

NEWS DIGEST

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Investigation into Waco begins

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vowing to pursue the "dark questions" of the Waco siege, former Republican Sen. John Danforth opened an independent inquiry Thursday into whether the FBI started the deadly fire and later tried to cover its actions. Danforth pledged a thorough inquiry that could include questioning of Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh.

At a news conference in the Justice Department, where Reno announced she had appointed him, Danforth said the country could survive bad judgment, "but the thing that really undermines the integrity of government is whether there were bad acts, whether there was a cover-up and whether the government killed people."

"I think my job is to answer the dark questions," Danforth said.

He said his inquiry would include whether false statements were made to Congress and the Justice Department.

Danforth, who said he has authority to question both Reno and Freeh, will hold the title special counsel and is empowered to use a federal grand jury for his investigation. He said he hoped to get voluntary cooperation for what will start as an administrative, not a criminal, inquiry.

Reno said Danforth also will investigate whether there "was any illegal use of the armed forces" in the final assault. Members of the Pentagon's Delta Force commandos were at Waco the day of the assault.

Freeh, who spoke with Danforth briefly this week, said in a statement that he welcomed the selection, and Reno called Danforth "a man of impeccable credentials."

As the former senator made a round of courtesy calls on Capitol Hill, congressional leaders said they envision Congress' own Waco investigations will be more wide-ranging than Danforth's.

"I want to know it all," House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-

"I think my job is to answer the dark questions."

JOHN DANFORTH
leader of independent inquiry

Texas, said.

Reno said she herself had no plans to resign, despite calls from some Republicans to do so. "I don't run from controversy," she said, removing herself entirely from the Waco matter from now on.

She has been under renewed criticism since revelations that the FBI, contradicting a position it had taken for six years, had used some incendiary devices on the last day of the 51-day standoff, which ended in a fire and the deaths of David Koresh and about 80 followers. Reno and the FBI

maintain that the devices did not cause the deadly fire, which they insist was set by the cult members.

Danforth said some family members and friends advised him not to take the job, with one telling him it would not be a good career move.

"But, hey, I'm 63" and "at this point in your life. ..." Danforth joked with reporters.

Among the questions Danforth said he would leave for Congress: whether it was a good idea for the FBI to have assaulted the compound on the final day and for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to have raided it three months earlier, beginning the siege.

Danforth will remain at his law firm in St. Louis but probably will open an office in Washington, where he will devote most of his time to the inquiry. His chosen deputy in the investigation — Edward Dowd, who is joining the St. Louis law firm where Danforth is a partner — will work full time on the probe.

At least 23 killed in Moscow explosion

MOSCOW (AP) — Authorities searched for survivors and clues after a massive explosion tore apart a nine-story apartment building Thursday, killing at least 23 people and leaving dozens more feared dead.

Rescue workers said more than 150 people were hospitalized with serious injuries after being pulled from the wreckage. Up to 100 people could be buried under the mounds of smoking debris, they said.

Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov visited the blast site and said a "terrorist act" appeared to be the most likely cause of the explosion on the southeast fringes of the capital, near the Moscow River.

But other officials said the blast was caused by a gas leak or explosives possibly stored in the building — which could bring the mayor under fire for negligence in enforcing building regulations.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin originally pointed to a gas leak as the cause of the blast.

But as the day wore on, Luzhkov and some other officials said evi-

dence pointed to a bomb.

"The nature of the damage and the number of casualties" suggests an explosive device was placed in the building, the Federal Security Service, the country's main intelligence agency, said in a statement.

Vladimir Stavitsky, the deputy press chief for the security service, said the blast had been centered in a store on the first floor. He said industrial explosives equivalent to 660-880 pounds of TNT or a great quantity of fireworks had caused the blast.

Sergei Bogdanov, press officer of the Moscow branch of the security service, said the blast may have been caused by explosives stored in the building. He said no scenarios have been ruled out.

An anonymous caller told the Interfax news agency that the Moscow explosion and a Saturday night bomb blast in southern Russia were in response to Russia's military campaign against Islamic rebels in the southern territory of Dagestan. There was no way to determine the authenticity of the claim.

U.N. prepares for evacuation of East Timor

DILI, Indonesia (AP) — The United Nations prepared to evacuate all but a skeleton staff from East Timor amid allegations by the Roman Catholic Church on Thursday that anti-independence militiamen massacred nuns, priests and civilians.

Keeping the U.N. compound in Dili open is vital to the world body's plans to shepherd East Timor to full nationhood after its people voted overwhelmingly on Aug. 30 for independence from Indonesia.

