

76 Nobel laureates endorse Obama for president

ENVIRONMENT NEWS SERVICE, Washington

In an open letter to the American people released Tuesday, 76 American Nobel Laureates in science endorsed Democratic Senator Barack Obama of Illinois for president of the United States. This is the largest number of Nobel prize winners ever to endorse a candidate for office.

"This year's presidential election is among the most significant in our nation's history," the Nobel Laureates wrote. "The country urgently needs a visionary leader who can ensure the future of our traditional strengths in science and technology and who can harness those strengths to address many of our greatest problems: energy, disease, climate change, security, and economic competitiveness."

"We are convinced that Senator Barack Obama is such a leader, and we urge you to join us in supporting him."

McCain renews attacks on 'far-left' Obama

Voter turnout expected to be highest in decades

AFP, AP, Newport News/Washington

Republican presidential nominee John McCain ramped up his attacks on Democratic rival Barack Obama on Saturday, describing his rival as stuck in the "far left lane" of American politics.

McCain kicked off the final weekend of campaigning before Americans head to the polls in historic elections on Tuesday by sticking to his strategy of painting Obama as an old-school tax-and-spend liberal.

Virginia is one of a handful of battleground states McCain needs to win if he is to score an upset over Obama, who is bidding to become the first black US president and who is leading in a slew of national and local polls.

McCain has honed in on Obama's tax proposals in the final stages of the campaign, aiming to attract unde-

cided working class voters by portraying Obama as a socialist plotting to introduce steep hikes.

The 72-year-old Arizona senator returned to the theme on Saturday, saying Obama's plans for the economy were "exactly the wrong approach in an economic slowdown."

He said Obama's comments to Ohio plumber Samuel Wurzelbacher that it was good to "spread the wealth around" during a campaign stop revealed his true intent.

"We've learned more about Senator Obama's real goals for our country in the last two weeks than we did in the last two years, and that's only because Joe the Plumber asked him a question," McCain said.

Senator Obama is in the far left lane of American politics, it should surprise no-one. He's the most liberal senator in the US Senate, and who is leading in a slew of national and local polls.

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US voters plug into power of the Internet

AFP, Washington

Barack Obama and John McCain have relied heavily on the Internet for their US presidential campaigns but it's not just the candidates who have tapped into the power of the web this election.

The voters have too -- whether it's finding how much money a neighbour or a celebrity has donated, watching a video on YouTube, reading a political blog or news site or consulting an online "Truth-O-Meter" for politicians.

Leaving aside the candidates' websites, Facebook pages, YouTube videos, Twitter feeds and emails, the average US voter this time around has an unprecedented trove of information available at his or her fingertips.

"There are a lot of great non-partisan sites that have all kinds of information, not just about the presidential candidates," said Micah Sifry, co-founder of techpresident.com, a blog which covers politics and the web.



PHOTO: AFP
US Democratic presidential candidate Illinois Senator Barack Obama talks with children as he walks around his neighbourhood with his daughter Sasha, 7, dressed up for Halloween, in Chicago, Illinois on Friday.



PHOTO: AFP
Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (L) meets with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (R) at the Kremlin in Moscow yesterday. Gaddafi stressed oil and gas in a meeting with Medvedev, starting talks, which are also expected to touch on arms purchases and nuclear energy.

Gaddafi meets Medvedev for arms, nuclear talks

AFP, Barvikha

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi met President Dmitry Medvedev on Friday on his first visit to Russia since 1985, a trip that could revive military ties between Tripoli and Moscow.

"I hope your visit will be productive... Our countries have had friendly relations for decades," said Medvedev prior to dinner with his guest at his country residence outside Moscow.

Gaddafi, in his trademark Bedouin

robes, responded: "I hope this visit will be fruitful for our relations."

Arms purchases and nuclear energy are on the cards for Gaddafi's three-day visit. Libya might also offer to host a Russian naval base at the Mediterranean port of Benghazi, the Russian newspaper Kommersant reported.

The Russian military presence will be a guarantee of non-aggression against Libya from the United States," it said.

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Indian cabinet okays setting up of a South Asian University

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian cabinet has approved a bill before its introduction in Parliament in its current session for setting up of a South Asian University here.

