INTERNATIONAL

Bush faces dissent at home

Iraq dismisses 'lame' US charges of illegal weapons

REUTERS, Crawford, Texas

President Bush on Friday defended his Iraq policy from criticism within his own Republican Party, saying he would consult with others but make decisions based on the "latest intelligence.

Bush has made ousting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein one of his top priorities, but dissent from within his own political ranks has persisted. The national security adviser during Bush's father's presidency said on Thursday an attack on the oil-producing nation could alienate U.S. allies. Bush characterised that dissent as a healthy debate, but left no doubt about his opinion.

"I listened carefully to what they have to say," Bush said. "There should be no doubt in anybody's mind that this man (Saddam) is thumbing his nose at the world, that he has gassed his own people, that he is trouble in

his neighbourhood, that he desires weapons of mass destruction." Bush, who calls Iraq part of an "axis of evil," has long maintained an attack on Saddam is justified because he is trying to build an arsenal of

nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. During decades in power, Saddam has used chemical weapons to quell rebellion from ethnic Kurds in the mountainous northern region of

"I will use all the latest intelligence to make informed decisions about how best to keep the world at peace, how best to defend freedom for the long run," said Bush, who planned to meet at his Crawford, Texas ranch over the weekend with his National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice. Next Wednesday, he will meet with Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. "We'll continue to consult," he said. "Listen, it's a healthy debate for

people to express their opinion . But America needs to know, I'll be making up my mind based upon the latest intelligence, and how best to protect our own country plus our

friends and allies," Bush added.

Former U.S. national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, a key member

of the previous Bush administration who helped build a coalition for the Gulf War against Iraq, reiterated his concerns in a Thursday Wall Street

"An attack on Iraq at this time would seriously jeopardise, if not destroy, the global counter-terrorist campaign we have undertaken. Scowcroft wrote

"There is a virtual consensus in the world against an attack on Iraq at this time. So long as that sentiment persists, it would require the U.S. to pursue a virtual go-it-alone strategy against Iraq, making any military operations correspondingly more difficult and expensive," he continued.

Other key Republicans have also voiced concern, warning that Bush has failed to make a strong case for an attack on Iraq and that a war could undermine the U.S. fight against global terrorism and destabilise the

U.S. House of Representatives Majority Leader Dick Armey, a Texas Republican, has said the United States has no business attacking the oil exporter without sufficient provocation.

AFP adds: US allegations that Iraq has developed prohibited weapons are nothing but "lame" and "lies", which no longer get a hearing, the

government daily said Saturday. "The US lies about Iraq are lame because they are not based on any reasonable logic," Al-Jumhuriya said.

"No one wants to hear them and the numbers supporting them have fallen even in the United States and Britain," the newspaper added.

The daily said Irag's invitations to the chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix and members of the US Congress to visit Baghdad for disarmament talks "have confirmed the correctness of Iraq's position.

Another official newspaper, Al-Iraq, said: "Everything that is said today in the world about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction is unjust fabrication by the evil American administration which is trying to build a new coalition to give legitimacy to its threats against Iraq

Benazir vows to run for Oct polls

Pakistan's self-exiled ex-premier Benazir Bhutto said Saturday she remains determined to contest elections in October, despite being disqualified from running in the polls by President Pervez

The two-time former prime minister said if she remained barred from contesting the October 10 poll, the elections would lack credibility.

"I am sure people will question the credibility of an electoral process where their chosen representative is excluded." she told AFP.

"I hope that I can participate and look towards the people ... of Pakistan to support the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians

"I hope to run for premier myself as I am still qualified to contest and I will file my nomination papers by August 24," she said referring a deadline set by Pakistan's Electoral Commission deadline.

Benazir told AFP in an interview from London earlier this month that she would return to Pakistan in late August or early September to

pursue her bid for re-election. despite threats she would be arrested on her arrival

But she still has to win a legal battle which was continuing in a Karachi court Saturday to qualify for participation in the October 10

She is contesting two laws which have resulted in her disqualification from the elections, the first since President Pervez Musharraf seized power in a bloodless military coup in October 1999.

