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Musharraf orders strong action against rioters in Pakistan

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has ordered security forces to take firm action against rioters following the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto. The violence has left at least 44 people dead and dozens injured. Mr. Musharraf insisted the measures were to protect people. VOA's Ayaz Gul reports from Islamabad that a bitter dispute has also erupted over how the 54-year-old politician died and who was behind her assassination.

Thursday's assassination of Ms. Bhutto has plunged the Pakistani nation into a situation that many perceive as a crisis, with violent protests across the country. Officials say the violence has also caused tens of millions of dollars in damages. Most of the deaths have occurred in southern Sindh province, which is Ms. Bhutto's political stronghold.

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Wikipedia Current Events

- Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (pictured) is assassinated in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.
- The Nepalese government agrees to abolish the country's 240-year-old monarchy.
- The People's Power Party led by Samak Sundaravej wins a plurality in parliament after the general elections in Thailand.
- The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia join the Schengen zone of the European Union.
- After more than 190 days of discussion, an interim government led by Guy Verhofstadt is formed in Belgium.
- Lee Myung-bak wins the presidential election in South Korea.
- The bodies of six people killed on 24 December are found in a house in Carnation, Washington.
- Hours of torrential rains cause landslides killing at least 78 in the island of Java in Indonesia.
- At least 34 people are killed following a pipeline explosion in Lagos, Nigeria

Featured Story

Tiger that escaped enclosure at San Francisco Zoo may have 'climbed' over wall

Zoo officials are now saying that a Siberian tiger that escaped her enclosure at the San Francisco Zoo in San Francisco, California on December 25, killing one and severely injuring two humans in the Terrace cafe, may have climbed or jumped over the walls that kept the tiger inside her habitat.

"The animal appears to have climbed or otherwise leaped out of the enclosure. There was no way out through the door," said Robert Jenkins, the zoo's director of animal care and conservation. The tiger has been identified as Tatiana, one of two Siberian tigers at the zoo. The other Siberian, Tony, was not involved in the attacks.

Police, who shot and killed Tatiana, are considering the incident a "crime scene" until they can determine if foul play may have been involved.

"[The incident is being treated as a crime] because we're not certain why the incident occurred - as result of human action or whether this was an incident where the animal was able to get out of the grotto," said Chief of the San Francisco Police Department Heather Fong.

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Ms. Bhutto was killed when an unknown attacker fired shots at her and then blew himself up as she was leaving an election rally in Rawalpindi on Thursday.

Pakistani officials say that Ms. Bhutto's death occurred when the force of the suicide blast crashed her head against a lever on the sunroof of her vehicle. An official investigation is under way, but leaders of Ms. Bhutto's party have rejected the official account of her death as "ridiculous."

Ms. Bhutto's senior advisor, Sherry Rehman, says she helped wash the slain politician's body for burial. She alleges the government is trying to cover-up its failure to protect Ms. Bhutto, who was campaigning for January 8 elections.

"It is very clear, it is running on all the Pakistan TV channels, the footage of an assassin who took clear aim at her with his gun and fired the shot that went through the back of her head and came out the other," she said. "I have seen the bullet wound myself. I was part of the bathing ritual party and she bled to death from that wound."

Interior Ministry spokesman Javed Cheema told reporters in Islamabad Saturday that the government's version is based on a medical report and other evidence collected from the scene of the attack.

"Now, if there is any doubt, if they say that she died of the bullet wounds, we don't mind," he said. "If the Peoples Party's leadership wants, her body can be exhumed and post-mortemed. They are most welcome, but we gave you what the facts are."

Pakistani authorities have accused a pro-al-Qaida fugitive tribal leader, Baitullah Mehsud, of ordering Ms. Bhutto's assassination.

But a spokesman for Mehsud has denied the militant leader had anything to do with the assassination.

Government spokesman Cheema says investigators have collected irrefutable evidence of Mehsud's involvement in the suicide attack on Ms. Bhutto.

"No criminal would ever accept responsibility of a crime that one has committed. It does not suit him," he said. "And I don't think anybody else has the capability to recruit and carry out such kind of attacks except for those [al-Qaida] people."

Pakistan plans to hold parliamentary elections next month. But election officials say that violent unrest across the country sparked by Ms. Bhutto's assassination has undermined preparations for the polls.

