

# US Senate rejects Iraq pullout plan

AFP, Washington

Democrats cranked up pressure on the White House over Iraq Thursday, scoring an initial coup in the House of Representatives, but then failed to ram a troop withdrawal plan through the Senate.

Rancour between Congress's majority Democrats and President George W. Bush and his Republican backers hardened amid fierce debate over two bills advancing a timetable to get combat troops out of Iraq's cauldron of violence next year.

The Senate rejected a Democratic bill by 50 votes to 48, which set a goal of a withdrawal of troops by March 2008, in the latest twist of a bitter political tussle sparked by a war, which has claimed 3,209 US lives.

One Democrat, Ben Nelson of Nebraska, voted against the measure, while one Republican, Gordon Smith of Oregon, who has already broken with the president over the war, voted with the Democrats.

Bush, who accuses Democrats of trying to micromanage the war and of trying to handcuff his constitutional powers as commander in chief, had threatened to veto the bill.

Democrats had harboured little hope of piling up the 60 vote super-majority they needed to assure passage, but their strategy was designed to publicly tighten the screws on Republicans over the unpopular war.

In the House, Democrats did succeed in forcing a separate attempt to pull troops out of Iraq by September 2008 through the powerful Appropriations Committee.

Members voted to insert the deadline in Bush's 120 billion dollar budget request for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, overriding Republican opposition and in defiance of another presidential veto threat.

The full House is expected to consider the bill next week.

In the Senate, both sides claimed

## Sacking of top judge

FROM PAGE 1  
hundreds of people including lawyers entered the court compound as Chaudhry arrived, a reporter said.

A crowd of around 1,000 people outside the court chanted "Down with Musharraf dog", "Go Musharraf go" and "Allahu Akbar (God is Greatest)" and waved black banners.

Ahmed - a fundamentalist and vocal opponent of Musharraf because of his failure to restore full democracy and his ties to Washington - had earlier led a session of Friday prayers in front of parliament lodges.

Police also tear-gassed and baton-charged opposition workers who came out of a mosque near a key intersection in the eastern city of Lahore, as well as lawyers outside Lahore High Court, witnesses said.

The opposition rally in Lahore was also attended by former president Rafiq Tarar, they said. More than 50 people were arrested, witnesses said.

In the northwestern city of Peshawar around 1,000 people joined a rally attended by both Islamists and secular parties, while some 300 lawyers marched in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, witnesses said.

Security forces earlier rounded up nearly 100 lawyers and Islamists across the country in a bid to stop the outcome.

## Iran develops air defence system

AFP, Tehran

The Iranian military has developed a new air defence system with a boosted ability to hit targets by firing two missiles simultaneously, state radio said yesterday.

"This new air defence system which can shoot one or two missiles simultaneously... has been designed by army ground forces and tested successfully," the radio said.

"It has high mobility and flexibility, and can pursue aerial targets in any climate. Simultaneous firing increases the chances of defence missiles hitting" their targets, it added.

Iran is heading for a showdown with the UN Security Council over its disputed nuclear programme, which the West fears could be diverted towards weapons development.

Tehran vehemently denies the charges, insisting that its atomic programme of uranium enrichment is peaceful in nature.

Iranian leaders have repeatedly said the country's armed forces are ready for any eventuality in the current nuclear stand-off.

"If our bullying enemy wants to do something insane, it will surely be taken by surprise," army chief Major General Attaullah Salehi said on Friday, in remarks quoted by the official IRNA news agency.

The United States, which accuses Iran of seeking a nuclear weapon, has never ruled out a military option to halt Tehran's atomic drive.

Iran also considers the nuclear programme to be an "existential threat" after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad repeatedly called for the Jewish state to be wiped off the map.

Its Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said Israel did not "rule out" taking military steps against Iran.

Israel is believed to be the region's sole if undeclared nuclear power.

victory after their latest fracas, and immediately dug in for a new round of legislative infighting over the war, likely to intensify with presidential and congressional elections looming in 2008.

"We have had a very good day. The Republicans are rubber-stamping the president's failed policy, that is the message here," said Democratic majority leader Harry Reid.

"This is part of a process, a process to bring our troops home."

Senator Joseph Biden, Democratic chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee predicted Republican Senators would soon feel rising political heat.

"It is only a matter of time before our Republican colleagues come to that conclusion... In the meantime a lot of innocent lives are going to be lost."

Republican Minority leader Mitch McConnell however said the Senate had made a landmark declaration against a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq.

"I am very pleased that the majority of the Senate today expressed themselves in opposition to a specific timeline for a withdrawal of troops," he said.

"That is like sending a memo to the enemy: 'just hold on to a certain date and we are out.'"

In a clutch of Iraq votes, the Senate also voted 96-2 to pass a Democratic bill expressing support for the troops in Iraq and calling for the provision of adequate medical care when they return home wounded.

The largely symbolic measure states that supporting the troops also means giving them proper training before they are deployed.

Some Democrats have accused the Bush administration of sending soldiers into harms way before they are ready to enter combat or are properly equipped.

A third resolution, perceived by some as an attempt to force Congress to finance all military

operations, was also passed. Congress theoretically has the power to cut funding for the war, but Democrat leaders have so far declined to take the politically explosive step that could be seen as deserting troops while they are locked in combat.

Democrats believe they have a mandate from US voters to begin a troop withdrawal, after winning control of Congress in November elections and a stream of opinion polls showing strong public support for leaving Iraq.

But Republicans have so far blocked all attempts to interfere with Bush's surge strategy that will see more than 21,500 troops deploy in a last-ditch attempt to pacify Iraq.

