to Islam in

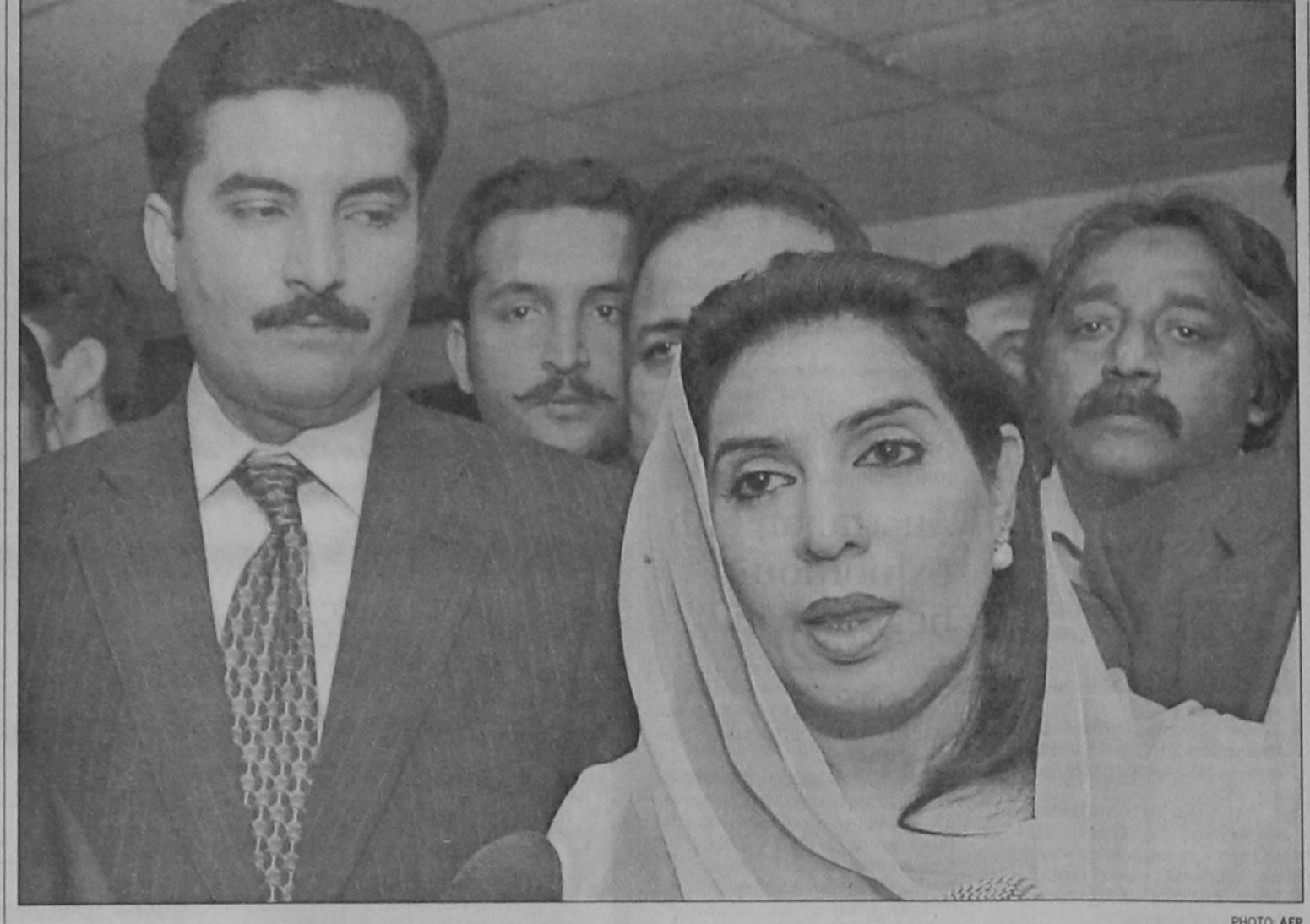
Jordan appeals for aid for Iraqi refugees

AFP, Amman

Jordan appealed yesterday for more aid to assist neighbouring countries sheltering hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees uprooted by war, saying the solution lies in their return home.

Foreign Minister Salah Bashir urged an international conference in Amman to find "mechanisms to help these states cope with the burdens of hosting Iraqi brothers and provide them with a decent living until they return to a unified

"But the main challenge now is to find the right environment for a political settlement in Iraq," Bashir said at the opening of the one-day meeting.



