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Party supporting Scottish independence from UK wins elections

The Scottish National Party has picked up 20 seats in the parliamentary elections to challenge the coalition government led by the Scottish Labour Party, which no longer has the most seats for the first time since the Parliament's creation in 1999.

Protesters in Israel call for resignation of Prime Minister

Protesters in Israel have called for the resignation of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the Defense Minister Amir Peretz after the government issued a report on the first 6 days of the recent conflict with Lebanon saying that Israel was too "hasty" in the decisions the government made during the conflict.

Featured story

Britain's Ministry of Defence to release UFO files

Great Britain's Ministry Of Defense has announced that they plan to release their UFO files to the public, 7 weeks after the France's space agency CNES opened its UFO file to the public in March 22, 2007.

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- The Labour Party performs poorly in local and regional elections in the UK, with the Scottish National Party winning the most seats in the Scottish Parliament and the

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Conservatives performing well in English local government elections.

- The world's biggest airline takeover of Qantas Airways by Airline Partners Australia Limited has failed after investors rejected it.

- Mali's opposition, The Front for Democracy and the Republic calls on the Constitutional Court to annul last Sunday's presidential election.

- Convicted terrorist Carlos the Jackal will face charges in France relating to alleged involvement in deadly bombings in 1982 and 1983.

- International delegates reach agreement at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the summary report on mitigating climate change despite some concerns raised by China.

- Major world and Middle East powers discuss the future of Iraq on the second day of an International Compact for Iraq conference in Egypt.

- A boat capsizes in the Atlantic Ocean southeast of the Bahamas, killing at least twenty, requiring the rescue of at least seventy-three and leaving at least fifty-eight unaccounted for.

- Two Cuban military deserters hijack a bus and reroute it to Havana Airport, before attempting to steal an empty passenger jet with the occupants of the bus as

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hostages. the plan is ultimately foiled but one hostage is killed before the men were captured

Party supporting Scottish independence from UK wins elections

The Scottish National Party (SNP), which supports Scottish independence from the UK, has pulled off a historic, albeit narrow, victory in yesterday's Scottish elections.

In the third Scottish election, since the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the left of centre SNP beat the ruling Labour Party by a single seat. It won 47 seats, while Labour gained 46.

It is the first time since the parliament opened that Labour has been beaten, and the first time in fifty years that they have not had a majority of Scottish constituency seats in any election.

SNP leader Alex Salmond declared: "Scotland has changed for good and forever." He added that the Labour Party had "lost the moral authority to govern Scotland."

The current First Minister of Scotland, Jack McConnell of Labour said: "While I recognise that the SNP are the largest party by the narrowest of margins, Alex Salmond must himself recognise that he does not have a majority in the Scottish Parliament or anywhere near a majority of the vote."

It is believed that many factors caused the Labour vote to slump, and the SNP vote to rise, including the war in Iraq, and the renewal of Trident, which are both unpopular in Scotland.

The election also raises a serious dilemma for the Labour party's Gordon Brown, a Scotsman widely tipped to succeed Tony Blair as the next prime minister of the United Kingdom. Brown is vehement in his support of the Union, and is a Westminster (London parliament) MP for Kirkcaldy. An SNP government in Scotland, will find itself facing the very Labour party it beat, in power in London.

Turnout was up 2% on the last Scottish election.

Controversy

The election was highly controversial, not least for having three separate systems, running in tandem -

- A constituency vote, which was "first past the post", and for a candidate.
- A regional list vote, which was additional member system, and was for a party
- A local authority (council) vote, which was Single Transferable Vote, and in which parties could field more than one candidate.

The three systems, along with difficulties with electronic counting meant that maybe as many as one hundred thousand ballot papers were "spoiled". In addition, there was also huge problems with the postal vote.

Due to the extensive computer problems, votes had to be cancelled early on Friday morning, and postponed to later in the day.

Many other problems beset the election, with a helicopter from the Western Isles constituency being held up by fog, and a boat carrying ballot papers from the Isle of Arran, breaking down in the Firth of Clyde.