US Vice President Dick Cheney led resistance to Democratic tactics earlier this week in a speech to the powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee lobby group.

"A sudden withdrawal of our coalition would dissipate much of the effort that's gone into fighting the global war on terror and result in chaos and mounting danger," he said.

"For the sake of our own security, we will not stand by and let it happen."

The 13 nations agreed on Friday to assess the economic cost of Earth's rich biodiversity in a bid to stem species loss and sought common ground in the world's global warming crisis.

The meeting at the Cecilienhof chateau - the venue of the 1945 Potsdam agreement that reshaped Europe - gathers the Group of Eight (G8) countries and five major developing nations: Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa.

The 13 ministers agreed a "Potsdam Initiative" on biodiversity that would seek to calculate the economic costs from dwindling species, said German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel, hosting the meeting.

The study would be like the Stern Report on climate change, Gabriel told a press conference, referring to the landmark document issued by British economist Sir Nicholas Stern last year that estimated the economic costs from the effects of global warming.

The 13 countries account for more than two-thirds of the world's carbon emissions, the invisible gases that trap heat from the Sun and threaten havoc with the planet's delicate climate system.

Gabriel said the talks, taking place in an "excellent atmosphere," also sought a way forward on how to cut emissions of greenhouse gases.

"There has been no negotiations," stressed Gabriel, saying the goal was to find common ground ahead of a G8 plus Five summit in June in the Baltic resort of Heiligendamm.

Breaching a low-key security ring, Greenpeace activists aboard a sailing vessel and five Zodiac dinghies sailed up the Havel river next to the chateau, and unfurled banners demanding urgent action against global warming by the G8.

Joerg Fedder of Greenpeace Germany came to the chateau entrance where, under police escort, he sought to hand a petition to Gabriel.

Earth's surface temperatures have been steadily rising for the last few decades, driven by the release of billions of tonnes of carbon gases from burning fossil fuels.

The only worldwide pact for reducing these dangerous emissions is the UN's Kyoto Protocol, which runs out in 2012 but will deliver a cut of only a few percentage points compared with 1990.

That reduction will apply only to industrialised countries, not big developing ones, which do not have binding

targets.

It was also learnt that cricketers Nahidul Haq Shaown and Mohammad Salim were accompanying Rana in another bike to the hotel, some 30 kilometres from Khulna city.

According to his family sources, Rana and Setu were going to Abash hotel at Chuknagar to take lunch after playing a local cricket match between Boyra Tarun Sangha and Flying Pigeon Club at the Bir Shreshtha Flight Lt Matir Rahman Stadium, which is about 200 yards from his residence.

It was also learnt that cricketers Nahidul Haq Shaown and Mohammad Salim were accompanying Rana in another bike to the hotel, some 30 kilometres from Khulna city.

Hundreds of people including officials of civil and police administration rushed to the Khulna Medical College Hospital where the dead bodies were brought from Dumuria at 7:30 pm.

Rana's mother Jamila Khatoon received the news of her son's death at 6:30 pm and was repeatedly losing sense. All other family members were outside Kulna.

Setu, a Premier League cricketer in Dhaka who also played for Khulna Division in the country's first-class competition, was the son of Abdul Matin, a businessman who hails from Bagmara under Khulna Sadar than.

Both the cricketers had featured in Kulna's final match of this season's National Cricket League in Dhaka on Thursday. Rana was also due to leave for Colombo on March 24 to represent Bangladesh Ateam.

In further international reaction a group of 70 British lawyers, including Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife, said reports of the "humiliating treatment of the chief justice of Pakistan" was causing "great international unease."

Musharraf spoke about the issue for the first time on Thursday, telling a public meeting that he would accept whatever decision emerges from the ongoing judicial inquiry and that he would address the nation on the outcome.

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Mohtyuddin

FROM PAGE 1  
Enforcement from his Los Angeles residence.

Brian De More, deputy field director of the US immigration enforcement agency said on Thursday that the authorities will begin proceedings to return Mohtyuddin to Bangladesh.

Mohtyuddin left the country soon after Awami League (AL) had come to power in 1996. He was tried in absentia and two years later, along with some other ex-army personnel, was convicted of assassinating the country's founding father.

Led by Sheikh Hasina, one of Bangabandhu's two surviving daughters, the erstwhile AL government took measures for extraditing the killers, but could not finish the job during its tenure. The process of bringing them back stalled after BNPL-led four-party alliance had formed a new government in 2001.

Meanwhile, assistant inspector general (AIG) of police of the Bangladesh chapter of Interpol said the government has yet to issue instructions regarding Mohtyuddin's extradition.

"We have not been officially informed of the arrest but we have learnt about it from the media," AIG of Interpol Motiur Rahman Sheikh told The Daily Star.

He said the government had earlier placed a demand to the international police organisation, for sending Mohtyuddin back to Bangladesh.

Police sources said Mohtyuddin was declared an absconder when the trial of Bangabandhu killing case started in 1996. An arrest warrant was also issued through Interpol at the time.

The sources also said Interpol may send him back to Bangladesh under that arrest warrant.

Mohtyuddin may be executed immediately after his return to the country since he did not appeal his death sentence within the stipulated timeframe, according to legal experts.

## Rich, poor nations seek way through climate deadlock

AFP, Potsdam

Environment ministers from 13 major nations agreed here on Friday to

assess the economic cost of Earth's rich biodiversity in a bid to stem species loss and sought common ground in the world's global warming crisis.

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