



briefly

UNITED NATIONS Funds sought for cholera fight

The United Nations is asking for \$164 million to fight the cholera outbreak in Haiti, which has now claimed 724 lives.

A spokeswoman for the UN humanitarian office said unless the funds are provided "all our efforts can be outrun by the epidemic."

Elisabeth Byrs said that the UN and non-governmental organizations would use the money to bring in additional doctors, medicines and water purification equipment to treat up to 200,000 people who could be affected by the disease.

SOUTH KOREA Elderly residents perish in fire

A pre-dawn fire swept through a women's nursing home in South Korea on Friday, killing 10 people too old to flee the flames and smoke, officials said.

Another 17 people aged between 71 and 90 were injured in the fire at the home in the southeastern city of Pohang, and at least two of them were in a critical condition.

RUSSIA Police killed in Dagestan attack

Seven police and four rebels were killed in shootouts on Thursday in Russia's Dagestan region in the North Caucasus, police said.

Seven traffic policemen were gunned down by suspected militants in Dagestan's capital Makhachkala on the Caspian Sea, a source in the police force said.

POLAND Composer Gorecki dies

Polish composer Henryk Mikolaj Gorecki, known internationally for his 1976 Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, has died after a long illness at the age of 76, the country's national orchestra said on Friday.

His Symphony No 3 or Symphony of Sorrow Songs, focused on motherhood and the ravages of war gained global popularity after its 1992 re-release which sold more than a million copies.

EUROPEAN UNION Ashton 'to meet' Iran nuke official

Catherine Ashton, the European Union's foreign affairs chief, will propose to meet Iran's chief nuclear negotiator early next month to discuss Teheran's nuclear program, an EU diplomat said on Friday.

Following consultations with the six world powers involved in negotiating with Iran — the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany — the diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Ashton would write to Iranian negotiator Saeed Jalili proposing a meeting on Dec 5, probably in Switzerland.

AP-AFP-REUTERS

Comatose Sharon moves home

By DAN WILLIAMS
REUTERS

JERUSALEM — Israel's comatose former prime minister Ariel Sharon was moved back to his desert ranch on Friday, leaving the secure hospital ward that had been his home for almost five years, officials said.

Sharon, 82, will continue to receive treatment at Sycamore Farm, where as premier he would often retreat with aides to plan strategies such as Israel's 2002 offensive in the Palestinian West Bank and the surprise 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Felled by a massive stroke in January 2006, ex-general Sharon left an often jittery state

that has fought two wars while charting an uncertain course in US-sponsored peace talks with the Palestinians.

"Today, in 2010, the aspiration of any patient, our aspiration in the hospital, is to ensure that any chronic patient, when possible, is with his community, at home," said Professor Shlomo Noy, director of rehabilitation at the Sheba Medical Centre outside Tel Aviv, where Sharon had been receiving care.

Asked whether there is any chance of Sharon recovering — or even returning to public life, as some of his loyalists envisage — Noy told Israel's Army Radio: "Clearly what's behind this (move home) is

the hope that his situation will get better.

"But the improvements that we talk about in such situations are not great improvements, not dramatic improvements."

After being stabilized for brain hemorrhage, Sharon settled into what medical staff and the few friends allowed to visit describe as a limbo state — uncommunicative but apparently responding to basic stimuli like television.

He is said to have kept much of the fat that made him a favorite of satires and gave girth to his nickname "bulldozer."

"There is a feeling of communication, of realization — I mean, the eyes are open and there is kind of, like, you feel

that he feels your presence," his doctor, Shlomo Segev, told the Daily Beast news website last year.

"So it's not completely what we call a coma. Not a deep coma, for sure. But if you asked me to quantify that, I cannot."

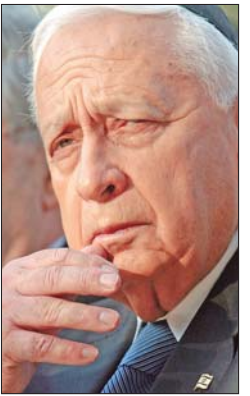
As Israeli defense minister in 1982, Sharon masterminded the Lebanon invasion and was forced to step down over the massacre there of Palestinian refugees by allied Christian militiamen.

