

Bush, Bush Sr. and Clinton to attend funeral

REUTERS, Washington

Former Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton will accompany President Bush to Friday's funeral of Pope John Paul but former President Jimmy Carter will not join them amid conflicting signals over whether there was room for him on the delegation.

Carter spokesman Jon Moor said the Nobel Peace Prize winner, who was in the White House when John Paul was elected and greeted him during a papal visit, had "expressed to the White House a desire to attend the pope's funeral."

But Moor said Carter "was quite willing to withdraw his request when he was subsequently informed that the official delegation would be limited to just five people, and there were also others who were eager to attend."

Also in the delegation will be first lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Carter's spokesman said the decision to skip the funeral was not related to the 80-year-old former president's health.

The former president and his wife, Rosalynn, will be honoring the pope "in spirit," Moor added.

Carter, a Democrat, was a strong critic of Bush in last year's US election campaign.



PHOTO: AFP

Thousands of faithfuls from around the world waited to enter the Basilica where the body of the Pope lies-in-state at the Vatican City for a glimpse.

Massive security plan for pope's funeral

Tired pilgrims wait for hours to see pontiff

REUTERS, Vatican City

Rome was setting up a massive security plan to protect pilgrims and presidents at Pope John Paul's funeral as a flood of faithful queued for hours to see his body in St. Peter's Basilica on Wednesday.

Tired pilgrims huddled together to keep warm in the line that stretched more than two kms through the streets around the Vatican. Some waited nine hours for a quick glimpse of the man who led the Roman Catholic Church for 26 years.

"It's not such a big effort," said James Dube from Boston, who is studying in Rome. "If you're not prepared to put in this kind of effort for your faith, you may as well watch baseball instead of going to church."

About 1 million people from all around the world have filed past the crimson-clad body of the Pope in the last two days. At least as many more are likely to shuffle past his bier before he is laid in a coffin for his funeral on Friday.

The funeral will bring together dozens of world leaders, some of whom rarely if ever meet, a fitting tribute to a Pope who fought for world peace and unity.

The chairs already laid out in St. Peter's Square will seat President Bush near President Mohammad Khatami of Iran, one of the countries Bush included in his "axis of evil."

About 2 million pilgrims are expected at the funeral but some say 4 million will flood to Rome for the three-hour Mass.

Bus-loads are already on their way from the Pope's native Poland. Ships and planes are bringing in many more.

Huge fields on the outskirts of Rome have been filled with tents to house those who cannot find or afford a hotel.

"He always wanted to connect with the people as a good pastor," said Cardinal Roger Mahony, archbishop of Los Angeles. "(Now) the flock is coming to see the pastor."

To protect the masses, Rome is

drafting in extra police, a surveillance plane and anti-aircraft missiles. From Thursday, no planes will be allowed to fly over the Italian capital.

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said he was worried.

"Of course I'm anxious but only as much as you would be, as much as you should be," he told reporters. "We are working and preparing every last thing and I think we'll do our bit well."

The Pope will be buried under St. Peter's on the same spot as John XXIII who died in 1963 but has since been beatified and moved up to the main level of the marble-lined basilica.

A Vatican spokesman said John Paul's will could be opened when cardinals meet on Wednesday but ruled out the possibility of his body -- or parts of it -- being buried in Poland.

Pope felt 'deep anguish' over Iraq war

AFP, Rome

Pope John Paul II felt "deep anguish" that he was unable to stop US President George W. Bush -- who will be among mourners at the late pontiff's funeral on Friday -- from waging war against Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

While the pope and Bush, who is set to arrive in Rome late Wednesday ahead of the funeral, may have shared common ground on the issues of abortion and euthanasia, they were worlds apart over the use of military force to topple Saddam.

The Italian people were clearly on the side of the pope, as three million of them took to the streets of Rome in 2003 in the largest of worldwide protests against the war.

"There was a clear disagreement," the former US envoy to the Vatican, Jim Nicholson, recalled Monday. The pope "was a man of peace, and he always hoped for the peace option," he told the Denver Post.

"If he could keep war from break-

ing out, there's always a chance that peace would break out," he said. "That was his position about Iraq. ... He also said that war is a defeat for humanity."

Speaking to reporters in Washington on Monday, Bush sought to play down the rift. "Of course he was a man of peace and he didn't like war," Bush said. "And I fully understood that, and I appreciated the conversations I had with the Holy Father on the subject."

