



### Top stories



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In a gun battle that took place between Pakistani soldiers and insurgents on Sunday, eight insurgents were killed and ten others were injured.



**Current news****Thai prime minister dismisses offer by anti-government protesters**

Thailand's prime minister, **Abhisit Vejjajiva**, has ruled out a compromise offer by anti-government protest leaders for parliament to be dissolved in thirty days, with elections to be held in 90 days.

In a televised address on Sunday, with army chief General Anupong Paochinda at his side, the prime minister dismissed the offer made by the United Democratic Front against Dictatorship, saying such issues could not be resolved in such a short period of time, and "because they use violence and intimidation. I cannot accept this."

Abhisit said the government stood by an offer made during earlier talks with the UDD for the house to be dissolved within the next nine months.

In reaction, the UDD, maintained an earlier call for parliament to be dissolved immediately. The UDD also withdrew from any further negotiations with the government. UDD leaders have repeatedly warned supporters rallying in central Bangkok's retail and business areas of the threat of a new government crackdown.

There have been two large incidents of street violence in the past month or so, resulting in 26 deaths and injuries to hundreds of people. The Red Shirts primarily consist of supporters of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, ousted in a 2006 coup. He was later given a two-year prison term on charges of corruption, although Shinawatra left the country in self-exile to avoid being jailed.

**Current news****Spokesman: At least 55 dead after violence in Darfur, Sudan**

According to Mohammed Issa Aliou, a spokesman for the Rezeigat tribe in Darfur, Sudan, at least 55 people have been killed in the city after clashes with the Southern Sudanese army.

Issa Aliou said yesterday that Rezeigat tribal members were attacked by armed forces near the border with the partially autonomous South Sudan on Friday, as they were looking for water and new pastures.

The south Sudanese army, however, responded by saying that the tribal members were the ones who had started the attacks.

"A company of 120 SPLA [Sudan People's Liberation Army] soldiers was attacked on Friday night by armed men wearing uniforms of the northern army that were heavily equipped," said Major General Kuol Deim Kuol, with the southern former rebel SPLA.

**WHO starts simultaneous immunization campaigns in over 100 countries**

The WHO yesterday began simultaneous immunization campaigns, in 112 countries and territories across its Americas, Eastern Mediterranean, and European regions. The unprecedented vaccination drive will last for a week.

This is the first time the World Health Organization has launched such an event across multiple regions at once. WHO officials say their goal is to expand immunization coverage and raise awareness of the importance of vaccines, and that such cross-

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border activities can prevent disease and save lives.

WHO spokesman Daniel Epstein says that many countries are working to eliminate measles, adding that says countries in the European region are very concerned that they have stalled in their goal of eliminating measles and rubella this year.

"In European countries, in many of them, immunization coverage is below the 95 percent recommended level. And, there have been ongoing measles outbreaks in some of these countries. Measles cases have also been imported to the US and Canada and the Americas from European countries," said Epstein.

The agency says an important goal of the immunization campaigns is to reach those who have been excluded up to now. It notes that every year, in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 25 percent of deaths among children under age five are attributed to vaccine preventable diseases. 2.1 million children in the Middle East hadn't received a shot against tetanus, whooping cough, or diphtheria in 2009, according to the WHO.

In the Americas, WHO says special regional events are being held in border areas of Nicaragua, between Suriname and French Guiana, and between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. It says many young children, pregnant women, elderly and indigenous peoples live in isolated areas where vaccine coverage is low.

In all three regions, Epstein said the vaccination campaigns will be accompanied by health information campaigns.

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"The biggest obstacle to reaching our goals of vaccination are lack of awareness, lack of information and people being ignorant that they should be vaccinated, and thus not having enough vaccinators, money, trucks, bicycles, etc. to get to these remote regions," he said.

WHO also began a large polio immunization campaign across sixteen countries in central and West Africa on Saturday. It says 78 million children under five will be vaccinated to stop a major outbreak of the disease.

**Mississippi tornado kills at least ten**

At least ten people are dead after a large, destructive tornado tore through Yazoo City, Mississippi, yesterday.

Five of the deaths were in Choctaw County, four in Yazoo County, and one in Holmes County. 21 people have been hospitalized as a result of the storm, and others have been trapped in cars and houses. Multiple injuries resulted from cars being blown off of Interstate 55 during the storm.

The tornado moved along a path 200 miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide. Among damaged or destroyed buildings included at least twenty houses, a church, and several businesses. According to Yazoo City mayor McArthur Straughter, the storm ripped the roofs off of every building in the area. Fallen trees and debris are hindering access to some parts of Yazoo City and Yazoo County. Before ravaging the city, the tornado damaged a chemical plant in Louisiana, causing a nitrogen leak and

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several injuries.