Another Pakistani opposition leader, Nawaz Sharif, says his party will boycott

the elections, adding to the uncertainty surrounding the January 8 date.

Ms. Bhutto returned home from eight years of self-imposed exile in October, hoping to become prime minister for a third time. She narrowly escaped a suicide attack on her homecoming rally in Karachi, hours after she landed in Pakistan.

UK rail regulator launches investigation into line closure at short notice

The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), the regulatory authority for Great Britain's railway network, has launched an investigation of Network Rail procedures following a complaint from Virgin Trains regarding over-running engineering works on New Year's Eve.

Network Rail, who are responsible for the British railway infrastructure, have announced that as part of ongoing engineering work to improve the West Coast Main Line, no services will be able to pass through Rugby on December 31.

The closure will affect services operated by Virgin Trains, London Midland and First ScotRail.

Chris Gibb, the Managing Director of Virgin Trains said, "I am very disappointed that Network Rail (NR) has given us so little opportunity to warn our passengers of this further disruption. We were first warned of the possibility of this additional work on 6 December."

"Because of the seriousness of the situation we felt it necessary to refer the matter to the Office of Rail Regulation. We simply cannot have NR bullying train operators in this way just because their engineering planning processes are in a mess."

The company has warned passengers that journeys are likely to be extended by an hour or more in some cases.

Whilst the ORR will be investigating the complaint from Virgin, they have ruled that the work should still go ahead.

A spokesman for Network Rail said, "Work will be ongoing for most of the next year, but the Christmas period is the last major opportunity we have to do key work while passenger numbers are down during the relatively long holiday period.

"It was only realised at the beginning of December that work was falling behind. Rail companies are usually given 12 weeks notice of engineering work. Virgin were told only at the beginning of the month, so that is very late.

"Network Rail is extremely sorry and apologises to passengers for the inconvenience."

According to the company, the engineering works will contribute to enabling increases in service frequencies and reductions in journey times on the West Coast Main Line from December 2008.

Scottish footballer Phil O'Donnell collapses during game and dies

Scottish football player Phil O'Donnell has died today after collapsing during a game in which his team Motherwell F.C., of which he was captain, were playing Dundee United in a Scottish Premier League match.

O'Donnell collapsed as his substitution for Marc Fitzpatrick was being arranged. He received treatment for around five minutes before being stretchered off and transferred to a waiting ambulance. David Clarkson, O'Donnell's nephew, was also playing at the time and had scored twice but was taken off due to being visibly distressed by O'Donnell's collapse.

Medics from both teams believed he had suffered a seizure. Attempts were made in the ambulance to revive him, but these failed and he was pronounced

dead at 17:18 GMT, having been taken to Wishaw General Hospital.

Born on March 25, 1972 O'Donnell made his debut for Motherwell in 1990, and scored the following year in the final of the Scottish Cup, which Motherwell defeated Dundee United 4-3 in. In 1993 he earned his only international cap for Scotland as a substitute in a World Cup qualification match against Switzerland.

The following year he was bought by Celtic for £1.75 million (\$3.5 million). He stayed with them for five years, after which he was transferred to Sheffield Wednesday. A high number of injuries caused Sheffield Wednesday to release him after four years, and the next year, 2004, then Motherwell manager Terry Butcher awarded him an 18-month contract. In 2006 he was appointed captain, and in April the following year, upon the expiration of his original contract, signed a new one as a player-coach.

Motherwell chairman Bill Dickie said "Unfortunately I can confirm very, very sad news that Phil O'Donnell has lost his life. We don't know what it was, but there will be a post-mortem. This is a tragic happening and that's all I can say."

Motherwell owner John Boyle told the press "Everyone at Motherwell is shocked to the core, and we are sure that everyone involved in Scottish football will feel the same. Phil was not only an inspirational player for Motherwell and club captain, but was an inspirational person. All of us at Motherwell are thinking of his wife Eileen and their four children."

Mark McGhee, manager of the team, said "I don't want to say anything more than how devastated everyone at the club is for his wife and his young children. That's what we are all feeling tonight, nothing else matters. Obviously from the club's point of view, we'll

gather round to give his family as much support as they need."