John Paul II used his moral position as leader of the world's 1.1 billion Catholics to lead a diplomatic offensive aimed at averting the March 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, which he said would be seen by extremists as a clash of civilizations.

"War must never be allowed to divide the religions of the world," he said then.

The pope met a range of world leaders in his efforts to prevent a war, including British Prime Minister Tony Blair and then Iraqi deputy prime Minister Tareq Aziz.

Blair admits Iraq war eroded public trust in him

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair admitted Wednesday that the war in Iraq has badly eroded public trust in him, tackling one of his most difficult obstacles ahead of a May 5 general election.

In an interview with the GMTV television station, Blair was asked whether his backing for the March 2003 US-led war had done more to erode public trust in him than anything else.

"Yes, I would accept that," he said.

"With Iraq I had to decide, would the world be better without Saddam or with him? In the end I think it's better he is out but I have never disrespected someone with a different point of view," Blair said on Wednesday.

Conservatives claw away at Labour's dominance

AFP, London

The main opposition Conservatives tried to put their internal divisions behind them and chip away at the governing Labour Party with one month to go before general elections.

In the first full day of campaigning since Prime Minister Tony Blair on Tuesday set May 5 as the election date, the Tories moved to replace a key figure who was ousted last month in a row over the party's budget plans.

Conservative leader Michael Howard barred Howard Flight, a deputy party chairman, from running as a candidate after the press published Flight's remarks to a private meeting suggesting the

party had a program of secret cuts.

Flight had sought local party support to fight his removal but the Conservatives in his Arundel and South Downs constituency in south-east England were now preparing to replace him during a vote later Wednesday.

"We will not promise one thing before an election and do something else after an election," Howard said March 25 after barring Flight as a candidate. "We will not say one thing in private and another thing in public."

Meanwhile, Howard prepared later Wednesday for what promises to be a gloves-off duel with Blair in their last head-to-head session in parliament before it is dissolved for the elections.

The economy, which has performed well under Labour, is a key focus of the campaign and likely to be highlighted in debate Wednesday.

Blair and Howard were due to debate in the House of Commons for the weekly prime minister's questions, joined by Charles Kennedy, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the second largest opposition party.

Howard was also due to visit the northern English region of Yorkshire, where he was to highlight law and order, in line with the focus he wants to place on the scourge of "job culture," referring to thugs.

Nationwide raids against 'corrupt' Indian officials

PTI, New Delhi

CBI on Wednesday carried out a nationwide special drive against the Government officials of India allegedly indulging in corrupt practices.

Raids were being carried out at 60 places and the CBI has registered 25 cases against Government officials, the agency sources said.

In New Delhi, six places, including official and residential premises of some senior officers have been raided, the sources said.

In the second nationwide swoop in the year, the CBI on Wednesday carried out raids at 60 places against senior Government officials suspected of indulging in corrupt practices. It recovered cash to the tune of lakhs of rupees.

The raids, which began in the wee hours of Wednesday, were being carried out in various parts of the country after the agency had com-

pleted its preliminary enquiry, the CBI sources said in New Delhi. Twenty-five cases have been registered so far.

Raids were being carried out at six places in New Delhi against Deputy Commissioner of Police (Supreme Court Security) AA Farooqui and Director (Finance), Urban Development Ministry, Sanjay Kumar Sah, an Income Tax Officer of 1990 batch.

The CBI sources claimed that Rs one lakh cash had been seized from the residence of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, besides over one kg of gold.

Similarly, a disproportionate assets case was registered against an Executive Engineer Bansi Lal in Patna for allegedly amassing assets over Rs 1.21 crore. The CBI also claimed to have recovered cash of Rs 1.3 lakh from his residence, besides a bank balance of Rs three lakh.

US to tighten border controls by 2008

AP, Detroit

Flashing your driver's license when returning from jaunts to Mexico, Canada or the Caribbean won't be enough in a few years after federal officials announced plans to tighten re-entry rules.

Americans would need passports to come home to the United States by 2008 under guidelines proposed Tuesday, the latest effort to deter terrorists from entering the country.

Across the country, the proposal drew mixed reaction from those who use the crossings with Canada and Mexico. Some say people will simply adapt to the new rules the way they have other changes, while others worry that requiring passports could cause delays or make them less likely to cross.

