

## Bush refuses to abandon military tribunals

BBC NEWS ONLINE

US President George Bush has refused to rule out military tribunals for inmates at Guantanamo Bay detention centre.

His administration was dealt a blow on Thursday when the Supreme Court ruled it had overstepped its authority in setting up the tribunals.

But Republican senators immediately began planning how to win congressional approval for new tribunals.

The ruling came in response to a case brought by Osama Bin Laden's ex-driver, Salim Ahmed Hamdan.

He is one of 10 Guantanamo inmates facing a military tribunal, but demanding to be tried by a civilian tribunal or court martial, where proceedings would be more open and defendants would have greater access to the evidence

against them.

His lawyer said he was "awestruck" at the court's ruling.

The Cuba-based facility currently holds about 460 inmates, mostly without charge, whom the US suspects of links to al-Qaeda or the Taliban.

In its ruling, the court said military tribunals contravened both the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners, and the US code of military justice.

It also ruled that the tribunals were not expressly authorised by any congressional act, and there was no "sweeping mandate for the president to invoke military commissions whenever he deems them necessary".

But the ruling does not demand the release of prisoners held at Guantanamo, and it does hold out the possibility of coming up with another way of trying those held.

President Bush told reporters he promised to take the findings of the court "very seriously". But he signalled he might seek congressional approval to resurrect the tribunals.

"To the extent that there is latitude to work with the Congress to determine whether or not the military tribunals will be an avenue in which to give people their day in court, we will do so," he said.

"The American people need to know that this ruling, as I understand it, won't cause killers to be put out on the street."

Within minutes of the court ruling, a small group of Republican senators were working the phones trying to sort out the mess, reports the BBC's Justin Webb in Washington.

A former military lawyer who is leading the efforts to salvage the tribunal system, Senator Lindsey Graham, predicted that the Senate

would begin work on ideas for new tribunals within weeks and vote on the plan in September.

Meanwhile, Sen Arlen Specter, a moderate Republican who chairs the powerful judiciary committee, introduced an "Unprivileged Combatant Act" which would, he said, balance "the need for national security with the need to afford detainees with sufficient due process".

White House spokesman Tony Snow underlined the administration's resistance to abandoning the special courts.

"Nobody gets a 'get out of jail free' card," he said.

Hamdan had success in his first legal outing, in the US District Court in Washington, which ruled that he could not face a military trial unless he had previously been found not to be a prisoner of war under the Geneva Convention.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi boy collects slippers of wounded and dead civilians at the site where a suicide bomber struck a memorial service for a slain soldier in the northern city of Kirkuk yesterday. Four people were killed and 23 wounded in the attack that took place Thursday night. Meanwhile, a Sunni Arab leader said insurgents have rejected the Iraqi prime minister's reconciliation plan, as Al-Qaeda supreme Osama bin Laden vowed that the jihad would press on until victory.

*'I want you, I need you, I love you'*

Koizumi to US

AFP, Washington

At the close of his visit to the White House, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi summed up Japan's policy toward the United States with the words of an Elvis Presley song.

"I would like to propose a toast to the further enhancement of Japan-U.S. relations. In the words of Elvis, 'I want you, I need you, I love you,'" Koizumi said lifting his glass during a White House state dinner late Thursday.

The prime minister, a life-long fan of the late King of Rock 'n' Roll and a personal friend of US President George W. Bush, said that was the first English song he learned by heart when he was young.

After a summit focused on North Korea, Iran and Iraq, and trade, and energy cooperation, Bush and Koizumi relaxed for an evening of food and entertainment ahead of their visit Friday to Graceland, Elvis' home and resting place in Memphis, Tennessee.

## Malaysia's ruling party trying to fix leaders' row

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's ruling party was trying to mend the sour ties between Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his unhappy predecessor Mahathir Mohamad, a senior minister said Friday.

Information Minister Zainuddin Maidin said the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which is led by Abdullah, was working to bring the two together to patch up their differences.

Zainuddin said he had enlisted the assistance of an individual who is "dear" to both Abdullah and Mahathir to put relations back on track.

"I've contacted the individual," he was quoted as saying by Bernama news agency, without elaboration.

A senior cabinet minister Nazri Aziz on Wednesday accused Mahathir of trying to bring down the government and destroy UMNO, which has headed the ruling coalition for half a century.

Mahathir still commands influence in UMNO, but in a sign of his fading importance, political figures have lined up to condemn his campaign against the government which included comments that it lacked "guts".

## Dutch govt collapses

REUTERS, Amsterdam

The collapse of the Dutch center-right government over immigration policy will lead to an opposition Labour victory in early elections likely to be held in a few months, an opinion poll showed on Friday.

Dutch prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende is set to hand in his government's resignation to Queen Beatrix on Friday, after a small party in his ruling coalition quit over the handling of the citizenship of a Somali-born Dutch lawmaker.

Before new elections expected as early as September or October, a minority government based on the two remaining parties in Balkenende's coalition was expected to rule, with the help of rightwing parties.

But Labour is set to grab 44 of the 150 parliamentary seats in the expected autumn elections, according to opinion polls.

This would be well ahead of either party in Balkenende's remaining coalition, the VVD and CDA, which would win up to 33 seats and 38 seats respectively, according to opinion polls if elections were held now.



PHOTO: AFP

Rescue workers search for survivors from a bus which plunged into the "Khud" near Ghanahatti, 15 kms from Shimla yesterday.

