

Today	Saturday	Sunday
High: 58 Low: 48 Precip: 30%	High: 55 Low: 43 Precip: 80%	High: 54 Low: 46 Precip: 40%

IN BRIEF

Weakened Arafat heads to Paris for treatment

RAMALLAH, West Bank — An ailing Yasser Arafat — too weak to stand, unable to hold down food and spending most of Thursday sleeping — agreed to leave his battered West Bank compound for the first time in more than two years and fly to Paris for urgent medical treatment. The 75-year-old Palestinian leader's planned departure Friday, a decade after he arrived in the West Bank with the promise of statehood, could mark the end of an era. Arafat, who hoarded power and declined to groom a successor, leaves behind a people in disarray.

Insurgents slaughter 11 Iraqi soldiers

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Insurgents slaughtered 11 Iraqi soldiers, beheading one, then shooting the others execution-style, and declared on an Islamic militant Web site Thursday that Iraqi fighters will avenge "the blood" of women and children killed in U.S. strikes on the guerrilla stronghold of Fallujah. The wave of foreigner kidnappings claimed another victim — a Polish woman in her 60s who is married to an Iraqi. Her captors demanded that Poland withdraw its 2,400 soldiers and that the U.S.-led coalition free all Iraqi women held at Abu Ghraib prison.

UN urges US to lift sanctions on Cuba

UNITED NATIONS — For the 13th straight year, the U.N. General Assembly overwhelmingly urged the United States to end its more than four decade trade embargo against Cuba, rejecting Washington's argument that Fidel Castro is "a tyrant" who denies basic human rights to Cubans.

The Cuban-sponsored resolution calling for the embargo to be repealed "as soon as possible" was approved by a vote of 179-4 with one abstention, very similar to last

year's vote of 179-2 with two abstentions.

The resolution is not legally binding and Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said the U.S. government has ignored it for the last 12 years. But he said "that does not diminish the importance and momentousness" of the vote to the Cuban people and to show the worldwide opposition to the 43-year-old trade embargo.

Trial begins for Cleric tied to Bali bombing

JAKARTA, Indonesia — A Muslim cleric accused of heading the terror group blamed for the Bali bombings proclaimed his innocence as his trial opened Thursday, and said the charges were the work of President Bush and "his slave" — Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

Abu Bakar Bashir is charged with heading the al-Qaida-linked group Jemaah Islamiyah and with involvement in two attacks — the Bali nightclub bombings and a suicide blast at the J.W. Marriott Hotel in Jakarta last year.

The United States and Australia also accuse the 66-year-old cleric of being a key Southeast Asian terror leader.

"I am innocent. The charges are baseless," a relaxed-looking Bashir told reporters before the trial began. "All those people who do not agree with the interests of George Bush are called terrorists," Bashir said.

FBI investigating Halliburton contracts

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The FBI has begun investigating whether the Pentagon improperly awarded no-bid contracts to Halliburton Co., seeking an interview with a top Army contracting officer and collecting documents from several government offices. The line of inquiry expands an earlier FBI investigation into whether Halliburton overcharged taxpayers for fuel in Iraq, and it elevates to a criminal matter the election-year question of whether the Bush administration showed favoritism to Vice President Dick Cheney's former company.

Rumsfeld suggests explosives were moved

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld suggested Thursday that the removal of 377 tons of explosives from an Iraqi munitions base probably took place before U.S. forces arrived, saying

any large effort to loot the material afterward would have been detected. "We would have seen anything like that," he said in one of two radio interviews he gave Thursday at the Pentagon. "The idea it was suddenly looted and moved out, all of these tons of equipment, I think is at least debatable."

Peru students drown in Lake Titicaca

LIMA, Peru — Eleven people, including nine high school students and their teacher, were killed when their boat was upended by high winds on Lake Titicaca, officials said Thursday.

The boat filled with water and sank Wednesday night as the students — aged between 12 and 16 — returned from a school excursion to a local island, said Dr. Humberto Quispe, from the regional hospital in Yunguyo, 980 kilometers (607 miles) southeast of Lima.

Three 16-year-old survivors were pulled from the waters, Quispe said.

Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake at 3,811 meters (12,503 feet) above sea level, straddles Peru and Bolivia and is a popular tourist attraction, famous for its floating islands made out of reeds.

Moscow to install vehicle checkpoints at city schools

MOSCOW — Moscow authorities plan to install video cameras, erect fences and set up vehicle checkpoints at the city's public schools to prevent terrorist attacks like the Beslan school hostage seizure last month, Deputy Mayor Valery Shantsev said Thursday.

Shantsev said the measures, which were approved by a regional anti-terrorism commission, also include "panic buttons" that would allow administrators to communicate with law enforcement in case of emergency, according to the ITAR-Tass news agency.

Video cameras will monitor schools inside and out and guards will be stationed at entries to check vehicles, he said. New fences will be erected and existing fences reinforced at the more than 1,000 elementary and secondary public schools in the Russian capital.

ITAR-Tass said authorities plan to spend nearly 1 billion rubles (US\$34.8 million, euro27.4 million) to set up the new security measures; parents would be expected to help pay for hiring guards.

— The Associated Press

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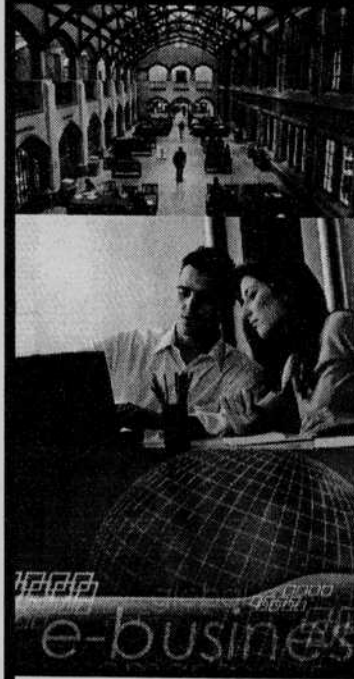
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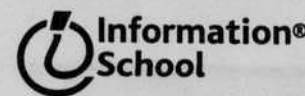
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