

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Blast, Fire Rip Through Area Near San Fran.

SAN BRUNO, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters poured water on flaming and smoldering wreckage early Friday after a massive explosion sent blazes roaring through a neighborhood in the hills south of San Francisco, killing at least one person, destroying more than 50 homes and damaging dozens of others.

Thursday night's explosion shot a fireball more than 1,000 feet in the air and sent frightened residents fleeing for safety and rushing to get belongings out of burning homes, witnesses said.

Utility officials said a gas line ruptured in the vicinity of the blast, which left a giant crater and sent flames tearing across several suburban blocks in San Bruno just after 6 p.m.

At least one person was confirmed dead, San Bruno Fire Chief Dennis Haag said. There was no word on injuries.

"It's going to take us until at least until tomorrow into the afternoon to do a full search," Haag said late Thursday.

Schwarzenegger, Palin Trade Twitter Jabs

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Flying over Alaska on his way to Asia, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger couldn't help but take a lighthearted jab at the state's former governor.

His Twitter message Thursday night said he was "looking everywhere but can't see Russia from here," a reference to an infamous remark from Republican then-vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin during the 2008 presidential campaign.

That prompted a tart response from Palin on Friday. The former Alaska governor says in her own Twitter message that "Arnold should have landed" so she could explain to him her state's multibillion dollar budget surplus. California has a \$19 billion budget deficit.

Schwarzenegger, also a Republican, was leaving for a weeklong trade mission to China, Japan and South Korea.

Military Policy Violates Constitutional Rights

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A federal judge said she will issue an order to halt the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, after she declared the ban on openly gay service members unconstitutional.

U.S. District Judge Virginia Phillips ruled Thursday that the prohibition on openly gay military service members was unconstitutional because it violates the First and Fifth Amendment rights of gays and lesbians.

The policy doesn't help military readiness and instead has a "direct and deleterious effect" on the armed services by hurting recruitment efforts during wartime and requiring the discharge of service members who have critical skills and training, she said.

The Log Cabin Republicans sued the federal government in 2004 to stop the policy. Phillips will draft the injunction with input from the group within a week, and the federal government will have a week to respond.

Government lawyers said the judge lacked the authority to issue a nationwide injunction.

Report: U.S. Fails To Deal With Terrorists

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. was slow to take seriously the threat posed by homegrown radicals and the government has failed to put systems in place to deal with the growing phenomenon, according to a new report compiled by the former heads of the Sept. 11 Commission.

The report says U.S. authorities failed to realize that Somali-American youths traveling from Minnesota to Mogadishu in 2008 to join extremists was not an isolated issue. Instead, the movement was one among several instances of a broader, more diverse threat that has surfaced across the country.

"Our long-held belief that homegrown terrorism couldn't happen here has thus created a situation where we are today stumbling blindly through the legal, operational and organizational minefield of countering terrorist radicalization and recruitment occurring in the United States," said the report, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

As a result, there is still no federal agency specifically charged with identifying radicalization or working to prevent terrorist recruitment of U.S. citizens and residents, said the report, slated to be released Friday by the Washington-based Bipartisan Policy Center's National Security Preparedness Group.

The group, headed by former 9-11 commission leaders Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton, laid out a detailed description of domestic terror incidents ranging from the Fort Hood, Texas, shooting spree and the attempted Christmas Day airliner attack in late 2009 to last May's botched truck bombing in New York's Times Square.

Castro Says He Was Misinterpreted

HAVANA (AP) — Fidel Castro says his comments about Cuba's communist economic model were misinterpreted by a visiting American journalist.

Appearing at the University of Havana on Friday, the 84-year-old ex-president says he meant "exactly the opposite" of the quote contained in a blog by Atlantic magazine reporter Jeffrey Goldberg.

Goldberg wrote Wednesday that he asked Castro if Cuba's economic system was still worth exporting to other countries. He said that Castro replied: "The Cuban model doesn't even work for us anymore."

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Fla. Pastor At Odds Over Deal To Cancel Quran-Burning

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Will he or won't he? Negotiations between a local Muslim cleric and the leader of a tiny Florida church who had threatened to publicly burn copies of Islam's holy text left the heated debate in a state of confusion with the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks a day away.

The Rev. Terry Jones said Thursday he would call off the planned burning of Qurans based on a deal negotiated with the president of the Islamic Society of Central Florida that the location of a mosque planned near ground zero in New York would be changed.

