

Blast Rips through Pakistani Market; Guantanamo Terror

The Associated Press

Suspects; Snag over Medicare; \$5 Billion in Business Loans; Explosion in Kabul; Surviving the Recession; Weather Worsens Search for 2 Missing Climbers; Golden Globe Nominations Announced - Part 1

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ALINA CHO, CNN ANCHOR: ...Hopefully jobs. You know, lots of stories to talk about including Ali's bus tour, Sanjay and John's (INAUDIBLE). If you want to continue the conversation on today's stories, go to our blog at CNN.com/amfix. JOHN ROBERTS, CNN ANCHOR: That's going to wrap it for us. Thanks so much for sitting in today. Great to see you.

CHO: Thank you. Nice to be here.

ROBERTS: We'll see back here bright and early again tomorrow morning. Right now the news continues with Heidi Collins in the CNN NEWSROOM .

HEIDI COLLINS, CNN ANCHOR: Thanks, John and Alina. That's right. Here's what we're working on this morning.

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Digging through the devastation. We are talking about three U.S. allies that have been hit by huge blasts. We're going to take you there and talk about how they were targeted by terrorists.

Also this morning, Senate Dems have been called to the White House today. One member balking at Medicare expansion puts health care reform in serious jeopardy.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: The man that I thought I was going to grow old with, I'm not.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COLLINS: A heartbreaking story for a family. A degenerative disease hits a man hard.

Good morning, everybody. I'm Heidi Collins. It is Tuesday, December 15th. And you are in the CNN NEWSROOM.

We get started in Pakistan this morning where at least 20 people are dead in a blast that ripped through a market. Sixty others are wounded.

CNN's Arwa Damon is joining us live from the capital of Islamabad with the very latest.

Arwa, good morning to you.

ARWA DAMON, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Hi, Heidi, and what we do now know from the police is that this blast was caused by a suicide bomber. The apparent target seems to be the home of a very prominent local politician. Now he and his family were not home. And again, as we do see with these devastating attacks, it is the local population that bears the brunt.

As you just mentioned there, at least 20 people killed, 60 wounded. Rescue workers saying that they still believe that some individuals including women and children could be buried underneath the rubble.

There has been no claim of responsibility just yet. This blast was so powerful that it also damaged around 20 buildings in the area. According to the police, the vehicle used was a Toyota that was packed with around 600 to 700 pounds of explosives.

And Pakistanis have been struggling with the insurgency here, especially when it comes to the province of Punjab. That's significant because Punjab is the home of Pakistan's military and political leadership -- Heidi.

COLLINS: Arwa, what is Pakistan doing to crack down on these militants? It's a problem that we've been talking about for quite sometime.

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DAMON: Absolutely. And most certainly it's a problem that has been in the spotlight. The focus of many debates, both here in Pakistan and on the international stage.

Now Pakistan, for its part, has launched a fairly significant offensive against the militants those that carry out attacks within Pakistan. In fact it was something highlighted to us by General Petraeus who is here meeting with senior Pakistani political and military leadership.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GEN DAVID PETRAEUS, U.S. CENTCOM COMMANDER: Pakistan has demonstrated enormous determination in going after the extremist elements that are threatening their state. Obviously, we are supportive of that. We want to assist in every way we can, recognizing, though, that they are the ones doing the fight, not our troopers.

We want to assist that. We want to encourage that. And over time, we want to very much continue the nascent process of coordination of what it is that we, our ISAF partner, our Afghan partners are doing on the Afghan side and what the Pakistan forces are doing on their side.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

DAMON: What the U.S. wants to see more of, though, is the Pakistanis applying that same kind of pressure to militant groups. The Afghan Taliban, for example. They are seeking sanctuary on this side of the border -- Heidi.

COLLINS: Arwa Damon, thank you.

And eight people are dead in Afghanistan after an explosion near the home of the former vice president. This morning's blast rocked the heavily guarded neighborhood of Kabul. Breaking windows in a hotel just a few blocks away.

Former vice president, Ahmad Zia Massoud, was not harmed in the attack. Massoud's brother, killed by a bomb in 2001, was hailed as a leader in the fight against the Taliban.

We're going to have a live report coming your way from Kabul just about 20 minutes from now.

Also, central Baghdad hit by explosions this morning. Four people are dead, 14 others wounded. Three bombs went off within minutes of each other near the fortified green zone. Today's bombings come one week after a string of terror attacks killed 130 people in the Iraqi capital. Bomb attacks in the northern city of Mosul are being blamed for four deaths.