Fahmida Mirza (C) contesting the post of national assembly speaker and also leader of The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is watched by Faisal Karim (L) deputy speaker for national assembly as she addresses media representatives after filing her nomination papers at Parliament House yesterday. If elected, Fahmida will be the first Muslim woman assembly speaker of the deeply conservative Islamic nation of 160 million people.

Obama tackles race and religion as Hillary fights rival lead

Florida decidec not to redo Democratic primary

AFP, Washington

Florida will not redo its voided presidential nominating primary Democratic party officials said Monday, as the agonizingly close campaign contest between bitter rivals Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton plays on.

"We researched every potential alternative process -- from caucuses to county conventions to mail-in elections -- but no plan could come anywhere close to being viable in Florida," Congresswoman Karen Thurman, chair of the Florida Democratic

divisive disputes, party officials in Florida had proposed a repeat presidential primary on June 3 that would combine mail-in ballots with in-person voting.

"The consensus is clear: Florida doesn't want to vote again, Thurman said. "So we won't."

Meanwhile Democrat Barack Obama was to address inflammatory language by his flamboyant former pastor late on Tuesday as he bids to lance a controversy dogging his White House campaign.

The uproar around Chicago preacher Jeremiah Wright, who officiated at Obama's wedding and

presidential campaign's most candidate's promise of racial heal-

A day after fighting running battles with his rival Hillary Clinton over the Iraq war, Obama was to address supporters in Pennsylvania on the theme of "race, politics, and unifying our country.

Obama said it would have been "naive" to believe that race would never crop up in his primary battle against Hillary, just as gender was always likely to feature in a race featuring the former first lady.

Hillary Clinton aides, normally quick to attack the Obama campaign, have studiously ignored the pressure to resolve one of the 2008 threatened to undermine the daily fodder on conservative talk August convention.

radio and television.

Comparisons were being made between Obama's planned speech and former Republican contender Mitt Romney's December speech about his Mormonism, itself modeled on president John F. Kennedy's 1960 address on his Catholicism.

Over Iraq, though, Hillary and Obama traded jabs Monday ahead of the US-led invasion's fifth anniversary on Thursday.

Campaigning for Pennsylvania's primary on April 22, Hillary Clinton is battling for every delegate as she strives to overhaul Obama's narrow lead heading in to the Democrats'

Badawi brings new faces to cabinet

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi unveiled a slimline new cabinet yesterday, dropping veteran politicians and appointing fresh faces after unprecedented election losses.

Nasional coalition lose its twothirds majority for the first time in resignation.

the reshuffle, which also saw some government critics given influenministers are new faces and I hope they can serve the people more

1987, was the biggest casualty of

conference. The premier would not comment on the departure of Rafidah, who is to be replaced by outgoing agriculture

minister Muhyiddin Yasin. portfolio of internal security, and outgoing foreign minister Syed Hamid Albar will run a newly merged home affairs and internal security ministry.

Former arts, culture and heritage minister Rais Yatim will take over at the foreign ministry.

Badawi, who won the backing of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) last week, reiterated his insistence on staying in power, saying he had been given "a very strong mandate."

"I am not going to shirk my responsibilities," he said, adding Badawi was under pressure to that in his new term he would focus rejuvenate his administration after on implementing the many pro-March 8 polls that saw the Barisan . jects launched during the outgoing administration.

He said he was well aware of four decades, triggering calls for his criticism that he had plenty of good policies but that his administration Veteran trade minister Rafidah was "very short on implementa-Aziz, who had held the post since tion."

Badawi cut down the size of the cabinet, which had been criticised as unwieldy and wasteful, from 90 to 68 positions by dropping the "More than half of the cabinet roll call of parliamentary secretar-

Political observers comeffectively and bring a fresh mended Abdullah's reshuffle, and approach to the country's admin- particularly the decision to bring in istration," Abdullah told a press dissenting voices including Zaid Ibrahim, who has been a leading critic on social and human rights issues.

Zaid was refused permission to contest the March 8 polls but will The premier relinquished his now be appointed to the upper

> "It shows a refreshing change of face, it shows that the PM at least would like to give the impression that he is changing some of the old guard," said Tricia Yeoh from the Centre for Public Policy Studies thinktank.

Karbala shrine death toll rises to 52

AFP, Karbala

The death toll from a bomb attack near a revered Shiite shrine in the central Iraqi city of Karbala has risen to 52, a health official told AFP vesterday.

A bomb exploded near the shrine of Imam Hussein, a pilgrimage destination for Shiite Muslims in the centre of the city, on Monday.

Karbala police chief, said the bomb had been planted in the area by insurgents although other police and health officials say a female suicide bomber carried out the

On Tuesday, Salim Kadhim, spokesman of the Karbala health directorate said the death toll from the attack was now at 52, while 75 others were wounded.