But Imam Muhammad Musri said he was clear on Thursday when he told Jones that he could only set up a meeting with planners of the New York City mosque, whose leader said he had spoken to neither the pastor nor Musri. Jones responded by opening the door, if only a crack, that he would go forward with his plan on Saturday.

"We are just really shocked," Jones said of Musri. "He clearly, clearly lied to us."

For U.S. political leaders and Muslims around the world who have been outraged by Jones' antics, the on-again, off-again threat bred even more angst and frustration.

U.S. Troops Brave Grenade Attacks In Afghan Town

BY TODD PITMAN
Associated Press Writer

SENJERAY, Afghanistan — Pfc. Sean Provenzano saw it whiz by out of the corner of his eye: a dark object hurled from a rooftop as he patrolled the medieval maze of alleyways in this fort-like walled village at the center of America's Afghan surge.

It bounced off his M-4 Carbine's gun-sight and landed in the dirt a few yards away. At first he mistook it for a rock — kids here often throw them at U.S. troops. But when it rose up and began spinning like a top, he realized it was something far more dangerous.

"GRENADE!!!" the 25-year-old screamed, diving to the ground as the explosion sprayed a deadly burst of shrapnel across the street.

Through a cloud of black smoke and brown dust, Provenzano heard a colleague calling his name. He was alive, unscathed, and incredibly, so was everyone else.

U.S. forces deployed to this village in southern Afghanistan's Kandahar province as part of President Barack Obama's troop

surge say they came with the noblest intentions: to build up government and security forces, protect the population, make this a safer place. But after a relentless spate of grenade attacks — tossed anonymously over walls and down from rooftops at soldiers patrolling the labyrinthine town — they now keep their distance from the people they're trying to protect.

The change of heart — nine years after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks that triggered the war — underscores the profound challenges American forces face in securing this insurgent stronghold, where sympathy for the Taliban runs high and the radical Islamist movement was born in 1994. NATO commanders say a major operation will be launched this month here in Zhari district to clear guerrilla fighters who use the cover of grape vineyards and pomegranate orchards to stage attacks.

"When we first came here, we were giving candy away and water bottles. But as soon as we saw a little kid throw a grenade over the wall, that was it, we don't give 'em anything anymore," said Provenzano, of the 101st Airborne Division's 1st

Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment.

"We make sure they keep their distance," he said of the population. "You keep 'em away from you as long as you can, because it's only a matter of time before someone gets hurt."

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates visited the joint Afghan-U.S. outpost at Senjeray last week and said he was "encouraged" by signs of progress. But Zhari remains a battlefield where firefight erupts daily. The lush green fields fed by the Arghandab river, just south of the village, are virtual no-go zones controlled by Taliban fighters, and progress in building local governance is painfully slow.

On Wednesday, insurgents ambushed a convoy carrying district chief Kareem Jan, killing one of his guards and getting close enough to steal one of his vehicles. The midday attack on Highway 1 was the third attempt on his life since he assumed office in late May.

Grenade assaults against U.S. forces occur mostly when they move into walled Senjeray. They began in earnest in June, and "a significant amount" of troops

have been wounded but none killed, said Capt. Nick Stout, a 27-year-old U.S. company commander from Lake Orion, Michigan.

Soldiers say the assaults are aimed at demoralizing or disrupting their operations. Stout said the Taliban or their sympathizers are "trying everything they can to keep us out."

"But you have to continue to get out there, you have to keep them at bay," Stout said. Because "if we don't go in, things could get a lot worse."

Some grenade throwers are "impressionable teenagers" influenced by Taliban propaganda, he said. The youngest is believed to have been 10 or 11 years old.

Troops have captured several, but most escape easily, jumping across rooftops, fleeing through ubiquitous doors, tunnels and passageways hidden inside the sprawling compounds. Others simply blend in with everyone else.

As Provenzano's squad headed into Senjeray on Tuesday accompanied by Afghan police, they scanned rooftops and spread out to lower the risk of multiple injuries in case of an attack.

Spanish Miners In Day 9 Of Underground Protest

BY DANIEL WOOLLS
Associated Press Writer

INSIDE LAS CUEVAS MINE, Spain — Far, far away from a Chilean mine where 33 trapped men struggle to cope as they await rescue, 50 Spanish miners are also deep in the earth's bowels — but by their own choice.

