



Top Stories

Death toll in Indonesian tsunami continues to rise

More than 650 people have now died after a tsunami hit the Indonesian island of Java on Monday afternoon. In the past few days, around 100 dead bodies have been recovered, and it is estimated that over 300 people are still missing.

Somali Islamists halt peace talks with government

The Union of Islamic Courts has broken off peace talks with Somalia's interim government as the country slides closer towards major military conflict. The Islamists blamed the influx of soldiers from neighbouring Ethiopia for the end of talks.

Featured story

Human Rights Watch: US abuse of Iraqi prisoners continues

A report published by Human Rights Watch titled No Blood, No Foul: Soldiers' Accounts of Detainee Abuse in Iraq claims that that harsh interrogation techniques and torture continues and are approved by commanders.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Tiger Woods wins the The Open Championship commonly known as the British Open, finishing two shots ahead of Chris DiMarco.
- Ariel Sharon's condition said to be worsening.

Wikipedia Current Events

- American Floyd Landis wins the 2006 Tour de France.
- Saddam Hussein is hospitalised as a result of a hunger strike to demand better security for his defence team at his trial.
- The UN's Jan Egeland has condemned the devastation caused by Israeli air strikes in Beirut, saying it is a violation of humanitarian law.
- Two Israeli civilians are killed by Hezbollah rocket attacks on Haifa. More than 2200 rockets have been fired at Israeli cities since the beginning of the conflict, killing 17 Israelis, all of them civilians. 20 Israeli soldiers were killed in other incidents. About 300 Lebanese, most of them civilians, have been killed by Israeli forces.
- Israel and the United States governments say they would accept NATO forces deployed along the Lebanese/Israeli border.
- An earthquake of 6.1 magnitude off the coast of Gorontalo province on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi prompts warnings of a possible tsunami.
- A suicide bomb explosion kills at least 26 people in a busy market in Sadr City, a predominantly Shi'a district of Baghdad.

Lebanon faces humanitarian crisis

UN relief coordinator Jan Egeland flew to Beirut for a 48 hour visit to

Lebanon focused on assistance required by people displaced or trapped by the conflict.

He visited Haret Hreik, a crowded Beirut neighborhood where Hezbollah had its headquarters, hours after it was bombed by Israel. Calling the destruction there "horrific", he said, "I did not know it was block after block of houses,... It makes it a violation of humanitarian law,". Mr. Egeland appealed for both sides to put a halt to attacks.

The Israeli government said the military was trying to be as precise as possible in its operations in Lebanon. "The Lebanese people are not our enemy. We cannot sit idly by while Hezbollah terrorists launch rockets at our towns and cities," Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said.

Mr. Egeland said there was a humanitarian crisis unfolding in Lebanon, and more than half a million people were directly affected. He said that wounded people were unable to get treatment, no safe drinking water was available and that tens of thousands of civilians were caught in the crossfire between the Israeli Defense Forces and Hezbollah militants, particularly in south Lebanon. He expected the number of displaced to increase "dramatically" as Israel has warned the population of south Lebanon to leave the area ahead of possible new military action there.

Outlining plans for a "major" relief operation, he called for an end to violence to facilitate the aid effort, saying, "We can't get relief into the country in any quantity or distribute it beyond a few points".

The Lebanese newspaper Daily Star reports that the number of displaced people in Lebanon passed 900,000 on Friday, with close to 40,000 refugees in Beirut itself. Other estimates place the number of refugees between half a million and a million.

Israel has urged the remaining people living in south Lebanon to leave, and streams of people, some carrying white flags, are making their way from the south.

About 42,000 refugees had flooded into the city of Sidon from the surrounding countryside, believing it to be safe from attacks, when it was hit by Israeli strikes today.

