



Lead Stories

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Suicide bomber kills twelve in northwest Pakistan

At least twelve civilians have died and over 25 were injured in a suicide bombing in the Hangu district of north-west Pakistan, Thursday night. A convoy of 140 vehicles running from Tall in the Hangu district to Parachinar in the Kurram region was targeted.

The victims, some of them women, were at a petrol station in Hangu. The wounded were taken to adjoining hospitals.

According to police, the attacker detonated a bomb near a fully loaded bus. The convoy carried several people, vehicles filled with provisions and commodities for trading. A majority of the people in the group were Shia Muslims.

No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack. Several insurgents have attacked the country's North West Frontier Province in the last year.

Earlier, three died in another suicide attack on a police station in Karak, located in the same area.

Many Shi'as dwell in the Parachinar and Orakzai area which has been home to violence in the past. The Tall-Parachinar road was closed to the public in 2008 and 2009 due to Taliban activity. The latter targeted Shia Muslims, sources say. The road was re-opened about two months ago, with convoys guarded by security forces forming the bulk of the traffic.

Hangu borders Pakistan's tribal regions, where several militant groups are believed to be operating. However, security forces say that arrangements have improved from the past.

Somali pirates seize tanker off coast of Madagascar

Somali pirates seized the Norwegian chemical tanker UBT Ocean off the coast of Madagascar yesterday, according to reports.

The Norwegian News Agency reports that the ship, which is Marshall Islands-flagged, has 21 crew members aboard.

Svenn Pedersen of the ship's owner, Broevigtank, said yesterday that "[t]he captain of the ship called us early this morning and told us: We have pirates on board. Very quickly afterwards we lost all contact with the boat."

Pedersen commented that the tanker had taken a route to the south of where Somali pirates are usually active.

A spokesman for Nautictank, the ship's operator, commented that "[w]e are

doing everything we can to establish contact and our sole concern right now is the safety of our crew. We have no contact whatsoever with the vessel, or the master, or the pirates."

The UBT Ocean was en route to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania from its departure port of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates.

The waters off the coast of Somalia and the Indian Ocean are patrolled by an internationally operated naval force; however, it has not been able to entirely prevent pirate hijackings. Two days ago, pirates took a Saudi tanker from its position in the Gulf of Aden and sailed it to Garacad, Somalia.

Gordon Brown defends Iraq decision

On Friday, the current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Gordon Brown defended the decisions he made leading up to and following the British invasion of Iraq in 2003. Brown made his statements while testifying before the Chilcot Inquiry. At the time of the invasion, Brown was the Chancellor of spending for the British Armed Forces.

Brown comments were mainly directed at critics who had alleged that he had limited the spending budget for the war. Brown said that he had told then Prime Minister Tony Blair that he "would not try to rule out any military option on the grounds of cost." One of the most notable criticisms involved the use of the Snatch Land Rovers, a patrol vehicle used following the invasion. People had complained that

the vehicles were vulnerable to road side bombs. Brown, however, alleged that he fulfilled all requests for better vehicles. Regarding the Land Rovers, Brown said that he moved to replace them as soon as he heard complaints.

In addition to defending his budget decisions, Brown also defended the overall decision to go into Iraq. Brown said that invading was "the right decision" and that it was based on "the right reasons." He said the international community was justified in its invasion. However, Brown admitted he may have been unknowledgeable about certain aspects of the war, and hinted that the possibility that things could have been done better. Brown mentioned that there were "learnt lessons" from the war. One specific regret he made was that did not apply more pressure towards America regarding their plans for Iraq following the invasion. During the testimony, Brown emphasized the importance of post-invasion planning and reconstruction. Brown also mentioned that he was unaware of doubts that another Cabinet member had about the validity of the evidence that Saddam Hussein was harboring weapons of mass destruction. The member, Robin Cook, later resigned because of his opposition to the war. This is relevant because both the UK and America had claimed that Hussein had had the weapons, and used this as part of their cases for the invasion. It was later revealed that Hussein had never had the weapons.

In addition to the issues regarding his handling of the war, Brown is also in the situation of being up for reelection. The main opponent of Brown, who represents the Labour Party, will be David Cameron, from the Conservative Party. The elections will be held on June 3, 2010.

Eleven soldiers killed in clash with rebels in the Philippines

According to officials, at least eleven soldiers in the Philippines were killed and several others injured on Saturday after a gunfight with Communist rebels in Mindoro, a province south of the capital Manila. It was the deadliest incident between the two since the start of the year.

Army officials commented that a platoon of Filipino soldiers accidentally entered the grounds of the New People's Army (NPA) rebel camp.

"The two sides exchanged fire a few meters apart," remarked army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Noel Detoyato. "[...] The troops fought it out literally to the last bullet." He commented that the gunfight lasted for about three hours, that about sixty NPA rebels were involved in the clash, and that seven of the Filipino troops were injured.

Another army spokesman, Colonel Romeo Brawner, noted that the troops were in the vicinity as part of security measures implemented for the elections in May, so that the candidates would be able to safely campaign.

Imam pleads guilty in New York subway bomb plot

A Queens, New York Imam pleaded guilty to lying to federal officials on Thursday. 38-year-old Ahmad Afzali, an Afghan national, made his plea in Brooklyn Federal court.

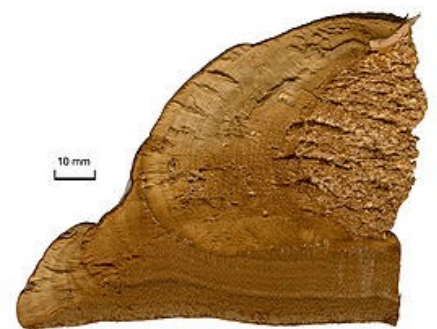
Afzali faces up to six-months in prison. Under the plea deal Afzali must leave the United States within 90 days of leaving prison. "I failed to live up to my obligation to this country, my community, my family, and my

religion. I am truly sorry," Afzali said in court.

The plea is related to the subway bomb plot surrounding Najibullah Zazi, who also pleaded guilty earlier last month to conspiracy to commit murder, conspiracy to use weapons of mass destruction, and material support for al-Qaeda.

Federal officials allege Zazi spent more than a year plotting the attack with co-conspirators and that he received bomb-making instructions in Pakistan in 2008. The U.S. government also says he bought components to build improvised explosive devices and traveled to New York City on September 10, 2009, to move forward with his plans. Zazi's father was also arrested in September and charged with lying to federal officials. Zazi faces life in prison if convicted.

Commons Picture of the Day



Tinder fungus (Fomes fomentarius) in section. Image in the public domain, by George Chernilevsky.

Quote of the Day

It is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limbs but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason, when the use of reason is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs.

~ Aristotle ~

Word of the Day

putative *adj*

1. Commonly believed or deemed to be the case; accepted by supposition rather than as a result of proof.

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