Other parties

In addition to the SNP and Labour, the other parties results' were as follows -

Conservative and Unionist - 17 members
 Liberal Democrats - 16 members.
 Scottish Greens - 2 members.
 Independent - 1 (Margo MacDonald, formerly of the SNP)

The Scottish Socialist Party, Solidarity and the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party were all wiped out.

In order to establish a majority in the Scottish Parliament, the SNP must form a coalition with one or more of these parties. The Liberal Democrats, who were in coalition with the Labour party in the first two terms of the Scottish parliament, are a possibility

Other parties that campaigned for seats in Holyrood included the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the British National Party (BNP), the Scottish Unionist Party, the Scottish Socialist Labour Party, the Christian Peoples Alliance and the Scottish Christian Party.

Gains and losses

The Scottish National Party, while not gaining the landslide it had wished for, made breakthroughs in Glasgow (Govan), Edinburgh (Edinburgh East) and also took both seats in Dundee.

The Liberal Democrats gained seats in Dunfermline West, but their losses meant their seats effectively equalised.

Wales and England

While the Scottish election was going on, the Welsh were also having their election for the Welsh Assembly. Plaid Cymru gained a seat from Labour at Llanelli. The Conservatives had their best showing since the Assembly began.

In England, the elections were more minor, dealing only with local authorities. The Conservatives made the greatest gains, but did not make the breakthrough in Northern England that they would have hoped. The Liberal Democrats did not make the advances that they had hoped, and stayed at more or less the same level. Elsewhere, Cornish regionalists Mebyon Kernow gained an extra seat bringing their total to seven, and the Eurosceptic United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and Liberal Party (not to be confused with the Liberal Democrats) gained seats in several areas of England.

Khamenei denounces US 'bullying', praises martyrdom operations

Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ruled out any talks with Washington because of "America's bullying." His remarks come after the United States denounced Iran for supporting terrorism.

Khamenei also expressed support for an oil embargo of Israel and its allies saying, "A one-month oil embargo is a principled and serious issue," to back the Palestinian Intifada (uprising). Additionally, he praised Palestinians who conduct martyrdom operations in the occupied territories, "Palestinians are standing up to the pressures on them and the height of their resistance is manifested in their martyrdom-seeking operations which make the enemy tremble. Sacrificing oneself for religion and

national interest is the peak of honor and bravery.”

Grand Ayatollah Khamenei was recently featured in the Chinese magazine *Global People* (环球人物), which named the Leader of the Islamic Revolution as the only world leader who has confronted the United States.

Khamenei has in the past criticized the U.S. for trying to create conflict in the Middle East; in a 2005 statement, he said, "All Muslim nations, particularly the people of Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, must promote their unity and solidarity and be aware of the plots of the enemies of Islam to foment discord among them." After Iran was dubbed an element of the "Axis of Evil", Tehran called Washington "the enemy of Islam."

Mercury astronaut Walter Schirra dies, aged 84

Former NASA Astronaut Walter Marty Schirra, Jr (born March 12, 1923), a member of the original Mercury Seven and the fifth American in space, has died at the age of 84.

Schirra, who is best known for flying the Mercury-Atlas 8 mission, launched on October 3, 1963, is believed to have died of natural causes on May 3, 2007.

"With the passing of Wally Schirra, we at NASA note with sorrow the loss of yet another of the pioneers of human spaceflight. As a Mercury astronaut, Wally was of a member of the first group of astronauts to be selected, often referred to as the Original Seven," said NASA Administrator Michael Griffin in a statement posted on NASA's website.

Schirra also flew on the Gemini 6A mission, which was involved, along

with Gemini 7, in the first rendezvous in orbit between two manned spacecraft. His third and final mission was the first manned Apollo flight, Apollo 7, during which he and two other astronauts tested the Apollo spacecraft in low Earth orbit, ahead of later lunar flights.

He was the only astronaut to fly on Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo flights. Following his death, only two of the Mercury Seven, John Glenn and Scott Carpenter remain alive.

Plane crashes in McAllen, Texas; two dead

Two people are dead after a plane crashed at a intersection in McAllen shortly after 7:00 p.m.(CTR) local time on May 2.

A man who video taped the scene stated on a TV interview " The plane just missed my truck... total strangers just started jumping in to help the pilot... people were yelling 'Bring a fire extinguisher'... It was amazing that the pilot still asked to save his girlfriend even though his own life was in danger."

