

US, Europe get frustrated with Karzai

Several militants killed in Afghan raids

AFP, AP, Washington/Kabul

US officials are growing increasingly frustrated with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, arguing that he is not up to addressing Afghanistan's many troubles. The New York Times reported yesterday.

The newspaper said that even a senior State Department official questioned in an interview whether Karzai had the "trust and the backbone" for the job.

"Of course he's a good guy, and therefore as long as he's president we'll support him," the paper quotes the unnamed official as saying. "But

there's a lot of talk inside the administration saying maybe there's a need for some tough love to push him to do the right thing."

One European diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "We've got the standard administration problem of fascination with a flawed figure."

According to the paper, the diplomat likened the US support for Karzai to Washington's backing for President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan.

US officials expressed particular frustration over the Afghan president's refusal to arrest drug lords who are running the country's

opium trade, which many international observers believe the Taliban have used to fund their comeback. The Times said.

At both the State Department and the Pentagon, some officials are saying that President Bush should use the financial leverage of American aid to Afghanistan to demand that Karzai do more to crack down on corruption, according to the report.

Others questioned whether the White House would endorse a tougher line against Karzai when there are no obvious pro-American alternatives to him among Afghan leaders, the paper noted.

Still, President George W. Bush has sought to address some of the complaints, the report said.

Meanwhile, US-led coalition and Afghan forces raided several homes in a district just north of the capital, killing several militants who shot at them, the coalition said yesterday.

The operation in the Tagab Valley of Kapisa province, 40 miles northeast of Kabul, targeted a militant leader, the coalition said in a statement. During the operation, militants fired on the Afghan and US forces from covered defensive positions, the statement said.

Brown begs for backing on terror plans

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown on Saturday begged his own party's lawmakers to back plans for tackling terror suspects, in a last-ditch bid to avoid a damaging defeat.

The beleaguered premier wrote to every MP in his governing Labour Party, urging them to support proposals to extend the period that terror suspects can be held without charge from 28 days to 42 days.

Around 50 Labour lawmakers are worried by the plans and could vote with the opposition on Wednesday.

That would be enough to inflict on Brown his first defeat as prime minister in parliament's slower House of Commons, adding to his woes following dismal opinion polls and crushing local election and by-election defeats.



People trapped inside a convenience store wait for floodwaters to subside in Hong Kong yesterday. Streets in Hong Kong were flooded by torrential rain, leaving two people feared trapped after a wall collapsed due to the downpour.

Europeans already looking past Bush

AP, Washington

President Bush's motorcade will speed through European capitals next week, but for many Europeans, the Bush presidency is already in their rearview mirror.

Trans-Atlantic relations are on the upswing. European leaders have moved beyond their anger over the US-led invasion of Iraq. And while anti-Bush sentiment still runs high

on the streets, it is being mollified by Europeans' excitement about the race for Bush's successor.

Like many Americans, Europeans have Bush fatigue and many believe that both presumptive presidential nominees, Barack Obama and John McCain, will have different positions perhaps more favourable than Bush on issues important to Europe.

"I'm sure there will be some

protests, but I think people are just looking past this guy at this point and they're interested in what comes next," said James M Goldgeier, an expert on Europe at the Council on Foreign Relations. "There's no reason for any leader to give him anything because he's on the way out. You have a presidency that's losing energy, is consumed by Iraq and a president who is unpopular, in general, in Europe and people are

looking beyond him."

Bush's weeklong trip to Slovenia, Germany, Italy, France and Britain is not his final goodbye to his European counterparts. He sees them again at another summit next month in Japan. Yet, as he completes the final leg of his presidency, the jaunt through central and western Europe is one of Bush's last chances to further smooth US-European relations for his successor.

Larijani warns IAEA against playing for time

AFP, Tehran

Iran's powerful parliament speaker Ali Larijani warned the UN nuclear watchdog on Saturday against playing for time in a dispute over Iran's controversial atomic programme.

Iran came under heavy fire at a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency this week for failing to come clean on alleged nuclear weapons work.

