

# China defies world to back embattled Nepal king

REUTERS, Kathmandu

China became the first major country yesterday to voice support for Nepal's King Gyanendra as the Chinese foreign minister ended a visit to the Himalayan nation globally isolated since the monarch seized power.

"The international community should respect the choice made by the Nepali people," Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Wu Dawei told a news briefing in Beijing.

"We support the king and the government of Nepal to ensure national stability and reconciliation and for economic development," Wu said.

Beijing had earlier described as Nepal's internal affair the king's move in February to sack the government, declare a state of emergency and arrest political leaders. The rest of the world urged Gyanendra to restore democracy.

The latest comments could spark concerns in India -- Nepal's giant neighbour to the south and a key trading partner -- which, along with Britain and the United States, has pressured Gyanendra to revoke his decisions.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao is due to tour South Asia next week and will be aiming to cement an improvement in Sino-Indian ties when he visits New Delhi.

Wu's comments came as Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing -- the first senior foreign official to visit Kathmandu since Gyanendra took power -- rounded off talks with the monarch in what is seen as a signal that China would maintain friendly

ties with Nepal.

"The visit was full of positive results," Li told reporters at Kathmandu airport before leaving for the Maldives.

"We'll continue to make it even more fruitful for the benefit of our people," he said without elaborating.

Gyanendra justified his decision to assume power as a necessary move to crush a nine-year Maoist revolt in which more than 11,000 people have been killed.

The Maoists have been fighting since 1996 to replace the Hindu monarchy with a communist republic. They have called for a 11-day general strike across the landlocked nation from Saturday to protest over Gyanendra's assumption of power.

The Nepali army said it had stepped up security along highways, and soldiers would escort trucks carrying supplies to the capital.

"We'll make sure that there is no shortage of essential goods in Kathmandu," Brigadier General Dipak Gurung told Reuters. "We have taken steps to neutralise their move."

Nepalese generally heed rebel strike calls and few drivers dare to defy their ban on vehicles.

In February, the Maoists killed a driver and set several buses and cars on fire for defying a road blockade, disrupting supplies of petroleum products and essential goods to the hill-ringed capital for two weeks.

Officials said Kathmandu, home to 1.5 million people, had stocks of fuel and food supplies to last more than a month.

The campaign led to the demolition in 1992 by Hindu zealots of the mosque, sparking massive Hindu-Muslim riots across the country in which over 2,000 people were killed.

The issue is still in the courts and all attempts by BJP supporters to forcibly build a temple to Ram at the site have been thwarted by India's security forces.

Hindus believe the mosque was built after Muslim rulers destroyed a shrine at the birthplace of their god Ram and they have since been pressing for the "reconstruction" of the Ram temple.

"When we were in power, we did take steps to construct the temple but were not successful. We hope the courts take a decision quickly," Mahajan said.

Analysts said one of the reasons the BJP was swept from power by the left-leaning Congress party in the parliamentary poll last year was because it focused on the temple at the expense of more pressing socio-economic issues.

appropriate therapeutic and cardio-respiratory measures were activated," but it was not clear whether the pope was put on a respirator.

Giving an update six hours later, Navarro-Valls said the pontiff's blood pressure continued to be "unstable".

The pope had received the "Viaticum", Holy Communion given to those close to death, on Thursday evening, the spokesman said.

Still, he gave the impression that John Paul II, even on his deathbed, was capable of exercising considerable control.

He said he had insisted on concelebrating mass with his private secretary, Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, at 6:00 am and had met separately with some of his advisers, including Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican secretary of state and his number two, as well as Ruini and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

Navarro-Valls said the pope realised the seriousness of his condition but had chosen to stay at the Vatican rather than return to Rome's Gemelli clinic where he had been hospitalized twice in the past two months.

The pope has since Thursday asked aides to read various scriptures to him, including a series of prayers, or stations, which commemorate the passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Boiler explosion

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at Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College and Hospital.

According to the BDNEWS, Younus Howlader and his family members were asleep during the incident.

High officials of the district administration visited the spot yesterday morning.

