

Today	Thursday	Friday
High: 68 Low: 49 Precip: 50%	High: 71 Low: 50 Precip: 0%	High: 68 Low: 49 Precip: 60%

IN BRIEF

Record flu vaccine shortage hits U.S.

WASHINGTON — Americans' supply of flu vaccine was abruptly cut in half Tuesday, prompting the government to ask most healthy adults to delay or skip flu shots so that the elderly and others most at risk from influenza can get scarce supplies. British regulators unexpectedly shut down a major flu-shot supplier Tuesday, prompting a record shortage in this country just as flu season is about to begin.

White House staunchly defends Iraq policy

WASHINGTON — The White House staunchly defended its Iraq policy Tuesday as new questions emerged about President Bush's prewar decisions and postwar planning. An impending weapons report undercut the administration's main rationale for the war, and the former head of the American occupation said the United States had too few troops in Iraq after the invasion. Four weeks before Election Day, Sen. John Kerry pounced on the acknowledgment by former Iraq administrator Paul Bremer that the United States had "paid a big price" for insufficient troop levels.

U.S.-Iraqi forces launch major offensive

BAGHDAD, Iraq — More than 3,000

U.S. and Iraqi troops launched a major operation Tuesday against insurgent strongholds just south of Baghdad, their second mission in five days to wrest control from militants whose attacks threaten national elections seen as crucial to stabilizing this turbulent country. The operation in Babil province — an area notorious for kidnappings and ambushes and home to the fabled, ancient city of Babylon — follows last week's U.S.-Iraqi drive to oust insurgent forces from Samarra, about 60 miles north of Baghdad.

Turkey edges closer to European Union entrance

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The European Union head office will likely push for stringent and long-term conditions to membership for Turkey as part of its expected approval on Wednesday to start entry negotiations, which are likely to last at least 10 years.

The 30-member executive European Commission is expected to warn Ankara in its recommendation that any backtracking on human rights or other democratic reforms could cause a delay in negotiations.

Body found in Willamette River still unidentified

DUNDEE — A body was discovered in the Willamette River over the weekend, and authorities on Tuesday still could not determine the man's identity or what caused his death.

A child on a day outing with his family spotted the body floating face down on Sunday. Yamhill County District Attorney Brad Berry said an autopsy was performed Monday at the state Medical Examiner's Office in Portland.

"What we know is more about what did not happen," the district attorney said. "He was not shot, stabbed or strangled."

— The Associated Press

Voters rally in Afghanistan as weekend elections near

Thousands gather in support of three presidential candidates; elections focus is on recovery from war

BY AMIR SHAH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GHAZNI, Afghanistan — Watched over by American bodyguards and sharpshooters, Afghanistan's eternally optimistic interim president told a campaign rally of 10,000 people Tuesday that this weekend's election is a key step in their recovery from decades of war and hardship.

The gathering was one of three big rallies by leading presidential contenders on the most active day yet in a campaign that has mostly been waged behind closed doors, with the candidates courting the support of tribal elders who can influence how whole villages vote.

It was only President Hamid Karzai's second campaign trip out of the capital since an assassination attempt by Taliban rebels last month, and security was tight. Truckloads of Afghan police lined the road leading to the dusty field, and everyone attending the rally had to pass through security checkpoints as U.S. helicopters flew overhead.

Karzai, the overwhelming favorite among the 18 contenders, said Saturday's election is an opportunity to build a new future for a country that has known nothing but war, drought and poverty for a quarter century.

"Brothers and sisters of Afghanistan, I ask you to vote for me freely, with no pressure," Karzai told the crowd in Ghazni, about 75 miles

south of Kabul. "We want a proud Afghanistan, a stable Afghanistan, a peaceful Afghanistan."

After the rally, he mingled in the crowd, shaking hands with an old man who pressed closer to meet him.

"Don't push him! Don't push him!" Karzai told his security detail when they tried to keep the man away. "This is democracy. This is emotion!"

People in the crowd danced and sang, while drummers beat out a traditional song.

Karzai's main rival, former Interior Minister Yunus Qanooni, addressed more than 2,000 people at the Kabul sports stadium to appeal for support. Qanooni, an ethnic Tajik, is expected to finish second but hopes to hold Karzai below the majority vote needed to avoid a runoff.

In the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, Uzbek strongman Abdul Rashid Dostum told several thousand people that Karzai's government had fallen short on promises of reconstruction and improved security. Afterward, Dostum mounted a brown horse — his electoral symbol — as the crowd pressed in around him, chanting his name.

Afghan police raid hideout Monday

On Monday, Afghan soldiers and police raided a hideout where Taliban militants were suspected of

preparing attacks to disrupt the presidential election, prompting a three-hour battle that killed seven insurgents, officials said Tuesday.

Seven police officers were reported killed Tuesday when their vehicle struck a land mine close to the Pakistani border, and police said gunmen shot at a U.N. vehicle, wounding three Afghan election workers.

The Taliban, which was driven from power by a U.S.-led coalition in late 2001, has staged a string of attacks on election workers, made frequent rocket assaults on U.S. bases and sprung occasional ambushes.

But the rebels have not launched the major assault that many people had feared in the days leading up to the vote. Officials said they were confident the rebels would not be able to mount attacks capable of stopping the vote.

"The elections will be secure, not so much because the remnants of the Taliban or the terrorist forces are saving their energies to launch attacks on the day of the election," said Jawed Ludin, a spokesman for Karzai. "Our intelligence is that in fact there is not much energy left there."

In neighboring Pakistan, the International Organization for Migration, which organized a four-day voter registration drive among Afghan refugees, said about 740,000 had signed up to vote in the election. It said about 28 percent were women, who had been pressured in Pakistan's conservative tribal areas not to register.

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