In several towns and cities, food, medical supplies and fuel stocks are running low, and municipal authorities have expressed inability to assist people. They have called for urgent shipments of food products such as milk, rice, sugar and canned meat; diapers and kitchen tools; medicine such as insulin, painkillers, antibiotics and chlorine to clean water; sterilized gloves; refrigerators to store medicine; tents; electrical generators of 5, 10, 20 and 30 kva; blankets and other necessities.

In the government hospital in the Al-Bass Palestinian refugee camp, the mass burial of 86 bodies was begun, after rising casualties overwhelmed the local morgue.

Infrastructure hit

The air strikes and bombardment

of roads, bridges and trucks has made supplying aid to affected areas even more difficult. Lebanon's only international airport has been out of action since the first days of the conflict. Reports estimate that billions of dollars worth of infrastructure has been destroyed.

UN plans relief operation

The UN relief coordinator Jan Egeland spoke to reporters of the plans for getting aid to Lebanon. He said UN supplies of humanitarian aid would begin to arrive in the next few days. "But we need safe access," he said, "So far Israel is not giving us access." He estimated that US \$100 million is urgently needed to help the half a million to million people in Lebanon who were in need of international assistance.

U.N. and other relief agencies have been asking for humanitarian aid corridors to be opened up. Israel said it opened a 50-mile-long and five-mile-wide (80-kilometre by eight-kilometre) safe passage to Beirut for ships and aircraft to allow aid into Lebanon.

Egeland said the United Nations was planning to deliver aid by setting up humanitarian corridors in the next few days. Aid will be shipped by road and by sea from Cyprus to Beirut and the southern city of Tire and by air.

The evacuation of foreign nationals from Lebanon continues, with most being taken to the island of Cyprus, where temporary accommodation has to be found for the estimated 70,000 evacuees, in the middle of the holiday tourist season.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) says that it plans to evacuate civilians from

the Lebanese-Israeli border in the new few days days, but "the ability to move will depend on the situation on the ground,".

Situation in Israel

Meanwhile, thousands of Israelis have been living in bomb shelters since the fighting in Lebanon started and between a third to a half of all residents in northern Israel have left the area to escape the bombardment, officials said.

"For a week people have been sitting in shelters and security rooms, so they prefer to leave," said Adi Eldar, mayor of Carmiel in a report on Haaretz newspaper's Web site.

Attacks continue

On Saturday, more television stations and mobile telephone masts in Lebanon were targeted in Israeli strikes, killing five people, including a television station employee.

Israeli struck Beirut, Sidon, a port city in the south crammed with refugees, for the first time and factories, roads and bridges in air strikes in the eastern Baalbek region, killing one person.

In Haifa, two people were killed by rockets fired by Hezbollah forces, and Fifteen people are reported injured.

Casualty figures rise

Current estimates say that more than 350 Lebanese and atleast 36 Israelis have been killed in the conflict. One third of those killed in Lebanon are children, according to a UN report released July 21.

Thai king endorses October 15 general election rerun

Thailand's king, Bhumibol Adulyadej has endorsed a decree confirming that the new general

election will take place on October 15, 2006.

The King's proclamation follows on from a year of political turmoil in the country, involving public demonstrations calling for Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to step down amid perceptions of government corruption and legal malfeasance. A series of legal actions against popular public figures and opposition politicians led to further unrest and a surprise decision by Thaksin to hold a snap-election on April 2, 2006.

An opposition boycott left Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party certain of victory, but unable to meet the conditions of the constitution for opening parliament. By-elections were ordered in areas where unopposed candidates failed to be returned, however the country's constitutional court eventually ruled the April 2 election void due to privacy issues surrounding the arrangement of polling booths.

October's election may not be the final point in the ongoing political crisis, Thai Rak Thai and the opposition Democrats (Pak Prachatiap), alongside three minor parties, face allegations of election fraud which could lead to any of the parties being dissolved. Unfortunately the volume of evidence presented to the Constitutional Court may lead to a ruling being given after the election.

