

NEWS IN BRIEF



Obama gets 12 stitches after errant elbow to mouth



WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. President Barack Obama needed 12 stitches in his upper lip after taking an errant elbow during a pickup basketball game Friday morning with family and friends visiting for the Thanksgiving holiday, the White House said.

First word of the injury came in a statement from press secretary Robert Gibbs nearly three hours after the incident.

The White House did not initially name the person who caused the injury, but identified him later Friday as Rey Decerega, director of programs for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute.

Obama received the stitches under local anesthesia in the doctor's office on the ground floor of the White House after returning home. Doctors used a smaller filament than typically used, which increases the number of stitches but makes a tighter stitch and leaves a smaller scar.

The president had gone to nearby Fort McNair to indulge in a game of basketball, one of his favorite athletic pursuits. It was a five-on-five contest involving family and friends. Among the players were Obama's nephew, Avery Robinson, Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Reggie Love, Obama's personal assistant, who played at Duke University.

Iraq arrests 12 suspects in Baghdad church attack

BAGHDAD (Reuters) — Iraqi security forces arrested 12 suspected al-Qaeda members on Saturday in connection with an attack on a Christian cathedral in Baghdad, a security official said.

Fifty-two hostages and police were killed when Iraqi forces tried to free more than 100 Catholics taken hostage at the Our Lady of Salvation church during Sunday mass on November 1.

The attack was the bloodiest against Iraq's Christian minority since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

General Ahmed Abu Ragheef, the Interior Ministry's head of internal affairs, said security forces had arrested 12 al-Qaeda members including one of the group's Baghdad commanders.

"Iraqi forces have successfully arrested the terrorist group involved in the attack on the church in Baghdad," he said, adding they had an al-Qaeda leader.

Ragheef said security forces seized 6.5 tonnes of explosives planned for use against a government ministry, hotels and the Christian community.

The Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaeda affiliate, claimed responsibility for the church attack.

Kidnapped Mexican politician released



MEXICO CITY (Reuters) — Diego Fernandez de Cevallos, a prominent Mexican politician and former presidential candidate who was kidnapped in May, has been released, daily El Universal reported on Saturday.

The newspaper, quoting members of the politician's family, said Fernandez, who belongs to President Felipe Calderon's ruling party, was released on Friday night.

According to the daily, the family paid a ransom of around \$20 million. "Everything is fine, he is OK and everything came out well," the family was quoted as saying.

Officials at the Attorney General's office were not immediately available for comment.

Cigar-chomping Fernandez, a 69-year-old lawyer known for his outspoken personality, was abducted in central Mexico more than six months ago as he arrived at his ranch late at night. His car was found with some of his belongings inside and blood on a pair of scissors thrown on the ground nearby.

Trustee for Madoff victims files 40 lawsuits in NY



NEW YORK (AP) — Relatives of both Bernard Madoff and his wife are among those being targeted in 40 lawsuits announced Friday by the trustee endeavoring to recover money for victims fleeced by the disgraced financier.

Twenty-two of the lawsuits were filed against relatives of Madoff and his wife, trustee Irving H. Picard said in a news release. Eighteen lawsuits were filed against former employees of Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities LLC, he said.

An attorney for Ruth Madoff didn't immediately respond to an e-mailed request for comment Friday night.

Picard said his firm is seeking about \$69 million in funds deposited by the company's customers and stolen in the 72-year-old's vast Ponzi scheme.

Picard said the lawsuits were filed as part of an effort to recover funds from relatives and employees "who were closest to the center of the fraud and who were, in many cases, among those who benefited most from the Ponzi scheme."

Iraqi PM: No need for U.S. troops to stay post-2011

BAGHDAD (AP) — Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said Saturday that an agreement requiring U.S. troops to leave by the end of 2011 will stand because Iraqi forces are capable of taking care of the country's security.

The comments are his first on the subject since being tasked with forming a new government following eight months of political deadlock, and some of his strongest to date on what is expected to be a key issue faced by the next government.

"The security agreement with what it included of dates and commitments will remain valid, and I do not feel the need for the presence of any other international forces to help Iraqis control the security situation," al-Maliki told reporters during his first news conference since getting the formal request on Thursday to form the new government.

Under an agreement between Iraq and the U.S., all American troops are to leave the country by the end of 2011. The U.S. currently has a little less than 50,000 troops in Iraq, down from a one-time high of 170,000.