Also the nations most feared terror suspects, some of them will soon leave Guantanamo Bay bound for the heartland. And this morning a senior administration official tells CNN some of the detainees will be transferred to a prison in Illinois.

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CNN White House correspondent Dan Lothian joining us now with the very latest on this.

So, Dan, this would be a pretty controversial decision, right?

DAN LOTHIAN, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: It really would be. I mean this is, first of all, the Thompson Correctional Center in Illinois, and the controversy, obviously, is some believe that by housing these terror suspects right here on American soil, it would really be a threat to national security.

On the flipside, though, there are those who really see this as an economic boom for a community that really has been struggling. This is a facility that was built in 2001. It was closed really for a number of years and has been under used. And so by housing what we're told by a senior administration official would be up to 100 of these terror suspects.

By housing them there, it would create up to 2,000 jobs, be about \$1 billion injected into the community. So some folks there who've been struggling for a long time really see this as a positive.

An administration official put out a statement a short time ago, and I'll read part of that. He said, Closing the detention center at Guantanamo is essential to protecting our national security and helping our troops by removing a deadly recruiting tool from the hands of al Qaeda. Today's announcement is an important step forward as we work to achieve our national security objectives --Heidi?

COLLINS: So Dan, any idea when these transfers could possibly begin?

LOTHIAN: We don't know. First of all, the government has to buy this facility so that will take some time.

COLLINS: Yes.

LOTHIAN: But certainly a short time after that, the detainees will begin. We don't know if all of them at one time or a few of them over a period of time will be transferred to that facility in Illinois.

COLLINS: All right. We'll be watching. Dan Lothian, in front of the White House this morning. Thank you, Dan.

The Senate health care bill hitting a snag over Medicare. And Democrats have a former member of their own party to thank for it.

Our congressional correspondent Brianna Keilar is live on Capitol Hill this morning with more.

Brianna, good morning to you. So is the buy-in Medicare idea dead now?

BRIANNA KEILAR, CNN CONGRESSIONAL CORRESPONDENT: You know, it would

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really seems that way because Senator Joe Lieberman would have been the necessary 60th vote.

COLLINS: Yes.

KEILAR: And he is just saying he's not going to be onboard with it. So without him, Democrats, it seems, don't have the votes for this. But remember, this was a plan B. This idea of allowing people 55 to 64 to buy into Medicare. This was an alternative to that government-run insurance plan.

So what that means is now Democrats are scrambling to find a plan C, and exactly what is that going to be, we're not sure. Perhaps after Senate Democrats meet with President Obama -- they're all going to the White House today to meet with him -- we may have some details about what direction they're going to take.

But really, Heidi, there is a window that is closing here because the Democrats want to have a vote on health care before Christmas and things don't just happen here on -- you know, things don't turn on a dime.

COLLINS: No.

KEILAR: They need time to debate something before they can vote on it. So we're talking about the next couple of days here which is the window of opportunity quickly closing -- Heidi.

COLLINS: Yes, Senator Lieberman has been for this expanded Medicare program in the past, as we know, and now it seems like a bit of a flip-flop. How does he explain that?

KEILAR: Well, and his office acknowledges that he has changed his mind about this.

COLLINS: Yes.

KEILAR: And this is what they say. You know, back in 2000, Senator Lieberman, while he was running as the vice presidential candidate, he did support this idea of the Medicare buy-in. He supported this idea, he acknowledges, as recently as 2006. But his office is basically saying, look, it was a good idea back then, but it's not now because of where the deficit -- because where deficit spending is, because of the strains on Medicare.

And so because of that, he's pulled his support for it. but, of course, as you know, Heidi, the liberal blogs are just skewering him over this, saying what they think is that he's in the pockets of these insurance companies that are headquartered in his state of Connecticut.

His office says that's not the case. In fact, he actually is pushing, for instance, for the antitrust exemption that health insurance companies are really opposed to in this reform bill.

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COLLINS: All right, Brianna Keilar for us this morning. Thanks, Brianna.

In the central Philippines some 50,000 people are raising to get out of the way of a volcano. It's rumbling to life in Albay Province. That's about 290 miles south of the capital. It's oozing red hot lava and spewing ash. And one scientist says a full blown eruption could take place within days. The volcano last erupted in 1993. Nearly 200 years ago a massive eruption wiped out several towns and killed more than 1,200 people.