Senior Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Pramod Mahajan said yesterday that a controversial campaign to build a temple on the ruins of a destroyed mosque would be reignited.

"We will rake up the issue again and go back to the public to garner support for the temple," said Mahajan. "It is our most desired but unachieved dream and we regret not having built the Ram temple at Ayodhya yet."

BJP will mark 25 years of its birth on April 6 and the temple campaign is likely to take center stage at a national convention of the party in New Delhi.

"In 25 years we achieved many things like making India a nuclear power, a stronger economy and improving relations with Pakistan... but the most important dream of a temple at Ram's birthplace has not yet been achieved," said Mahajan.

The BJP had in the early 1990s garnered massive support by campaigning to have a temple to the Hindu god Ram built on the site of the 16th century Babri mosque in

# BJP to reignite temple campaign

AFP, Mumbai

## Six abducted in Rangamati

BSS, Rangamati

Armed miscreants abducted six people from two villages of Barkal upazila of the district yesterday and on Thursday night, security sources said.

The victims are Ritesh Chakma, Jamini Chakma and Pratik Chakma of Rupbanpara village and Niranjana Chakma, Chittaranjan Chakma, Riten Chakma of Shilchhari village.

Nepal frees

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"The government of India welcomes the release ... of Mr G.P. Koirala, president of the Nepali Congress and respected senior political leader, who had been under detention at his residence," said a foreign ministry statement.

New Delhi said it hoped the freeing of Koirala would be followed by the release of "other political leaders and workers, human rights activists, student leaders, media personnel and civil society representatives presently detained under emergency provisions."

"(The) Government of India calls for the removal of all curbs on civil liberties and fundamental rights and the lifting of media censorship and restrictions on movement to enable the people of Nepal to enjoy their legitimate constitutional and democratic rights," the statement said.

This, it said, would help pave the way for reconciliation between the various parties "leading to a restoration of multi-party democracy."

Zahiruddin Khan

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Aviation and Tourism Mir Md Nasir Uddin, State Minister for Forest and Environment Jafrul Islam Chowdhury, Chittagong City Corporation Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, Shahjahan Chowdhury MP, Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed attended the namaz-e-janaza.

Meanwhile, an unpleasant situation marked the janaza prayer when Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker from Sattkania (Chittagong 14 constituency) Shajahan Chowdhury introduced ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury as "former mayor" over the loudspeaker.

He blurted out the remark while speaking at the outset of the namaz-e-janaza for Khan triggering tension among the participants, according to UNB.

"The mayor moved forward and took over the microphone from Shajahan Chowdhury and tried to deliver his speech. At this stage, BNP activists snatched the mouthpiece from the mayor," says a spot account of the scene.

However, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan took control of the situation and said on the microphone that it was a funeral ceremony where everyone came to pray for the departed soul of Zahiruddin Khan and pay last respect to him. There was no scope for making any political speech, Morshed Khan made it clear to pacify the situation.

Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury would not comment. He only said, "I fell victim to an unwanted situation."

"Mainly the tributaries and distributaries of these rivers are dying. Some of them because their infalls from the main rivers have been blocked and some others due to changes in their courses," says Mohammad Inamul Haque, director general at Bangladesh Haor and Wetlands Development Board.

The total length of river courses in Bangladesh is approximately 20,000 kilometres, covering 9,770 square kilometres or 7 percent of the country's area. According to the river map of WDB, 54 of the country's 230 rivers flow down from India and three from Myanmar.

Water experts say dams and barrages constructed upstream in India on most of these international rivers are choking the water flow to Bangladesh.

The 17 rivers a WDB report terms dead are Narasunda (Kishoreganj), Bhubaneswar (Rajbari and Faridpur), Bibiana and Shakha Barak (Habiganj), Palang (Shariatpur), Burnadi (Comilla and Brahmanbaria), Harihar and Mukteswari (Jessore), Hamkura (Khulna), Morichor (Satkhira), Banni (Lakshimpur and Noakhali), Manos (Bogra), Baral and Chikna (Natore and Pabna), Hinsa (Kustia), Musakhana (Rajshahi and Natore) and Bhairab (Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Jessore, Khulna and Bagerhat).