But while many Arabs reviled him for his war record, Sharon won respect as prime minister for plowing through Israel's fractious coalition politics to form the new, centrist Kadima party and pull out of Gaza.

Whether Sharon, who at one point boxed in former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat with tanks, would have secured a peace accord remains debated, not least as Hamas Islamists opposed to coexistence with Israel were quick to fill the Gaza vacuum.

The Likud party that Sharon abandoned, which was riddled with corruption and infighting, has rebounded, with its rightist leader Benjamin Netanyahu serving as premier.

Installing Sharon in Sycamore Farm will take around 48 hours and he may require to be brought back to the hospital for check-ups on his adjustments, Noy said.



VADIM GHIRDA / AFP
Former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon attends a memorial ceremony in this file photo taken on Nov 6, 2003.

Report cautions Obama on cost of war

By DAVID ALEXANDER
REUTERS

WASHINGTON — An independent task force cautioned President Barack Obama on Friday about the high cost of the Afghanistan war and said he should consider a narrow military mission if his December review finds the current strategy is not working.

The 25-member task force, led by former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and former national security adviser Samuel Berger, said it saw "hopeful signs" in Afghanistan, such as improved training of security forces, but other trends were less encouraging.

"The cloudy picture and high costs raise the question of whether the United States should now downsize its ambitions and reduce its military presence in Afghanistan," the task force said in a 98-page report.

"We are mindful of the real threat we face. But we are also aware of the costs of the present strategy. We cannot accept these costs unless the strategy begins to show signs of progress," said the task force, which was sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations think tank.

Dan Markey, a South Asia analyst at the council who was project director for the report, said the findings were a "sober reflection of a Washington consensus that is increasingly skeptical and concerned" about the war.

The task force was composed of a broad range of former government officials, military leaders, academics and journalists with expertise in the region. The report was not requested by the Obama administration, but the task force did speak to officials



PETER ANDREWS / REUTERS

Crew Chief Specialist Dennis Cater (center), helps US Marines Lance Corporal Zachary Byron (right), who was shot in the leg and the arm, as Corporal Andrew Campbell, who was shot in the leg, looks on during a Medevac mission in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province.

involved with the issue.

The group gave a qualified endorsement to Obama's ambitious counterinsurgency-style strategy, but only if it is clearly making progress.

"If the December 2010 review of US strategy in Afghanistan concludes that the present strategy is not working, the task force recommends that a shift to a more limited mission at a substantially reduced level of military force would be warranted," the report said.

The administration's current strategy calls for US-led forces, including nearly 100,000 US troops, to disrupt al-Qaida and its Taliban allies while training

Afghan military and police to take over security.

At the same time, foreign civilians are working to help improve Afghan governance in an effort to broaden popular support for the administration.

As the December review approaches, it is increasingly clear that defense officials believe the war plan is working but needs more time, despite rising casualties and worsening violence.

Administration officials have begun to downplay Obama's July 2011 deadline for beginning to hand over security to Afghan forces and

withdraw US troops as conditions merit.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said this week they viewed Afghan President Hamid Karzai's plan to assume full responsibility for the country's security by 2014 as a realistic goal NATO should endorse at its summit this month.

Administration officials have indicated the strategy review is likely to bring only tweaks rather than a wholesale reappraisal of the war effort.

The task force urged the administration to go beyond a narrow evaluation of the places where Afghans may be able to

take responsibility for security and also include a "clear-eyed assessment" of whether there is enough progress to conclude the strategy is working.

"The important thing that the report does is to try to clarify what progress should look like," Markey said.

The report urges the administration to answer questions like whether Afghan police and army capabilities have been significantly improved, whether momentum in contested areas has shifted against the insurgency and whether normal life returns to areas once NATO operations have concluded.

