Iraqis and US soldiers respond to a car bomb attack on a US Army convoy yesterday in western Baghdad.

At least 116 dead in Iraq in 4 days

Some 25 killed in funeral blast
by Antonio Castaneda

BAGHDAD — A car bomb obliterated a tent packed with mourners at the funeral of a Kurdish official in northern Iraq yesterday, killing about 25 people and wounding more than 50 in the single deadliest attack since insurgents started bearing down on Iraq’s newly named government late last week.

The blast capped four violent days in which at least 116 people, including 11 Americans, were killed in a storm of bombings and ambushes attributed to Iraqi insurgents, believed largely populated by members of the displaced Sunni Arab minority.

The Sunnis were dominant for decades under Saddam Hussein, but were mainly shut out of the new government announced Thursday. Some view the escalating violence since then as a response to political developments that the United States and the Shi’ite-dominated power structure had hoped would tamp down the bloodshed.

Despite the surge in violence, Iraq’s national security adviser said yesterday that the Redlisting government was making progress against the insurgents.

“There is no shadow of doubt in my mind that by the end of the year, we would have achieved a lot,” Mowaffaq al-Rubaie said in an interview with CNN’s “Late Edition.” “Probably the back of the insurgency has already been broken.”

Iraqi militants also released a video purporting to show the insurgents’ latest foreign hostage, an American who had been detained since May.

Catholic Church withers in Europe

By Charles M. Sennott

DUBLIN — The cavernous, underblock construction of the Church of the Most Precious Blood, built in 1964 in a solidly working-class neighborhood here, reflects an era when Ireland’s priests could marshal one of the world’s most devout Roman Catholic flocks for Mass each Sunday and on other days of obligation.

A half-century later, the massive church was nearly empty during Mass on a recent Sunday — its cold, cement walls echoing with the thin coughs of elderly women, who seem to make up the majority of parishioners in many Irish parishes.

Here and across Europe, Catholicism is withering after decades of steady erosion from the forces of secularism, consumer culture, and the fallout from priest sex abuse scandals.

In some of Catholic Europe’s largest dioceses in Germany, Catholics in Europe since 1970

Change in percentage of population identifying themselves as Roman Catholic, 1970-2003

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NOTE: Church attendance statistics tend to be low, according to sociologists who have found attendance among those polled to say they are going to church even when they do not.

BLOOMBERG, WET SOME

TRINIDAD: Storm with strong winds, p.m. showers likely. High to 64. tomorrow: Partly sunny, low 62, High to 65. No storm. Highs to 60.

HOUS TIDAL: 6:30 A.M. 7:18 P.M.
FULL REPORT: Page 198

Sneigroves come first, Menino says

As settlement nears, family given priority

by Donovan Slack and Suzanne Smalley

BOSTON — With Boston poised to pay out one of the largest wrongful death settlements in its history for the police shooting of Emerson College student Victoria Sneigroves, Mayor Thomas Menino said yesterday that his top priority is the well-being of the Sneigroves family.

“Money will never bring back this young woman’s life,” said Menino, who said the settlement of the $65 million and $9 million wrongful death suits from two young men. “I’m praying for the family that they can come through this.”

Sneigroves, a 21-year-old junior from East Bridgewater, died last year after she was struck in the head by a police officer’s bullet shot by Boston police trying to quell a crowd of people celebrating the Red Sox American League championship victory Oct. 21. The attorney for the Sneigroves family declared yesterday that the settlement, which is expected to be paid as early as this week.

Mayor Thomas Menino spoke yesterday in Copley Square.

The Internal Affairs Division of the Boston Police Department, meanwhile, has been investigating the case. At least one officer for actions in connection with Sneigroves’ death, a police source confirmed.

One officer is under scrutiny for telling fellow officers about the shooting that he intended to try to secure a certification for his commander to use the FN300 pepper bullet gun that killed Sneigroves although the commander had earned one, according to two law enforcement officers familiar with the probe who spoke on condition they not be named. WIRE REPORT

Private-equity firms, Hub’s ‘new expertise’

Locals control billions worldwide

By Charles Stein

A relatively obscure part of the local investment community has been going gangbusters lately, buying brand-name companies for billions of dollars, raising billions more for other firms and even trying to buy a major sports league.

With a Boston-based private-equity firm’s purchase of Toys "R" Us in March, the city’s private-equity community can boast that it owns major stakes in some leading US companies. Other holdings include Domino’s Pizza, Burger King, record company Warner Music, publisher Houghton Mifflin, and two of America’s leading makers of mattresses, Simmons and Tempur-Pedic.

“This is the new Boston expertise,” said Howard Anderson, a local venture capitalist.

Private-equity firms raise money from endowments, pension funds, and wealthy individuals. They use that money, plus more they borrow to buy companies. The goal is to make the aquisition businesses more profitable. That happens by replacing managers, cutting costs, expanding in new markets, or buying more companies in the same field. Eventually the private-equity firms sell the businesses or take it public.
PIMP MY PLANE

Corporations and the super-rich spend millions to turn private jets into palaces with everything from gold-plated plumbing to antiques.