The Salvation Army is aiding relief efforts by providing hot meals, coffee, cold drinks, and spiritual counseling to tornado victims in Yazoo and Warren Counties.

The tornado occurred on the third, and most active, day of a severe weather outbreak that had previously affected areas of Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, the latter two of which were also effected during Saturday's outbreak. The Storm Prediction Center has received 104 reports of tornadoes so far during this outbreak.

**Five dead after continuing violence in Nigeria**

Fresh violence has broken out in the central city of Jos earlier today, killing at least five people, according to witness reports.

The clashes began when the body of a seventeen year old Muslim teenager, supposedly strangled, was thrown onto a main street in the town in a sack, prompting riots. The Agence France-Presse (AFP) news service reports the dead body was that of a seventeen-year-old student.

The area has seen repeated conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the past.

"When the Muslims discovered the body, they took to the streets and barricaded roads, stabbing passers-by indiscriminately," said a military spokesman, Donald Oji.

According to security officials, the riots have been calmed down, although a youth curfew is still in place. "We now have the traditional chief and the youth

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leader of the area are with us and they are helping us with our investigation," a Plateau region police spokesman, Mohamad Lerama told AFP.

The rioters primarily consisted of "some Muslim youths calling for revenge over the killing of a Muslim teenager," he said. "From reports reaching us, one Christian was killed in the protest. Both bodies have been taken to the hospital."

**Stephen Hawking thinks aliens "almost certain to exist," could invade Earth**

After three years working on a new television series for the Discovery Channel, Stephen Hawking concludes that aliens are "almost certain to exist" and could even be dangerous.

Hawking says that it is rational to assume that intelligent life exists somewhere in the Universe, and mathematically unlikely that life is unique to the Earth, given the existence of a hundred billion galaxies, each of them containing hundreds of millions of stars.

Hawking imagines nomadic aliens, having exhausted their home's resources, could attempt to take control of other planets, invading with "massive ships", and draws a comparison with Christopher Columbus discovering America, resulting in similar devastating consequences. With this in mind he advises "intelligent life might develop into something we wouldn't want to meet." However, he believes that the most likely forms of life would be microbes or simple animals on planets, in the centre of stars or drifting through space.

His declaration comes in the

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month of the 20th anniversary of the Hubble Space Telescope's launch into space.

The Drake Equation, created in the 1960s, estimates the probability of extraterrestrial civilizations; feeding in modern research gives a high likelihood. The contradiction between this and actual discovery is known as the Fermi paradox.

Sir Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal, supports efforts to search for transmissions that might be artificial in origin. "Even if we couldn't make much sense of it, we'd have learnt that 'intelligence' wasn't unique to the hardware inside human skulls, and had emerged elsewhere," he said.

*Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking* will begin on May 9 on the Discovery Channle.

Stephen Hawking, 68, retired as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge in 2009. Known for his research into cosmology, quantum gravity and black holes, he became a household name following the publication of his 1988 book *A Brief History of Time*, which remained on the *Sunday Times* bestseller list for a record-breaking 237 weeks.

**Officials: Eight insurgents killed in Orakzai, Pakistan**

In a gun battle that took place between Pakistani soldiers and insurgents on Sunday, eight insurgents were killed and ten others were injured. The incident occurred when about 40 rebels attacked a checkpoint near the Goain village in the Orakzai district of the North-West Frontier Province of the country.

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Jahanzeb Khan, a local administrative official said the attack at the Goain checkpoint was resisted by the army. Two security officials confirmed that heavy artillery had been used for the battle, in which eight rebels died. Sajjad Ahmed, another local official told AFP that two underground hideouts of the rebels had also been captured by the army.

A senior military official confirmed that the death toll was eight. "Security forces killed at least eight militants during a search operation," the official said. "Up to 40 militants attacked our security forces," he said. Bodies of six of the dead insurgents have been discovered.

**Fire sweeps Manila, Philippines slum**

A large fire has swept suburban Manila, Philippines, has destroyed many houses and has left many homeless. At least two hundred fire engines have been sent to extinguish the flames.

The fire spread quickly due to strong winds and summer high temperatures. No fatalities were reported, although one resident suffered first degree burns; a Manila fire marshal told BBC Newstwo people were reported missing as well. The fire started on Sunday afternoon and was still burning at nightfall, while people were trying to rescue some of their belongings.

"We failed to save anything except our clothes," said resident Glen Sardon to the Associated Press. Reports say 600 homes were destroyed and at least 7,000 residents are homeless.

Slum areas in the city are exposed

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constantly to fires because the houses, often made from wood, are in close proximity to one another.

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