

Bush warns Syria, Iran not to meddle in Iraq

UN looks at expanding outside Baghdad

REUTERS, AFP, Washington

President Bush Wednesday warned Iran and Syria not to meddle in Iraq ahead of elections scheduled for January 30 and voiced new hopes of forging peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

At a White House meeting with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Bush urged Iraq's neighbors to help the interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi by enforcing border security restrictions in an effort to keep money and arms out of the hands of insurgents.

"We will continue to make it clear to both Syria and Iran that... meddling in the internal affairs of Iraq is not in their interests," Bush told reporters.

He spoke after Iraq's interim defence minister earlier Wednesday accused the two countries of aiding al-Qaeda Islamist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and former agents of Saddam Hussein to promote an insurgency that has intensified in recent weeks.

Iran and Syria deny any links to the Iraqi insurgents battling Iraqi security and US-led international forces.

"We expect there to be help in establishing a society in which people are able to elect their leaders," the president said. "We expect people to work with the Iraqi interim

government to enforce borders to stop the flow of people and money that aim to help these terrorists."

Bush and Berlusconi, who met for more than an hour in the Oval Office, also voiced optimism about peace in the Middle East a day after former Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas called on his people to pursue negotiations rather than violence in their quest for statehood.

Abbas is favored to win a Jan. 9 election to replace the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

"There's a very good chance that we can achieve that peace. I look forward to working toward that end," Bush said.

Added Berlusconi: "We agreed on the fact that it is now the appropriate time to solve the Middle East issue."

Neither leader mentioned Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom's urging for a Middle East summit on peace that would include roles for both the United States and European Union.

Berlusconi, one of Washington's closest European allies, pledged wide-ranging support for a second-term Bush agenda that calls for continued backing for Iraq and Afghanistan and the promotion of democratic reform in the greater Middle East.

"President Bush tells me and all of the others always what's in his

mind. And it is very positive that 'yes' means really 'yes' to him and 'no' means 'no', the Italian leader said through an English interpreter.

Meanwhile, Bush praised Berlusconi's leadership five days after a Milan court dropped criminal corruption charges against the Italian prime minister after ruling that the statute of limitations had run out.

"He's the kind of man, when he gives you his word, he keeps his word, which is the sign of an impressive, strong leader," Bush said.

Berlusconi promised to help Bush mend strained US relations with European countries, where the US president is unpopular. Bush is expected to visit Europe in February.

Meanwhile, the United Nations on Wednesday said it was looking at security in two Iraqi cities in a first step to expanding the UN's presence in Iraq outside Baghdad.

The announcement came on the eve of talks in Washington between UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, US Secretary of State Colin Powell and his intended successor, national security advisor Condoleezza Rice.

Annan, concerned about security after 22 people were blown up at the UN's Baghdad offices last year, ordered a security review in the northern Kurdish city of Erbil as well as Basra in the south, spokesman Fred Eckhard said.

British govt loses case over detention of terror suspects

AFP, London

A key but controversial plank of Britain's post-September 11 security policy was dealt a blow yesterday as the country's highest law court ruled that detaining terror suspects indefinitely without trial broke human rights laws.

A specially convened panel of nine Law Lords ruled by 8-1 that such detentions on suspicion alone went against both democratic norms and international obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.

It is a serious blow to Prime Minister Tony Blair, coming just hours after Home Secretary David Blunkett -- architect of the controversial measure -- resigned following a personal scandal.

The ruling is also an instant headache for Charles Clarke, the former education minister who has replaced Blunkett, and must now urgently repair a gaping hole in the government's anti-terrorism policy.

However, the decision was hailed by human rights groups, who have labelled Belmarsh Prison in south-east London, where the bulk of the detainees have been held, some for up to three years, as "Britain's Guantanamo Bay".

The ruling does not overturn the law under which the men are held,

the 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, or require the suspects be freed.

However the government will now have to return to parliament and amend the legislation to take into account the Law Lords' views.