Friday marked Day 9 of an unusual coal miners' protest, a sit-in staged 1,650 feet (500 meters) underground. No showers, no toilets, no Internet and soot-dusted mattresses are a small price to pay, the miners reason, in exchange for a more hopeful future for their beleaguered industry.

Their strike in northern Palencia province is the culmination of a long dispute over unpaid wages and the future of an antiquated industry struggling to survive as it competes with gas-fired electrical utility plants and heavily subsidized renewable energy projects. To make matters worse, all these sources of energy are seeking aid from a government grappling with a recession, high unemployment and a debt crisis.

Spain's coal mining industry employs about 10,000 people, down from 50,000 in the late 1970s.

The Spaniards underground vehemently deny any suggestion they are cashing in on the South American crisis where the Chileans have been trapped in a cramped shelter for a month, saying the two dramas overlap only in time. They acknowledge their plight is by choice, nowhere near as perilous and can end whenever they choose.

"You have to think about their situation. Their thing is about survival. Ours is about asserting ourselves," said Juan Carlos Liebana, 41, wearing a white hard hat turned gray with coal soot. "We send them hope and unity."

His colleagues sat in near

silence at a long wooden table in the dim light. They read newspapers sent down daily by relatives and ate hot food like pasta and bean soup, gaining strength by looking at family photographs and messages.

Like a makeshift clothesline, a rope attached to one wall where coal is collected from the mine's shafts exhibits letters and pictures from the miners' children.

One crayon rendering showed a man dressed in a miner's blue jumpsuit standing next to a small boy. It read: "Daddy, I love you and I miss you. Hang in there so nothing happens to you. Love, Ivan."

Daddy is Eugenio del Amo, who turned 41 on Sept. 4 in the mine called Las Cuevas, Spanish for "the caves." He got the artwork from his 10-year-old son on his birthday.

"I didn't cry because I was embarrassed the other guys would see me. But don't think I didn't want to," he said Friday.

The mine's foreman, Eluterio

Arto, a barrel-chested man of 42, choked up and looked away as he pointed to a drawing he got a few days ago from his three children. One part of it depicts him with a flashlight-equipped hard hat and a jackhammer digging away at a wall of coal. His smallest child, Alberto, 6, misspelled "cuevas" as "cubas."

"We love you so much," the children wrote.

The miners earn euro1,000 to euro3,000 (\$1,275 to \$3,820) a month, the highest wages going to "picadores," those doing the most dangerous job of crawling into cramped spaces with heavy jackhammers to extract coal that has been loosened with dynamite blasts.

The strike in Palencia began when the miners' employer, a company called UMINSA, told them they would not be paid on time for August. The miners, however, insist their main gripe is much broader: Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's failure to implement a decree

that would subsidize utility companies running old coal-fired plants so they will use a certain percentage of Spanish coal instead of importing coal from developing countries such as South Africa.

The decree was signed in February but has been held up by the European Union amid concerns that the subsidies may hinder free-market competition.

Just outside the Palencia mine is an idle electrical power plant, its giant cooling tower and slim smokestack free of the steam that would indicate it is up and running. A pile of coal five stories high sits nearby, unwanted. Like the rest of Spain's coal-fired plants, it simply cannot compete on price when the government auctions off slots to generate power.

The government has been buying up the coal itself to help mining companies, but the miners dismiss this as a makeshift solution.



Some Risks Are Worth Taking. Your Health Isn't One Of Them.

Skin cancer is the most common of all cancers, accounting for 40 to 50 percent of all cancer cases diagnosed each year. While some forms of skin cancer are more dangerous than others, early detection and prompt treatment of any malignant area is of the utmost importance.

Causes and risk factors for skin cancer include fair skin tone, frequent exposure to ultraviolet rays, family history and age. Symptoms may appear as spots; irregular moles; bumps; discoloration; sores; or scaly, reddish, bleeding or oozing skin.

The American Cancer Society recommends a skin examination every three years between the ages of 20 and 40, with annual exams after age 40. They also suggest performing a monthly self-examination in front of a full-length mirror, checking all areas of the body including palms, soles, back of the torso and back of the legs.

Concerned about skin cancer?

Dr. Lisa Miller will present a free seminar on preventative measures and the detection and treatment of skin cancer on **Monday, September 27th, 7:00pm at Lewis & Clark Specialty Hospital**



Dr. Lisa Miller
Yankton Surgical Associates



2601 Fox Run Parkway, Yankton, SD • 605-665-5100 • www.lewisandclarkspecialty.com