They succeeded in dragging the pilot, 35-year old Jose Francisco Vasquez, out of the burning wreckage; however, his girlfriend, 24 year Gina Asuara, was burned to death. Vasquez suffered 3rd degree burns to 90% of his body. He later died at the Brook Army Medical Center at around 7:30 a.m.(CTR) on May 3

Friends say Vasquez was an experienced pilot. He owned several planes and flew at least twice every week. He was in the Mexican Air Force during his earlier years and was on vacation at Houston Texas.

Officials said the accident was likely due to a engine failure during take off. The plane crashed near a

intersection on 10th St. and Dicker Road about 2 minuets away from the Dodge Arena. The road was closed due to investigations; however it was reopened on May 3 at 8:30 p.m.(CTR)

Fugitive Cuban soldiers in failed skyjacking

Two Cuban military deserters made a failed attempt to skyjack a Spanish Hola Airlines Boeing 737, leased by Cubana Airlines and headed for Venezuela. An unarmed military officer was killed in the process.

The two soldiers, Leandro Cerezo Sirut and Alain Forbus Lameru, both 19 years old, took over a local bus and then drove it to the airport and onto the tarmac in an attempt to hijack a plane. Once on the plane, they attempted to take the officer hostage and when they tried to do so, the officer fought back and foiled the hijacking. The soldiers were attempting to flee Cuba and head for the United States.

A statement by Cuba's Interior Ministry praised the officer's action: "Despite being unarmed, he heroically tried to prevent the commission of the terrorist act. Effective and coordinated action allowed security forces to frustrate the kidnappers' plans and save the lives of the other hostages," and also blamed the U.S. for the hijacking attempt.

"The responsibility for these new crimes lies with the highest-ranking authorities of the United States, adding to the long list of terrorist acts that Cuba has been the victim of for nearly half a century," added the statement.

Both of the soldiers, along with a third soldier, Yoan Torres Martinez, 21, were arrested. All three are

believed to have escaped from the military base, causing a shootout which killed one soldier and injured at least one other, in which they were stationed.

Several passengers were on the bus, but no one was hurt. There were no crew or additional passengers on the plane at the time it was boarded.

Taliban resurgent in Pakistan on enforcement of Sharia law

"Pakistan was un-affected by Talibans and al-Qaeda (in my opinion) until the US flushed them out of Afghanistan. So 9/11 and WTC and the post WTC attacks by the ISAF (read American, for the locals) forces have led to the present condition in NWFP. At least that is the way the people there see it," wrote Riaz A Hakeem in one of a series of email exchanges with Wikinews.

Mr. Hakeem, 58, left the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) at the age of 25 and became a naturalized citizen of the U.S. Now a businessman who is active in Texas politics, he shares some views as a person who is in touch with his family and friends who remain in the region. He travelled throughout portions of Pakistan at the end of last year.

What is the current situation in the NWFP?

The Pashtun people are or were renowned for their hospitality. Many westerners commented on it. Some with suspicion NOT willing to believe some people so poor could be so generous. It was almost a character flaw. One could travel without fear of personal danger as long as you followed local protocols.

That was the sort of mind set

among the people. An ageless paradigm of self satisfaction: this is enshrined in the code of the Pashtuns way of life.

The Islamic radicalism is in reality nothing but the Taliban movement. Not all Pashtuns are Taliban (obviously), but most Taliban are Pashtun. Of these, most belong to the FATA. Of these, most were affected by their cousins from Afghanistan coming over. Mingled with them were Arab-Afghans, Uzbeks and some Tajiks and even Chechens. Some of these married within the tribes and formed a bond with the locals. Marriage bonds go back in history.

This Talibanization shows itself in the content of the Friday sermons at the mosque. Now it shows in the popularity of growing beards, especially since the MMA - the coalition of religious political party's - won power. More recently in their showdown with the Pakistan army in North and South Waziristan - where according to my sources, people prefer going to the Taliban for justice rather than the older system of Maliks and Political Agents. The latter are known as corrupt. In Pakistan, in general, people are sick of the amount of corruption.