The guidelines don't concern Shirley Foran, who always carries

her passport, birth certificate and Michigan driver's license when she makes one of her half-dozen or so trips a year across the Detroit River to Canada.

It's a quick drive -- traffic permitting -- to Windsor, Ontario, where restaurants and Casino Windsor are among the attractions for day-trippers. "I don't want them to change the rules when I'm in the other country," Foran said.

But Johanna Hitcome, who spent a few hours Tuesday at the Fort Erie Race Track and Slots in Ontario, predicted the requirement would end excursions to Canada for many. The Detroit-Windsor crossings are the busiest links between the United States and Canada.

"It would restrict a lot of people," said Hitcome, 68, of Lakewood in Chautauqua County, N.Y. "The idea of getting a passport is too mind-boggling," she said.

Royal wedding invite to Mumbai 'dabbawallas'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

When Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, weds Camilla Parker Bowles next Saturday, there will be two unusual guests from India at the marriage ceremony.

The guests Raghunath Medge and Sopan Mare, two of the 5,000-odd "lunch box carriers", popularly known as "dabbawallas" of Bombay who are hailed by global management gurus as a perfect supply chain that delivers nearly 150,000 lunch boxes carrying homemade food to office employees and students every day in India's commercial capital.

Medge, 48 and 55-year-old Mare are two members of Mumbai Tiffin Box Suppliers' Association who have been invited by the British High Commission to attend the wedding of Prince Charles with Camilla Parker Bowles.

Monaco in mourning after Prince Rainier dies

REUTERS, Monaco

Monaco's Prince Rainier III, Europe's longest reigning monarch, died at the age of 81 on Wednesday April 6 2005 at 6.35 in the morning (0435 GMT)," the palace said in a statement.

Rainier brought Hollywood glamour to Monaco by marrying beautiful American actress Grace Kelly in 1956 and transformed the world's smallest state except for the Vatican from a faded gambling center into a billionaires' haven.

would recover.

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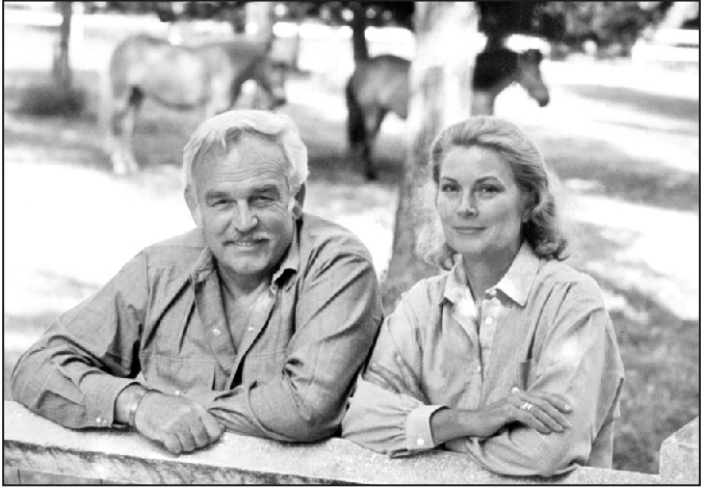


PHOTO: AFP

Picture taken during a summer of 1979 at Roc Agel, their summer residence near Monaco, of Prince Rainier of Monaco and his wife Princess Grace who died in a car crash in 1982.

He strengthened the sovereignty of Monaco as enshrined by a 1917 treaty with France, its territorial waters and air space were recognized and it won a United Nations seat.

But Rainier -- the world's second longest-serving monarch after King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand -- cut a lonely figure in later life as media focused on his children's problems and on charges that Monaco had become a mafia refuge for dirty money.

Rainier's reign added to the legendary curse of the Grimaldi dynasty that has haunted his family during its seven centuries of rule over Monaco.

Princess Grace died in a car crash in 1982 and his daughters Stephanie and Caroline have had a succession of disastrous, high-profile relationships.

Rainier was clearly heartbroken when Grace died after the car she was driving skidded off a steep mountain road in 1982.

He never showed any sign of wanting to remarry. "I still feel her absence. It was a marriage of love," he said in 1999.

When Rainier succeeded his grandfather Prince Louis II, Monaco was best known for the casino on which its prosperity was founded in the 19th century.