We'll get to Rob Marciano now for a little bit more on this. Boy, that is pretty incredible.

ROB MARCIANO, AMS METEOROLOGIST: Yes, it is. They don't call it the ring of fire for nothing.

COLLINS: Yes.

MARCIANO: That pretty much tell -- they had like 80 some earthquakes proceeding that eruption. So they kind of knew it was coming. Those volcanoes over there, they percolate quite a bit. Looks like they're it in stride, so to speak. Just checking out and hoping nothing too bad that happens over there.

Meanwhile across the south, they are suffering from a deluge of heavy rain. We're going to talk more about that plus the cold air that seeping into the southeast and northeast in a few minutes --Heidi.

COLLINS: Yes, I've been feeling that. All right, Rob, thank you.

And a huge recall to tell you about this morning. It's not a new danger. Parents know about this one but are they all listening?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

COLLINS: There are windows everywhere, maybe even in your home, but this morning a major recall on more than 50 million shades and blinds by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Eight children have died since 2000 because of the hazard.

We know this video is a little bit strange with the doll baby there, but it seems the best way for the CPSC to show us how the cords could wrap around the necks of babies and toddlers. On the list, 27 million of the kind of blinds that roll up from the bottom and 25 million Roman style shades which often have fabric or paper panels. The commission is working on putting out a repair kit to fix the problem.

So we want to know what you think about this. Are recalls like this necessary or is common sense enough? For example, if you have a child in your home, do you yourself take the cords from the blinds and put them up high so that the children cannot get at them? Want to go to our blog and post your comments there, your thoughts here this morning, at CNN.com/heidi.

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Rob Marciano joining us now. Severe weather across the southeast and west coast, both?

MARCIANO: You know, Heidi, I'm starting to feel like my parents didn't love me. Because all these precautions that modern day parents are taking to insure the safety of their children were pretty much overlooked when I was a kid.

COLLINS: Yes. And look at you.

MARCIANO: It's though I don't have enough insecurities, now my parents didn't take those necessary precautions. All right. Keep your kids' fingers out of the sockets, too. That's always a good one.

(WEATHER REPORT)

COLLINS: Forget it. Yes, absolutely. All right, Rob, we'll check back later on.

MARCIANO: OK. See you.

COLLINS: Thank you. Watch out for the sockets over there.

MARCIANO: See you.

COLLINS: President Obama has railed against what he calls fat cat bankers urging them to free up loans for the taxpayers who bailed them out. Now it seems at least one bank got the message.

Christine Romans joining us now live from New York to explain more on this.

Good morning to you, Christine. So, yes, Bank of America...

CHRISTINE ROMANS, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Good morning.

COLLINS: ... responding to President Obama's call to increase small business lending. What are they doing and how are they able to do it when others seem to be going the other direction?

ROMANS: Well, they're promising for next year -- and this is from Bank of America whose CEO Ken Lewis was at that meeting with the president yesterday.

COLLINS: Yes.

ROMANS: Five billion dollars for 2010. This year, keep in mind, it has loaned \$12 billion to small business just through -- just now through 2009. So they're promising another \$5 billion at least on top of that. But also, Heidi, I mean, to put it in perspective, their small business lending is down this year. And many critics are quick to point out look, this is a drop in the bucket compared with what the banks have pulled back on small business lending.

So another thing that I find interesting about this is the default rate for small business loans at Bank of America is about 16 percent. So they've been losing money this year on small business loans. So Ken Lewis is saying, we're going to try to ramp up the lending a little bit next year.

Their small business loans are down 5 percent this year. About \$2.2 billion. Their SBA back loans, look at these, these are the small business administration back loans. This year down 90 percent. This is the second largest small business lender. So it is a move that says, look, we're going to be spending more money. It comes a day after the president urged them to try to do something.

But, again, there's a lot of work that needs to try to fix the lending problems for small businesses. And Heidi, small businesses are critical to the recovery. And many say they create 60 percent of the new jobs in this country. So if you want job creation, you've got to figure out a way to get money to small businesses.

COLLINS: Yes. The creation versus the savings. You know it's funny I heard somebody said the other day -- actually it's not funny at all. You know, when you look at the situation right now with the bankers, you know, it's not very many people that have sympathy for them whatsoever across this country.

In the same breath they are burned with some of these loans that...

ROMANS: Right.

COLLINS: That they end up losing money on. So who do they end up lending to? They're being very, very cautious.