American officials have said they will abide by the agreement although they would consider any request by the new Iraqi government to stay longer.

Earlier this month, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said the U.S. government is open to discussing changes to the agreement. But he said the "initiative clearly needs to come from the Iraqis."

One sign of the Iraqi security forces' burgeoning capability came Saturday when Iraq's Interior Minister said they have arrested at least 12 insurgents behind a deadly church siege.

Interior Minister Jawad Bolani told The Associated Press that the arrests — the first in connection to the October siege at the Our Lady of Salvation church — occurred in recent days.



Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki speaks during a news conference in Baghdad on November 23, 2010. (Reuters photo)

He said the insurgents were behind a wide range of operations in Iraq leading up to the siege and described their arrest as a coup for security forces.

"It is a painful blow to al-Qaeda," Bolani said.

Insurgents took about 120 people hostage during the Oct. 31 church attack. The siege ended hours later with 68 people dead in an attack that shocked many of Iraq's already-hardened citizens.

The attackers raided the church located in one of Baghdad's more affluent neighborhoods during Sunday evening Mass. Dozens of cowering parishioners, and two priests were killed — one execution-style on the church floor — before Iraqi security forces stormed the building.

Al-Qaeda later claimed responsibility for the attack and vowed in an Internet message to continue a campaign of bloodshed against Iraq's dwindling Christian minority.

According to Bolani, security forces also seized money and explosives during the arrests.

Bolani gave no details as to where and how the arrests took place, but an intelligence official responsible for monitoring Al-Qaeda cells in Iraq, said security forces acted on a tip to make the first arrest.

From there, the security forces eventually managed to round up the entire group, the official said. He put the number of people arrested at 17.

The intelligence official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Suicide bombing at Afghan police HQ kills 12

KABUL (AP) — Two suicide bombers wearing police uniforms blew themselves up at an Afghan police headquarters Saturday, killing at least 12 officers in a deadly border region that has long been a refuge for extremists from around the world.

In a statement e-mailed to the media, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attacks in the eastern Paktika province.

The attackers made it through three security gates before reaching the main building on the police compound, said Nawab Waziry, the provincial council head. One attacker detonated his explosives inside the police headquarters building, while the other blew himself up near the entrance about 20 minutes later, Waziry said.

"The site was covered with blood," Waziry told The Associated Press.

Gen. Daud Andarabi, the spokesman for the regional police commander in southeastern Afghanistan, said the blasts killed at least 12 officers and wounded 16. Meyawer Khan, chief of the criminal investigation department for Paktika province, confirmed 12 people were killed. The compound was also used as a police training center.

The attack took place in one of the most violent areas of Afghanistan, where NATO and Afghan forces fight daily against the Haqqani network, a Pakistan-based Taliban faction closely tied to al-Qaeda. The area, about 90 miles (150 kilometers) south of Kabul, borders the Pakistani region of North Waziristan and has been the target of numerous drone strikes against the insurgents.

A NATO service member also was killed Saturday in a bomb



U.S. soldiers walk in the camp of Howz-e-Madad district near Kandahar city on November 23, 2010. (Getty Images)

attack in eastern Afghanistan, but the military coalition did not give any further details, so it was unclear if there was any connection to the Paktika bombing.

President Hamid Karzai condemned the Paktika attack in a statement, saying that the Afghan police are trying to serve the people of Afghanistan.

The ongoing violence and intransigence of Taliban militants has led Western officials to advocate more strongly this year for a negotiated solution that would allow insurgents to have some sort of role

in the government. That push hit a roadblock this week, however, as a man believed to be a high-ranking Taliban representative was exposed as an impostor.

Afghanistan's intelligence service issued a statement Saturday saying that it had discovered the man posing as Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour was a fake and blocked him from entering Afghanistan from Pakistan for a planned meeting with Afghan government officials.

"He was about to come to Afghanistan, then during a meeting with the intelligence service near the border, it was made clear that he was not Mansour, so the intelligence service did not bring him in to Afghanistan for the negotiations," the statement said.

According to the New York Times, which first reported the ruse, the impostor met with Afghan and NATO officials three times — including once with Karzai — before they discovered he was not Mansour. He was allegedly paid to attend.

Karzai's office, however, has insisted the president never met with a man named Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour.

Computer meltdown leaves Aussies without cash

SYDNEY (AFP) — A freak computer glitch at Australia's biggest bank froze cash machines and left millions of people struggling to access their money.

