

Bush defends plan for Arab firm to run ports

Busy ports of call

The six U.S. ports in an acquisition deal with the United Arab Emirates accounted for 26 percent of all port traffic in the nation in 2004.

Vessel calls, 2004, all vessel types

New York* (8)	4,862
New Orleans (8)	4,612
Philadelphia (5)	2,909
Baltimore (3)	1,747
Miami (2)	1,247

*Includes New Jersey; number in parentheses is percentage of total U.S. vessel calls

SOURCE: Department of Transportation AP

President says he will veto any bill to block agreement

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON

Brushing aside objections from Republicans and Democrats alike, President Bush endorsed the takeover of shipping operations at six major U.S. seaports by a state-owned business in the United Arab Emirates. He pledged to veto any bill Congress might approve to block the agreement.

The president on Tuesday defended his administration's earlier approval of the sale of London-based Peninsular and Oriental

Steam Navigation Co. to Dubai Ports World, despite concerns in Congress it could increase the possibility of terrorism at U.S. ports.

The pending sale, expected to be finalized in early March, puts Dubai Ports in charge of major shipping operations in New York, New Jersey, Baltimore, New Orleans, Miami and Philadelphia.

"If there was any chance that this transaction would jeopardize the security of the United States, it would not go forward," Bush said.

Bush sought to quiet a political storm that has united Republican governors and Senate Majority

Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee with liberal Democrats.

Frist said Tuesday, before Bush's comments, that he would introduce legislation to put the sale on hold if the White House did not delay the takeover.

U.S. Sen. Evan Bayh, D-Ind., said he will introduce legislation to increase oversight of business deals with foreign governments to protect homeland security.

Bayh said his bill would require such deals to be approved by the director of national intelligence before they were reviewed by the Committee on Foreign Investment.



AP PHOTO
An official guards the Port of Miami on Tuesday. President Bush said he would veto any bill that would stop an Arab company from taking over six U.S. ports.

THE WAR IN IRAQ

Car bomb kills 22 in Baghdad

Other attacks in city kill at least 8, leave 30 injured

By ROBERT H. REID
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

A car bomb exploded Tuesday on a street packed with shoppers in a Shiite area of Baghdad, killing 22 people and wounding 28, police said. It was the deadliest bomb attack in the Iraqi capital in a month.

Terrified children screamed and several women wailed for their dead, crying, "The terrorists, may God punish them." Shattered bits of fruits and vegetables from vendors' pushcarts lay scattered on the street amid pools of blood.

At least eight other people were killed and more than 30 were injured Tuesday in bombings and shootings elsewhere in Baghdad and in attacks on beauty parlors and liquor stores — symbols of Western influence — in Bagouba northeast of the capital.

The car bombing occurred shortly before 5 p.m. in a Shiite corner of Dora, a predominantly Sunni Arab district of Baghdad and one of the most dangerous parts of the city, rocked almost daily by bombings, ambushes and assassinations.

Police Maj. Gen. Mahdi al-Gharawi said the bomb was detonated by remote control and an Iraqi suspected of triggering the device had been arrested. Claims of early arrests in bombing cases often prove premature.

Another policeman, 1st Lt. Maitham Abdul-Razaq, said the blast apparently was aimed at a police patrol but missed its target, killing and maiming



AP PHOTOS
Iraqis inspect the wreckage of a car that exploded in Baghdad, Iraq, on Tuesday. At least 30 people were killed and at least 58 injured in a series of bombings Tuesday in Baghdad, according to police. An attack in a Shiite area killed at least 22 people.

shoppers strolling with their families along a street lined with appliance shops and fruit and vegetable stalls.

It was the deadliest bombing in Baghdad since Jan. 19, when a suicide attacker blew himself up in a coffee shop, killing 22 people and injuring 23.

The Dora bombing was the second major attack in as many days against a Shiite target in the capital. Twelve people died Monday when a suicide bomber detonated an explosives belt on a bus in the heavily Shiite district of Kazimiyah.

At least 969 Iraqis have been killed in war-related violence this year and at

least 986 have been wounded, according to an Associated Press count.

However, large-scale attacks against civilians have declined in recent weeks amid widespread public criticism, including from Sunnis clerics and others sympathetic to the Sunni-dominated insurgency.

Some Sunni insurgent groups are believed to be holding back to give Sunni Arab politicians a chance to negotiate concessions from Shiites and Kurds during talks on a new government.

Talks among parties that won parliamentary seats in the Dec. 15 elections

have bogged down because of fundamental differences among Shiite, Sunni Arab and Kurdish politicians.