Bannu, from where hails the Chief Minister of the NWFP, Mr. Durrani, is now in Taliban control in the sense that there is a parallel government that they have established which is functioning quite well and is popular among the people.

Has Taliban influence caused a stricter interpretation of Sharia law in the NWFP?

Yes. The Maliks, or tribal elders, consider themselves quite conservatively religious. Even so,

they had a laid back attitude towards enforcement of religious doctrine.

The Taliban emulated the Saudi system of having a department concerned with citizens' morals (even the name is the same: the department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) and this department has, as in Saudi Arabia, an enforcement police, called mutawwa'in, a morals law-enforcement agency.

Is there a shift from tribal elders to clerics, as the main interpreters of law?

There has been a movement in that direction, but it has started a power struggle between the clerics who traditionally have been at the lowest strata of the social structure. Now when they have seen a bigger role for themselves, first from the Taliban in Afghanistan - but also the government of the MMA in the NWFP, who are nothing more than glorified clerics themselves, only a little smarter in exploiting religion politically.

The MMA is largely non-Pashtun, which is a source of discontent in that they stand in the way of Pashtun nationalism, such as it is, because it only rears its head when non-Pashtuns start to usurp power over what the Pashtun consider their turf.

The deal made between Pakistan's central government and the North and South Waziristan provinces, where tribal leadership was given the pivotal role in dealing with militants, has been criticized as a failure. What caused this initiative to fail?

First off, I don't agree with the premise of the question, that the "deal" is a "failure" - for the

following reasons:

In the first place the Pakistan army (govt - same difference) did not have many options. This was the least worst option they had.

And most importantly, I have said this before, this area is literally in a time warp - which means they proceed at (what seems to us in the west) a glacial pace. I will give an example from the folklore:

The story goes that a Pashtun had to repay (badal) an enemy for a crime against his family and he waited patiently for 20 years (some say 50 years), after this time, he exacted his revenge - but soon after was depressed because he wondered "Did I act too hastily?" So one part of Pashtunwali is to "pay back" - (Badal: literally to exchange) which most people translate as revenge. Yes that is the form that is most visible, but badal is also played out in the exchange of gifts at wedding and other celebrations, and in the exchange of favors like in politics. The rules can be arcane, unwritten and hard to follow -- who did what to whom, when, and so on, and what is the proper recompense -- this same give and take would occur in a peace process pursued by the Tribal Maliks, who rule by consensus. There is no actual leader in the western sense, because all the Maliks, in fact all the others are de facto, so many co-equals is a mind set, a paradigm foreign to the uninitiated, as the concept of consensual gay sex is to the Wazir in Waziristan.

The agreement has not failed, because it has not been given enough time, in Wazir time reference, not American time presidential election cycle controlled. I do not have a crystal ball, but if I did, I would see NATO troops in Afghanistan long after Iraq is over. Afghanistan can be a success ONLY if we accept one

thing, the time warp these people live in -- by my reckoning its still 1700 CE over there.

Is the Talibanization of Pakistan partly due to a perception of corruption among the system of Maliks and Political Agents?

The corruption is in the ISI, the Pak army and the Pak system of Political Agents (PA) assigned to these tribal zones (FATA & PATA).

These PA have budgets that are much like the CIA in that they are a single line item in the national budget, there is no accountability of where or how the PA spends the money. If one followed the IRS rules and looked at the lifestyles of the PA and compared them with their income, you would soon understand what was going on.

Musharraf critics are a larger issue. Republicans have coddled Pakistan with the belief that "as long as they are pro America" then democracy in Pakistan will come in due course. Democrats have, I think, insisted Democracy first, and then we can discuss the other issues later.

The Talibanization of Pakistan has more to do with graduates of "Raiwind", a place near Lahore, where the "Tablighi Jamaat" conducts brainwashing camps. It was graduates of this place, in my opinion, that are responsible for Britain's 7/7 attacks as an example.

Corruption amongst the Maliks is self limiting because of the egalitarian society they live in and because of Pashtunwali.

What is your view on Musharraf suspending judge Iftikhar Chaudhry?

I believe, and this is widely held belief, that Musharraf has no

constituency of his own for his power base. He wanted legitimization from the Supreme Court, and Mr Choudhry as Chief Justice (their system is not like ours) would not give it.

