

## 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,

even more liberal than a senator who used to call himself a socialist."

"My friends, that's where he is now. That's where he is now."

Meanwhile, voter turnout will be the highest in decades, dwarfing recent presidential elections, experts predict. The only question dividing experts is how high it will be. Will it be the largest since 1968, largest since 1960 or even, as one expert predicts, the largest in a century? Soaring early voting levels hint at a big turnout, but that could just be the same voters casting ballots earlier instead of more voters hitting the polls. Weather should generally be favourable, according to forecasts.

What early voting numbers mean and how much the youth and Hispanic votes turn out are the big factors political scientists look at when trying to predict how many eligible Americans will vote.

## 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.



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.



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, Barvika

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.

Gaddafi is expected to meet Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Saturday.

## 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.

## 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.

## 19 Muslim rebels killed in Philippine fighting

AFP, Cotabato

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

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.

The government has suspended peace talks with the MILF and ordered a massive assault after two rebel commanders launched a string of deadly attacks across Mindanao in August.

## '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 attempting to secure the area, Uruguay Defence Minister Jose Bayardi said Friday.

The rebels troops led by ethnic Tutsi warlord Laurent Nkunda "are backed by tanks" and "artillery" from Rwanda, according to Uruguayan military commander Jorge Rosales, who is overseeing the peacekeeping troops.

Over the last two days 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 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.

"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.

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

## World faces growing risk of conflict

Says US intelligence chief

AFP, Washington

The world faces a growing risk of conflict over the next 20 to 30 years amid an unprecedented transfer of wealth and power from West to East, the US intelligence chief has said.

Michael McConnell, the director of national intelligence, predicted rising demand for scarce supplies of food and fuel, strategic competition over new technologies, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

"What I'm suggesting -- there's an increased potential for conflict," McConnell said in a speech Thursday to intelligence professionals in Nashville, Tennessee.

"During the period of this assessment, out to 2025, the probability for conflict between nations and within nation-state entities will be greater," he said.

Conditions for "large casualty terrorist attacks using chemical, biological, or less likely, nuclear

materials" also will increase during that period, he said.

McConnell described a multipolar world in 2025 shaped by the rise of China, India and Brazil, whose economies will by then match those of the western industrial states.

"In terms of size, speed, and directional flow, the transfer of global wealth and economic power, now underway, as noted from West to East is without precedent in modern history," McConnell said.

## Iraq sends more police to Syrian border

AP, Baghdad

Iraq sent police reinforcements Saturday to the Syrian border after last weekend's US raid against an alleged al-Qaeda hideout in Syria raised tension between the two countries, officials said.

Police Col. Jubair Rashid Naief said a police quick reaction force for Anbar province moved to the border town of Qaim, about 200 miles northwest of Baghdad, to prevent al-Qaeda from moving into the area from Syria.

Al-Arabiya television quoted witnesses as saying scores of armoured vehicles were seen moving from the Anbar provincial capital of Ramadi to Qaim,

which had been a major al-Qaeda stronghold until Anbar's Sunni tribes turned against al-Qaeda.

The police moves follow last Sunday's bold US raid on the Syrian border town of Abu Kamal, during which US officials say they killed a top al-Qaeda militant who operated a network of smuggling fighters into Iraq.

The US has not officially acknowledged the attack. Syria says eight civilians were killed and has branded the raid as aggression.

Syria has demanded that Washington apologise for the strike and has threatened to cut off cooperation on Iraqi border security in response to the attack. Earlier this week,

Damascus also sent additional troops to the border following the raid, but has since withdrawn them.

The Iraqi government has rejected the attack, but has urged Syria to crack down on organisations on its territory that are trying to hurt Iraq.

Also Saturday, unknown assailants gunned down a policeman on a foot patrol along Palestine Street in Shia eastern Baghdad, police said.

Violence is down sharply in Iraq since the Sunni revolt against al-Qaida and the routing of Shia militias in Baghdad and southern Iraq last spring. Still, attacks continue, although at a lower level.