Her lawyers are challenging one law introduced last year which requires defendants to be present in person at trials, and another introduced this month which bans "absconders" from running for

Under the 2001 law, Benazir was convicted twice this year of absconding after she failed to return to Pakistan to appear corruption trials in May and July.

Benazir, who was dismissed on corruption charges in 1990 and 1996, maintains that the laws are ' Benazir-specific" and has accused Musharraf of acting to prevent her returning to politics.



Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri (R), gestures as she stands next to her husband Taufik Kiemas (L), at the end of a prayer service during the ceremony to mark the 57th anniversary of the country's independence at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta on Saturday.

Poland and Hungary

The European Commission said

However, Prodi said the floods

"It will not be taken as a pretext to

circumvent the stability pact" which

requires the 12 euro nations to keep

public deficit below three percent of

gross domestic product, Prodi told a

not be discussed at Sunday's sum-

floods in terms of infrastructure

He said the stability pact would

But the financial cost of the

news conference in Prague.

Thursday it had managed to ear-

mark some funds to provide disaster

could not be used by euro-zone

members as an excuse to abandon

their commitments to curb public



Middle East even further.

A man paddles with his makeshift raft through the flooded streets in the centre of Meissen, Saxony in Germany on Friday while flood evacuees from the region around Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt, find shelter in a sport hall in the nearby city of Wolfen. The river Elbe has reached a new all-time record height of nine meters above average and continues rising. The banks of the Elbe have overflowed, sending water gushing into the historic heart of the baroque city, known to Germans as the Florence on the Elbe for its sumptuous architecture and cultural treasures.

European flood woes mount

AFP, Dresden

The death toll rose to 15 in Germany as the Elbe swelled Saturday to another record in the historic city of Dresden, raising questions on how to fix the damage done by the worst floods to hit central Europe in mem-

The latest victim of the floods was a 56-year-old man who drowned while looking for belongings in his cellar in Dresden, the interior ministry in the eastern state of Saxony said Friday. He was the 11th flood casualty in Saxony since the beginning of the crisis last

Large areas of the baroque east German city, including the centre where many of its cultural treasures are housed, were under water.

The level of Germany's second river stood at 9.33 metres (nearly 30 feet 9 inches) in Dresden early Saturday, pulverising the previous record of 8.77 metres set more than 150 years ago, in 1845.

The regional geological institute said the Elbe was set to hit 9.6 metres later Saturday with some fearing it might go as high as 10

Some 100,000 people have

been evacuated, including 30,000 from Dresden and its immediate area, while thousands more were on standby to leave as the Elbe rushes

eased in neighbouring Austria and the Czech Republic, giving shattered communities the chance to assess the extent of the damage to homes, livelihoods and landmarks.

In welcome contrast, the crisis

As they returned, their leaders increasingly turned to the question of how to pay for the devastation. At least 90 people have died

since the weekend as the worst floods in more than a century engulfed central Europe, wreaking a trail of disaster from the Black Sea to the Baltic. With Germany suffering the

worst, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder invited his central European colleagues and EU Commission President Romano Prodi to talks Sunday in Berlin. They will look at the scale of the

damage, what measures to take and how to finance them, German government sources told AFP. As well as Prodi, the leaders of

They may be joined by those of

Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have agreed to come.

repairs is enormous, quite apart from the human and social cost. Schroeder, whose own government has pledged 400 million euros (394 million dollars) in aid, says the

cost in Germany alone will run into

In Austria, bankers estimate the bill at some two billion euros. Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel has pledged one billion in aid, but he has warned that the floods would hit efforts to balance the budget

76 million may perish due | Zimbabwe detains more | Congress for president's to water-borne diseases

More than 76 million people could perish by 2020 due to waterrelated diseases, a California based think-tank has warned.

Calling for urgent action to provide safe drinking water, independent Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment and Security said on Friday that more people would die of water-related diseases globally than AIDS.