The rivers marked as near-dead are Karatoa (Panchagarh, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Bogra and Sirajganj), Ichhamati (Pabna, Manikganj, Dhaka and Munshiganj), Kaliganga (Kushtia, Jhenidah, Magura, Narail, Pirojpur), Kumar (Kushtia, Magura, Faridpur, Jehnidah, Madaripur), Chitra (Narail, Chuadanga, Jhenidah), Bhadra (Jessore, Khulna), Someshwari (Netrakona) and Nabaganga (Narail).

The receding water flow has shrunk the ailing rivers to mere canals. Numerous chars have emerged in some main rivers. Salinity has increased in the coastal zone that threatens the Sundarbans, a world heritage site.

Experts believe the top dying disease that affects the Sundari trees in a vast part of this world's largest mangrove forest is also caused by the increasing salinity in

# Bottled water

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Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) called this correspondent and made known their decision to raid the illegal businesses and to seize equipment used for making false security seals for the bottles.

However, sources said the BSTI inspection team never raided the businesses, allowing the supply of the illegal products to continue uninterrupted across the country.

According to the traders, each empty bottle with an unbroken seal fetches Tk 0.20 0.30 depending on the quality of the bottle.

Once a bottle, mostly one litre containers, is filled with tap water, a new lid is fixed with a transparent plastic label made to look like a security seal. To carry out such business, traders have set up small bottle labelling plants on the other side of Buriganga river in Keraniganj, supposedly to escape police interference.

During visits in guise of a common inhabitant to the areas, this correspondent found young boys engaged in washing bottles and separating the discarded ones inside tin-shed thatched booths, while older men were occupied in fixing the labels using hand-held machines.

Anonymous sources said that every day between one and two thousand bottles of water are sent to

their 'agents' for distribution for sale. Each intact one litre bottle fetches Tk 3 while the same when sold at retail stores goes for the fixed retail price of Tk 10 apiece set by the original manufacturer. In fact, some retailers are keen to sell such counterfeit drinking water bottles, as the margin of profit is huge.

But to escape suspicion, the bottles are mostly sold at social get-togethers, meeting places and wedding functions, where the safety seals are removed beforehand and kept ready for serving.

Some manufacturers of bottled water, when contacted recently, acknowledged facing similar problems. They said the counterfeit or adulterated water bottles cost much less than the genuine ones. To keep pace with the prices, some manufacturers resorted to reducing prices.

"To avoid the supply of counterfeit drinking water bottles, we have arranged fixed clients who receive our products directly from the factory," said an official of a popular brand of drinking water bottle.

When contacted by telephone yesterday, Sub-Inspector Alamgir Kabir of Keraniganj police station said he had no knowledge of these illegal activities, adding, "We raid the areas frequently but never did we come across such illegal businesses."

recovery.

"People, both in the rural and urban areas, mainly depend on unscientific and traditional bone injury treatment mainly because it is less costly and they lack knowledge of proper treatment," said Dr M Amjad Hossain, head of orthopaedic and trauma surgery department at the DMCH.

Many orthopaedic patients come to the DMCH every day from different parts of the country after having wrong treatment, he mentioned.

In reply to a question, Dr Amjad said, sometimes people might benefit from traditional treatment of bone injuries. As the 'traditional' healers lack knowledge of blood circulation, they bandage the limbs so tightly that it stops blood circulation, leading to gangrene in the organs, he said.

Most of the crippled street beggars in the city might have been the victims of wrong treatment by traditional healers of bone injuries, he thought.

Dr Hossain, who conducted a study on orthopaedic patients, however suggested providing proper training to such traditional healers. It is not difficult to arrange such training, he added.

river water.

IMPACT OF FARAKKA

A government source claims over 80 rivers have dried up in the last three decades due to the Farakka barrage built in 1974 on the Indian side of the Ganges, some 17 km off the border.

Meanwhile, a super-ambitious plan of India to link up the major common rivers flowing from the Himalayas and to divert them to the drought-prone areas in the south is still on the drawing board.

