

NATION & WORLD

THE WORLD

Lebanon's pro-Western majority declares victory

BEIRUT — Lebanon's pro-Western coalition declared victory early Monday, as local television stations reported the faction had successfully fended off a serious challenge by the Shiite militant group Hezbollah and its allies to grab the majority in parliament.

Official results for Sunday's election were not expected until later Monday, but the winners were already celebrating.

The election was an early test of President Barack Obama's efforts to forge Middle East peace. A win by Hezbollah would have boosted the influence of its backers, Iran and Syria, and risked pushing one of the region's most volatile nations into international isolation and possibly into more conflict with Israel.

Iraqis detain Americans in death of contractor

BAGHDAD — Iraqi authorities have detained five U.S. citizens in connection with the death of an American contractor in Baghdad, officials said Sunday, in what could be the first case of Americans facing local justice under a joint security pact that took effect this year.

The body of Jim Kitterman, who was reportedly bound, blindfolded and stabbed, was found in his car last month in the protected Green Zone where his small construction company was based.

U.S. Embassy spokesman James Fennell confirmed that five Americans are in Iraqi custody but said no formal charges have been filed.

Infatuated France gets its Obama moment

PARIS — People gawked and cameras clicked as the Obamas cut a wide figure through the French capital, even while confined to a presidential motorcade.

President Barack Obama, wife Michelle, and their two daughters touched lives in simple ways during a private stay in the French capital.

Even a Sunday visit to the gilded Elysee presidential palace was casual and intimate.

The luncheon hosted by President Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife, Carla, for Michelle and the two Obama daughters looked like an advance fete for Sasha's eighth birthday this Wednesday. The Obama trio, lingering a bit in the City of Light after the president's departure, then went shopping at the high-end Left Bank store for children, "Bonpoint."

Media scrutiny of the family was intense. The French are confirmed fans of the Obamas, whose politics and elegant style conform to their ideal vision of the United States.

THE NATION

High court asked to block Chrysler sale to Fiat

WASHINGTON — Opponents of Chrysler's sale to Fiat are asking the Supreme Court to block the deal.

Three Indiana state pension and construction funds filed emergency papers at the high court early Sunday to put the sale on hold so they can pursue an appeal.

The federal appeals court in New York approved the sale Friday, but gave objectors until Monday afternoon to try to get the Supreme Court to intervene. Chrysler wants to sell the bulk of its assets to a group led by Italy's Fiat as part of its plan to emerge from bankruptcy protection.

Clinton: Obama can handle that 3 a.m. call

WASHINGTON — Hillary Rodham Clinton says that if the phone rings at 3 a.m. at the White House, she's certain that President Barack Obama will know what to do.

Such a phone call in the wee hours — probably about an unexpected crisis — was a central argument that Clinton used during her primary campaign against Obama last year. She argued in a TV ad that she was the candidate with the experience to answer that 3 a.m. call.

Clinton, now secretary of state, told ABC's "This Week" that Obama's public and private actions show him to be strong, thoughtful and decisive.

From wire reports

War spending problems found

By Richard Lardner
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — This is one Christmas gift U.S. taxpayers don't need.

Construction of a \$30 million dining facility at a U.S. base in Iraq is scheduled to be completed Dec. 25. But the decision to build it was based on bad planning and botched paperwork. The project is too far along to stop, making the mess hall a future monument to the waste and inefficiency plaguing the war effort, according to an independent panel investigating contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In its first report to Congress, the Wartime Contracting Commission presents a bleak assessment of how tens of billions of dollars have been spent since 2001. The 111-page report, obtained by the Associated Press, documents poor management, weak oversight, and a failure to learn from past mistakes as recurring themes in wartime contracting.

The report is scheduled to be made public Wednesday at a hear-

ing held by the House Oversight and Government Reform's national security subcommittee.