So Musharraf has had to hang on to his Army Chief of Staff position to get his power from the Army. If some one else were Chief of Staff, that person could refuse to support Musharraf.

The Justice favorable to the general is Justice Iqbal, who was not the next in line for Chief Justice. The next in line is a Hindu. That presented problems of its own for Musharraf. So when the Hindu judge went for a trip to India, Iqbal became the "available" senior most Supreme Court judge, and hence the haste and lack of decorum with which Justice Chaudhry was removed.

What is the prevailing sentiment regarding Pakistani government efforts in the provinces and the international effort in Afghanistan to combat Taliban and affiliated militants?

In my dealings and inquires, one thing stood out like a sore thumb - the conspiracy theories vis-à-vis anything having to do with America. I mentioned to one of my close friends that events that were previously ascribed as acts of God were now considered acts of the CIA. Some even believed that the Earthquake in the northern areas was because of some sort of underground secret "bomb" used by the CIA. Lack of evidence is further proof that the CIA did it. I was flabbergasted, and started to give this kind of thinking as an example in speaking to "educated" Pakistani's - and among these, those that did agree that the earthquake was NOT the work of

the CIA, they would start giving other examples, notably the Blow up of the plane carrying Zia ul Haq an ex President of Pakistan, in which the US Ambassador also perished. When I would point this out, the response would be that that is the sort of thing they do to take away suspicion from themselves.

In a nutshell, the impression I came away with is, there is NO war of civilizations going on. What is going on is a war between literacy and illiteracy.

Taliban are not visible in the areas I visited, but the militants handiwork clearly is - as elsewhere, the common criminals are taking advantage of this situation, and crime is up significantly. One new crime is Cell phone "snatching" - it's easy and nobody wants to pursue it. If some one is using a Razr phone, he can expect to be hit soon if he uses it in public. So people have two cell phones, one fancy to show off, and one for use in public places.

In so far as "foreign" militants are captured and identified, that is to say non-Pashtun (including non Afghan Pashtun or Pak Pashtun) - then the people are obviously in agreement with the government that these people don't belong here and need to go.

The problem is this: the foreigners are usually in the FATA and have been there since the Soviet war times. Many of them have taken local wives and now have a family. The local have accepted them into their family. Now for the Pak govt to ask them to kick them out, the locals are thinking what am I doing to my grandchildren's father, etc. Again the edicts of Pashtunwali also play a role.

What is the relationship, if any, between the Taliban and Al Qaeda?

Al Qaeda is mostly composed of Arabs, they do not trust any one else. While they might use others as couriers or in lowly position as servants, for second rate Al Qaeda officials, the Top guys ONLY deal with Arabs and are served by Arabs.

The Taliban are mostly Pashtun tribesmen. Mostly they are graduates of madrassa's. Mostly illiterate by any world standards. The better educated among them will know how to speak a few words of English, such as their Information minister. There might be one or two notable exceptions of which I am not aware.

However, while Al Qaeda does not trust the Taliban, the Taliban look up to Al Qaeda top leadership. We saw this situation in Iraq where initially Al Zarqawi had no direct link with Qaeda but was keen to form one. It would be conjecture on my part to state that in the end he did indeed succeed in forming that connection. In the press at least that impression was prevalent.

So the lines of interest proceed ONE way, like one way traffic. Extremist want to be affiliated with Qaeda, in my opinion, while the latter does not, so as to maintain its hideout.

The Qaeda supply lines are hampered, new recruits would have to be Arabs, and they would have to travel a long way through tight Pakistani security to reach here, or suffer hardship over a long and arduous land route through Balochistan and the Tribal area's - NOT all of which are accommodating.

So as is becoming clear, Qaeda is

having trouble replacing people they loose meaning those that were captured or died. They only trust Arabs, and that also a certain type of Arabs, (not all Arabs are the same, not all Arabic is the same - for example they would never trust a Syrian, in fact Qaeda folks consider Syrian brand of Islam an apostasy - but that is another story).

