

## NATION/WORLD DIGEST

### Iraq PM Moves Ahead Of Rival In Election

BAGHDAD (AP) — Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki edged ahead Sunday in a tight race in the country's parliamentary elections after partial results from all of Iraq's 18 provinces showed his bloc leading in seven — two more than his chief rival.

The early tally strengthens al-Maliki's chances of retaining the prime minister's post, although he is unlikely to win a majority necessary to govern alone. Instead, the narrow race could lead to months of political wrangling as leaders try to cobble together a coalition government that will rule as American forces leave Iraq in 2011.

The March 7 vote was Iraq's second for a full-term government since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

According to the partial count from all of Iraq's 18 provinces released by the country's electoral commission, al-Maliki's State of Law coalition leads in seven provinces.

### Israeli Leader Regrets Crisis With U.S.

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's prime minister expressed regret Sunday for a crisis with the United States over plans to expand a Jewish neighborhood in east Jerusalem, even as American officials played down the apology and called for bold Israeli action to get peace efforts back on track.

With tensions rising, Israel deployed hundreds of police around east Jerusalem's Old City and heavily restricted Palestinian access to the area — the scene of several recent clashes.

Israel's already strained relationship with the U.S. hit a new low last week when the Jewish state announced plans during a visit by Vice President Joe Biden to build 1,600 homes for Israelis in east Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as their capital.

The announcement embarrassed Biden, who quickly condemned the plan, and cast a shadow over upcoming U.S.-mediated peace talks.

### Northeast Copes With Flooding, No Power

EGG HARBOR CITY, N.J. (AP) — Last month, the Northeast was smothered by blizzards. Now, it's waterlogged by torrential rains.

The region mopped up Sunday following a bout with high wind and heavy rains that uprooted trees, downed power lines and flooded some creeks and rivers. Five people died in storm-related accidents and hundreds of thousands were without electricity.

More than a half-million customers in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut lost electricity at the peak of Saturday's storm, which carried wind gusts of up to 70 mph. It came about two weeks after heavy snow and hurricane-force winds left more than a million customers in the Northeast in the dark.

### Search Resumes After Avalanche In Rockies

REVELSTOKE, British Columbia (AP) — An avalanche that killed at least two people at an informal snowmobile rally in Canada's Rocky Mountains may have been triggered by three daredevil sledders who apparently unleashed a deadly wall of snow on up to 200 people below, witnesses said Sunday.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said an even worse tragedy may have been averted because many of the snowmobilers had come equipped with avalanche recovery equipment and dug people out even before rescuers arrived at the scene.

RCMP Cpl. Dan Moskaluk told a news conference Sunday that two men are confirmed dead, not three as reported earlier in the chaotic hours after the slide. He said it remains unknown how many others are still unaccounted.

He said 30 people were injured, including one person in critical condition and three others in serious condition who were taken to regional hospitals.

Despite avalanche warnings, about 200 people had gathered on the mountain for the Big Iron Shoot Out, an annual unsanctioned event known for its party atmosphere and stunt riding that has become popular among people who enjoy snowmobiling in the deep snow of back country British Columbia.

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# Pentagon Gun Was From Tenn. Police

BY DEVLIN BARRETT  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Two guns used in high-profile shootings this year at the Pentagon and a Las Vegas courthouse both came from the same unlikely place: the police and court system of Memphis, Tenn.

Law enforcement officials told The Associated Press that both guns were once seized in criminal cases in Memphis. The officials described how the weapons made their separate ways from an evidence vault to gun dealers and to the shooters.

The use of guns that once were in police custody and were later involved in attacks on police officers highlights a little-known divide in gun policy in the United States: Many cities and states destroy guns gathered in criminal probes, but others sell or trade the weapons in order to get other guns or buy equipment such as bulletproof vests.

In fact, on the day of the Pentagon shooting, March 4, the Tennessee governor signed legislation revising state law on confiscated guns. Before, law enforcement agencies in the state had the option of destroying a gun. Under the new version, agencies can only destroy a gun if it's inoperable or unsafe.

Kentucky has a similar law, but it's not clear

how many other states have laws specifically designed to promote the police sale or trade of confiscated weapons.

A nationwide review by The Associated Press in December found that over the previous two years, 24 states — mostly in the South and West, where gun-rights advocates are particularly strong — have passed 47 new laws loosening gun restrictions.

John Timoney, who led the Philadelphia and Miami police departments and served as New York's No. 2 police official, said he doesn't believe police departments should be putting more guns into the market.

"I just think it's unseemly for police departments to be selling guns that later turn up," he said, recalling that he had once been offered the chance to sell guns to raise money for the police budget.

"Obviously, we always need the money but I just said, 'No, we will take the loss and get rid of the guns,'" said the former police chief, who now works for Andrews International, a security consulting firm.

A spokeswoman for the Memphis police said gun swaps are a way to save taxpayer money.

One of the weapons in the Pentagon attack was seized by Memphis police in 2005 and later traded to a gun dealer; the gun used in the Jan. 4 courthouse shooting in Las Vegas as sold by

a judge's order and the proceeds given to the Memphis-area sheriff's office. Neither weapon was sold by the Memphis law enforcement agencies directly to the men who later used them to shoot officers.