U.S. expedites bombs shipment to Israel, outcry in the Muslim world

While whole blocks of Beirut are leveled to rubble and civilians flee by the thousands, the Bush administration is rushing a delivery of bombs to Israel,

according to the New York Times. According to an article in the Sydney Morning Herald the sale of more American arms to the Israeli arm will cause anger and might be used to justify Iran supplying missiles to Hezbollah. According to Arab political analysts the decision to rush more bombs to Israel will increase existing anti-American feelings in the Middle East and will help radicals.

The rushing of more bombs to Israel is consistent with US policy, according to a report issued three days ago by the World Policy Institute which indicates that Israel has always been the largest recipient of military aid from the United States. According to Frida Berrigan, co-author of the review entitled U.S. Military Assistance and Arms Transfers to Israel: U.S. Aid, Companies Fuel Israeli Military, U.S. military aid to Israel is about \$3 billion a year. This equates to about 20% of the Israeli military budget annually. According to Berrigan, in an interview given to Democracy Now on Friday, just on the 14th of July while calling for restraint the U.S. also sold \$120 million worth of jet fuel to the Israeli military assisting their bombing campaign of Lebanon. In fact, Berrigan said, since the Bush administration came into power, about a total of \$6.3 billion worth of weapons sold to Israel. Berrigan also added that if in fact the United States wanted to cut military aid at this time they have precedent to do so, citing as an example the Reagan administration's cut of military aid and freezing of weapons sales to Israel during its last invasion of Lebanon in 1981, during the then conflict's first 10 weeks.

Israel claims they have been using precision-guided munitions in order to neutralize Hezbollah and

to minimize harm to civilians, however U.N. and Lebanese officials estimate at least 360 Lebanese civilians have been killed and more than 1,000 wounded, with about 700,000 people already displaced since Israel's bombings began. According to the United Nation's emergency relief co-ordinator, Jan Egeland, nearly one third of casualties resulting from the Israeli offensive in Lebanon has been children. Egeland, who visited Lebanon today denounced the Israeli strikes and appealed for safe passage for aid, saying civilians were paying a "disproportionate price" in the attacks targeting Hezbollah strongholds. He said civilians are paying a disproportionate price in Lebanon and northern Israel and stated that "A disproportionate response by Israel is a violation of international humanitarian law."

In many capital cities around the world including the Middle East, as well as Europe, Canada, Latin America and the United States thousands of people took part in demonstrations against the Israeli strikes. In London people marched to the US embassy and shouted slogans such as "George Bush, terrorist" and "Down, down, USA." In Tel Aviv 1,000 Israeli Jews and Arabs also turned out to denounce their country's actions, gathering in Rabin Square and brandishing placards reading "war is disaster" and "Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies."

Earthquake strikes off Indonesia

Indonesian officials have said an underwater earthquake measuring 6.6 on the Richter scale has erupted off the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. At first, officials told residents to flee coastal areas as a safety measure, but they later said there had been no tsunami.

According to reports, no damage has been caused.

Last week, an underwater quake with a magnitude of 7.7 produced a tsunami that ravaged a 200km stretch of Java's southern coast. Six hundred and fifty people perished after the deadly two-metre high tidal wave struck, and it is estimated that over three hundred people are still missing.

Navy boats and marine police have been searching for dead bodies off Java's coast, but according to the Associated Press, rough seas today have forced teams to abort their operations.

Regions hardest hit, like the small town of Pangandaran, are starting to return to normality. However, people who have taken refuge in camps are refusing to return home due to fears of another tsunami.

Indonesia's President has said efforts to build an early warning system planned after the 2004 Asian tsunami are to be accelerated. His government has been criticised as to why local people weren't informed that a tsunami was imminent last week.

Saddam Hussein taken to hospital

Saddam Hussein has been rushed to hospital after being on hunger strike for more than two weeks, prosecutors at his trial in Baghdad have announced.

He and three co-defendants have refused to eat for sixteen days. They have been demanding more security for their defence lawyers, three of whom have been murdered.