A coalition of Shiite Muslim religious parties won 130 of the 275 seats in the new parliament, and Shiite leaders insist their strong showing in the election gives them the right to control key ministries.

U.S. officials believe a government capable of winning the trust of all communities is essential so the United States can hand over more security responsibility to the Iraqis and begin sending the 138,000 American troops home this year.

Rumsfeld backtracks, saying U.S. may still be planting stories in Iraq

By ROBERT BURNS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Tuesday that the Pentagon is reviewing its practice of paying to plant stories in the Iraqi news media, withdrawing his earlier claim that it had been stopped.

Rumsfeld told reporters he was mistaken in the earlier assertion.

"I don't have knowledge as to whether it's been stopped. I do have knowledge it was put under review. I was correctly informed. And I just misstated the facts," Rumsfeld said at a Pentagon news briefing.

Rumsfeld had in a speech in New York Friday and in a television interview the same day that the controversial practice had been stopped.

He said that Gen. George Casey, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, was reviewing the practice. Previously, Casey has said he saw no reason to stop it.

Earlier Tuesday, Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said Rumsfeld had been incorrect in saying on Friday that the practice of paying for positive stories in the Iraqi media had been halted in the wake of negative publicity in the United States.

An official inquiry into the program by Navy Rear Adm. Scott Van Buskirk has been completed, but its results have not been publicly released.

In his speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, a foreign-policy think tank, Rumsfeld raised the issue as an example of the U.S. military command in Baghdad

seeking nontraditional means to get its message to the Iraqi people in the face of a disinformation campaign by the insurgents.

"Yet this has been portrayed as inappropriate, for example, the allegations of someone in the military hiring a contractor and the contractor allegedly paying someone to print a story, a true story, but paying to print a story," he said during his speech.

"The resulting explosion of critical press stories then causes everything. All activity, all initiative, to stop, just frozen," he added.

In an appearance Friday on PBS' "The Charlie Rose Show," Rumsfeld said he had not known about the practice of paying for news stories before it became a subject of critical publicity in the United States.



Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Peter Pace leave a news conference at the Pentagon on Tuesday.

Top court to review abortion decision

Alito could be key in partial-birth case

By GINA HOLLAND
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

The Supreme Court said Tuesday it would consider reinstating a federal ban on what opponents call partial-birth abortion, pulling the contentious issue back to the high court on conservative Justice Samuel Alito's first day.

Alito could well be the tie-breaking vote when the court decides if doctors can be barred from performing the abortion procedure.

It is the first time the court has considered a federal restriction on abortion, and conservatives said they expect the membership change to affect the outcome.

"This is the frontline abortion case in the country," said Jay Sekulow, chief counsel for the conservative American Center for Law and Justice, who represents members of Congress in the case.

Justices split 5-4 in 2000 in striking down a state law barring the same procedure because it lacked an exception to protect the health of the mother. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who was the tie-breaking vote, retired late last month and was replaced by Alito.

Abortion was a major focus in the fight over Alito's nomination, and that of new Chief Justice John Roberts. Neither divulged how he would vote.

OTHER COURT DEVELOPMENTS

Supreme Court reviews racial discrimination case

The Supreme Court stepped into a dispute Tuesday over whether white managers can be sued for calling black employees "boys."

The court unanimously overturned an appeals court decision that said the term "boy" alone was not evidence of workplace discrimination and ordered the court to reconsider the matter.

Court sides with church in dispute over tea drinking

The Supreme Court ruled unanimously Tuesday that a small congregation in New Mexico may use hallucinogenic tea as part of a four-hour ritual intended to connect with God.

Justices, in their first religious freedom decision under Chief Justice John Roberts, moved decisively to keep the government out of a church's religious practice. Federal drug agents should have been barred from confiscating the hoasca tea of the Brazil-based church, Roberts wrote in the decision.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

P.O. Box 699
Franklin, IN 46131
letters@thejournalnet.com

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Publisher

Jeffrey W. Owen 736-2744
jowen@thejournalnet.com

Editor

Scarlett Syse 736-2749
syse@thejournalnet.com

Assistant managing editor

Michele Holtkamp-Frye 736-2774
mholtkamp@thejournalnet.com

Assistant managing editor

Jennifer L. Gaskin 736-2721
jgaskin@thejournalnet.com

Circulation director

Mike Warren 736-2711
mwarren@thejournalnet.com

Delivery manager

Bruce Powell 736-2702
bpowell@thejournalnet.com

Advertising director

Christina Cosner 736-2750
ccosner@thejournalnet.com

Administrative manager

Linda Wirey 736-2751
lwirey@thejournalnet.com

Information technology manager

Kathy McDermott 736-2782
kmcdermott@thejournalnet.com

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