"The agency has submitted an ambiguous report. They might be pursuing a 'One Thousand and One Nights' diplomacy that they are continually playing for time," the state IRNA news agency quoted Larijani as saying.

The former nuclear chief was alluding to a collection of folk tales, also known as the "Arabian Nights," in which the storyteller Scheherazade, doomed to be executed, begins a new story each night but delays the ending till the following night as a way of staying alive.

In his latest report on Iran, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei accused the Islamic republic of withholding key information on alleged nuclear weapons studies.

Israelis, Palestinians to start writing peace pact

AP, Jerusalem

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have agreed to start drafting elements of a proposed peace accord, the chief Palestinian negotiator said Friday.

Ahmed Qureia, the veteran negotiator heading the Palestinian team, made it clear the decision did not necessarily reflect agreement on major issues. But this would be the first time since negotiations resumed more than six months ago that anything would be committed to paper.

"We agreed with the Israelis to begin writing the positions," Qureia told reporters late Friday.

Israeli government officials would not comment and Qureia did not explain why the two sides had agreed at this point to begin drafting a text.

However, the timing coincides with a corruption scandal in Israel that threatens to unseat Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Should Israel find itself going to early elections, polls show Benjamin Netanyahu, who opposes major territorial concessions to the Palestinians, becoming Israel's next premier. However, drafting during previous rounds of peace talks has not always meant that those positions were then preserved for future negotiators.

Qureia did not say what issue

the two sides would start with. If they reach agreement on any issue, then they will draft a single provision, he said. If not, they will lay out on paper their divergent views, he added.

Israel and the Palestinians resumed peace talks in late November under US prodding. Continued Israeli settlement construction and Israeli security concerns have clouded negotiations, and both sides have expressed doubt about achieving the declared goal of clinching a final accord by the end of the year.

Qureia confirmed that Israeli peace negotiators have offered the Palestinians land in exchange for territory where major West Bank settlements lie, but he termed their offer "unacceptable."

Palestinians would like to incorporate all of the West Bank into a future state, but their moderate president, Mahmoud Abbas, has acknowledged that Israel, with US backing, likely will hold on to blocs where tens of thousands of settlers live. In exchange, Abbas is prepared to relinquish some West Bank land for an equal amount of Israeli land.

Qureia would not say how much territory Israel offered, where it is located or how much West Bank land the Jewish state proposed to keep under a final peace accord with the Palestinians.

"The Israelis presented a land

swap offer, but this offer is unacceptable to us," he said.

Other Palestinian officials have said Israel has presented maps giving it 10 percent of the West Bank in exchange for southern Israeli territory near the Gaza Strip.

Early Friday, one Palestinian militant was killed and two were injured in a gunbattle that erupted after Israeli tanks and bulldozers crossed into central Gaza. The military said its forces entered to prevent rocket launches.

Fifteen Palestinians, some Hamas militants, others civilians were wounded in a second aerial attack on a Hamas base in northern Gaza later Friday, doctors said. The missiles destroyed a building, witnesses said.

Hamas also fired four rockets toward Israel, the group said. One landed in the rocket-scarred town of Sderot, damaging six cars, the military said.

The latest flare-up in violence began Thursday when a Hamas mortar killed an Israeli and injured four others in southern Israel. Israel then sent aircraft after a rocket squad, the military said, but apparently missed their target, killing a 6-year-old Palestinian girl.

Olmert warned that Israel was close to abandoning efforts to bring a truce to the volatile area and was seriously considering a large-scale incursion.

Obama, McCain in neck-and-neck race

PTI, New York

With five months to go for the US Presidential election, presumptive Democratic nominee Barack Obama and Republican John McCain are locked in a statistical dead heat with more than one in five voters acknowledging that they might change their mind between now and November, an opinion poll showed.

Analysts agreed that polls five months before the election may not be indicative of the final outcome but would be watched closely by the candidates.

In the CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll, the first conducted entirely after Obama became the presumptive Democratic nominee, he leads his Republican counterpart 49 per cent to 46 per cent among

registered voters -- a statistical tie, given the 3-point margin of error.