Iraqi chiefs of tribes and clans wave their national flag during a protest against the controversial security pact with the United States SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) in Baghdad's Mustansiriyah Square yesterday. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said Friday he will submit the text of the controversial security pact with the United States to all of his country's neighbours.

## 90,000 Thais gather to hear Thaksin's address

AFP, Bangkok

About 90,000 supporters of exiled former premier Thaksin Shinawatra gathered in a Bangkok stadium Saturday to await his audio address, raising fears of clashes with rival protesters.

Clad in red shirts signalling their pro-government and pro-Thaksin stance, fans of the ousted ex-PM began arriving at Rajamangala sports stadium in Bangkok's eastern outskirts early in the morning.

The former premier, who fled to Britain in early August following his wife's conviction for tax evasion, is due to telephone the rally from an undisclosed location abroad at 8:00pm (1300 GMT).

Special Branch police said only a few seats remained empty at the sports ground.

## Mining for minerals fuels Congo conflict

AP, London

The conflict in eastern Congo is being fuelled and funded by a tussle for mineral resources that end up in cell phones, laptops and other electronics deepening the stakes in a war that sprung out of festering hatreds from the Rwandan genocide.

Rebel militias and Congolese army troops are fighting each other for control of mineral-rich land. They can then sell the raw materials they mine and use the proceeds to fund their activities and arms which prolongs the conflict.

"The links are very clear between the mining activity going to finance these groups, and these armed groups we know have been benefiting financially from the mining areas," said Lizzie Parsons, a member of the Congo team at London-based Global Witness, a non-governmental organization that investigates natural resource

exploitation.

Congo's present conflict stems from a rebellion started four years ago by renegade general Laurent Nkunda, who claimed the country's transition to democracy had excluded the Tutsi ethnic group. Despite agreeing in January to a UN-brokered cease-fire, he resumed fighting in August.

He alleges the Congolese government has not protected ethnic Tutsis from the Rwandan Hutu militia that escaped to Congo after helping slaughter half a million Rwandan Tutsis in 1994.

But analysts say that the heart of conflict is the struggle for minerals.

"In some ways (mineral exploitation) has become the means and the ends of the conflict," said Jennifer Cooke, the director of the Africa programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in New York.

control over the eastern Congo and much of the conflict there is a scramble at the local level and at the regional level for access to land and the minerals underneath them."

Congo is awash with gold, diamonds and metals such as cassiterite and coltan used to weld small pieces together in electronics.

The area around the eastern provincial capital of Goma, from which thousands of people fled and government soldiers retreated this week after Nkunda and his forces besieged it, is particularly mineral-rich.

There are several paths to the international market mostly bound for Asian factories for use in electronics and devices such as mobile phones and portable music players, said Colin Thomas-Jensen of Enough Project, a Washington-based human rights organization that carries out field research into various African conflicts including Congo.

### Singapore National Eye Centre

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#### One-stop International Centre Focused on Eye Care Excellence

Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) spearheads and coordinates the provision of specialised ophthalmological services and is the designated national centre for eye services in Singapore. Known for its high quality one-stop personalised service for patients, SNEC currently manages 250,000 outpatient visits, 14,000 day surgeries and 13,000 laser procedures annually. These include more than 10,000 phaco cataract surgeries, 7,000 LASIK procedures and 6,000 laser procedures for diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma.

#### Highly Qualified and Experienced Surgeons

The SNEC Vitreo-Retinal Service provides diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the retina, vitreous and choroids. Conditions commonly managed by the service include retinal detachment, diabetic retinopathy and age-related macular degeneration. The team of highly qualified and experienced surgeons performs more than 1,200 retina surgeries and 13,000 laser procedures annually.

#### Consultation Facilities At Galaxy's Local Office

Dr. Md. Gias Uddin, a senior consultant (eye), has completed a special programme from SNEC on critical eye care. From now, he will be available at Galaxy's Gulshan office on every Sunday. Dr. Md. Gias Uddin will consult and guide patients requiring treatment from SNEC for Vitro-Retinal Diseases, Corneal Diseases, Glaucoma, Lasik and other eye conditions.

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