The approval was given at a meeting of the cabinet here on Thursday night.

Even though the bill, which provides the legal contours of the university, is being brought in Parliament in its ongoing session, groundwork for setting up India's first international university has already begun with land acquisition and appointment of four coordinators, including one from Bangladesh, for drawing up infrastructure, business model and course curriculum and some other aspects of the university.

While India will pay Rs 75 crore for land, contribution for meeting other expenditures of the university will be decided by Saarc member-countries.

While Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh proposed the setting up of the university at the 13th Saarc summit in Dhaka in November 2005, it was only last year that an inter-governmental agreement was signed during the 14th summit in Delhi.

The university will have certain privileges and immunities as accorded to all Saarc bodies based on the UN Convention on Privileges and Immunities.

The university is expected to begin functioning from the second half of 2010 with 5,000 students.

Nineteen Muslim separatist rebels have been killed in fresh air strikes carried out by Philippine troops on southern Mindanao island, an official said yesterday.

The air assault was carried out after Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas attacked an army outpost Friday near the town of Datu Piang, regional army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Julieto Ando said.

He said three soldiers were wounded in that attack.

"We launched an air assault

Europe look ahead to life after Bush

AFP, Warsaw

They were favourites of George W Bush and his team, but on the eve of the US presidential election, the once-communist states of central and eastern Europe are not lamenting his departure.

In what used to be the frontline of the Warsaw Pact, as in the rest of Europe and beyond, a majority would rather see Democratic candidate Barack Obama move into the White House.

In one recent opinion poll, 62 percent of Poles said they would vote for Obama if they could, compared to 38 percent for Republican rival McCain, while in Czech Republic, Obama's support level was 68.3 percent.

The mood owes much to the integration of 10 once-communist nations into the European Union that began with enlargement in 2004.

"President Bush is very unpopular in Europe and McCain is perceived by Europeans as his continuation," political analyst Michael Romanow told the Czech daily Dnes.

"This is why they prefer anyone who stands up against him. It doesn't really have much to do with Barack Obama himself."

Five years ago, just before the Iraq war, then US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld coined the idea of "New Europe", praising the pro-American nations of eastern and central Europe as they emerged from communism.

The rebels have laid siege to some 300 Uruguayan and 150 Indian peacekeepers, and some 100 UN staff, NGO personnel and local civilians at a UN base in Rutshuru, near Goma, the regional capital in the eastern province of Nord-Kivu.

The rebels also currently surround the city.

The rebels are also recently surrounded by the conflict, UN officials reported.

"These (rebel) troops are backed by tanks, something that General Nkunda had not had until now," said Rosales.

'UN peacekeepers under siege in DR Congo'

AFP, Montevideo

Rwanda-backed rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are laying siege to 100 civilians, 150 Indian peacekeepers and half of the Uruguayan peacekeeping force at a UN base in Rutshuru, near Goma, the regional capital in the eastern province of Nord-Kivu.

The rebels also currently surround the city.

The Uruguayan contingent of the UN mission in the country (MONUC) have been under siege without drinking water for 48 hours," said Bayardi at a press conference at the Command of Peacekeeping Operations in Montevideo.

The rebels are also recently surrounded by the conflict, UN officials reported.

"These (rebel) troops are backed by tanks, something that General Nkunda had not had until now," said Rosales.

"Yesterday there was a contact with Nkunda and the water was restored, but the blockade remains and (those inside) are rationing food," he said.

Rosales said it was "not easy to identify rebel forces," but indicated that there is "high probability that troops from Rwanda are operating in the area."

The rebels have also recently attacked camps for people displaced by the conflict, UN officials reported.

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19 Muslim rebels killed in Philippine fighting

AFP, Cotabato

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The air assault was carried out after Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas attacked an army outpost Friday near the town of Datu Piang, regional army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Julieto Ando said.

He said three soldiers were wounded in that attack.

"We launched an air assault

to thwart reinforcement on the enemy side," Ando said, adding that radio reports from the ground indicated that 19 MILF rebels were killed in the air raid.

Fighting for the past week has been concentrated mostly in a sprawling marshland area where MILF units have been engaging the troops.

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