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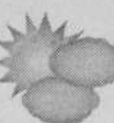
Monday Tuesday Wednesday



Low: 53
High: 83



Low: 50
High: 80



Low: 49
High: 73

IN BRIEF

Senior Hamas operative killed in car bombing

DAMASCUS, Syria — In a hit claimed by Israeli security officials, a senior Hamas operative was killed in a car bombing Sunday outside his house in Damascus. It was the first such killing of a leader of the Islamic militant group in Syria. Izz Eldine Subhi Sheik Khalil, 42, died instantly in the explosion, which wounded three bystanders. Witnesses said he was speaking on his mobile phone as he put his white Mitsubishi SUV in reverse before it exploded about 10 yards from his home.

Fourth hurricane ravages Florida, leaves six dead

HUTCHINSON ISLAND, Fla. — Jeanne, Florida's fourth hurricane in six weeks, piled on destruction in already ravaged areas Sunday, slicing across the state with howling wind that rocketed debris from earlier storms and torrents of rain that turned streets into rivers. At least six people died in the storm, a cruel rerun for many still trying to recover from earlier hurricanes. Jeanne came ashore in the same area hit three weeks ago by Hurricane Frances and was headed for the Panhandle, where 70,000 homes and businesses remained without power because of Hurricane Ivan 10 days earlier.

Mount St. Helens quakes signal possible eruption

SEATTLE — A strengthening series of earthquakes at Mount St. Helens prompted seismologists Sunday to warn that the once-devastating volcano may see a small explosion soon. The U.S. Geological Survey issued a notice of volcanic unrest in response to the swarm of hundreds of earthquakes that began Thursday.

Initially, hundreds of tiny earthquakes that began Thursday morning had slowly declined through Saturday. By Sunday, however, there had been more than 10 temblors of magnitude 2.0 to 2.8, the most in a 24-hour period since the last dome-building eruption in October 1986.

Mount St. Helens is about 55 miles northeast of Portland.

U.S. military death rate in Iraq nears 1,050

Friday, 1,042 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to the Defense Department. Of those, 792 died as a result of hostile action and 250 died of non-hostile causes. The figures include three military civilians. The department did not provide an update over the weekend.

The British military has reported 65 deaths: Italy, 19; Poland, 13; Spain, 11; Bulgaria, six; Ukraine, eight; Slovakia, three; Thailand, two; the Netherlands, two; and Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Hungary and Latvia have reported one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 904 U.S. military members have died — 683 as a result of hostile action and 221 of non-hostile causes, according to the military's numbers as of Friday.

— The Associated Press

Oregon soldier killed in ambush, embassy shaken

Also, car blasts kill Iraqi guardsmen and wound American troops in a weekend of Iraq violence

BY FISNIK ABRASHI
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq. — A soldier from the Portland area was killed in a roadside explosion, Maj. Arnold Strong of the Oregon Army National Guard said.

Sgt. David Wayne Johnson, 37, of Sandy died on Saturday morning northwest of Baghdad. He was a gunner on a Humvee, the last in a convoy, Strong said.

Two other guardsmen suffered minor injuries in the explosion and returned to duty, Strong said.

Johnson, who was promoted from specialist after his death, joined the Guard following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Strong said Johnson was an amateur motorcycle racer who, before enlisting, had orange dreadlocks flowing down his back.

Johnson's family declined interview requests late Sunday.

Johnson, who was scheduled to return home next spring, was the third Oregon National Guard soldier to die in two weeks and the eighth in less than four months. He was the oldest of those killed.

Roughly 750 members of the Oregon National Guard are stationed in Iraq. The number will increase to about 1,400 in two months, Strong said.

On Monday a car bomb exploded in the northeastern city of Mosul as an Iraqi National Guard patrol was passing by, killing at least four guardsmen and wounding three others, police said.

At least three vehicles were damaged in the blast, witnesses said.

Police Capt. Mushtaq Abdul-Karim said the explosion killed at least four guardsmen, wounded three others and hurt a civilian.

Additionally, two car bombs wounded American and Iraqi troops west of the capital Sunday and a few hours later the U.S. military announced the arrest of a senior Iraqi National Guard commander on suspicion of ties to insurgents, underscoring the challenges to building a strong Iraq security service capable of restoring stability.

The two attackers who died in the twin blasts tried to ram their cars into a National Guard base in Kharma, a town on the outskirts of the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah, a U.S. military official said on condition of anonymity.

The number of U.S. and Iraqi casualties was not immediately clear, but a statement from the U.S. Marines said there were no serious injuries among American troops at the base.