Saddam Hussein and seven co-defendants are on trial charged with crimes against humanity after

Hussein allegedly ordered his special security and military forces to kill 148 people from the village of Dujail following an attempted assassination of the former Iraqi leader in 1982.

Chief prosecutor Jaafar al-Musawi has said the 68 year-old will not be well enough to appear before judges on Monday. "Saddam Hussein has just been admitted to hospital because of his hunger strike. A medical report has established that he cannot appear tomorrow, because his condition needs medical attention," he told AFP today.

Human Rights Watch: US abuse of Iraqi prisoners continues

A report is published by Human Rights Watch on treatment of prisoners in Iraq by US soldiers after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. It claims torture and other abuses against detainees in US custody in Iraq continues and is authorised and routine. The report includes detailed accounts of abuse from detention centers throughout Iraq, and allegations from an Army interrogator stationed at Camp Nama at Baghdad International Airport.

The 55-page report titled No Blood, No Foul: Soldiers' Accounts of Detainee Abuse in Iraq claims that that harsh interrogation techniques were approved by commanders. Soldiers describe how detainees were routinely subjected to severe beatings, painful stress positions, severe sleep deprivation, and exposure to extreme cold and hot temperatures. The accounts come from interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch, supplemented by memoranda and sworn statements contained in declassified documents.

Marc Garlasco, Human Rights Watch military analyst, said "Up to now, a lot of allegations and evidence has been floating around about authorization up the chain of command of abusive techniques," "MPs on trial tried to raise this in their defense and got nowhere. For the first time, we have been provided clear information on the scope of authorization of abusive techniques, and it points directly to officers in charge and the Pentagon."

John Sifton, researcher at Human Rights Watch said "Soldiers were told that the Geneva Conventions did not apply, and that interrogators could use abusive techniques to get detainees to talk."

The Department of Defense denies any Pentagon approval for any abuse.

Lt. Col. Mark Ballesteros, a Pentagon spokesman says "DoD policy has and always will be the humane treatment of detainees in its custody." He said there is a task force in Iraq that oversees detainee operations and has made a dozen reviews of detainee policies. None of the reviews found that the Department of Defense ever ordered or condoned detainee abuse.

The Human Rights Watch report recommends appointing a bipartisan commission to investigate the range of detainee abuse in Iraq, overhauling the military justice system, and appointing an independent prosecutor to investigate and prosecute those responsible.

Marc Garlasco said "In the current

situation of long occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan with troop rotation, there is no reason an independent prosecutor can't deal with abuse allegations," "It would make a difference if the E-3 (private first class) in the field saw some senior officers or flags that had authorized abuse being tried in courts-martial instead of promoted."

Today in History

1847 - Brigham Young led the first group of Mormon pioneers into Salt Lake Valley.

1911 - In the Peruvian Andes, Hiram Bingham re-discovered Machu Picchu, "the Lost City of the Incas".

1927 - The Menin Gate war memorial in Ypres, Belgium was unveiled.

1943 - World War II: RAF Bomber Command started Operation Gomorrah, the strategic bombing of Hamburg, Germany.

2001 - Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, the last Tsar of Bulgaria when he was a child, was sworn in as Prime Minister of Bulgaria, becoming the only monarch in history to regain political power through democratic election to a different office.

July 24 is Pioneer Day in Utah, Simon Bolivar Day in Ecuador and Venezuela.

Quote of the Day

We thought we were done with these things but we were wrong.

We thought, because we had power, we had wisdom.

We thought the long train would run to the end of Time.

We thought the light would increase.

Now the long train stands derailed and the bandits loot it.

Now the boar and the asp have power in our time.

Now the night rolls back on the West and the night is solid.

Our fathers and ourselves sowed dragon's teeth.

Our children know and suffer the armed men.

~ Stephen Vincent Benet ~

Word of the Day

pragmatic; adj

1. Practical; concerned with making decisions and actions that are useful in practice, not just in theory.

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