In both cases, the weapons first went to licensed gun dealers, but later came into the hands of men who were legally barred from possessing them: one a convicted felon; the other mentally ill.

The history of the two guns in the recent attacks was described by officials from multiple law enforcement agencies on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss details of the investigations. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives provided reports on the gun traces to the investigating agencies, but is barred from publicly disclosing the results.

Rich Wyatt, a former police chief in Alma, Colo., who now operates a gun store — and who has bought weapons from police agencies — defended the practice of police selling guns.

"Maybe if they put the money they made selling the guns into training those officers better, they'd be better off," said Wyatt. "Nobody ever, ever questions selling a car that was used in a crime. I am sad that officers were shot, but I don't care where the guns came from. To say we need to chase guns is not the issue, we need to chase people."

## Americans Killed In Mexican Drive-By Shooting

BY PHILIP ELLIOTT  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Three people with ties to the American consulate in a drug-plagued Mexican city were killed in a drive-by shooting, a U.S. official said.

The department noted the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City has advised American citizens to delay unnecessary travel to parts of the Mexican states of Durango, Coahuila and Chihuahua.

Two American citizens and a spouse of a Mexican employee were killed Saturday afternoon, a U.S. official said. The official spoke only on condition of

anonymity to discuss sensitive information.

The State Department authorized six U.S. government employees at six U.S. consulates in northern Mexico to send their family members out of the area because of concerns about rising drug-related violence. At least 18,000 people have been killed since Mexican President Felipe Calderon launched an offensive against drug traffickers in December 2006.

The State Department said it would allow family members of diplomatic staff to leave border cities of Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Monterrey and Matamoros.

State Department spokesman Fred Lash said the decision to authorize consular employees' family members to leave the area was based not only on Saturday's killings but also on a wider pattern of violence and threats in northern Mexico in recent weeks.

The bloody drug war in has plagued the 200-mile U.S.-Mexican border for years, and once-busy streets are empty after dark. More than 45,000 soldiers have been dispatched to fight cartels since Calderon took office in late 2006, but the U.S. has been critical of Mexican efforts to fight the drug trade amid complaints of human rights abuses.



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## Probe Questions Runaway Prius Story

BY ELLIOTT SPAGAT AND KEN THOMAS  
Associated Press Writers

SAN DIEGO — Investigators with Toyota Motor Corp. and the federal government were unable to make a Toyota Prius speed out of control as its owner said it did on a California freeway, according to a draft memorandum obtained Saturday by The Associated Press that casts doubt on the driver's story.

James Sikes, 61, called 911 on Monday to report losing control of his Prius as the hybrid reached speeds of 94 mph. A California Highway Patrol officer helped Sikes bring the vehicle to a safe stop on Interstate 8 near San Diego.

During two hours of test drives of Sikes' car Thursday, technicians with Toyota and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration failed to duplicate the same experience that Sikes described, according to the memo prepared for the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

"Every time the technician placed the gas pedal to the floor and the brake pedal to the floor the engine shut off and the car immediately started to slow down," the memo said.

The report says that, according to Toyota's "residential Hybrid expert," the Prius is designed to shut down if the brakes are applied while the gas pedal is pressed to the floor. If it doesn't, the engine would "completely seize."

"In this case, knowing that we are able to push the car around the shop, it does not appear to be feasibly possible, both electronically and mechanically that his gas pedal was stuck to the floor and he was slamming on the brake at the same time," the memo said.

The findings raise questions about "the credibility of Mr. Sikes' reporting of events," said Kurt Bardella, a spokesman for California Rep. Darrell Issa, the top

Republican on the committee, which is looking into the incident.

Sikes could not be reached for comment. However, his wife, Patty Sikes, said he stands by his story.

"Everyone can just leave us alone," she said. "Jim didn't get hurt. There's no intent at all to sue Toyota. If any good can come out of this, maybe they can find out what happened so other people don't get killed."

Mrs. Sikes said the couple's lives have been turned upside down since Monday and they are getting death threats.

"We're just fed up with all of it," she said. "Our careers are ruined and life is just not good anymore."

Monday's incident appeared to be another blow to Toyota, which has had to fend off intense public backlash over safety after recalls of some 8.5 million vehicles worldwide — more than 6 million in the United States — because of acceleration and floor mat problems in multiple models and braking issues in the Prius. Regulators have linked 52 deaths to crashes allegedly caused by accelerator problems.

The brakes on the Prius also did not show wear consistent with having been applied at full force at high speeds for a long period, the Wall Street Journal reported Saturday, citing three people familiar with the probe, whom it did not name.

Toyota Corp. spokesman Mike Michels declined to confirm the Journal's report. He said the investigation was continuing and the company planned to release technical findings soon.

Following the tests, NHTSA bought the gas pedal, throttle body and the two computers from Sikes' vehicle, the memo said. The estimated cost was \$2,500 for the parts and labor.

Drivers of two other Toyota vehicles that crashed last week said those incidents also resulted from the vehicles accelerating suddenly.

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