

Today	Saturday	Sunday
High: 46 Low: 36 Precip: 0%	High: 45 Low: 33 Precip: 80%	High: 43 Low: 37 Precip: 30%

IN BRIEF

**Putin opposes presidential runoff in turbulent Ukraine**

KIEV, Ukraine — Russian President Vladimir Putin injected himself directly into the election crisis in the former Soviet republic Thursday, strongly attacking the opposition's central demand for a new presidential runoff.

Putin made his comments while meeting with Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma at an airport outside Moscow, as tens of thousands of opposition supporters waving Ukrainian flags and wearing orange armbands, sweaters and scarves rallied for the 11th straight day in Kiev's Independence Square.

**Palestinians denounce jailed leader's ambitions**

RAMALLAH, West Bank — A day after jailed uprising leader Marwan Barghouti shocked his compatriots by announcing he'll run for president, many Palestinians denounced him Thursday for endangering unity and a smooth transition of power in the post-Yasser Arafat era.

Barghouti's last-minute decision to enter the Jan. 9 election roiled what was shaping up to be a rather staid campaign to replace Arafat and created a strong challenge to interim Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

Analysts say a Barghouti victory could bode ill for peace prospects with Israel.

— The Associated Press

# U.S. senator calls for U.N. chief officer to resign

*Sen. Norm Coleman criticizes Kofi Annan and the food-for-oil program; President Bush refuses to comment*

BY EDITH M. LEDERER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

UNITED NATIONS — Three years after winning the Nobel Peace Prize, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan is the target of escalating attacks in the United States, and a U.S. senator has called for his resignation over a deepening corruption scandal in the U.N. oil-for-food program in Iraq.

Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany and dozens of other countries have rallied to support the beleaguered U.N. chief — but not the United States.

President Bush twice on Thursday refused to say whether Annan should resign and didn't use the opportunities to back him. Instead, Bush demanded "a full and fair and open accounting" of the oil-for-food program, saying this was essential for U.S. taxpayers to continue supporting the United Nations and "for the integrity of the organization."

The demand for Annan to step down came from Sen. Norm Coleman, a Minnesota Republican who is leading one of five U.S. congressional investigations into the oil-for-food program. The program began in 1996 to help Iraqis cope with U.N. sanctions imposed after Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Two weeks ago, Coleman's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations said it had uncovered evidence

that Saddam's government raised more than \$21.3 billion in illegal revenue by subverting U.N. sanctions and the oil-for-food program. Coleman wrote in Wednesday's Wall Street Journal that Annan should resign because "the most extensive fraud in the history of the U.N. occurred on his watch."

While several U.S. newspapers and columnists also have called for Annan to be replaced, there is no such clamor in other U.N. member states, and at U.N. headquarters the secretary-general has been receiving letters and phone calls of support.

In Europe and elsewhere, critics and commentators have accused the U.S. media and some American politicians of exaggerating the oil-for-food scandal, pointing to the United States' permanent membership on the Security Council, which authorized the program, and the sanctions committee that monitored it.

Annan's mandate ends in December 2006. By then, he will have served 10 years at the helm of the United Nations, and it will be Asia's turn to choose a new secretary-general.

The United Nations rejected Coleman's call for Annan's resignation, saying no country has asked him to step down, and more than 3,000 U.N. staff members have signed a letter of support.

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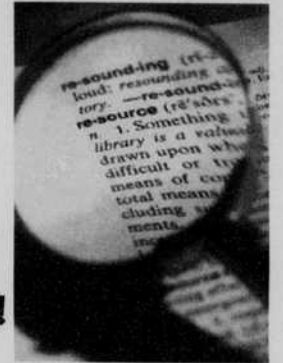
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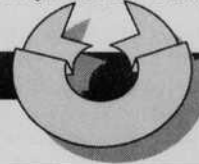
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