The Vatican's missionary news service FIDES cited local sources as saying three priests were slain in a grenade attack in Suai on Monday. One of the three priests, Rev. Hilario Madeira, was well-known as an independence backer, FIDES said.

FIDES also said witnesses reported that 15 priests were killed in Dili and Baucau, and some nuns were killed in Baucau.

The Roman Catholic charity group, Caritas, cited reports that the director of its East Timor operations, Father Francisco Barreto, had been killed by army-backed militiamen in Dare. Other Caritas workers were also feared dead.

U.N. officials said about 40 to 50 U.N. staff, including police and military liaison officers, will stay behind when another 150 U.N. international workers and 167 local staff members are evacuated Friday by the Australian air force.

In a statement, U.N. mission chief Ian Martin said the security situation had improved but was still dangerous in Dili on Thursday.

"The state of the city is a disgrace with significant numbers of militia members still roaming the streets with impunity," he said. "Dili is a ghost town with not very much left to loot."

Witnesses at the U.N. compound said shots echoed nearby at sunset. Army personnel had also lit fires near its perimeter and several stun grenades had been set off. The

"The state of the city is a disgrace with significant numbers of militia members still roaming the streets with impunity."

IAN MARTIN
U.N. mission chief

United Nations is scrambling to find ways to protect several hundred panic-stricken refugees who had streamed into the compound over the last few days.

Indonesian soldiers Wednesday night opened fire on about 300 refugees who had fled from a school next door to the U.N. compound. It was not known whether anyone was injured.

West Timor is the half of the island that has been anchored in Indonesia since it gained independence from the Netherlands in 1949. The west has been fertile ground for recruiting militiamen to enforce Jakarta's will on the east.

U.N. officials estimated that up to 200,000 people — a quarter of the territory's population — have fled in the past several days, and there are widespread reports of mass killings.

At a meeting in Auckland, New Zealand, ministers from the Americas, Asia and Europe criticized Indonesia for failing to stop the terror in East Timor but stopped short of endorsing a peacekeeping mission to the province.

In Jakarta, anti-government students clashed outside the parliament with riot police. Four protesters were injured.

World and Nation Datelines

Washington CIA: Iran, North Korea possible threats to U.S.

WASHINGTON (AP) — North Korea and Iran are likely to join established nuclear powers Russia and China as long-range missile threats to the United States over the next 15 years, the CIA said Thursday.

These emerging missile forces "potentially can kill tens of thousands, or even millions, of Americans, depending on the type of warhead, the accuracy and the intended target," the intelligence agency said.

In an intelligence report with major implications for the Pentagon's efforts to develop defenses against ballistic missiles, the CIA said Iraq posed an additional, though somewhat more distant, threat.

Washington Clinton proposes \$15 million plan to buy back guns

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new \$15 million federal gun buyback plan will get guns off the streets and may save children's lives, President Clinton said Thursday.

The program will give local police departments up to \$500,000 to buy guns in and around public housing projects for a "suggested price" of \$50. The guns will then be destroyed, the White House said.

Clinton twice recited this statistic to a White House audience of mayors and police chiefs: American children under 15 are nine times more likely to die by accidental shooting than children in the other 25 industrialized nations combined.

West Bank Release of prisoners to result in West Bank peace talks

BEITUNIYA, West Bank (AP) — Israel released 199 Palestinian security prisoners Thursday, providing the first real evidence that the peace process is back on track after nearly a year of deadlock.

The inmates, raising cuffed hands in triumph, chanted "God is great" as buses carrying them to freedom were greeted by cheering relatives and bagpipe bands at army checkpoints in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The releases, a day early, marked the launch of a new interim land-for-security deal that also requires the transfer of 7 percent of the West Bank to Palestinian civilian rule by the weekend — possibly as early as Thursday evening — and the opening of talks Monday on a permanent peace agreement.

Northern Ireland Commission: N. Irish police should be neutral force

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Northern Ireland's overwhelmingly Protestant police force should discard its British symbols, accept a new, neutral name and recruit Catholics as heavily as it does Protestants, a commission recommended Thursday.

The commission's long-awaited report is a blueprint for transforming the Royal Ulster Constabulary, or RUC.

The terrorism-hardened police force, which is only 8 percent Catholic in a 40 percent Catholic community, has long been a focus of Catholic-Protestant antagonism. Police patrol hard-line Catholic areas in armored cars, and Catholic leaders have urged locals to rely on the Irish Republican Army's vigilante justice for criminal suspects, instead of dealing with the RUC.

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