Children among the poor countries would be the worst affected, it said, and called for

stress on traditional water sources rather than centralised systems that are difficult to maintain.

ranks as one of the greatest development failures of the 20th century," according to the report "Dirty Water: Estimated Deaths from Water-Related Diseases" prepared by the Institute. Current development efforts,

which focus on large, centralised water systems, are part of the problem, it added.

"Far too much money has been spent on centralized, large- scale water systems that cannot be built

or maintained with local expertise or resources, while traditional and community -scale systems have "This largely hidden tragedy been inadequately funded and supported," said Peter Gleick, director Pacific Institute.

> It is time to change direction toward a 'soft path' that relies on smaller-scale systems designed, built, and operated by local groups, he said.

Observing that outside assistance in terms of information, funding, and expertise was necessary, Gleick said that this assistance must be provided in new

white farmers

Authorities in Zimbabwe detained 54 white farmers for ignoring notices to guit their land as officials stepped up a crackdown after President Robert Mugabe warned that his controversial land reform programme was irreversible, a farming group said on Saturday.

The farmers' lobby, Justice for Agriculture (JAG), said the new wave of arrests, initially concentrated in the southern provinces of Matabeleland, had now spread to

most regions of the country. JAG spokesman Jennie Williams said 54 had so far been detained. 20 others warned and cautioned to appear in court next week, and seven remanded by the courts to stand trial next month.

Police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena said police could not yet comment on the latest arrests or say how many farmers were behind bars pending charges on new legislation which carries a maximum penalty of two years in jail and a fine.

Williams cited the example of Tony Smith, a farmer who was allegedly attacked early Saturday by police and pro-government militants and veterans of the 1970s war against white rule.

"Very early this morning, police in the company of war veterans approached a farm in Mhangura, 100 km northwest of Harare and assaulted an employee there, compelling him to take them to the home of Tony Smith, who no longer lives on his farm." Williams said.

rule in Gujarat

India's main opposition Congress Party on Saturday demanded the imposition of federal rule in the riothit state of Gujarat after the election commission said free and fair elections were not possible there at the moment.

"We will go to the people of Gujarat and, if need be, to the president to demand imposition of president's rule in the state." Shankersinh Vaghela, leader of the Congress Party in Gujarat, told AFP.

He said federal rule should be imposed immediately as the state government had lost any credibility

for continuing after bloody sectarian riots earlier this year which killed more than 1,000 people, mainly Muslims "After the stinging slap by the

Election Commission to the state government, the ruling BJP party has lost all moral authority for continuing to rule," Vaghela added. President's rule is imposed

infrequently and can only be ordered by the central government, usually when a state has a constitutional or political crisis.

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi last month dissolved the state assembly and called for elections by the first week of October

Political experts said such early elections were bound to favour the ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party in Gujarat due to a polarisation between majority Hindus and minority Muslims in the state after the communal riots, which were the

On Friday India's Election Commission said the law and order situation was still far from conducive for free elections in Gujarat, where the rioting also left tens of thousands of people homeless or job-

worst in India for ten years.

"The wounds of the communal divide following the riots have not yet healed," it said.

Pope's trip down memory lane



Pope John Paul II waves as he arrives at the Krakow-Balice International airport on Friday. The Pope is in Poland, his homeland for a four-day visit, the ninth during his pontificate, centering on Krakow, where he was ordained and lived for 40 years

AFP, Krakow

Pope John Paul II begins the second day of his four-day visit to his homeland Poland on Saturday with the consecration of a shrine to Poland's first woman saint who said she had revelations from Jesus on divine

"Thanks to the humble efforts of an unusual witness -- Saint Sister Faustina -- the Gospel message of God's merciful love rings out," the pope told an enthusiastic crowd of 15,000 people waving Vatican and Polish flags that had gathered to meet him at the airport upon his arrival Friday

In his remarks the pope gave his fellow Poles a message of hope the country would emerge from its current economic difficulties to enter a new era of prosperity, but he said the motto of his eighth papal visit to his homeland was "God, rich in Mercy." Sister Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938) was canonized by John Paul II on April 30, 2000.