ROMANS: Of course.

COLLINS: And I wonder if they're actually taking these steps now because of the meeting with Obama yesterday?

ROMANS: You know, and that's a good question. I mean the optics, the public relation optics of it are, of course, perfect, right? The president calls them and says do this. And now I think we'll probably start hearing some more initiatives from banks about the things that they are trying to do.

Clearly we'll hear more about the banks trying to give their money back, the TARP money back. Citigroup and Wells Fargo now.

COLLINS: Yes.

ROMANS: But Bank of America CEO has said they think that things --conditions are going to get better next year. And yesterday a US Bancorp CEO also said we think that next year is going to be better. So I wouldn't say this is charity necessarily.

COLLINS: No.

ROMANS: I would say this is banks-see-things-are-going-to-get-better, and so they're going to be ramping up their lending because they'll be able to make money on it.

COLLINS: All right. Got it. Because that's what banks do. All right, Christine Romans.

ROMANS: Exactly. That's right.

COLLINS: We sure do appreciate it. Thank you.

And to this now, a heavily guarded neighborhood is rocked by an explosion. Did the blast target a former Afghan vice president? We're headed to Kabul for answers in a moment.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

COLLINS: Checking our top stories now.

Iran may be working towards testing a key final component of a nuclear bomb. That's according to confidential documents obtained by a British newspaper. The Times of London is reporting its sources dated the documents back to early 2007. A western diplomatic source tells CNN the document appears to be authentic. The United Nations nuclear watchdog is investigating the document.

And a big day for Boeing. Look at this now. The 787 Dreamliner is scheduled to take its first test flight today. The plane has been delayed by technical issues for more than two years. Boeing says it will be fuel efficient and cheaper to operate than planes of similar size.

And as we reported at the top of the hour, an explosion outside the home of Afghanistan's former vice president has left at least eight people dead.

CNN's Frederik Pleitgen is joining us now live from Kabul with the latest on those attacks.

Frederik, good morning to you.

FREDERIK PLEITGEN, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Hi there, Heidi. Yes. What we do know is that the suicide attacker came up to a checkpoint which is in front of the former vice president's house. He got to about 30 yards in front of that house and then detonated his bomb which of course killed him and seven other people.

In all, eight people were killed in the attack. We do know that 40 others apparently were wounded in that attack. It still isn't totally clear, though, Heidi, that this attack was really targeting the former vice president of this country.

Also right next to his compound is actually a hotel that is frequented by foreigners. And I can tell you I was at that blast site, and that hotel also bore a large brunt of

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that destruction. There was a huge scene of destruction down there. A lot of people came there to help.

It was really quite a devastating scene. And I can tell you when that bomb went off I was a couple of miles away from there at an anti- corruption conference. It was actually hosted by the Afghan president. And we could feel and hear that blast as it went off. So certainly a very, very large blast, eight people killed there --Heidi.

COLLINS: Yes. Sounds like it. Fred, also, a U.S. soldier was killed today? Tell us about that.

PLEITGEN: Yes, absolutely. We're still trying to get to the bottom of what happened there. So far what NATO is telling us is that one American soldier was killed in southern Afghanistan. They're not willing to say at this point how the soldier died or where exactly in southern Afghanistan this soldier was killed.

Of course we know that there is a lot of U.S. troops down there in multiple areas in southern Afghanistan. Another thing that we've heard just a couple of hours ago really is that also in a separate suicide attack two Afghan soldiers were killed and they were on a joint patrol with NATO forces.

So we're still trying to see if there is any connection between those two incidents. We will certainly keep you updated once we learn more -- Heidi.

COLLINS: OK. Very good. Fred, let us know. Appreciate that.

Not every small town in America is suffering from the recession. Hear how some small business owners in South Carolina have found a way to survive in our Road to Recovery series.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ANNOUNCER: Live in the CNN NEWSROOM, Heidi Collins.

COLLINS: The Dow riding a four-session winning streak after closing yesterday at a 14-month high.

For a look at what to expect today -- hopefully more of the same -- let's go to -- who's that? Susan Lisovicz.

(LAUGHTER)

She's back. How are you, Susan? And are you going to talk to us about Morocco? Do we get to hear about the trip?

SUSAN LISOVICZ, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Hey, the dollar is stronger there. And believe me, that was a key determination in figuring out where I was going...

COLLINS: Yes.

LISOVICZ: ... to go on vacation.