In a press conference given at the hospital, Motherwell chief executive Ian Stillie said "The management, directors, players and fans are all stunned and having great difficulty in comprehending what has happened over the last few hours. At this stage we do not have all the facts surrounding the tragic death of Phil O'Donnell. We have been in contact with Phil's wife Eileen and his family and they have given us their blessing to speak to the media tonight. Phil collapsed during the second half of the game today. He was standing alone at the time. He was immediately attended to by Motherwell's club doctor and assisted by Dundee United's club doctor. He was transferred almost immediately to an awaiting ambulance and taken to Wishaw General. It is believed Phil suffered some form of seizure and was pronounced dead at 1718."

Gordon Smith, Scottish Football Association chief executive, told reporters "This is absolutely devastating news. Phil was not just a wonderful footballer, he was a great human being. My thoughts are with his family at this tragic time." Meanwhile, Celtic chief executive Peter Lawwell said "When the news came through, everyone at the club was obviously shocked. Our thoughts are with his family to whom we offer extreme condolences for a tragic loss of a young life. Everyone at Celtic Park will mourn him."

World Trade Organization allows Antigua to ignore US\$21 million of US copyright per year

Arbitrators at the World Trade Organization (WTO) have granted the Caribbean country of Antigua and Barbuda a special dispensation to ignore United States copyright law.

In their report, the WTO panel stated

that Antigua possessed "no effective trade sanctions against the USA" and agreed to allow the country to ignore up to US\$21 million worth of US copyrights a year. While this amount falls significantly short of the US\$3.4 billion per year dispensation that Antigua was seeking, it is far higher than the US\$500,000 per year allocation that US negotiators were pushing for.

The ruling comes at the end of a five year legal contest between Antigua and the USA regarding the USA's blocking of offshore online gambling sites. Because many of these sites were located in Antigua, the Antiguan government filed a complaint with the WTO saying that the US prohibition constituted unlawful restriction of trade. When the WTO agreed, Antigua pressed for US\$3.4 billion in punitive damages. They asked to have this penalty assessed as permission to copy US intellectual property, since there was no trade embargo that Antigua could impose on the US to collect the amount for itself. The panel agreed that Antigua had no way to collect punitive damages through trade sanctions. However, they lowered the amount of damages to US\$21 million per year.

Australian David Hicks is released from Yatala Labour Prison

Australian David Hicks was released Saturday from Yatala Labour Prison in Adelaide, South Australia.

Hicks, who until May 2007 had been held for five years at the U.S. Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba, was serving out his remaining sentence in an Australian jail. At a U.S. war crimes tribunal, Hicks pleaded guilty to providing material support to a listed terrorist organisation and was sentenced to seven years in prison. As part of the plea agreement, all but nine months of the sentence was suspended and in May of 2007, Hicks was transferred to Yatala.

A contentious part of his sentence was a ban placed on Hicks to prevent him from speaking with the media for a period of one year from the time he pleaded guilty, which was in March, 2007. On his release Saturday, Hicks indicated that he intended to comply with the suppression order.

"It's my intention to honour this agreement as I don't want to do anything that might result in my return there," said Hicks in a written statement read by his lawyer, David McLeod. "So for now, I will limit what I have to say - I will say more at a later time."

A small group of supporters waited outside of Yatala and cheered as his car drove away. In his statement, Hicks had thanked his supporters for "the huge debt of gratitude that I owe the Australian public for getting me home." He added, "I will not forget or let you down."

At his trial, Hicks admitted he attended training camps in Afghanistan, conducted surveillance of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul and revealed that he had met Osama bin Laden, leader of Al-Qaeda. He had participated in fighting against the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan in late 2001, and was caught while trying to flee the area.

On his release from prison Saturday, Hicks was driven to an undisclosed location in Adelaide. His lawyer said that Hicks fears for the safety of himself and his family. "David is concerned about the safety of his family from people who hold views he was purported to share," said David McLeod. "There are also a number of far-right nationalist groups in Australia who have spoken out about David."

Terry Hicks, David's father, said his son was pleased to be free. "He's on a high, he seems alright but I suppose in the quiet times everything will come back."

"It's now up to him," said Terry Hicks. "He now has got to get on with his life."

South African prosecutors charge ANC leader Jacob Zuma with corruption

Corruption-related charges have been brought against Jacob Zuma, the newly-elected leader of the African National Congress (ANC), according to his lawyer. A trial is scheduled to begin on August 14, 2008.