By Keith Reed

Forget first class.

If you think spending a few hundred dollars for a worn-out leather seat, bottled water, and a few extra inches of legroom is luxury, then you don’t know what luxury is.

Try sinking $40 million into a private aircraft, and then spending another $10 million to $30 million for plush carpets, rare woods, intricate entertainment systems, and palatial bedrooms to outfit it before it ever rolls down a runway.

Welcome to the real mile-high club, where only the wealthy can afford the cover charge.

Like a teenager shelling every penny to soup up his first set of wheels, corporations and the super-rich are sparing no expense to make their private jets every bit as luxurious as the homes, hotels, and offices they are accustomed to. And the demand has fueled the growth of an exclusive group of “completion centers” — airborne versions of the custom car and motorcycle shops that are featured in hit TV shows like “Pimp My Ride” — that are reinventing what it means to fly private.

“You’re really trying to turn it into your home,” said Flo Ciobotaru, president of Aircraft Industry Management Solutions International Inc., a Montreal company that specializes in custom private jet interiors. “If you’re going to sit in it for 12 hours or 14 hours, you want to be comfortable.”

Considering the airborne cattle cars in which most people travel, it’s no surprise that companies like these are enjoying a boom in business.

Elaborate plane interiors include (above, left to right) a service area, lounge, and bathroom.

In medical devices, a jobs boom is forecast

New products bring plans to boost hiring

By Ross Kerber

Boston-area medical device companies foresee a hiring boom in coming years, a strikingly optimistic outlook compared with other parts of the Massachusetts economy.

Of the 51 companies that responded to a recent survey by the Massachusetts Medical Device Industry Council, 90 percent, or 46 of them, reported they planned to increase the number of jobs in the state over the next three years. That could translate into 5,000 more jobs over the sector’s 21,000 jobs today, by one estimate.

That would be a significant upswing for an industry whose workforce has dipped in recent years. But the positive forecast shows how many device makers have reached the point where their research has paid off with new products, requiring more employees, say officials at the trade group and local executives.

One is Richard G. Ganz, chief executive of Omnisciences Medical Technologies Inc. of Wilmington. Ganz predicts a significant expansion of the company’s workforce of 50 people, starting later this year, though he said it’s too soon to give specifics. The venture-backed company expects to get final approval from the Food and Drug Administration to sell its acoustic devices for unblocking blood vessels.

“We’re moving from being an R-and-D company to being a real company with sales,” he said.

Another growing firm is Nova Biomedical Corp. in Waltham, a closely held maker of diabetes test kits and blood analysis products. It has 550 employees in Massachusetts, up from 450 in late 2003, and plans to add another 50 over the next two years, said John J. Wallace, chief operating officer.

So far, nearly all of its employees are in Waltham and Bedford, and Nova plans to keep most of the new jobs in Massachusetts, Wallace said. That’s because the company needs access to the skilled labor force it finds at local colleges. Nova also wants to stay close to the hospitals that buy its blood-diagnostic equipment.

“Our product ideas are driven by what the customer is looking for,” Wallace said.

New jobs in the life-sciences industries have been a longtime hope of economic-development officials. But so far, the increases haven’t happened. Medical-device
Super-rich make jets flying palaces

Today’s top-of-the-line jets feature multiple kitchens, bedrooms, lavatories, and office suites; they are filled with accoutrements that range from gold-plated plumbing to state-of-the-art digital entertainment systems and antique furniture.

Device makers expect jobs boom

Many types of new devices are coming to market, he said, citing all sorts of products from automated cardiac defibrillators to car- diac stents to ambulatory de- vices.

The survey results are due to be presented by the device council at an annual meeting, scheduled for tomorrow.

To conduct the survey, the de- vice council worked with the re- al-estate brokerage firm Nah Hum- man, sending inquiries to all 200 council members who either de- velop or manufacture medical de- vices; 51 of them responded.

Thomas James Snower, the coun- cil’s president, said he had expect- ed only half the respondents would forecast job growth. Other findings weren’t so surprising. A major- ity of respondents said significant increases in labor costs, shallower and healthcare costs all had a negative impact on their ability to expand in Massa- chusetts.

Fifty-nine per- cent rated the state’s policies to promote the medical device industry as “effective” or “very effective.”

The survey’s executives Michael DiGiano and James Boudrot said the results suggest the sector might add 2,000 jobs by 2008. They see device companies start- ing to fill many underutilized medical buildings, an example of which is the Globalink building in Andover that one house-owned conference firm, PictureID Corp.

"From our perspective, this sec- tor doesn’t get a lot of play, but we feel there’s a lot of good news for it," DiGiano said.

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U.S.TRUST

Dev: Investments

Life day to day. Thank generation to generation.
Together we can build a bigger picture.

Lori Sutherland