

Cheney, Edwards pull no punches in debate

REUTERS, Cleveland

Vice President Dick Cheney and Democratic Sen. John Edwards battled fiercely over the war in Iraq in a debate that featured repeated personal attacks on the other side's records and judgment.

The running mates for President Bush and his Democratic rival Sen. John Kerry picked up where their bosses left off last week – arguing on Tuesday over Iraq and US security -- with Edwards accusing Cheney of "not being straight" on Iraq and Cheney countering the Democrats were not qualified to lead.

"What we did in Iraq was exactly the right thing to do," Cheney said, arguing Iraq was a crucial front in a broader war on terror. "If I had it to recommend all over again, I would recommend exactly the same course of action."



French police guard the British-registered Pacific Pintail, carrying 140 kilograms of plutonium from weapons arsenals in the United States, in the French port of Cherbourg yesterday. Local police said that activists of the anti-nuclear group Greenpeace did not make efforts to stop the ship.

PHOTO: AFP

US-Iraqi forces forge ahead with crackdown

One killed, 10 wounded in Basra bomb blast

AFP, Baghdad

US and Iraqi forces swept through rebel bastions south of Baghdad and pounded positions held by Iraq's most wanted, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, in Fallujah Wednesday, pressing on with a promised anti-insurgency crackdown as Iraq again took centre stage in the US presidential race.

And on the second day of a surprise visit, British Foreign Minister Jack Straw countered widespread scepticism that the war-torn country's tough-talking prime minister Iyad Allawi could stabilise Iraq in time for elections set for January.

Bush plans to follow up the debate on Wednesday with a speech in the swing state of Pennsylvania on the war on terror, on which polls show voters trust him more than Kerry.

launched its largest operation to date in the Babil province south of Baghdad, in a bid to dismantle insurgent cells there and cut off the western rebel enclave from some of its rear bases.

"While rounding up 30 suspects during the initial sweep, the Iraqis and their American allies seized a suspected insurgent training camp and took control of the Jurf Kas Suk bridge," it said.

"The bridge, spanning the Euphrates southwest of Baghdad, is believed to be a favoured corridor for insurgents moving into and out of key cities, including the capital hub and the current (rebel) sanctuary of Fallujah," the military added.

In an almost daily occurrence,

US warplanes also pounded Fallujah directly overnight, hitting what it described as a meeting of ring leaders loyal to Zarqawi, the most wanted man in Iraq.

There was no immediate report of any casualties after the raid.

Meanwhile one civilian was killed Wednesday by the explosion of a homemade bomb in the southern Iraqi city of Basra which also left 10 wounded, six of them civilians and four policemen, police said.

"A civilian was killed and 10 wounded, including four policemen, by the explosion of a bomb which had been planted on the Qaddisiyah bridge at the northern entrance to the city," police Lieutenant Colonel Karim al-Zaidi said.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh addressing Congress Party workers during his visit to Bombay yesterday.

N Korea testing world patience: IAEA

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea's two-year-old nuclear crisis has taxed the world's patience, the chief United Nations nuclear regulator said on Wednesday, urging communist Pyongyang to return to its disarmament treaty obligations.

Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), also said that there was no comparison between South Korea's recently reported atomic experiments and North Korea's full-fledged reprocessing programme and weapons assertions.

"The six-party talks have been going on for quite awhile and the international community is getting impatient to see quick results and to see North Korea turning back to the non-proliferation regime," ElBaradei said.

No link between Zarqawi and Saddam: CID

REUTERS, Washington

A CIA report has found no conclusive evidence that former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein harbored Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, which the Bush administration asserted before the invasion of Iraq.

"There's no conclusive evidence the Saddam Hussein regime had harbored Zarqawi," a US official said on Tuesday about the CIA findings.

But the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, stressed that the report, which was a mix of new information and a look at some older information, did not make any

final judgments or come to any definitive conclusions.

"To suggest the case is closed on this would not be correct," the official said in confirming an ABC News story about the CIA report that the network said was delivered to the White House last week.

ABC quoted an unnamed senior US official as saying that the CIA document raises "serious questions" about Bush administration assertions that Zarqawi found sanctuary in pre-war Baghdad.

"The official says there is no clear cut evidence that Saddam Hussein even knew Zarqawi was in Baghdad," ABC reported.

Addressing a gathering of party workers on his maiden visit to the city after becoming the Prime Minister, he said that the country had been saved in the last Lok Sabha elections after the communal

PM to Maharashtra electorate

Vote secular parties to power

PTI, Mumbai

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday appealed to the Maharashtra electorate to vote the secular parties back to power to ensure rapid socio-economic development in the country.

The Prime Minister said that the communal forces, however, have not been able to accept defeat.

After stalling the UPA Government's effort in carrying out some work in Parliament, "these forces had turned to astrologers and tantriks to find out ways and means how the Government could be toppled," Singh said.

The Opposition also did not

resist from spreading rumours and predicting the fall of the UPA Government before September 26, he said.

However, these rumours of instability were a false illusion harboured by the Opposition, and if the Congress-led allied group is voted to power in Maharashtra, it will enable the state to experience a rapid social and economic development through harmonised relationship and coordination between the state and Centre, Singh added.

Israel pushes on with Gaza offensive

AFP, Jabalya

Israel's deadly offensive in northern Gaza entered its second week Wednesday as the Palestinian radical group Hamas threatened to step up rocket attacks and strike deeper inside the Jewish state.

The United States, meanwhile, vetoed a UN Security Council resolution aimed at putting an end to the Israel army's "Days of Penitence" operation which has cost more than 80 lives.

Three Palestinians were killed in Israeli tank strikes in the north-

ern Gaza Strip overnight, medics said.

A father and his son were killed in the impoverished refugee camp of Jabalya. The third victim, a 17-year-old Palestinian, died in the nearby town of Beit Lahia.

Dr Said Jada from Jabalya's Kamal Udwani hospital told AFP that 20 Palestinians had been wounded by tank fire and were being treated for shrapnel injuries. Ten of them were from the same family.

He said two of the patients, both teenage girls, were in serious condition.