U.S. reliance on contractors has grown to "unprecedented proportions," says the bipartisan commission, established by Congress last year. More than 240,000 private sector employees are supporting military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thousands more work for the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development.

But the government has no central data base of who all these contractors are, what services they provide and how much they're paid. The Pentagon has failed to provide enough trained staff to watch over them, creating conditions for waste and corruption, the panel says.

In Iraq, the panel worries that as U.S. troops depart in larger numbers, there will be too few government eyes on the contractors left to oversee the closing of hundreds of bases and disposal of mountains of federal property.

At Rustamiyah, a seven-acre forward operating base turned over to the Iraqis in March, the military population plunged from 1,490 to 62 in just three months. During the same period, the contractor population dropped from 928 to 338, leaving more than five contractors for every service member.

In Afghanistan, where President Barack Obama has ordered a large increase of U.S. troops, existing bases will have to expand and new ones will be built — without proper oversight unless the Pentagon rapidly changes course.

One commander in Afghanistan told the commission he had no idea how many contractors were on and off his base on a daily basis. Another officer said he had property all over his installation but didn't know who owned it or what kind of shape it was in.

There are questionable construction projects in Afghanistan, too. The commission visited the New Kabul Compound, a building intended to

serve as headquarters for U.S. forces in Afghanistan. But members saw cracks in the structure, broken and leaking pipes, sinking sidewalks and other defects.

"The Army should not have accepted a building in such condition," the report says.

The commission cites concerns with a massive support contract known as "LOGCAP" that provides troops with essential services, including housing, meals, mail delivery and laundry.

Despite the huge size and importance of the contract, the main program office managing the work for both Afghanistan and Iraq has only 13 government employees. For administrative help, it must rely on a contractor.

KBR Inc., the primary LOGCAP contractor in Iraq, has been paid nearly \$32 billion since 2001. The commission says billions of dollars of that amount ended up wasted due to poorly defined work orders, inadequate oversight and contractor inefficiencies.



BRAZIL AIR FORCE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this photo released by Brazil's Air Force, officers recover debris belonging to the Air France Flight 447 in the Atlantic Ocean, Sunday. Fifteen more bodies were found Sunday bobbing in the ocean near the spot where an Air France jet is believed to have crashed a week ago, bringing the total number of bodies plucked from the water to 15, Brazil's military said.

Workers recover 15 bodies from jet crash

By Marco Sibaja and Alan Clendenning
ASSOCIATED PRESS

RECIFE, Brazil — Search ships methodically worked through a "sea of debris" from a doomed Air France jet Sunday, recovering 15 more bodies near the spot where the Airbus A330 is believed to have gone down a week ago.

Two bodies were recovered Saturday, and Brazilian and French ships picked up 15 more Sunday afternoon after pilots participating in a grid search reported additional sightings. The bodies have been found in an area about 45 miles from where the jet sent out messages signaling electrical failures and loss of cabin pressure.

"We're navigating through a sea of debris," Brazilian Navy Capt. Gicemar Tabosa Cardoso said.

Brazil's military was not releasing detailed information about bodies or debris that have not been taken

aboard ships, after sea trash was mistaken last week for a cargo pallet from the plane, prompting criticism.

Flight 447 disappeared and likely broke up in midair in turbulent weather May 31 during a flight from Rio de Janeiro to Paris with 228 people aboard — all now presumed dead.

The investigation is increasingly focused on whether external instruments on the Airbus A330 may have iced over, confusing speed sensors and leading computers to set the plane's speed too fast or slow — a potentially deadly mistake.

The French agency investigating the disaster said airspeed instruments on the plane had not been replaced as the maker had recommended, but cautioned that it was too early to draw conclusions about what role that may have played in the crash.

The agency, BEA, said the plane received inconsistent airspeed

readings from different instruments as it struggled in a massive thunderstorm.

France is leading the investigation into the cause of the crash, and will try to recover the plane's black box data and voice recorders, which could reveal why the jet crashed. Brazilian officials are focusing solely on the recovery of victims and plane wreckage.