Bangladesh government scientists estimate that even a 10 to 20 percent decrease in the water flow to Bangladesh could dry out vast areas for much of the year, with 100 more rivers in the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna basins also drying out.

Some experts however say Farakka barrage cannot be held singularly responsible for the deaths of these rivers. They rather blame it also on a lack of river management.

"The rivers from Noakhali, Sylhet and Dinajpur are not affected by Farakka [barrage]. These rivers dried up mainly because of lack of care," says Dr Ainun Nishat, country's leading river expert.

"Rivers should be managed properly, as our country is flood-prone and a lot of siltation and soil erosion occur every year," Nishat says. "Just 50 years ago, farmers used to cultivate only two crops, Aman and winter vegetables. But now they are growing Boro, which causes more soil erosion and the eroded soil is ultimately discharged into the canals and rivers leading to filling up of river beds," he explains.

CROPPED RIVER ROUTE

Over 15,600km of river routes across the country, meanwhile, have lost navigability because of continual silt deposition in the last 29 years, while another 3,300km routes have become risky for plying of riverine vessels.

An official at Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) says the total length of river courses was 24,000km in 1971. But in 1984 it came down to 8,400km during the rains and only 5,200km in the dry season.

At present the length has plunged to 6,000km during the rainy season and 3,800km during the dry period, the official adds.

"As Bangladesh is a riverine country, the government should prepare a river policy and implement it, especially as a vested quarter has been encroaching on rivers all over the country. The government should be very strict in this regard, as the rivers are the lifeline for the nation," a top BWDB official says preferring anonymity.

## Khulna 'criminal'

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Marufa, commissioner from ward No. 15 and also president of the union, alleged Khoka had threatened her with death if she opposed his act.

When asked, city unit BNP Secretary Nazrul Islam Manju said he is not aware of the incident.

Additional police were on hand to avert any untoward situation.

Khoka had earlier been absconding to escape arrest, as he was a member of notorious criminal Ershad Shikder's death squad and chargesheeted accused in Moslemuddin murder case. He is also accused of several criminal offenses including murders and rape.

Dr Kamal

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In reply to a question, he said, "Unilateral appointment by the government without consultation tends to generate controversies and undermine the confidence in the election commission."

Dr Kamal said Election Commission must also have its own separate budget, officers and staff and not be dependent upon the government. It must also be able to ensure independence of the returning officers, presiding officers and the others who conduct elections.

The Election Commission must have power to monitor violation of election laws and adjudicate to take penal actions against the transgressors, he noted.

"In order to protect the election process from the destructive impact of black money, candidates must make public declaration of their assets and their dependants," he said, adding that political parties and others must be made financially accountable through public disclosures.

About opposition plea for reform of caretaker government, he said, "The caretaker government must be headed by a person who is above controversies and whose nonpartisanship cannot be questioned."

Dr Kamal, who is also an author of the Bangladesh Constitution, said the existing constitutional process has to be interpreted and applied in the light of the aforesaid fundamental objective.

Asked if an amendment would be needed to ensure the nonpartisan character of the caretaker government, he said, "If this fundamental objective is kept in view, the problem can be resolved without constitutional amendment."

In the Constitution there is a provision for appointing chief adviser of the caretaker government from among other eligible citizens under certain circumstances.

Article 58C (5) of the 13th amendment says, "If no retired judge of the Appellate Division is available or willing to hold the office of chief adviser, the president shall, after consultation, as far as practicable, with the major political parties, appoint the chief adviser from among citizens of Bangladesh who are qualified to be appointed as advisers under this article."

Asked if he seeks early parliamentary elections in view of the prevailing political situation, Dr Kamal said, "I see from various reports, and particularly from activities of the government, that an election may be called even before the end of the fifth year of its term."

115 killed

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reason. A total of six people were killed, 27 others injured, 16 abducted and one was raped in Chittagong Hill Tracts region.

The Odhikar report also reveals that during the period, 86 children were killed, 27 injured, 67 raped, 46 abducted, 19 trafficked, nine arrested, 26 were missing, nine received acid-burns and 13 committed suicide.

In three months, a journalist was killed, 36 others were injured, five arrested, 14 assaulted, 55 received death threats, six came under attack and 22 faced cases, the report says.