The charges stem from an arms deal with a French company, which is alleged to have involved bribes and fraud. Zuma's financial adviser at the time, Schabir Shaik, was convicted in 2005 of attempting to solicit a bribe of US\$72,500 per year from the arms company on Zuma's behalf and was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Zuma was fired as deputy president in 2005 by South African President Thabo Mbeki due to the scandal.

Two-term ANC leader Mbeki recently lost an ANC leadership contest to Jacob Zuma, who garnered about 60 percent of delegate votes in his win.

Zuma had been charged with corruption in 2005, but the case was dismissed on procedural grounds. Michael Hulley, Zuma's defence lawyer, indicated that they will strongly contest the new charges in court. Hulley also suggested that the South African government's National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and its anti-organised crime division known as The Scorpions, have carried out a smear campaign against Zuma.

"These charges will be vigorously defended, in the context of the belief that the Scorpions (NPA) have acted wrongly and with improper motive calculated to discredit Mr. Zuma and ensure that he play no leadership role in the political future of our country," said Michael Hulley in a statement.

Given that the ANC has been the governing party in South Africa since the end of apartheid in 1994, it is likely that Jacob Zuma could become the next

president after general elections in 2009. Zuma has said, however, that he would resign if he was found guilty by the courts.

Today in history

- 1065 - Westminster Abbey is consecrated.
- 1308 - The reign of Emperor Hanazono, emperor of Japan, begins.
- 1612 - Galileo Galilei becomes the first astronomer to observe the planet Neptune, although he mistakenly catalogued it as a fixed star.
- 1832 - John C. Calhoun becomes the first Vice President of the United States to resign.
- 1835 - Osceola leads his Seminole warriors in Florida into the Second Seminole War against the U.S. Army.
- 1836 - South Australia and Adelaide are founded.
- 1836 - Spain recognizes the independence of Mexico.
- 1846 - Iowa is admitted as the 29th U.S. state.
- 1867 - United States claims Midway Island, first territory annexed outside Continental limits.
- 1869 - William E. Semple of Mount Vernon, Ohio patents chewing gum.
- 1879 - The Tay Bridge Disaster: The central part of the Tay Rail Bridge in Dundee, Scotland collapses as a train passed over it, killing 75.
- 1895 - The Lumière brothers have their first paying audience at the Grand Cafe in Boulevard des Capucines marking the

debut of the cinema.

- 1902 - The first indoor professional American football game is played in New York City at Madison Square Garden.
- 1908 - An earthquake rocks Messina, Sicily killing over 75,000.
- 1912 - The first municipally owned streetcars take to the streets in San Francisco.
- 1935 - Pravda publishes a letter by Pavel Postyshev, who revives New Year tree tradition in the Soviet Union.
- 1939 - First flight of the Consolidated XB-24 Liberator bomber prototype.
- 1945 - The U.S. Congress officially recognizes the Pledge of Allegiance.
- 1948 - The DC-3 airliner NC16002 disappears 50 miles south of Miami, Florida.
- 1950 - The Peak District becomes the United Kingdom's first National Park.
- 1959 - Jazz pianist Bill Evans records the album Portrait in Jazz with his newly formed Bill Evans Trio.
- 1973 - The Endangered Species Act is passed in the United States.
- 1974 - Senegalese marxist group Reenu-Rew founds the political movement And-Jëf at a clandestine congress.
- 1981 - The first American test-tube baby, Elizabeth Jordan Carr, is born in Norfolk, Virginia.
- 1989 - A magnitude 5.6 earthquake hits Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, killing 13 people.

- 1999 - Saparmurat Niyazov is proclaimed President for Life in Turkmenistan.
- 2000 - U.S. retail giant Montgomery Ward announces it is going out of business after 128 years.
- 2005 - A U.S. immigration judge orders John Demjanjuk deported to Ukraine for crimes against humanity committed during World War II

Quote of the day

The forces of moderation and democracy must, and will, prevail against extremism and dictatorship. I will not be intimidated. ... Despite threats of death, I will not acquiesce to tyranny, but rather lead the fight against it. ~ Benazir Bhutto

Word of the day

snowclone (noun)-
A type of cliché which uses an old idiom formulaically in a new context

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