In Brazil, Air Force Col. Henry Munhoz said nine bodies have been recovered by Brazilian authorities: four men, four women and one that was impossible to identify by gender. He said he did not have information about the genders of the eight bodies recovered by French military helicopters that were transferred to a French ship.

The search is focusing on a zone of several hundred square miles roughly 400 miles northeast of the Fernando de Noronha islands off

Brazil's northern coast.

Munhoz and Cardoso declined comment on the condition of the recovered bodies, saying that information would be too emotionally painful for relatives.

Authorities also announced that searchers spotted two airplane seats, debris with Air France's logo, and recovered dozens of structural components from the plane. They had already recovered jet wing fragments.

Munhoz said there is "no more doubt" that the wreckage is from Flight 447.

Hundreds of personal items belonging to the passengers have been recovered, but Munhoz said authorities would not immediately identify them because relatives of the victims were devastated by the announcement Saturday that a laptop computer and briefcase containing a plane ticket had been found.

16 dead in Acapulco shootout

By Natalia Parra
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ACAPULCO, Mexico — It was a shootout straight from Hollywood in the former playground of its biggest stars: Masked and heavily armed Mexican soldiers battled outlaws holed up in a cliffside mansion in a four-hour shootout that had tourists cowering in hotels nearby.

Roughly 3,000 shots flew, and 50 grenades exploded during the raucous gun-battle late Saturday that killed 15 gunmen and one soldier. Six other people were wounded, including three bystanders.

More than a dozen tourists were evacuated from a neighboring hotel strip frozen in the 1950s, when Elizabeth Taylor held one of her many weddings in Acapulco and John Wayne and "Tarzan" star Johnny Weissmuller threw lavish parties at Los Flamingos Hotel less than 100

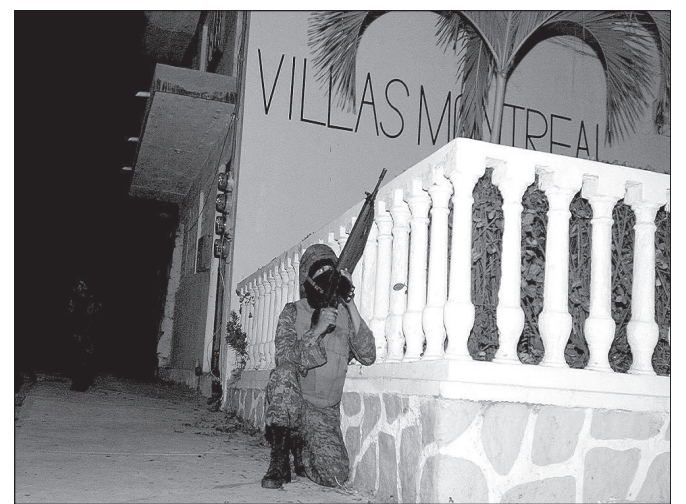
yards from where gunfire broke out.

Cindy Pelaquin and Michelle Johnson, both of Boston, were watching the famous Acapulco cliff divers less than a mile away. They saw the military roadblocks but heard nothing.

"We were just lucky I suppose," said Johnson, a Boston nurse.

One neighbor said it sounded like fireworks. But a Mexican tourist, whose group had just arrived from the Mexico City area, immediately recognized the sound of gunshots and dove under a hotel bed.

The battle erupted after soldiers received a tip that a group of armed men were gathered at a gated house in a seedy section of Acapulco where working-class homes bleed into 1950s mansions. One hotel across from the street from the shootout offers three-hour stays for 30 pesos, roughly \$2.25.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Soldiers hold a position during a gunfight in Acapulco, Mexico, Saturday. Soldiers fought for two hours with armed men apparently holding police hostage at a house in Acapulco, leaving one soldier and 15 gunmen dead, a military official said Sunday.