ODI today

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test and draw the series 1-1.

The batsman aggregated 508 runs, averaging 101.60, with two triple figure knocks and a fifty in the Tests.

"He was in great form and his presence would certainly have helped the team," Inzamam said.

"But injuries are part and parcel of the game.

"It will give the other boys a chance. I'm sure they will try and make sure we don't miss him."

His India counterpart Sourav Ganguly will be hoping his fortunes with the bat change in the limited-overs matches after a relatively poor Test campaign.

"The important thing is to get some runs under the belt. If I play well the runs will come," said the left-hander, who is 64 runs away from becoming only the third batsman to score 10,000 one-day runs.

The visitors, buoyed after rallying to a 168-run victory in the third test in Bangalore this week, also hold a clear edge from recent meetings between the two sides.

Pakistan have won the last four one-day games, including a six-wicket victory in Kolkata in November to mark the platinum jubilee of the Indian cricket board.

The other match venues are Visakhapatnam (April 5), Jamshedpur (April 9), Ahmedabad (April 12), Kanpur (April 15) and New Delhi (April 17).

# Chinese premier

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Dwelling on historical events related to these two countries he added, "Xuan Zang, an eminent Chinese monk of the Tang Dynasty, lived and explained Buddhist scriptures in the Bengali region for seven years. The venerable Master Atisha Dipankar from Bengal resided in China's Tibet for 17 years during the Song Dynasty. They have left a story of lasting reputation in the history of friendly exchanges between China and Bangladesh."

Mentioning that this year marks the 30th anniversary of the Sino-Bangladesh diplomatic ties, Wen Jiabao said that over the past 30 years, "our bilateral relations have developed smoothly on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence."

He said the two countries have witnessed constant exchange of high-level visits, expanded trade and economic cooperation, and strengthened cooperation in culture, education, science and technology, agriculture and other fields. "Our two countries have accorded each other understanding and support in international and regional affairs and become mutually trusted partners."

He said China and Bangladesh, both developing countries, are facing such common tasks as developing economy and improving the people's living standards.

The Chinese premier said that adhering to a foreign policy of "building friendship and partnership with neighbouring countries" and "fostering an amicable, peaceful and prosperous neighbourhood", China attaches importance to developing traditional friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation with Bangladesh.

"I hope that my visit will contribute to further promoting China-

Bangladesh relations." Wen Jiabao said and sincerely wished the "industrious and talented Bangladesh people" greater achievements in their grand cause of national development.

"May the friendship between our two peoples continue to grow and the cooperation between our two countries bear more new fruits," he added.

Benazir

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scenario we are not thinking in these terms," she said.

Benazir, who governed Pakistan twice between 1988 and 1996, was accompanied by her husband Asif Ali Zardari, who was released from eight years imprisonment in Pakistan last June on charges of murder and corruption.

Musharraf has held the posts of Pakistan president and army chief since seizing power from the democratically elected government of prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Last year, he pushed through a new law in parliament enabling him to continue as military chief despite earlier pledging to relinquish his dual post.

Pakistan held elections in November 2002 but a quick change in prime ministers since then has put question marks over Musharraf's pledges to restore democracy.

On talks with India, Benazir said the dialogue would be more meaningful if Islamabad was represented by "elected" leaders.

India and Pakistan, who have fought three wars since independence in 1947, two over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, are engaged in a slow-moving peace process that began in January last year.

# Wolfowitz WB chief

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Wolfowitz for the post, US President George W. Bush vowed to work with Wolfowitz.

"The president looks forward to working with president-designate Wolfowitz and World Bank member countries to advance the fight against global poverty, promote development and meet the International Development Goals of the Millennium Declaration," said a White House statement.

Wolfowitz said that debt relief for the poorest nations was a pressing issue in his new in-tray, along with September summit of the United Nations devoted to the so-called Millennium Development Goals.

The UN goals, established in September 2000, aim to slash global poverty in half by 2015, step up the fight against diseases such as AIDS and tuberculosis and increase access to education.