McCain and Obama are not alone. Independent candidate Ralph Nader and Republican-turned-Libertarian Bob Barr are vying with the two major-party candidates for independent voters.

But at this point, the poll says it looks unlikely either will play a spoiler role. When pollsters asked about a field of candidates that includes Nader and Barr, the margin between Obama and McCain was virtually unchanged, with Democrat leading 47 per cent to 43 per cent. Nader pulls in 6 per cent and Barr 2.

A hypothetical Obama-Hillary Clinton ticket would currently get 52 per cent of the vote, compared with 46 per cent for a hypothetical McCain-Mitt Romney ticket, according to the poll.

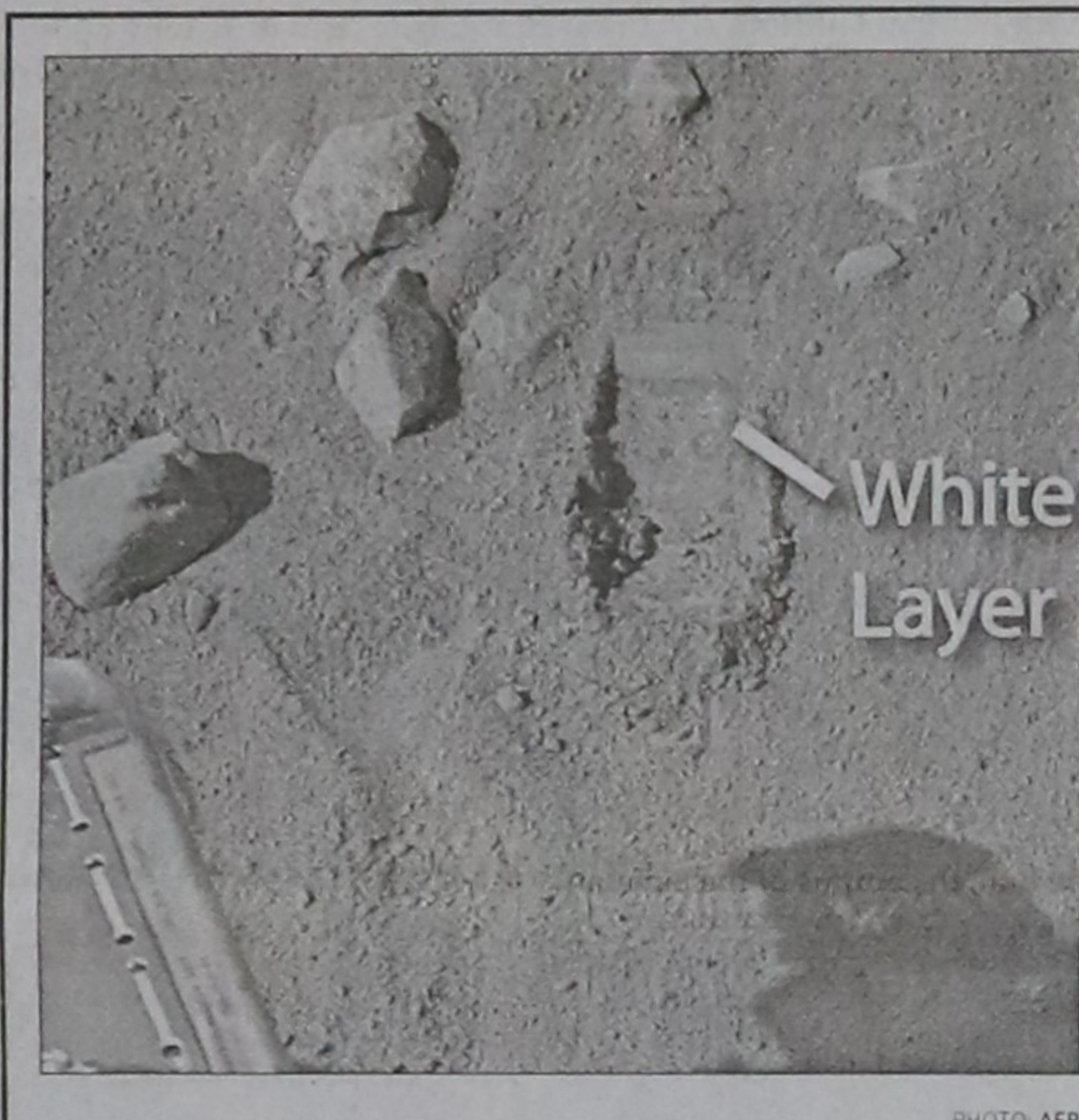


PHOTO: AFP

This June 4 Nasa handout image acquired by the Phoenix Mars Lander's Surface Stereo Imager shows a white layer visible where the Phoenix Lander robotic arm scooped away the Martian soil.

Mars probe digs up first sample of Martian soil

AFP, Washington

Nearly two weeks after its historic landing, the US Mars probe Phoenix has scooped up its first sample of Martian soil and begun analysing it for water and organic compounds, a Nasa official said Friday.

The 200-millilitre (12 cubic inches) of Martian earth is topped by a white crust that has set Nasa scientists debating whether it is ice or salt deposits from evaporated water.

"It looks like a good sample for

us," Phoenix mission chief scientist Peter Smith told reporters in a telephone conference.

"This is really an important occasion for us, to be poised to make a measurement for the first time of the polar soil that will tell us how much water is in the soil, and secondly what the minerals are that make up the soil," said Smith.

Especially intriguing, he said, is to find out whether ice believed to be under the Martian soil has already melted and changed the composition of the soil.

Zimbabwe opposition rallies banned

AP, Harare

Just three weeks before Zimbabwe's presidential runoff, Robert Mugabe is giving the opposition little room to campaign, banning rallies and attacking diplomats who try to investigate political violence.

Even food is being used as a weapon, American and British officials said, with a ban on aid agencies ensuring that the poorest Zimbabweans must turn to Mugabe for help even if they blame him for the collapse of the economy. The government denied the allegations.

Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai out-poll Mugabe and two other candidates in the first round of voting March 29, but did not get the simple majority necessary to avoid a runoff. In recent days, it has become increasingly clear that Mugabe does not plan to let Tsvangirai come close to toppling him in the June 27 runoff.

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Tender Notice

Sealed tender are hereby invited from the bonafide first class contractors for construction of Boundary wall and Barbed wire fencing of 3200 ± 1% rft periphery of a land situated at Ashulia, Uttara, Dhaka. The bidders must have experience in construction of civil construction works of at least 50 lacs in single contract within last two years. The land belongs to East West University.

Tender documents will be available from accounts section of East West University on ground floor of Academic building, 43, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka - 1212 on all working days up to 5 P.M. on or before 25 June 2008 at a cost of Tk. 2000.00 in cash (Non-refundable).

Tender will be received on 26 June 2008 at 10:00AM in the tender box to be kept on the 1st floor of Research Building in front of the office of Deputy Project Director. No tender will be received by post or courier service.

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Purchase of Microscopes.

Project Name	BHP (Malaria)
Tender Package No	BHP/01-08
Reference No & Date	IFT/BRAC/BPD-BHP/08-023 June 05, 2008
Name of Item	Microscopes
Quantity	71 (Seventy one) units
Time for Completion of Delivery	45 days
Price of Tender Document	Tk. : 500/- (Non-refundable)
Name and address of the Office Selling Tender Document	Accounts Department, 4 th Floor, Annex Building, BRAC Centre, 75 Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.
Name and address of the Office Receiving & Opening Tenders	BRAC Procurement Department (BPD), 75 Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.
Date and Time for Selling Tender Document	June 9 to June 18, 2008 Time: 09.00am to 3: 00pm.
Date and Time for Submission of Tenders	June 19, 2008 Time: 9:00am to 2:00 pm
Date and Time for Opening of Tenders	June 19, 2008 Time: 3:00 pm.