Whatever remains of the Qaeda, are not in a position to set up training camps, since they are in a survival mode. The Taliban resurgence helps them get a little warm and fuzzy in this survival mode, since they feel a little bit more secure with their partners-in-arms doing some evil stuff, blowing up people and causing mayhem.

What makes the North-West Frontier Province competent to administer money sent as foreign aid?

This is the central question. Much like California has taken a separate initiative on stem cell research - as an analogy - the NWFP is central to the war on terror, not Pakistan.

The NWFP was central to the fight and aid to the Afghans during the Soviet occupation, not Pakistan.

This small distinction is lost on Washington, and it is the main reason, in my opinion, why so much of the Aid was "lost in transit" was because the Punjabi army officers could not bring themselves to dispense such large sums to an ethnic group which it considers anti-Pakistani.

All the FATA is contiguous to the NWFP. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda are holed up somewhere either in the FATA, or across the Durand Line in Afghanistan; the Durand Line has never been recognized by the

locals as an international boundary. Even today, the Pashtun travel from Peshawar to Kabul by road with out a passport or visa, and it has been like that for eons.

The present governor of the NWFP belongs to the Orakzai tribe (he spells his name Aorakzai) and it is my opinion that that he was picked partly because he belongs to one of the FATA as well as he is a retired General of the Pak Army.

The Frontier Constabulary (FC) is a force which primarily recruits from the FATA. All or most of its forces are from the various tribes. In the eyes of the tribes this is a bona fide force and service with the FC is considered an honorable thing. The US has already allocated some funds for increasing recruitment, but far less than what it would take to counter the Taliban and far less than what the economic need is. The US spends a thousand times more on a battalions sent to monitor activity over there. Plus why endanger the lives of our troops and spread our forces thin when a more effective job can be done by the FC. The FC has over history shown that they will attack and use force against the tribes that create trouble. There have been no instances of insubordination or mutiny.

Even the US Embassy is protected by a contingent of the FC! That goes to show their trustworthiness and discipline.

The "tribal" Pashtuns in the FATA are not educated or trained and hence not employable right now. I propose that we fund directly the Director of Emigrants, Mr. Azhar Arbab in Islamabad, to set up training facilities in Concrete laying, iron work, pipe work, welding etc, which would then qualify these tribesmen to obtain jobs in the

Gulf. As such we would remove them from the scene altogether. They would not be available in the labor pool to the Taliban or anyone else. I might add here, that a number of these individuals have very high innate intelligence, which is one reason they make formidable foes.

Now the central reason why the NWFP ought to do this is because they are themselves most affected by the scourge of Talibanization. They are highly motivated in carrying out these policies because it is to their own benefit.

How many men does the FC field currently?

The FC currently has about 23,000 men in total.

How much do they get paid?

They are paid the equivalent of \$60 per month per person -Pak Rupees 3665, where Rs61= \$1. They do have some fringe benefits but life is very spartan for these soldiers.

What the US could get in return is a huge bang for a buck, no pun intended.

I think we ought to double the number of these soldiers with one proviso that the FC maintains its high standards of recruits.

Compare this with our costs in the War against Terror; just Halliburton's bills will have you reeling. I think that it would be foolish, NOT to do this.

The Frontier Constabulary is an Institution with a long and glorious history within the Frontier Province.

The recruits come strictly from the tribes of the various FATA and so they are very familiar with the

people, the bad guys the terrain.

They speak the Pashto dialect of the locals. The Pashto language has many dialects, and you can tell where someone is from based on which dialect he speaks. So if you do not speak the correct dialect, you are immediately identified as an outsider. This is one reason why these tribes are impossible to penetrate, there are other reasons as well, that are beyond the scope of the current discussion.

How can the FC help prevent attacks like the suicide bombing attempt on Sherpao in Charsadda last weekend?

In essence your question is how can anyone prevent a suicide attack? And frankly if I knew the answer to that I think the US military - and several other groups - would be knocking on my door. I think the Israeli Army has had the most experience with this sort of thing. The suicide bombing as a tactical weapon was invented by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, and even today in terms of statistics they use it in far greater numbers.

So to summarize neither the FC nor anyone else can prevent a suicide bombing. We could attempt to improve our intelligence to find out about an imminent attack, but so far these have not been very successful in Pakistan.

