

# Iraq

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said the demonstration was apparently in celebration of Saddam's birthday.

Some townspeople, however, said the crowd was objecting to the presence of troops, while others said students wanted the soldiers to leave the school so classes could resume.

The shooting was the third reported fatal clash involving U.S. troops and Iraqi protesters in two weeks, underscoring the problems that face soldiers as they try to switch from fighting to peacekeeping.

On April 15 and 16, Marines opened fire during angry demonstrations in the northern city of Mosul. Iraqis said 17 people were killed there, though details remained unclear and the Marines insisted they fired only in self-defense.

The shootings, widely reported by Arab news media, have fueled resentment of the U.S. military weeks after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime.

U.S. forces serving in the area said they have been trained in crowd control. About half the company headquartered at the school in Fallujah served in Kosovo peacekeeping operations, 2nd Lt. Devin Woods said.

It was unclear whether the protest that sparked the shootings grew from general animosity toward Americans in Fallujah, a city long considered a stronghold of Saddam support and site of factories suspected of having been involved in banned weapons programs. It appeared a clash of cultures, at least, was involved.

Residents repeatedly denounced battalion members' use of binoculars and night-vision goggles. They accused soldiers of spying on women from the school's upper floors and rooftop.

Monday night's protest started after evening prayers on Saddam's birthday, in the past an occasion for weeklong celebrations. Lt. Col. Eric Nantz said the demonstration involved no more than 200 people — an indication, Nantz said, of support for American forces.

Some protesters carried AK-

47 assault rifles, Nantz said. U.S. soldiers sent a loudspeaker-equipped truck to urge them to stop firing into the air, he said.

As the chanting crowd milled about, soldiers said, U.S. forces used illumination rounds and a smoke grenade to try to keep gun-toting protesters away.

At one point, Nantz said, soldiers sent out in an armored personnel carrier fired two rounds from a 50-caliber machine gun, also in warning.

A company of the battalion's soldiers, 130 in all, had been based in the school since late last week.

Eventually, soldiers of the company said, protesters closed to within no more than 10 feet of the schoolhouse wall. At that point, U.S. forces said, three men on a nearby roof fired into the school.

"Everybody could see the muzzle flashes," said Sgt. Nkosi Campbell, who commanded the first Americans who fired.

Even then, soldiers exercised restraint, Campbell said. "They turned around and said, 'Hey, sergeant, can we shoot?' And that was when they were already under fire."

Nantz said soldiers fired automatic weapons for 20 to 30 minutes. Because residents carried away the dead and wounded quickly, Bray said troops had no idea about Iraqi casualties overall.

# STATE

## More taxpayers filing electronically

(AP) — South Carolina taxpayers who file electronically have a little more time to file state income tax returns without facing a penalty.

Electronic taxpayers can file returns by computer or by telephone until midnight May 1. The state Revenue Department has extended the deadline for the third year to encourage taxpayers to file electronically, either by computer or telephone.

About 109,000 more tax returns were filed electronically this year than last year. That's a 13 percent increase.

Sixty-one percent — 914,004 — of state tax returns received so far have been filed electronically. That number will likely drop to 50 percent or less when all returns are submitted, said Revenue Department spokesman Danny Brazell.

South Carolina became the first state to offer an electronic filing program in 1991.

## Senate considers a variety of taxes

(AP) — As the Senate prepares to take up its \$5.2 billion state budget this week, some lawmakers made final rallies Tuesday against tax increases.

The Senate Finance Committee's version of the budget brings in additional revenue for schools by raising the sales tax cap on cars, eliminating a small sales tax break for people 85 and older and eliminating a tax break on manufacturing equipment.

The Senate's version also supports a plan pushed by Gov. Mark Sanford that would increase the state's cigarette tax to 60 cents a pack from 7 cents a pack to pay for Medicaid programs, while decreasing the state's income tax.

Sanford said that plan would put more money into the pockets of small businesses and individual taxpayers, while providing a steady source of funding for Medicaid.

# NATION

## Judge to rule on Malvo's confession

FAIRFAX, VA. (AP) — A judge will rule in the next seven to 10 days on whether to toss out a confession by sniper suspect Lee Boyd Malvo that his attorneys claim was obtained illegally.