Giving the decision in the House of Lords, Britain's upper house of parliament, Lord Thomas Bingham said 2001 law "permits detention of suspected international terrorists in a way that discriminates on the ground of nationality or immigration status".

It was thus incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, which was adopted into British law in 1998, he said.

"Indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial is anathema in any country which observes the rule of law," added Lord Donald Nicholls in his decision.

Lawyers acting on behalf of nine foreign nationals have challenged their detention a series of times, finally arguing their case in October in front of the Law Lords, a group of senior judges in the House of Lords who act as the country's highest legal power.

According to human rights groups, up to 14 foreign nationals are being held in prison or secure hospitals under the 2001 act, although only nine were involved in this test case.



US Nobel winner to marry woman 54-yr junior to him

AFP, Taipei

A 82-year-old Nobel prizewinner plans to marry a Chinese woman who is 54 years his junior and whom he sees as "God's last gift", Taiwanese newspapers reported yesterday.

They quoted a letter said to have been written by US physicist Yang Chen-ning and published on the website of the Taipei-based Review of Knowledge.

The website said Yang wrote the letter to a close friend to introduce his fiancée Wong Fan, 28, and the friend passed it on to them.

Yang said he first met Wong in 1995 when he and his wife attended an international conference at Chaozhou in China's southeastern Guangdong province. She was still a university student at the time.

Yang said he resumed contact with her in February after his wife died. He described her as "God's last gift" who had allowed "my old soul" to embrace youth again.

Yang is scheduled to marry Wong in January, the United Evening News said. The physicist declined comment Thursday when approached by Taiwan's cable news network TVBS.

Yang, who was born in the eastern Chinese province of Anhui in 1922, is now a professor at Beijing's Tsinghua University.

He and another China-born American physicist Tsung Dao Lee jointly won the 1957 Nobel Prize for Physics.

A hostage exits the public bus as police convinced the two hijackers, thought to be Albanians to surrender near Athens early yesterday. The bus was originally carrying 23 passengers. Two armed Albanian hijackers surrendered and released their hostages early yesterday, 18 hours after seizing a bus in an Athens suburb and threatening to blow it up if authorities did not pay a ransom.



Rubber boots are seen with flags of several countries during a protest before the 10th Climate Change Summit's opening ceremony, in Buenos Aires Wednesday. Argentine Wildlife Foundation and other organisations protested in demand of stronger policies against global warming. According to the Argentine WF, "there will be no pair of rubber boots big enough to battle with the world flooding cause by global warming".

UN calls for action over climate change

AFP, Buenos Aires

The United Nations on Wednesday urged the international community to do more to fight global climate change as host Argentine President Nestor Kirchner indirectly took aim at foot-dragging by the United States.

Speaking to environment ministers from around the world at the annual UN climate change conference in Argentina's capital, the chief of the UN framework agreement on climate change, Joke Waller-Hunter, sang the praises of the Kyoto Protocol set to take effect in February.

The 1997 Kyoto accord commits 39 industrial nations and territories to trim their output of six greenhouse gases -- especially carbon dioxide -- by 2012 compared with 1990 levels.

Ratification by Russia last month

gave the protocol the final stamp of approval needed for it to take effect from February 16.

The United States signed Kyoto's framework -- a declaration of principles -- in 1997 after four years of tough negotiations but then said it would not ratify the protocol.

US President George W. Bush, in one of his first acts after taking office, declared in March 2001 that it would be too costly for the United States to meet its reduced emissions targets.

He also said Kyoto was unfair because China and India, as developing countries that were also becoming polluters, were not required to make targeted emissions cuts.

Waller-Hunter, however, warned that a decade of action to counter a problem that will last decades, indeed centuries, can only be a first step.

Israeli arms deals with China raise tensions with US

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli arms deals with China have provoked tensions between Israel and its top ally the United States, the head of Israel's parliamentary defence committee acknowledged yesterday.

"There are tensions, which are hidden from the public, which have appeared over the last one or two years concerning Israeli weapons sales, particularly to China," Yuval Steinitz told Israeli radio.