In the Lal Masjid Case the government avoided a suicide killing by negotiating with those two Mullah brothers - but I don't know if that counts. But it does make for an interesting story. Both Washington, DC and Islamabad now have Madams threatening to publish the list of their clients unless they are given protection. Who would have thunk?

Going back to your question: In my opinion what ought to be done is to make a Policy change, and address the issues that are producing these suicide bombers, that is the only way to stop this phenomenon.

In this part of the world this is relatively new because prior to 9/11, suicide bombing was unheard of. Moreover it is not the FC's job to provide security to the Minister of the Interior, that is the job of the Police force, because this Ministry is equivalent to the Department of Homeland Security.

You don't expect Border patrol to provide body guard duty to the Secretary of the department of Homeland Security.

I am making these analogies so the American readers would relate to what is happening, and understand the difference in nomenclature.

Protesters in Israel call for resignation of Prime Minister

Protesters in Israel have called for the resignation of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the Defense Minister Amir Peretz after the government issued a report on the first 6 days of the recent conflict with Lebanon saying that Israel was too "hasty" in the decisions the government made during the conflict which began on July 12, 2006.

"Olmert and Peretz, we have received confirmation that both of you came to power in the wrong positions. You can't handle the position, you failed. Go home. You said you worked for us. You are fired," said Meir Shalev, the designated speaker for the protest.

Despite the calls for Olmert and Peretz to resign, Tal Zilberstein, an advisor for Olmert, said that the protest will not get the Prime

Minister to resign.

Organizers of the rally say that at least 200,000 protesters attended. Police; however, say that only 120,000 people were at the rally.

Ulster Volunteer Force announces it will put weapons "beyond reach"

The Northern Ireland loyalist paramilitary group, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) intends to end its decade-long campaign of violence and terror and will disarm, making it the first loyalist paramilitary to do so.

"All recruitment has ceased; military training has ceased; targeting has ceased and all intelligence rendered obsolete; all active service units have been deactivated; all ordinance has been put beyond reach."

—UVF disarmament statement

However, unlike the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the UVF will not fully decommission weapons. Instead the illegal organization will put weapons "beyond reach" of ordinary members in secure caches only known to UVF leadership.

The group, considered a terrorist group in both the United States and United Kingdom issued a statement, read by Gusty Spence, a founding member of the UVF, which stated that "as of 12 midnight, Thursday 3 May 2007, the Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commando will assume a non-military, civilianised, role."

It also added, "All recruitment has ceased; military training has ceased; targeting has ceased and all intelligence rendered obsolete; all active service units have been deactivated; all ordinance has been put beyond reach and the IICD instructed accordingly."

However, according to the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD), this does not meet the requirements set out in government legislature. Although it welcomed the news of disarmament, the Commission said it was "concerned by [the UVF's] intention to deal with their arms without the involvement of the IICD".

Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern suggested the UVF work with the Commission "with a view to full decommissioning". Sinn Fein welcomed the news of UVF's disarmament. "This is a welcome statement if it signals a recognition of the new political reality where there is no room for armed or violent actions," said John O'Dowd of Sinn Fein.

The British Prime Minister's office expressed cautious optimism over the UVF announcement. "We need to see how today's announcement is translated into action," said a spokesman for Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The group has been on a cease-fire since 1994 in response to the IRA ceasefire. The group was responsible for 500 deaths during the violent period in Northern Ireland known as the "the Troubles".

Royal Canadian Mint unveils world's largest gold coin

The Royal Canadian Mint (RCM) introduced two new products Thursday, one of which is claimed to be the world's largest gold coin. The Gold Maple Leaf coin, made of 99.999% pure gold, weighs 100 kg and has a face value of CA\$1 million. The other offering is a smaller one ounce (28 g) version.

The 100 kg coin is approximately

50 cm in diameter and about 3 cm thick. At 99.999% purity, the gold coins are amongst the purest in the bullion market.

Commenting on its impractical size, RCM President and CEO Ian E. Bennett indicated that the 100 kg coin was designed to draw attention to the mint. "The Royal Canadian Mint operates in a very competitive environment, which is especially true of the international gold bullion market," said Bennett. "Our 100-kg and one ounce 99.999% pure gold bullion coins are an achievement which separates the RCM from a large field of competitors."