A hearing on the confession's validity concluded Tuesday. Before ruling, the judge said she wanted time to read the voluminous case law dealing with a suspect's right to remain silent and right to a lawyer.

Circuit Judge Jane Marum Roush could throw out all or part of the confession or retain it in its entirety.

Malvo, 18, and John Muhammad, 42, are accused in at least 20 shootings. Both could face the death penalty if convicted.

Malvo confessed to some of the shootings during a six-hour interrogation on Nov. 7, just after he was transferred from federal custody to Virginia authorities.

But defense lawyers argued that improprieties by police and prosecutors conspired to keep Malvo from his lawyers and that Malvo's request to speak to his attorneys was ignored by police.

## Democrats prepare second filibuster

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats said Tuesday they would filibuster another of President Bush's federal court nominees, minutes after allowing the Senate to confirm a Bush nominee who critics said had worked to curtail the rights of the disabled.

The new filibuster target will be Priscilla Owen — a Texas judge and home-state favorite of the president's — who was nominated for a seat on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. Democrats have called Owen an anti-abortion, pro-business judicial activist whose opinions and rulings are overly influenced by her personal beliefs.

# WORLD

## Striking oil workers take 97 hostages

LAGOS, NIGERIA (AP) — Striking Nigerian oil workers have seized 97 hostages, including 21 Americans, on several offshore oil rigs, officials said Tuesday. Some captives said they feared armed rescue attempts would end in disaster.

There were conflicting reports about whether the hostages had been threatened. One wrote an e-mail that said the hostage-takers warned they would blow up the rigs if attacked, but oil officials dismissed reports that any oil workers had been threatened and said the strikers appeared willing to give up.

The rigs, owned by Houston-based Transocean, were drilling wells on behalf of oil multinationals Royal/Dutch Shell and TotalFinaElf.

## SARS travel warning lifted from Toronto

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization lifted its warning against nonessential travel to Toronto because of SARS on Tuesday, but in Asia the disease continued its spread as Hong Kong reported 12 new deaths, China nine and Singapore one.

The global death toll from SARS climbed to at least 355, with more than 5,300 infections in more than 20 countries, including probable cases reported for the first time in South Korea, Mongolia and New Zealand.

Travel warnings still stand for Hong Kong, Beijing and two Chinese provinces, as China's premier admitted his government failed to act quickly against the disease.

In return for the WHO's decision, the Canadian government promised to do more to prevent the spread of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, by screening passengers leaving the country.

WHO Director-General Gro Harlem Brundtland said the advisory was lifted because there had been no new outbreaks in the community at large for 20 days.

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## Attention Graduating Students

**Did you know that you can reduce the interest rate on your student loans and save thousands of dollars by consolidating your student loans after graduation?**

The Higher Education Act, established by Congress, allows any graduate (or parent with PLUS loans) to consolidate their student loans by combining all their eligible student loans into a single loan issued by a new lender. Graduates who do this immediately after graduation (while they are still in their non-repayment period) are able to reduce the interest rate on all their eligible loans by 0.60% - potentially saving themselves thousands of dollars.

There are several other benefits associated with Student Loan Consolidation and these include:

- The ability to reduce your monthly interest repayments by up to 54% by extending your repayment period. This may help you in matching your income level to your repayment obligations.
- Fixing the interest rate on your loans to take advantage of the historically low interest rates that are currently available for the life of your loans. Your existing loans are variable and could rise over time as interest rates rise. Consolidation can ensure that this doesn't happen.
- Dealing with only one monthly loan repayment from one lender can make your life easier.
- Save even more on your repayments by taking advantage of 'borrower benefits' that can reduce your interest rate by up to an additional 1.25% by making electronic and on-time repayments.

**Does it Matter When You Choose to Consolidate?**

Yes. If you are about to graduate (or have recently graduated) timing is critical to maximizing the amount that you can save with consolidation. If you wait too long to apply for consolidation, you might miss out on the opportunity to reduce the interest rate on all your loans by 0.60%.

**What Does it Cost to Consolidate?**

There are no fees or credit checks, nor is there any penalty for early repayment of your consolidation loan. Note however, that you can only consolidate once and consolidation can affect certain deferment and cancellation benefits associated with loans.

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