National Australia Bank (NAB) said a corrupted file wiped out a huge number of transactions, including salary payments and transfers, and crashed some ATMs, angering many customers who were facing a weekend without money.

Spokeswoman Meaghan Telford said NAB was opening branches on Saturday and Sunday and bringing in extra call-centre staff as technicians scrambled to fix the problem.

"We're very apologetic," she told AFP. "We recognize this has caused people a lot of inconvenience. We're just working to resolve the problem."

Telford said the rogue file knocked out transactions on Wednesday, including salary deposits, bill payments and transfers to other banks, and then work to fix the problem hit Thursday and Friday's business.

As the electronic system buckled, some ATMs had crashed, she said, without revealing how many.

"There's been some issues with the electronic system because of the pressure the system has been under as a result of trying to resolve these issues," she said. "This has meant some ATMs have experienced issues."

India seeks to resolve climate disputes at Cancun

NEW DELHI (AP) — India has offered two proposals for the U.N. climate summit in Cancun, Mexico, in hopes of redefining its global image and helping to resolve disputes that have stymied agreement on curbing greenhouse gas emissions, its environment minister said Saturday.

Expectations for a treaty mandating significant emissions cuts have dimmed after last year's conference in Copenhagen failed to reach a consensus on how to divvy up responsibility for global warming.

No one expects the two-week Cancun summit starting Monday will resolve the core conflicts, but India hopes to offer a middle ground for smaller deals that can be built on in the future.

"India has been seen to be obstructionist and petulant" in the past, Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said in an interview Saturday. "I'd like to think that perception is different now."

The two Indian proposals, obtained by The Associated Press, address the sticky subjects of monitoring emissions cuts and sharing environmentally friendly technologies with poor and developing nations.

They lay out solutions for framework agreements that leave the most contentious issues for later debate.

India's role in promoting the compromises in Cancun has much to do with its wider foreign policy ambition of playing a larger role on the world stage.



Haiti prepares for presidential elections amid cholera outbreak

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (CNN)

— Within a year that saw a massive earthquake, a spreading cholera epidemic and recurring signs of government instability, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere is gearing up for its latest battle: presidential elections.

Nearly all of the 19 candidates have campaigned on similar platforms: fighting corruption, creating jobs and addressing a series of natural disasters that has left the Caribbean nation reeling and prompted many to urge for a postponement of Sunday's vote.

Haiti, which has endured near constant health and environmental crises, is facing a growing cholera epidemic affecting nearly 70,000 people that many fear could further scare voters from the polls.

The death toll stands at 1,603, the Ministry of Public Health and Population reported Friday. More than 29,000 people have been hospitalized, with a stunning 18.3 percent mortality rate in the country's cholera-affected northeast, it said.

But Ken Merten, the United States ambassador to Haiti, said the election process was on track.

He said 250,000 new voters were registered and more than 11,000 voting stations have been identified in the fifth presidential election since the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship and the first since the devastating 7.0-magnitude earthquake in January.

Among the candidates is perhaps Haiti's most flamboyant politician, Michel Martelly, who is perhaps better known by his street name: Sweet Micky.

Martelly's penchant for dressing in drag and organizing raucous street parties in the Haitian capital has made him a popular choice among portions of the electorate.

"Yes, I've been the bad boy," Martelly told CNN. "But the people of Haiti believe in that rebel status that I'm selling. You know, in able to fight the system, you must be strong, must be courageous."

His style clashes sharply with that of a more soft-spoken front-runner and former first lady, Mirlande Manigat. The 70-year-old conservatively dressed Sorbonne Ph.D. stands to be Haiti's first female president.

Her husband, Leslie Manigat, was elected president in 1988 under the Assembly of Progressive National Democrats (RDNP) party but managed to hold on to the office only four months after his election.

"It was a coup d'etat," Manigat told CNN. "A military coup against him. And we had to go again in exile for two years."

Manigat ran again in 2006, losing to current outgoing President Rene Preval in a controversial election in which Preval failed to secure more than 50 percent of the vote, but managed to avoid a mandatory runoff.

In a country accustomed to political upheaval, angry crowds in the Haitian capital last week tore down posters of Preval's hand-picked candidate, Jude Celestin, amid frustrations with the country's corrupt and often ineffective leadership.

Celestin, whose well-funded campaign has occasionally featured airplanes dropping confetti, leads the largest bloc of politicians competing for seats in both houses of the Haitian parliament.