A member of the order of the Sisters of our Lady of Mercy whose convent is located in the Krakow neighborhood of Lagiewniki, she had Jesus appear to her in visions in which he urged her to spread the word about the merciful love of God.

Her visions were initially greeted with scepticism by many of her contemporaries, but her message about divine mercy began to be spread during the difficult years of

Contour drowns in space

REUTERS, Washington

NASA's comet-hunting Contour spacecraft may have broken apart as it was supposed to be heading deeper into space after orbiting Earth, scientists said late on Friday.

Images published by the University of Arizona show what look like two pieces of the spacecraft, which fell silent early on Thursday just as it was supposed to escape Earth orbit.

Controllers of the \$158 million spacecraft, built to probe the hearts of two comets for possible secrets of the early solar system, said they were disappointed but still had hope the spacecraft had survived. The Contour team at the Applied

Physics Laboratory of Johns Hopkins University outside Washington had expected to hear from Contour early on Thursday after its solid-propellant rocket motor boosted it out of the Earth's orbit. They never did, and have been listening for it ever since. They searched for the craft

along the path it should have taken into orbit around the sun on its journey to Comet Encke in 2003 and Comet Schwassmann-Wachmann 3 in 2006

"That image was pretty discouraging," Applied Physics Laboratory spokesman Mike Buckley said in a telephone interview.

The team will look over weekend with some radar and radio and telescope images and determine what it might be. It was located pretty close to where Contour might be. So we are definitely not encouraged by that news."

"There are two parallel trails near one of the predicted positions of the Contour spacecraft," the University of Arizona said in a statement posted on its Web site at http:/spacewatch.lpl.arizona.edu/c ontour.html.

University of Arizona experts helped in the search for Contour after it disappeared on Thursday.

The statement said the spacecraft was about 286,000 miles away from Earth at the time of its observation -- a little beyond the Moon's average distance from the planet. The statement added that the two observed objects probably separated at the end of a Contour solid rocket motor burn.

Buckley said there would be

another chance to hear from Elvis and his wife divorced in Contour on Monday if the craft is still intact.

Elvis 'live,' but on video screen

Twenty-five years to the day he died, Élvis Presley gave one more "live" concert Friday, lining up from the grave for a sold-out show with his old backing group the Sweet

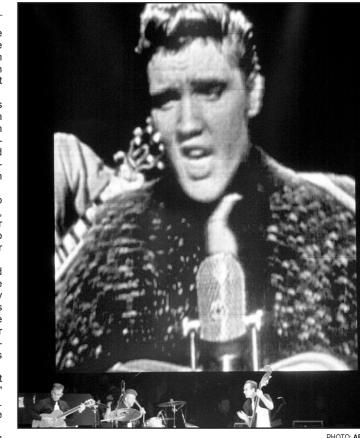
Inspirations. More than 12,000 Elvis fans packed the Pyramid arena in Memphis for the performance, in which 30 of Presley's original touring singers and musicians turned back the clock karaoke-style -performing with a giant video screen showing Elvis concert footage.

Among the performers was pop diva Whitney Houston's mother, Cissy Houston, a founding member of the Sweet Inspirations who provided the backing vocals for Elvis concerts in the 1970s. Tickets for the concert were sold

out months ago, and fans were rewarded with appearances by Presley's ex-wife, Priscilla, and his daughter Lisa Marie, who stole some of the tabloid thunder from her late father this month with her marriage to Hollywood star Nicholas Cage.
"This is so overwhelming. It just

seems like yesterday that he died,' Priscilla told the sell-out crowd. "Thank you for helping Elvis make history once again.

1973, four years before he died



The late, great Elvis Presley sings via projection screen at the Elvis Presley 25th Anniversary Concert on Friday at the Pyramid in Memphis, Tennessee.