

BRIEFS

Mexico's Fox blocked from giving speech

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Vicente Fox was forced to forego the last state-of-the-nation address of his presidency Friday after leftist lawmakers stormed the stage of Congress to protest disputed July 2 elections. It was the first time in modern Mexican history a president hasn't given the annual address to Congress. Instead, Fox handed in a written copy of his report, and his office said he would address the nation in a televised speech later Friday. A text of the speech Fox had planned to deliver to Congress called on Mexico to mend deep divisions that he said threatened the country's newfound democracy.

EU cautions against early Iran sanctions

LAPPEENRANTA, Finland (AP) — Despite mounting U.S. pressure for sanctions against Iran, the European Union said Friday it is too early to punish Tehran for its failure to halt uranium enrichment by the U.N. Security Council's deadline.

The call for renewed diplomacy came as Iran's president vowed never to give up a nuclear program that he said is being misrepresented by the West.

Iran ignored the Security Council's Thursday deadline to suspend uranium enrichment, opening the way for consideration of economic or other sanctions against the Islamic republic, which the U.S. and others suspect is trying to develop atomic weapons.

But EU leaders cautioned against pushing a confrontation.

"This is not the time or place" for sanctions, Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, said after a meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers.

Teen mails taped confession of killing

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A man obsessed with the 1999 Columbine school attack made a videotape showing his father's bloody corpse and describing plans to attack his former high school, then mailed it to a newspaper which posted excerpts on its Web site.

The release of the video was the latest twist in the case, which began when Alvaro Castillo was arrested Wednesday in front of Orange High School in Hillsborough after several shots were fired from the parking lot.

Two students suffered minor injuries in the attack.

Investigators say Castillo confessed to his father's slaying after he was taken into custody.

"Don't judge me for what I did," Castillo said in the homemade video mailed to The Chapel Hill News, a twice-weekly newspaper that shares a staff with The News & Observer of Raleigh. "Based on what I did, you might think I'm a monster, a sick freak. ... But I tried to do good things. I tried. I did it. I killed my father. I sacrificed him. He's with the Lord now. I shot him four times."

Ernesto weakens to tropical depression

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Ernesto weakened to a tropical depression Friday, but the storm still packed enough punch to dump more than half a foot of rain, knock out power to more than 300,000 customers and force hundreds of people from their homes.

And it was far from finished. On the eve of the Labor Day weekend, the storm prompted flash flood watches for wide sections of Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and central New York.



Hector Munoz, left, crosses a flooded street Friday as he tries to help move a tri-hull sailboat as owner Neil Conrad, right, looks on in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Hurricane John, packing sustained winds of 110 mph, was churning near the tip of Baja, and its outer edge was being felt on land, forecasters said.

Associated Press

John lashes Cabo

Tourists, slum dwellers take shelter in Mexico

CABO SAN LUCAS, Mexico (AP) — Hurricane-force winds slammed into the southern tip of Baja California on Friday night, as a powerful Pacific storm forced tourists to take shelter in luxury hotel ballrooms and residents in vacant schoolhouses.

Hurricane John, packing sustained winds of 110 mph, was churning near the tip of Baja and its outer edge was being felt on land, forecasters said.

Bands of steady rain swelled normally dry stream beds and ran down some streets as the eye of the Category 2 hurricane drew within about 25 miles of San Jose del Cabo Friday night. John wasn't likely to affect the United States; cooler Pacific waters tend to diminish storms before they reach California.

Known for the rugged beauty of their unique desert-ocean landscapes, the two resort cities of San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas on the southern tip of the Baja peninsula are studded with

high-end golf courses. The resorts are extremely popular with sports fishermen and celebrities. Rooms at some of the higher end hotels go for more than \$2,000 a night.

Winds toppled the signs of shops and businesses sent metal gates flying in San Jose del Cabo, while bands of rain swept ashore in nearby Cabo San Lucas.

On Friday, thousands of tourists who couldn't get flights out prepared to ride out the storm.