Wolfowitz pledged to work closely with European Union officials, having visited Brussels on Wednesday as part of a charm offensive to woo governments suspicious about his policy views and role in the war in Iraq.

Wolfowitz was the sole candidate to serve as president of the International Monetary Fund's sister institution. By tradition, an American leads the World Bank and a European the IMF.

Many in Europe and beyond were agast at the nomination of a figure whose "neocron" instincts would appear to put him at odds with the value of multilateral institutions such as the World Bank.

Wolfowitz is accused in addition of vastly underestimating Iraq's post-war needs through a "neocron" belief that the fruits of US-imposed liberal economics would be immediate.

But EU nations overcame their objections and France is now said to be lobbying hard for Wolfowitz to choose a Frenchman as his deputy.

"As I have said frequently, that suitability for the post, the poorest of the world to lift themselves out of poverty -- is a noble mission," Wolfowitz added.

"I believe deeply in that mission. Nothing is more gratifying than being able to help people in need and developing opportunities for all the people of the world to achieve their full potential."

Wolfowitz will be the bank's 10th president, and its most controversial since Robert McNamara (1968-1981), who as US defence secretary was the architect of the Vietnam War.

He will take over an organisation with nearly 10,000 staff that last year extended 20 billion dollars in funding for development projects around the globe.

Through its various agencies, the bank bills itself as the largest external funder of education and HIV/AIDS programmes in the world.

Activists were unimpressed with Wolfowitz's pledges.

Emira Woods, co-director of the left-wing Foreign Policy In Focus think-tank, said the installation of Wolfowitz at the World Bank rounded off Bush's "wrecking crew to demolish internationalism."

This was all the graver "when the world community needs to come together to tackle the debt crisis, HIV/AIDS, access to clean water, affordable education and healthcare, livable wages and a clean environment," she said.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan also congratulated Paul Wolfowitz.

"At a time when the world has before it far-reaching proposals for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the secretary general looks forward to working closely with Mr. Wolfowitz in the fight against global poverty," a spokesman said in a statement.

# Schiavo dies but battle

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that the House passed two weeks ago sitting in the Senate -- the Senate could pick that bill up and pass it -- that deals with this issue on a general basis.

"We will look at an arrogant, out-of-control, unaccountable judiciary that thumbed their nose at Congress and the president. When given the jurisdiction to hear this case anew and look at all the facts and make a determination, they chose not to participate, contrary to what Congress and the president asked them to do. We will look into that."

DeLay's outburst was deemed the "mark of an arrogant and out-of-control federal power ... the legislature," by The Washington Post, while The New York Times said that in the media circus surrounding the Schiavo case "worst of all were the powerful people" with opportunistic agendas.

USA Today said the debate over Schiavo's right to life or death was healthy because it showed that "abstract terms such as separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism really do mean something."

Schiavo, 41, died after some 15 years in what doctors called a "persistent vegetative state" and more than 20 court cases and state legislature hearing in the last seven years over whether her artificial lifeline should have been cut.

Michael Schiavo said his wife -- who suffered brain damage after heart failure in 1990 -- had told him she would not want to be kept alive

in such a helpless state. Her parents said she could improve with treatment.

The courts repeatedly backed the husband. The Supreme Court refused a sixth appeal by the parents to get involved a few hours before Schiavo died. President Bush and other conservative leaders backed the Schindlers. Congress passed a law after the tube was taken out on March 18 aimed at helping the parents.

Schiavo gradually weakened while the acrimony around her showed little sign of abating. Her brother, Bobby Schindler, was ordered out of her room after arguing with a police officer only a few minutes before she died.

Bush and other conservative leaders, who have highlighted their "pro-life" values, carefully directed their sympathies at the Schindler family.

In Washington, Bush urged "all those who honor Terri Schiavo to continue to work to build a culture of life where all Americans are welcomed and valued and protected, especially those who live at the mercy of others."

The Vatican also entered the dispute, with one cardinal calling Schiavo's death murder.

Some US judges criticised politicians for interfering in the prolonged legal process that led to the ending of Schiavo's artificial feeding. Most opinion polls indicated a majority of Americans opposed the political attempts to save the woman.