## 17 dead, 18 hurt as bus falls into gorge in India

AFP, Shimla

At least 17 people died and 18 were injured when a bus plunged into a gorge in India's Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh, police said Friday.

The injured were taken to hospital in Shimla, the state capital, police chief Anand Pratap Singh said.

It was not immediately known how many people were on the bus when it fell into the 150-foot gorge just outside Shimla as the driver was trying to overtake another vehicle on a sharp mountain bend.

Road accidents are common in India, many caused by rash driving and old vehicles.

## Manmohan promises help for farmers

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh promised Friday his government will do all it can to help farmers in India's main cotton belt where crippling debts and falling prices have pushed many to suicide.

"I want to assure you that both the Maharashtra government and the federal government will jointly find a solution to all problems with all sincerity," Singh told farmers in the badly-hit Vidarbha region of western Maharashtra state.

"I am aware of your problems. I can understand the pain and anguish you have gone through."

Singh made the comments at the start of a two-day visit to Vidarbha, during which he is slated to visit families of farmers who have ended their lives and who are still struggling to pay off debts.

The premier was expected some time during the tour to announce a relief package of 40 billion rupees (865 million dollars) aimed at waiving off loans, improving irrigation and encouraging diversified farming, newspaper reports said.

Alluding to the package but without giving details, the premier told farmers it would address several problems associated with the agricultural crisis.

"I heard that irrigation means are not available. We will announce a package to improve the situation," he told the farmers.

"I also heard that there should be alternative livelihoods. The package will also take care of that too."

He said that he was confident that the situation in the region would improve, but it would take time.

"I am confident that Vidarbha will improve and the phase you are

going through now, you will not have to go through it again."

Singh told farmers that the administration would also look at more immediate problems such as the lack of health facilities.

Agriculture minister Sharad Pawar, who is accompanying the prime minister, acknowledged the situation was serious.

"India is going through a severe agrarian crisis and yes, even if there is single suicide death, it disturbs everybody," Pawar told private CNN-IBN network ahead of the visit.

The minister said the government will also provide seeds at a subsidised rate.

Federal government officials say more than 8,900 farmers have committed suicide since 2001 in four states hardest hit by the ongoing agricultural crisis, including 980 in Maharashtra alone.

## Myanmar condemns US for raising pressure at UN

AFP, Yangon

Military-run Myanmar on Friday condemned the United States for using the United Nations to increase international pressure against the nation, one of the world's most isolated and poorest countries.

The junta accused Washington, which it refers to as "a certain Western power", of also using "expatriates and fugitives" to oust the ruling military government, the official New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

"At the same time, it is using the UN Security Council and the International Labor Organization as a means to attack the ruling government with slanders backed by the perpetration falsely portraying Myanmar's objective conditions," it said.

## Blair loses popular lead for first time

REUTERS, London

A poll in Britain revealed on Friday that British Prime Minister Tony Blair is less popular than his main rival for the first time in 12 years.

Blair also suffered more bad news on the electoral front, with results from by-elections for two vacant parliamentary seats yielding a poor showing for his Labour Party.

Pollsters YouGov, in a survey commissioned by the Daily Telegraph newspaper, found 30 percent of Britons thought new Conservative Party leader David Cameron would make the best prime minister, against 28 percent who preferred Blair.

The Telegraph said it was the first time any of five successive Conservative leaders had been preferred to Blair since Blair took the helm of the Labour party in 1994 as

opposition leader under Conservative Prime Minister John Major.

In the Welsh district of Blaenau Gwent, independent Dai Davies defeated a Labour candidate for parliament, thwarting Labour's hopes of winning back one of its heartland seats, which Blair's party lost at the last election last year.

The area had been safely held by Labour for years until Labour stalwart Peter Law quit the party and ran as an independent, refusing to step aside when Labour leaders said the party's candidate must be a woman.

After Law died of cancer, Labour hoped to win the seat back, and dispatched high profile cabinet members to campaign there, to no avail.



PHOTO: AFP

A woman looks at portraits of French actress Isabelle Huppert during a press preview of a photo exhibition "Woman of Many Faces" at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography yesterday. Over 100 photographic and video portraits by legendary artists, including Henri Cartier-Bresson, Richard Avedon, Helmut Newton, will be held a montly exhibition until August 6.

## Indonesians rampage over compensation

AFP, Jakarta

Dozens of residents from a quake-ravaged village in central Java vandalised a government office Friday over fears they would not receive adequate government compensation, local media reported.

Carrying signs saying: "We are victims of the quake" and "We demand compensation," the villagers from Sleman, a district devastated by a massive earthquake in May, attacked the office, Metro TV said.

Footage showed enraged residents throwing chairs and upending tables as they yelled at government officials in the grounds of the Sleman district head's office.

A village head Heru Yuli Susanto said demonstrators were angry about reports that only villagers whose houses had been seriously

damaged or totally destroyed would receive compensation, state-run Antara news agency reported.

"People feel this is not fair," he said.

Another demonstrator, Feri, said residents in his village of Tegallirto were angered by reports that just over half would receive government aid and so they had agreed to turn it down.

"In the Tegallirto area there are 1,200 people but the compensation will only be given to around 700 people. So we won't accept this aid until there is a decision that all the victims can receive compensation," he reportedly said.

Wahyu, a Sleman official, told AFP the protestors were meeting with the vice mayor Friday afternoon to have their "misunderstanding" of the aid allocations explained.