His comments followed a report on Israel's private Channel Two television Wednesday that the Pentagon was demanding the dismissal of Israeli defence ministry director general Amos Yaron.

US officials are furious at Israel for taking back a "sensitive weapons system" from China for upgrading, the channel said, although it did not identify the weapon.

Resignation of Blunkett leaves gaping hole in Blair govt

AFP, London

The resignation of David Blunkett as home secretary has left a gaping hole in the frontline of Prime Minister Tony Blair's government ahead of elections expected in a matter of months, newspapers warned yesterday.

However some commentators argued that Blunkett's decision to quit after findings that his office had fast-tracked the visa application for the nanny of his former lover, could bring relief to his Labour Party.

The Daily Telegraph described the minister's departure as "the most serious political setback Mr. Blair has suffered since becoming prime minister" and warned of a "big hole in Labour's preparations" for the general election, widely expected in May next year.

But, the best-selling conservative daily said, he "had no choice but to go" in light of the scandal that has dogged him for months.

Blunkett said on Wednesday he was stepping down after hearing that his office had helped secure a visa for Leonica Casalme, a Filipina nanny then working for Blunkett's lover, married magazine publisher Kimberly Quinn.

The scandal emerged in the bitter fallout from Quinn and Blunkett's three-year affair, which ended in August amid acrimony. Blunkett is also seeking access through the courts to Quinn's two-year-old boy, whom he claims is his son.

The Times expressed sympathy for Blunkett's plight and respect for his talent, and said he could possibly make a comeback after the elections. But it maintained the situation inflicted a "huge blow" on Blair at a delicate time.

Blair, it said, "regarded Mr. Blunkett as one of his most valuable electoral weapons and... backed him to the hilt despite the reservations of colleagues."

US eases sanctions against Cuba, Iran

AFP, WASHINGTON

The United States has quietly eased sanctions against three of its old nemeses -- Cuba, Iran and Sudan -- to facilitate literary, cultural and scientific exchanges that could help foster dissent there.

A new rule, unveiled by the Treasury Department Wednesday, enables Americans to freely engage in most ordinary publishing activities with Cuban, Iranian and Sudanese individuals and groups.

Restrictions on "certain interactions" with the local governments in the area of publishing will be maintained.

Robert Werner, director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control, said people seeking to publish works by Cuban, Iranian and Sudanese authors in the United States, or to publish their own materials in the three states, will henceforth be able

to do so "without seeking permission" from his office first.

"This rule provides clarity and promotes important policies aimed at the free exchange of ideas without undermining the national security objectives of these country sanctions," Werner stated.

Although introduced at different times, the US sanctions against Cuba, Iran and Sudan bar most types of trade or other exchanges because the US government believes these countries promote terrorism, suppress basic freedoms, and are run by oppressive governments.

All three nations are listed by the US State Department as state sponsors of terrorism.

While easing the restrictions on publishing, the Treasury Department made clear the bulk of other sanctions will remain in place because they are "critical to US interests."



US Secretary of State Colin Powell listens during a ceremony at the State Department where he was awarded the 2004 J. William Fulbright Prize for International Understanding (L) Wednesday in Washington, DC.

US free press faces tough challenge

REUTERS, Boston

America's First Amendment turned 213 years old on Wednesday, but supporters of the bulwark of personal liberty and free press are hardly celebrating.

The free press -- a linchpin of America's proud democracy -- faces its toughest challenge in a generation thanks to legal assaults that have left one US journalist in home detention and others facing prison. A flurry of well-publicised scandals at some of the country's top news organisations has sullied the media's image and only made matters worse.

With other nations expecting America to lead the world in press freedoms, the stakes could not be higher, said Committee to Protect Journalists Executive Director Ann Cooper.

"The very big concern for us is if journalists are imprisoned in these

cases it sends a terrible message around the world," she said.

Imprisoning journalists is typically associated with tyrannies and dictatorships, making it ironic that US judges in the past six months have threatened at least eight reporters with sanctions or jail time for not naming sources, said First Amendment Center Ombudsman Paul McMasters.