He said the dead included five

were also wounded.

across the country.

Brigadier General Raed Shakir,

Iranian pilgrims. Eight Iranians and wounded scores more.

The attack came as US Vice President Dick Cheney was on a visit to Baghdad where he met several US and Iraqi leaders to discuss improvements in security

Police in Karbala, 110 kilometres south of Baghdad, has imposed an indefinite curfew in the central districts of the city.

Insurgents have targeted the Shiite shrine city on a number of occasions in the past five years. On April 28 last year, a suicide

car bomb attack near the Iman Abbas shrine, another revered Shiite shrine in Karbala, killed more than 70 people and wounded nearly 160.

Two weeks earlier, a similar bomb attack close to the Imam Hussein shrine killed 42 people

Another four workers were killed in two separate shootings on Tuesday, the officer said.

on Belgian Coalition

AFP, Brussels

"It's a good deal for a government, with balanced measures,"

Agreement on a political programme followed a night of negotiations between two Dutchspeaking Flemish parties and three francophone parties.

McCartney divorce ruling criticises

ex-spouse

A judge criticised the estranged wife of Beatles legend Paul McCartney as "less than candid" in a ruling on the couple's bitter divorce battle released yesterday.

sive witness," High Court judge Hugh Bennett said evidence given by Mills -- who secured a 24.3million-pound divorce deal Monday -- was "not just inconsistent and inaccurate but also less than candid."

"She has conducted her own case before me with a steely, yet courteous, determination," said Bennett, calling here a "strongwilled and determined personal-

McCartney himself was described in more complimentary

"He expressed himself moder-

said the judge. Following Monday's divorce deal a 500-word summary of the.

judge's ruling was published. But Mills had appealed for the full judgment not to be published. citing concerns to protect the

old daughter Beatrice. Two appeal court judges

rejected her arguments.

Dalai Lama to resign if Tibet violence worsens that the Dalai Lama, who won the Gansu province. AFP, Dharamshala

The Dalai Lama yesterday vowed to orchestrated the unrest. resign as leader of Tibet's exiles if violence back home worsened, just hours before his aides said 19 people were killed in new demon-

The 72 year old spiritual leader of Buddhists also said independence of Tibet was "out of the ques-

The Dalai Lama, speaking in the Indian city where his exiled government is based, insisted he was opposed to the violence that erupted in Tibet last week. His comments came after Wen,

cast live around the world to blame him for the violence. Wen said the spiritual leader was "hypocritical" and that the

Chinese government had proof

news conference that was broad-

Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, had

China has also repeatedly said the Dalai Lama and his followers in Tibet ultimately want to break out from under Chinese control.

But the Dalai Lama said independence was "out of the question" and that ethnic Tibetans and Chinese should live "side by side" in peace.

The incidents have renewed international attention on China's human rights record just months before Beijing hosts the Olympics. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said Tuesday protesters were trying to undermine the Games. China's premier, used an annual

China has said 13 people were killed by Tibetan "mobs" but Tibetan exiles say nearly 100 people are confirmed dead, including 19 they said were shot by Chinese police in the area of Machu in

"There was a protest in Machu this morning, and police fired on them," said Thubten Samphel, a spokesman for the Dalai Lama's

been confirmed killed in Lhasa (the Tibetan capital) in the past several In a news conference with

reporters earlier, the Dalai Lama said he was opposed to using violence against Tibet's Chinese rulers and said he would step down as leader of the government-in-exile if the bloodshed deepened.

policy of non-violence in dealing with China, which annexed Tibet in the 1950s, was earning criticism from younger and more radical Tibetans in exile, and that he would stand down if necessary.



A Palestinian boy puts carnation flowers on tombs at a mock cemetery set up in Gaza City yesterday to symbolize the death of the economy due to Israel's crippling blockade on the Gaza Strip. An Palestinian association has installed tens of mock tombs in a public space in the war-battered city to represent the death of Gaza businesses. The unemployment rate in the territory tops 70 percent, private businesses across the Gaza Strip have collapsed, and water and power shortages have undermined the local health sector.

bers of the United Nations' inter-Russian Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov (L), US Defence Secretary Robert national police force in Kosovo, hurt when demonstrators pelted

after Serb riots grenade and possibly even shot at them. The rest were Serbs.

AUN policeman in Kosovo has died of injuries suffered in rioting by Serbs, police said yesterday as Nato tried to restore calm after the worst violence since Kosovo's independ-

"A Ukrainian police officer died Monday evening of wounds suffered during violent demonstrations in the north of Kosovska Mitrovica," Kosovo police spokesman Veton Elshani said.

