

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.

Benazir vows to run for Oct polls

AFP, Karachi

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 Musharraf.

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.



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.



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.

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 memory.

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.

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.

Poland and Hungary. The European Commission said Thursday it had managed to earmark some funds to provide disaster relief.

However, Prodi said the floods could not be used by euro-zone members as an excuse to abandon their commitments to curb public deficits.
"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 news conference in Prague.

He said the stability pact would not be discussed at Sunday's summit. But the financial cost of the floods in terms of infrastructure 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 billions.
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 to water-borne diseases

PTI, New York

More than 76 million people could perish by 2020 due to water-related 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.
"This largely hidden tragedy 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 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 and different ways.

Zimbabwe detains more white farmers

AFP, Harare

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.

Authorities in Zimbabwe detained 54 white farmers for ignoring notices to quit 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.

Congress for president's rule in Gujarat

AFP, New Delhi

India's main opposition Congress Party on Saturday demanded the imposition of federal rule in the riot-hit 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 worst in India for ten years.
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 jobless.
"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 mercy.
"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 World War II.

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 week-end 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.jpl.arizona.edu/c/contour.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 Contour on Monday if the craft is still intact.

Elvis 'live,' but on video screen

AFP, Memphis

Twenty-five years to the day he died, Elvis 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."
Elvis and his wife divorced in 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.