Until RCM's announcement on Thursday, the Austrian Mint held the record for the world's largest gold coin when, in 2004, it unveiled a €100,000 denomination coin weighing 31 kg.

In the RCM news release, Canada's government minister responsible for the Royal Canadian Mint, Lawrence Cannon, highlighted RCM's history of producing minted products. "The Royal Canadian Mint has long been recognized as one of the most innovative in the world, with a tradition of technical perfection and superior craftsmanship," said Cannon. "These new...coins now take Canada's reputation in the gold bullion industry to an unprecedented level."

The reverse, or tail side of the new Canadian coin features a maple leaf design, while the obverse, or head side bears the effigy of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Although the 100 kg coin has a face value of \$1 million, it would cost approximately CA\$2.6 million (or US\$2.4 million) to purchase, based on the market value of gold. A limited quantity of the 100 kg coins will be available as

a special order through the RCM.

Newspaper accuses Ahmadinejad of indecency

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been accused of "indecency and violating religious values" for embracing and kissing the hand of an elderly woman - his former schoolteacher - to express his gratitude.

The Iranian Hezbollah newspaper issued a statement saying, "The Muslim Iranian people have no recollection of such acts contrary to Shariah law during Islamic rule." The Iranian government instituted Shariah law soon after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Ahmadinejad has been criticised in the past for his objections to the enforcement of hijab and for permitting women to attend soccer matches.

Campaigning drawing to a close for French presidential candidates

Ségolène Royal (Socialist Party) and Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP) made their final appeals to voters today.

Campaigning is not allowed tomorrow or on the day of voting, which will take place on Sunday, May 6.

Royal, who has been falling behind in the polls, said, "It is my responsibility today to alert people to the risk of [his] candidature with regards to the violence and brutality that would be unleashed in the country [if he won]," specifically referring to the type of violence seen in the 2005 civil unrest.

Sarkozy responded in a radio interview with Europe 1: "She's not in a good mood this morning. It must be the opinion polls... She's

finishing in violence, in a certain state of feverishness. When I hear her remarks, I wonder why a woman of her qualities carries such violent feelings. It adds nothing to the debate."

Scottish elections: SNP gains 20 seats

Please also see a full article at: Party supporting Scottish independence from UK wins elections

Following yesterday's parliamentary election, the Scottish National Party (SNP), led by Alex Salmond, became the largest party in the new Scottish Parliament. The SNP is committed to hold a referendum on Scottish independence by 2010.

After a confusing day, in an election marred by many thousands of rejected ballot papers, the party has a 1 seat advantage over the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) who have controlled the Executive for the last 8 years.

For Salmond to become take the position of First Minister from SLP's Jack McConnell he needs to gain the support of another party. Only the Scottish Conservative Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats (the current junior partner of the SLP) are large enough. Of the major parties, only the SLD is opposed[citation needed] to the Union of Scotland and England, the 300th anniversary of which was marked the beginning of the week.

The parliament election was held on a combined 'first past the post' and Party List system, at the same time as local council elections, (which do not have the same constituencies) and used, for the first time, a Single Transferable Vote system. This appears to have confused many voters and led to a high number of spoilt papers.

Today in History

1789 - French Revolution: The Estates-General convened in Versailles to discuss a financial crisis in France.

1862 - Mexican troops led by Ignacio Zaragoza halted a French invasion in the Battle of Puebla.

1904 - Cy Young of the Boston Americans pitched the first perfect game in the modern era of baseball.

1949 - The Council of Europe was formed.

1950 - Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej was crowned in Bangkok as King Rama IX of Thailand, currently the world's longest-serving head of state.

May 05 is Liberation Day in Denmark, Ethiopia, and the Netherlands; Children's Day in Japan and South Korea; Cinco de Mayo in Mexico.

Quote of the Day

I see it all perfectly; there are two possible situations — one can either do this or that. My honest opinion and my friendly advice is this: do it or do not do it — you will regret both.

~ Søren Kierkegaard in *Either/Or*

Word of the Day

magnanimous; adj

1. Noble and generous in spirit.

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