(KFOR) peacekeepers on the one independence declaration. Sixty-three of them were mem-

them with stones and at least one

The rioting erupted after police

conducted a pre-dawn raid in order to dislodge a group of Serb protesters who had been holed up inside two UN-run courts in Mitrovica since Friday.

parliament unilaterally declared independence from Serbia on February 17, causing tensions in the north where the Ibar River splits Serbs in the north from ethnic Albanians in the south.

UN Secretary General Ban Kimoon led the international condemnation of Monday's violence in the town, urging "all communities to exercise calm and restraint."

Albanian but Serbs consider it a cradle of their civilisation. The territory had been under UN administration since 1999 when Nato intervened to stop Belgrade's crackdown on separatists.

Kosovo town tense Copenhagen, Oslo, London world's costliest cities Among Asian cities, Tokyo is the

AFP, Geneva

Tourists to Europe will have to fork out more as currency fluctuations mean they will be visiting some of the world's most expensive cities, researchers from Swiss bank UBS said yesterday.

bank UBS lists Oslo, London and Copenhagen as the three most costly cities, while Dublin has crept By contrast, cities in the United

thanks to the weaker US dollar. Brussels and Lyon.

States have become cheaper New York now ranks at just number 18, after cities such as Tokyo, have the highest spending "The US dollar's sharp depreci-

most expensive, followed by Seoul, Singapore and Hong Kong. Visitors on a tight budget may wish to pick Kuala Lumpur, Buenos

Aires and Mumbai, which are the three cheapest cities for visitors. However, for residents, it is a slightly different story. London is the most expensive

city after taking rent into consider-

ation, followed by Oslo, Dublin, Copenhagen and New York. As for those who bring home the most money after taxes, it is the inhabitants of Swiss city Zurich. Excluding housing costs, Zurich residents also

power in net wages. At the other half of the chart, Jakarta residents get the least for the amount of work they put in, followed by residents in Mumbai and Delhi.

terday, including two policemen in Baghdad, security officials said. The latest attacks came as US Vice President Dick Cheney ended a surprise two-day visit to Iraq.

Two policemen and a civilian were killed and seven others wounded when a roadside bomb exploded in Baghdad's northeastern neigbourhood of Al-Binuk, a security official said.

Insurgents killed at least seven

people in attacks across Iraq yes-

Another bomb explosion in a market in Baghdad's northern AJ-Shaab neighbourhood killed one civilian and wounded 13 others.

the official added. A car bomb attack in the restive northern city of Mosul killed three civilians and wounded 40 others, police spokesman Brigadier General Khalid Abdul Sattar said.

Quake rocks islands off New Zealand

AFP, Wellington

A strong 6.1-magnitude earthquake struck off the Kermadec Islands north of New Zealand yesterday, the US Geological Survey said.

(0822 GMT), was located about 70 kilometres northeast of Raoul Island, the main island in the New Zealand territory, at a depth of 28 kilometres. There were no immediate

The epicentre of the undersea

quake, which struck at 8:22 pm

reports of damage or casualties. The Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre did not issue a tsunami alert.

Separatists kill 11 in India AP, Guwahati

Suspected separatists fatally shot 11 migrant workers in three separate attacks in India's remote

northeast, police said yesterday. Seven migrant workers believed to be from northern Uttar Pradesh state were shot and killed Monday night on the outskirts of Impala, the capital of Manipur state, said apolice officer who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was

not authorised to talk to reporters.

Deal reached

Belgian political parties struck a deal yesterday on a programme for a coalition government under Christian Democrat Yves Leterme, who will take the reins on Thursday, the Flemish leader said.

Leterme said on local RTBF radio, announcing a pact that should bring to an end a nine-month political crisis that came close to splitting the country in half.

AFP, London

Calling her "a less than impres-

ately though at times with justifiable irritation, if not anger. He was consistent, accurate and honest,"

privacy of the couple's four-year-

Gates (2L) and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice walk prior to talks at the Foreign Ministry guesthouse in Moscow yesterday.

administration. In all, he said, "80 people have

days and 19 killed today."

But he acknowledged that his

AFP, Pristina

ence declaration.

More than 150 people were wounded Monday in the ethnically divided northern Kosovo town during clashes between the UN police and Nato-led Kosovo Force side and Serbs opposed to Kosovo's

Kosovo's Albanian-majority

Kosovo is overwhelmingly

A survey by economists at Swiss ahead to fourth place.

> ation has made New York a much more affordable place for European shoppers. London is now 26 percent more expensive," noted the researchers.