

IN BRIEF

Iraq's constitution seems assured of passage

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Iraq's landmark constitution seemed assured of passage Sunday after initial results showed minority Sunni Arabs had fallen short in an effort to veto it at the polls. The apparent acceptance was a major step in the attempt to establish a democratic government that could lead to the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

Opponents failed to secure the necessary two-thirds "no" vote in any three of Iraq's 18 provinces, according to counts that local officials provided to The Associated Press. In the crucial central provinces with mixed ethnic and religious populations, enough Shiites and Kurds voted to stymie the Sunni bid to reject the constitution.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani issued a decree setting Dec. 15 for Iraqis to vote again, this time to elect a new parliament. If the constitution indeed passed, the first full-term parliament since Saddam Hussein's fall in 2003 will install a new government by Dec. 31. If the charter has failed, the parliament will be temporary, tasked with drawing up a new draft on which to vote.

Wisconsin School bus crash kills at least five

OSSEO, Wis. — A bus carrying high school students home from a band competition crashed into a tractor-trailer that had jackknifed on the interstate early Sunday, killing four adults and an 11-year-old girl, officials said.

Twenty-nine others were injured,

some seriously, troopers said.

The semi had gone off the shoulder of Interstate 94 and jackknifed, and was blocking the westbound lane, Wisconsin State Patrol Capt. Douglas Notbohm said.

It was the first of four buses carrying about 140 students and 15 to 20 adult chaperones, Schoch said.

Tropical storm warning for Cayman Islands

GEORGE TOWN, Cayman Islands — A tropical storm warning was in effect Sunday for the Cayman Islands as a tropical depression moved through the Atlantic on a path that could threaten the U.S. Gulf Coast later this week as a hurricane, forecasters said.

The system was expected to become Tropical Storm Wilma by Monday, which would make it the 21st named storm of the season, tying the record for the most storms in an Atlantic season, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

The only other time so many storms have formed since record keeping began 154 years ago was in 1933.

At 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, the depression was centered about 150 miles southeast of Grand Cayman, forecasters said. It was moving west-northwest near 2 mph and had sustained winds near 35 mph. Depressions become tropical storms when their winds reach 39 mph.

Neo-Nazis march through Ohio neighborhood

TOLEDO, Ohio — In the days leading up to a white supremacist

march, ministers pleaded with residents to stay calm and community leaders organized peace rallies.

Authorities even delayed releasing the route so protesters wouldn't know where the group planned to march.

It wasn't enough to stop an angry mob that included gang members from looting and burning a neighborhood bar, smashing the windows of a gas station and hurling rocks and bottles at police on Saturday. Twelve officers were injured, one suffering a concussion when a brick flew through her cruiser window.

In all, 114 people were arrested on charges including assault, vandalism, failure to disperse and overnight curfew violations.

Chinese space capsule lands after five days in orbit

BELJING — A space capsule carrying two Chinese astronauts landed by parachute in the country's northern grasslands before dawn Monday following a five-day mission meant to affirm China's status as an emerging technological power.

The astronauts Fei Junlong and Nie Haisheng were "in good health" after their Shenzhou 6 capsule touched down at 4:32 a.m. local time in the Inner Mongolia region, the official Xinhua News Agency said. It said retrieval crews had reached the landing site and the two men were undergoing a medical checkup.

The two astronauts were shown live on state television climbing out of their kettle-shaped capsule with the help of two technicians in red jumpsuits and climbing down a ladder to the ground. They smiled,

waved to cheering members of the retrieval crew, accepted bouquets of flowers and sat in a pair of metal chairs beside the capsule.

Libby, lawyer's contacts with Miller questioned

WASHINGTON — New details about Judith Miller's decision to cooperate in the CIA leak probe are raising questions about whether Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff and his defense lawyer tried to steer the New York Times reporter's testimony.

The dispute arose as the newspaper on Sunday detailed three conversations that Miller had with the Cheney aide, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, in the summer of 2003 about Bush administration critic Joseph Wilson and Wilson's wife, covert CIA officer Valerie Plame.

The issue over the contacts between Miller, Libby and their representatives has arisen even though Libby's lawyer insists his client granted an unconditional waiver of confidentiality more than a year ago for the reporter to testify.

Pakistani officials estimate higher quake death toll

BALAKOT, Pakistan — Pakistani officials predicted Sunday that many more thousands of dead would be found in earthquake-ravaged Kashmir as heavy rains in the Himalayan region drenched homeless survivors in mud and misery.

The latest estimate would raise the death toll from the magnitude-7.6 quake in the mountains of northern Pakistan and India to at least 54,000 — a jump of more than 13,000 from the official count of

known dead.

A spokesman for the prime minister of the region warned that the cold and wet could cause further deaths among the 2 million or so people believed to be homeless.

About a fifth of the villages in the quake zone remained cut off eight days after the tremor turned villages scattered across lush mountainsides into death traps, and the bad weather over Kashmir halted aid flights by helicopters.

New ways to get stem cells may skirt ethical objections

NEW YORK — Two new mouse experiments may show how to obtain human embryonic stem cells without ethical hurdles, a step that could allow federal funding for such research, scientists reported Sunday.

Currently, scientists must sacrifice human embryos to harvest such cells, which can form any tissue type and are seen as valuable for studying and treating illnesses like diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

Objections to embryo destruction have led to a ban on federal funding for such work, which scientists say hampers research.

The new methods, detailed Sunday in the online edition of the journal Nature, seek to obtain the cells without destroying embryos.

The Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research, which advocates federal funding of stem cell research, cautioned that despite the goal of avoiding ethical quandaries, the new approaches "will not sit well with many who oppose embryonic stem cell research."

—The Associated Press

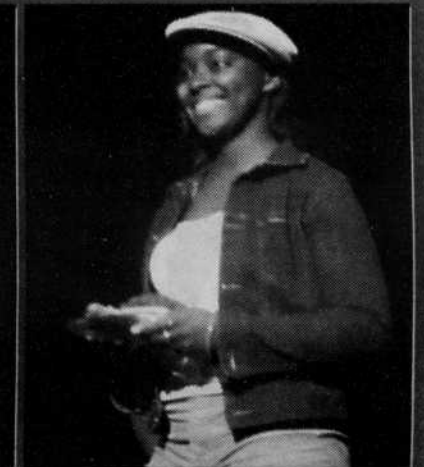
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