Free press rights in the First Amendment to the US Constitution have come under attack many times since the 45-word clause took effect Dec. 15, 1791. McMasters said the last big assault came when Richard Nixon was president.

"Not since then can I recall a time where the nation's free press has been tested so intensely," he said, noting that Nixon's Attorney General John Mitchell was not mindful of balancing the need for press freedoms.

Invitation for Tenders

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Communication.	V
2	Agency	Roads & Highways Department.	V
3	Procuring entity name	Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Barisal.	
4	Procuring entity code	Not used at present.	
5	Procuring entity district	Barisal.	V
6	Invitation for	Works.	V - V - V
7	Invitation Ref No.	Memo No. 4063.	
8	Date	28-11-2004.	V
KEY INFORMATION			
9	Procurement method	OTM (National).	V Open V
FUNDING INFORMATION			
10	Budget and source of funds	District Road/Important District Road Development Project.	V GOB
11	Development partners (if applicable)	Not applicable.	
PARTICULAR INFORMATION			
12	Project/programme code (if applicable)	Not applicable.	
13	Project/programme name (if applicable)	District Road/Important District Road Development Project.	
14	Tender package No.	13-BRD/2004-2005.	
15	Tender package name	Construction of brick pavement (HBB) & flexible pavement.	
Date			
16	Tender publication date	Not applicable.	V
17	Tender last selling date	26-12-04.	V
Date Time			
18	Tender closing date and time	29-12-04.	V 12:30pm V
19	Tender opening date and time	29-12-04.	V 3:30pm V
20	Name & address of the office(s)	Address	
- Selling tender document (principal)			
Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Barisal.			
- Selling tender document (others)			
Divisional Commissioner, Barisal/Executive Engineer, RHD, Planning Division, Sarak Bhaban, Dhaka/Road Division, Bholapatuakhal/Jhalakathi/Pirojpur/Barguna/Road Sub-Division-1/2/1 st Line Workshop, Barisal.			
- Receiving tender document			
Divisional Commissioner, Barisal/Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Barisal Zone, Barisal/Superintending Engineer, RHD, Barisal Road Circle, Barisal/Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Barisal.			
- Opening tender document			
Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Barisal. The tenderers or their authorized representatives are allowed to attend the opening of the tender.			
21	Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting (optional)	Date	Time
Not necessary			
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER			
22	Eligibility of tenderer	All tenderers regardless of whether enlisted or not enlisted with the employer may submit tenders provided that they are otherwise qualified. Tenderers of the categories specified in the TDS are eligible to participate in the tender.	
23	Brief description of goods or works	(a) Construction of brick pavement (HBB) at 32 nd & 33 rd km and flexible pavement at 37 th (p) km of Hizla-Mehendigonj-Beltala (Barisal) road under Barisal Road Division during 2004-2005. (b) Construction of flexible pavement at 37 th (p) & 38 th (p) km of Hizla-Mehendigonj-Beltala (Barisal) road under Barisal Road Division during 2004-2005.	
24	Brief description of related services	Not applicable.	
25	Price of tender document (Tk)	Tk. 200.00	
26	Lot No	Identification of lot	Location
1	13-BRD/2004-2005	Brick pavement (HBB) at 32 nd & 33 rd km and flexible pavement at 37 th (p) km of Hizla-Mehendigonj-Beltala (Barisal) road	1,30,000.00
2	13-BRD/2004-2005	Flexible pavement at 37 th (p) & 38 th (p) km of Hizla-Mehendigonj-Beltala (Barisal) road	1,30,000.00
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS			
30	Name of official inviting tender		Engr. Jnan Ranjan Sii, PHF.
31	Designation of official inviting tender		Executive Engineer, RHD.
32	Address of official inviting tender		Road Division, Barisal.
33	Contract details of official inviting tender		Telephone No. (0431) 52585 (office).
34	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders.		
Engr. Jnan Ranjan Sii, PHF Executive Engineer, RHD Road Division, Barisal			
DFP-28615-30/11/04 G-1195			