Militants release list of hostages

By JON GAMBRELL
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria — Nigeria's main militant group in the oil-rich southern delta on Friday issued a list of hostages it had taken from an attack on an offshore oil rig, with at least one name matching that of a US worker believed to be held.

In an e-mail, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) identified the seven men taken from a rig operated by London-based Afren PLC — which includes two US workers, one Canadian, two French and two Indonesians. The e-mail described the men as being "in good health and (they) will be in our custody for a while."

"Our fighters (caused) extensive damage on this facility and attempted to set it ablaze as they were instructed to do," the e-mail read.

The list of seven names included that of James Robertson, a US worker on the rig for contractor Transocean Ltd. Television stations in Mississippi earlier this week reported that Robertson, of Silver Creek, Mississippi, had been abducted during the attack on Monday on the rig 11 km off Nigeria's coast.

An Afren official reached on Friday declined to comment. A Transocean spokesman based in the US could not be immediately reached for comment.

The e-mail said the two Indonesians were seized off a nearby support ship operated by contractor Century Energy Services Ltd. The Canadian seized worked for a firm called PPI while one of the abducted Frenchmen worked for Sodexo, a France-based catering company. The other US citizen and Frenchman were identified as working for Transocean.

MEND began a campaign of pipeline bombings and high-profile kidnappings in 2006. Militants in the delta, a region of winding creeks and mangroves about the size of South Carolina, want more oil money to come to an area still gripped by abject poverty and pollution after more than 50 years of oil production.

Asia, Europe giving US science run for money

By MAGGIE FOX
REUTERS

WASHINGTON — The United States still leads the world with its scientific clout, armed with highly respected universities and a big war chest of funding, but Europe and Asia are catching up, according to a Thomson Reuters report released on Friday.

The US emphasis on biological and medical sciences leaves the fields of physical sciences and engineering open to the competition, the report said.

"The United States is no longer the 'Colossus of Sci-

ence', dominating the research landscape in its production of scientific papers, that it was 30 years ago," the report added.

"It now shares this realm, on an increasingly equal basis, with the EU27 (the 27 European Union members) and (the) Asia-Pacific," it said.

Thomson Reuters, parent company of Reuters, regularly reviews the state of scientific research using databases that include the Web of Science, which tracks the most influential scientific papers.

Scientists and engineers make their work public in scholarly journals, sharing ideas and making them available for others to critique, copy

and try to replicate. The top research is used as the basis of other work more often.

"The current state of scientific research in the United States remains strong, with significant funding (some 2.8 percent of GDP, relatively more than key competitors), excellent academic institutions that are a magnet for the best minds worldwide, and a talented workforce that leads the globe in the quality of its collective research efforts, innovations, and results," the report said.

But US influence is waning — not because the United States is doing less, but because other countries

are doing more, Thomson's Jonathan Adams and David Pendlebury found.

Losing influence

"In 1981, US scientists fielded nearly 40 percent of research papers in the most influential journals," they wrote.

"By 2009, that figure was down to 29 percent. During the same period, European nations increased their share of research papers from 33 percent to 36 percent, while research contributed by nations in the Asia-Pacific region increased from 13 percent to 31 percent."

China is now the second-largest producer of scien-

tific papers, after the US, with nearly 11 percent of the world's total, they found.

In 2008, Asian nations as a group passed the United States with \$387 billion in research and development spending, compared with \$384 billion in the US and \$280 billion in Europe.

Precisely half of US research focuses on the biological sciences "just at the time when Asian nations are focusing on and investing substantial sums in engineering, physical sciences and technology," the report said.

In the US, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and California Institute

of Technology led in research, the report found.

Outside the US, the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy of Sciences lead.

Earlier this week the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), published a report which revealed similar findings.

UNESCO said in 2002, almost 83 percent of research and development was carried out in developed countries but this dropped to 76 percent by 2007. It found China was leading the pack of emerging nations with 1.4 million researchers.