

Crew dies as copter downed

Deadline on U.S. hostages passes

By Abdul-Qader Saadi
and Lourdes Navarro
Associated Press

FALLUJAH, IRAQ — A fragile ceasefire continued to hold between Sunni insurgents and U.S. Marines on Sunday in the war-torn city of Fallujah. Near Baghdad, gunmen shot down a U.S. attack helicopter, killing two crew members.

Also, the military suggested Sunday that it is open to a negotiated solution in its showdown with a radical cleric in the south.

The Fallujah violence spilled over to the nearby western entrance of Baghdad, where gunmen shot down an AH-64 Apache helicopter. As a team moved in to secure the bodies of the two dead crewmen, a large force of tanks and troops pushed down the highway outside the Iraqi capital, aiming to crush insurgents.

The captors of Thomas Hamill, a civilian who works for a U.S. contractor in Iraq, threatened to kill him unless Marines end their assault on Fallujah, west of Baghdad, by 6 a.m. Sunday. The deadline passed with no word on Hamill's fate.



U.S. civilian hostage Thomas Hamill faced imminent death from captors.

IRAQ continues on A4:
— Gunmen run amok west of Baghdad.
— Iraqi leaders talking with radical cleric.



Pvt. Michelle Witmer, 20

Death in Iraq tears at Wisconsin family

Pvt. Michelle Witmer, one of three New Berlin, Wis., sisters serving in Iraq, was killed Friday. The family has asked that her sisters not be required to return to Iraq after her funeral. **A4.**



Stormi Greener/Star Tribune

DeLisa Valentine, 16, lives in north Minneapolis and attends Wayzata High School. She says she likes everything about her school except the time she has to wake up: She's up before 5 a.m. to catch a 6:10 bus. The Minneapolis School District's loss of thousands of students like Valentine has led to funding shortages, but the district also has many well-trained teachers and small class sizes that could help it compete.

Two faces of urban schools

Minneapolis public schools are hurting, but their strengths could help them survive.

By Steve Brandt
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Talk to Sharon Henry-Blythe and you can see the problem for Minneapolis public schools. She is chairwoman of the Minneapolis school board, and yet she's not sure she can keep her fifth-grade son in the system.

"Every year I struggle with the question of whether to leave him in the district or not," Henry-Blythe said.

She's satisfied with her son's magnet school — "So far it's been great" — but she's also seen the district's dismal record with older black male students. Only 38 per-

Given the choice

Second of two parts

cent of them passed the eighth-grade state basic-skills test for reading last year.

"My odds should not get worse as he gets older," she said.

In a school system already struggling with tighter money and widening competition from school choice, the exodus of black families sets off alarms. Most white families

already send their kids elsewhere. If other races bail out, too, the defections could send the state's largest school district into a vicious circle: Lower enrollment. Less money. Budget cuts. More parents opting their kids out. Less money. More cuts. Lower credit ratings.

With another 3,000 students projected to leave by this fall, some public officials are worrying out loud that Minneapolis schools might be in a death spiral, headed the way of large urban districts crushed by low incomes, low performance, low expectations.

But a closer look reveals a split-screen image. Many Minneapolis

schools boast well-trained teachers, small class sizes and students who test above their peers statewide. Others struggle with underachieving kids, inexperienced teachers and an increasingly poor population.

Minneapolis is, in effect, two school districts. To build confidence among the parents defecting from one without losing their loyal supporters in the other will require school leaders to make some tough decisions — and soon.

"We're at a serious juncture with public education in Minneapolis," said interim Superintendent David Jennings.

INSIDE: Are the district's success stories enough to counteract the failures and the funding drain? **A6-7**

Novel packaging and whimsical marketing help a Ham Lake man find a niche in the cricket trade.

Selling a tastier cricket

By Dan Wascoe
Star Tribune Staff Writer

For 57 years, Gordon Vadis' family business has tried to get the bugs out.

Maggots and leeches and crayfish, plus nightcrawlers and assorted mealworms. In other words, bait.

Vadis and his wife, Sandy, have raised such critters at their 53-acre farm on Tippecanoe Street in Ham Lake. They trapped and sold others at their own bait store. But economically speaking, the worm turned 14 years ago. That's when Vadis pulled a bait-and-switch to become, by most accounts, Minnesota's only cricket farmer.

Now his enterprise, the Bug Co., is peddling prepackaged



Tom Sweeney/Star Tribune

The Bug Co. owner Gordon Vadis raises and sells crickets by the thousand to owners of hungry snakes, frogs and lizards.

cricket dispensers that he figures could be his legacy and help revenues leap and bound to an estimated \$2 million this year.

His clients are mostly pet shops, distributors and zoos, but the basic users are people who feed snakes, frogs and lizards. Reptiles, it seems, love crickets. And the idea that reptiles make good pets has been catching on for at least 20 years.

BUGS continues on A10

BUG CO. CRICKET TIP: "Please understand crickets may go dormant when exposed to colder temperatures. To begin cricket CPR, place your mouth over ... just kidding."

Can teams afford to pay for their own stadiums?

Experts say public funding is fading

By Jay Weiner
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Minnesota's stadium battle is falling behind the national curve.

Massive public subsidies to pro sports teams for new facilities — commonly as high as 75 or even 100 percent during the halcyon construction days of the 1990s — could become a thing of the past, say national experts.

"If there's a city that allows itself to end up paying 50 or 75 percent of a stadium with public money, then they're

not being aware of recent events," said St. Louis-based sports economist Patrick Rishie.

As the state's ballpark debate moves into the home stretch of the 2004 Legislative session, a new study claims that Major League Baseball teams can increase revenues enough in new stadiums to pay off the cost of their buildings within 12 years — and without a dollar of public aid.

STUDY continues on A8: — Teams say study's claims don't fit the local reality.

WHAT'S NEXT:

A hearing Wednesday on stadium proposals before the Senate's State and Local Government Operations Committee, chaired by Sen. Linda Higgins, DFL-Minneapolis, 12:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 15.

NEWS INSIDE

A major relief



Stan Honda/Agence France Presse

Phil Mickelson received the green jacket from 2003 champ Mike Weir after winning the Masters Golf Tournament — his first major-tournament triumph in a 12-year career. He hit a birdie putt on the 18th to clinch it. Turn to Sports, C1.

THE FINAL SCORES Phil Mickelson: 279, 9-under par
Ernie Els: 280, 8-under par



Monday,
April 12, 2004
Copyright 2004
Star Tribune
Volume XXIII/No. 8
6 sections