"That water wasn't that high a few minutes ago," said Dale Broomfield, 26, a nurse from Adelaide, Australia, who negotiated a makeshift plank bridge over water that rose up between his hotel and an adjoining convention hall-turned-shelter in Cabo San Lucas.

Nearby, Guadalupe Amezcua, a 50-year-old tourist from Mexico City, set up camp on one of many mattresses on the floor of the hall, where windowless rooms provided protection from wind.

Pentagon says sectarian violence spreading

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sectarian violence is spreading in Iraq, and the security problems have become more complex than at any time since the U.S. invasion in 2003, a Pentagon report said Friday.

In a notably gloomy report to Congress, the Pentagon reported that illegal militias have become more entrenched, especially in Baghdad neighborhoods where they are seen as providers of both security and basic social services.

The report described a rising tide of sectarian violence, fed in part by interference from neighboring Iran and

Syria and driven by a "vocal minority" of religious extremists who oppose the idea of a democratic Iraq.

Death squads targeting mainly Iraqi civilians are a growing problem, heightening the risk of civil war, it said.

"Death squads and terrorists are locked in mutually reinforcing cycles of sectarian strife," the report said, adding that the Sunni-led insurgency "remains potent and viable" even as it is overshadowed by the sect-on-sect killing.

"Conditions that could lead to civil war exist in Iraq, specifically in and around Baghdad, and concern about

"Conditions that could lead to civil war exist in Iraq."

PENTAGON REPORT

civil war within the Iraqi civilian population has increased in recent months," the report said. It is the latest in a series of quarterly reports required by Congress to assess economic, political and security progress.

Iraqi forces were dealing with more violence Friday as officials said a mortar attack on an open-air market in Mahmoudiya, about 20 miles south of Baghdad, killed

three people and wounded 12. Elsewhere, two policemen were also killed and authorities said they found the body of a Saddam Hussein-era intelligence officer who had been kidnapped and shot.

The bloodshed capped a week in which hundreds of Iraqis were killed despite a security crackdown that targeted some of Baghdad's most violent neighborhoods.

A growing number of mem-

bers of Congress are calling for either a shift in the Bush administration's Iraq strategy or a timetable for beginning a substantial withdrawal of American forces. Although administration officials say progress is being made in Iraq, U.S. commanders have increased U.S. troop levels by about 13,000 over the past five weeks, to 140,000, mainly due to increased violence in the Baghdad area.

Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., who recently returned from a visit to Iraq, said the report squared with what he saw there.

"Iraq is tipping toward civil war," Reed said.

Mother of abducted boy gets photos 24 years later

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The mother of a boy abducted 24 years ago said she's bewildered by two photographs left at her front door, apparently showing her son and two other children bound and gagged.



Johnny Gosch, age 12

The old photos appear to show 12-year-old Johnny Gosch with his mouth gagged and his hands and feet tied. The boy is wearing the same sweatpants Johnny was wearing when he disappeared while delivering newspapers on the morning of Sept. 5, 1982, his mother said.

"It's like reliving it,"

Noreen Gosch said Thursday night. "But the bigger picture is, 'Why are they doing this?' "Whoever had these photos had them for 24 years. I don't understand why they would do this now. It must be some kind of message."

Gosch said investigators confirmed the photos were authentic and likely taken within "hours or days" of the abduction. She said they were checking for fingerprints that could lead them to the source and possibly a breakthrough in a case that has long baffled authorities. The other boys in the photo were unidentified.

"We are in the process of researching where they came from and whether they've been doctored up," West Des Moines police Lt. Jeff Miller told the Des Moines Register.

Johnny's disappearance triggered nationwide fears of child abductions. He was one of the first faces of missing or abducted children to appear on milk cartons across the country.

Several theories have developed since he vanished before dawn while delivering Sunday newspapers. His newspaper wagon was discovered near his West Des Moines home, but few substantial clues have surfaced since then.

Gosch believes her son was taken by child pornographers. She told authorities he briefly contacted her in 1997 but feared for his life and declined to give details about where he was. She believes his abductors got him involved in crimes, which is why he is hiding his identity.

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