The National Guard is the centerpiece of U.S. plans to turn over security responsibilities after elections slated for January and guardsmen have been repeatedly targeted. Militants waging a 17-month insurgency have repeatedly targeted Iraqi police and guardsmen in an effort to thwart U.S.-backed efforts to build a strong Iraqi security force capable of restoring stability.

But the threat may not only come from outside the force. Guard Brig. Gen. Talib al-Lahibi, who previously served as an infantry officer in Saddam Hussein's army, was detained Thursday in the province of Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, a U.S. military statement announced.

The statement provided no details, but said he was suspected of having

links to militants. Al-Lahibi was the acting head of the Iraqi National Guard for Diyala province, said Maj. Neal O'Brien, spokesman for the U.S. Army's 1st Infantry Division.

In other violence Sunday, U.S. troops and insurgents traded fire in Ramadi, west of Baghdad, resulting in at least three dead and four wounded, witnesses and hospital officials said. Insurgents fired mortar rounds and rockets at two U.S. positions west and east of the city, and U.S. forces responded with shelling, striking a house in a Tamim neighborhood, witnesses said.

A rocket slammed into a busy Baghdad neighborhood, killing at least one person and wounding eight, hospital officials and witnesses said.

Hours after the attack, another loud blast shook the area near the Green Zone, site of the U.S. Embassy and the interim Iraqi government. Smoke rose above the zone and alert sirens sounded. It was not clear whether anything had been hit.

Five members of the U.S. House of Representatives were in the embassy at the time, but none was injured.

Meanwhile, an Egyptian diplomat and two British Muslim leaders urged religious leaders to help secure the release of hostages.

Egyptian official Farouq Mabrouk sought help for six Egyptian telecommunications workers abducted with four Iraqis last week. Mabrouk refused to speak to reporters after his 30-minute meeting with Harith al-Dhari, who heads the Association of Muslim Scholars, a conservative organization that has helped win the release of other foreign captives.

Gunmen abducted two of the Egyptians on Thursday in a raid on their firm's Baghdad office — the latest in a string of kidnappings targeting engineers working on rebuilding Iraq. Eight other employees, four Egyptians and four Iraqis, were seized outside Baghdad on Wednesday.

More than 140 foreigners have been kidnapped in Iraq — some by anti-U.S. insurgents and others by criminals seeking ransom. At least 26 have been killed, including the two American civil engineers, Eugene Armstrong and Jack Hensley.

Persistent violence, coupled with the coalition forces' lack of control in key parts of the country, has raised questions about the feasibility of holding elections by the Jan. 31 deadline.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said Sunday that the United States is committed to allowing all Iraqis the chance to vote, but the top U.S. military commander in the region cautioned against expecting that sort of achievement.

Both Powell and Gen. John Abizaid spoke of a major political and military effort before the scheduled elections to take back areas that insurgents now control.

Powell said planning is under way for an Iraqi conference, possibly next month, that would include the leading industrialized nations and regional powers, including Iran and Syria.

"This was a way to reach out to Iraq's immediate neighbors and persuade them that this is the time to help Iraq, so that the region can become stable," Powell said on CNN's "Late Edition."



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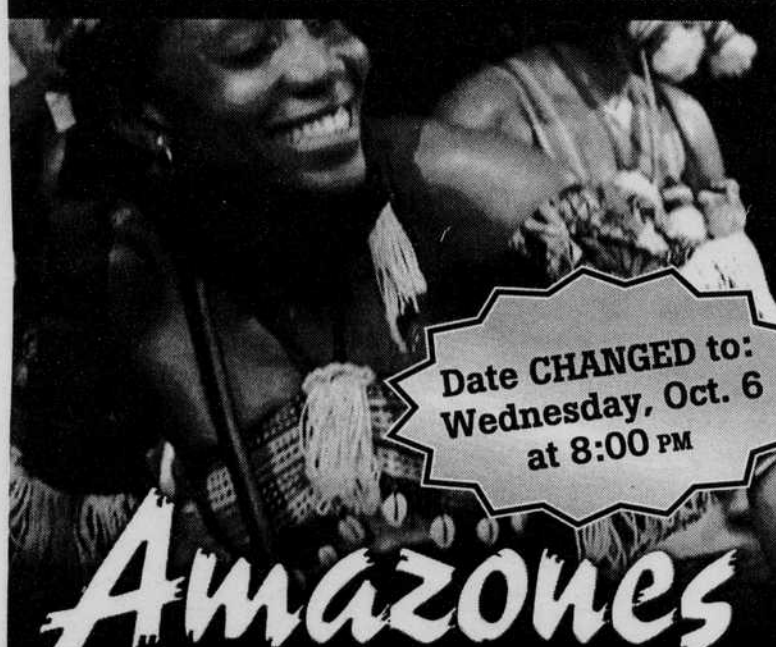
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