COLLINS: I bet.

LISOVICZ: Also the weather. The weather is good in December, also. Key factors really limit the choices, but I'm back from vacation, Heidi, and the bulls may be taking a vacation, unfortunately.

COLLINS: Yes.

LISOVICZ: That four-day win streak could come to an end today as the opening bell rings. Investigators are taking their cues from overseas where stocks are lower and the continuing worry -- worried about debts in Greece.

Here at home, a new report shows inflation at the wholesale level surged nearly two percent in November largely because of higher energy prices. That could get the attention of the Federal Reserve. Policy makers begin a two-day meeting today but they are expected to keep a key interest rate near its historic low of zero.

Wells Fargo meanwhile says it will return the \$25 billion loan it received from the government with interest, of course. The deal is contingent on a \$10 billion stocks sale. Wells is the last of the major banks to say it will repay the TARP bailout money.

We have a few strugglers on the earning's calendar. Best Buy's third quarter profit, which includes the weekend after Thanksgiving quadrupled from last year. But the retailer says its gross profit this quarter will be lower than expected. The company also says it expects to sell more lower-priced TVs and notebook computers, which is smaller and cheaper than desktops.

Shares of Best Buy right now are down nearly six percent. The Dow Industrials as well down .25 percent. The NASDAQ is down .50 percent. Boeing shares, though, are up 0.50 percent on the day that it's much anticipated and equally much delayed 787 Dreamliner is due to take a test drive. Finally.

COLLINS: Yes, saw that. We had a shot just a little while ago.

LISOVICZ: Oh, yes. Everyone is awaiting that.

COLLINS: Yes, they sure are. All right, Susan Lisovicz, we'll check back later on.

LISOVICZ: See you in a few.

COLLINS: Thanks.

So many people are facing tough questions about the economy. We want to offer some answers at least. Today's stop, Cheraw, South Carolina, where some small businesses have found a way to survive during this recession. That's the whole point of this trip.

And our chief business correspondent Ali Velshi joining us now to explain a little bit more.

Good morning to you, Ali. So how are people there coping with all of this? It sounds like they are being pretty creative.

ALI VELSHI, CNN SENIOR BUSINESS CORRESPONDENT: Yes, you know. And, Heidi, that's the purpose of this trip. We are actually calling it Recovery Road, because we are trying to go down the road and find people who are finding ways to help themselves out of the situation. And here in South Carolina.

Look, this area in the Carolinas has been suffering job loses for sometime because of the loss of the manufacturing base. But we ran into one family that runs a pharmacy around the corner. They've actually try to take advantage of the situation this year to try and equip themselves for the future.

Listen to their story.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: This is my mom and dad's office.

CHRIS BRIDGES, PHARMACIST/OWNER: This has been in existence since the 1890s. And when I came down here 21 years ago, we discontinued the name because nobody knew who Chris Bridges was.

VELSHI (on camera): Is that stuff, is that usually also covered by insurance?

LISA BRIDGES, NURSE: Yes, all of this is covered by insurers.

C. BRIDGES: This is a business that is very anxious to know what the administration and Congress are getting ready to do regarding health care.

VELSHI: You watched the whole situation changes, pharmacies were.

L. BRIDGES: Right.

VELSHI: They were all independents, and now so many people depend on chain pharmacies. What do people tell you the service difference is?

L. BRIDGES: Well, one of the things is free delivery, you know. And the fact that sometimes chains, they get so busy, they don't have that personal touch.

C. BRIDGES: We have expanded. We have a new pharmacy that we've open two months ago. We did have to acquire some financing. It was a little more difficult than I thought it would be to be honest, especially since the banking loans were supposed to be a little easier to obtain after the administration provided the stimulus money.

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How do we find our way?

L. BRIDGES: Through this recession. I guess just managing our money well, just watching just about every penny that we spend. We've had to make some changes in our staffing, but not major. The Lord has been good to us in that effect.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: This is one of our new offices. We're going to let one of our new employees from Texas stay here.

L. BRIDGES: We've gone through this whole year without making a lot of changes, like where people are laying people off, we haven't had to lay anybody off.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

VELSHI: So, Heidi, there is a lot of optimism on the part of this family. They are trying hard. There's nobody who was telling us, look, business is going gang busters and everything is fantastic in this recession. We're way out of the woods. But there is a sense that people understand that they're going to have to do things to fix their own situation. And this is one example of a small business and a family that's doing just that.

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