

Dubai company to give up stake in U.S. ports



Workers unload wood pulp Thursday at the Tioga Marine Terminal in Philadelphia. DP World gave up its quest Thursday to take over U.S. port operations.

DP World acts after pressure from Congress

By DAVID ESPO
AND ANDREW TAYLOR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Bowing to ferocious opposition in Congress, a Dubai-owned company signaled surrender Thursday in its quest to take over operations at U.S. ports.

"DP World will transfer fully the U.S. operations ... to a United States entity," the firm's top executive, H. Edward Bilkey, said in an

"It would have to be an American company with no links to DP World, and that would be a tremendous victory and very gratifying."

Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y.
Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee
on what the final outcome of the deal should be

announcement that capped weeks of controversy.

Relieved Republicans in Congress said the firm had pledged full divestiture, a decision that one senator said had been approved personally by the prime minister of the United Arab Emirates.

The announcement appeared to indicate an end to a politically tinged controversy that brought President Bush and Republicans in

Congress to the brink of an election-year veto battle. The White House expressed satisfaction with the outcome.

"It does provide a way forward and resolve the matter," presidential spokesman Scott McClellan said.

A leading congressional critic of the ports deal, Rep. Peter King, applauded the decision but said he and others would wait to see the details.

"It would have to be an American company with no links to DP World, and that would be a tremendous victory and very gratifying," said the New York Republican, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee.

"This should make the issue go away," said Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist. The Tennessee Republican was one of several GOP leaders to tell Bush earlier in the day that Congress was ready to ignore his veto threat and scuttle the deal.

Several Republican officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Frist and Sen. John Warner, R-Va., chairman of the Armed Services Committee, had been privately urging the firm to give up its plans.

After weeks of controversy — and White House veto threats that spokesman Scott McClellan renewed at midmorning Thursday — the end came unexpectedly.

The House Appropriations Committee voted 62-2 on Wednesday to block the deal, and GOP congressional leaders privately informed the president Thursday morning that the Senate would inevitably follow suit.

Senate Democrats clamored for a vote, increasing pressure on Senate Republicans to abandon the president.

It was unclear how DP would manage the planned divestiture, and Bilkey's statement said its announcement was "based on an understanding that DP World will not suffer economic loss."

BRIEFS NATION

WASHINGTON

Bush signs renewal of Patriot Act into law

A day before parts of the USA Patriot Act were to expire, President Bush signed into law a renewal that will allow the government to keep using terror-fighting tools passed after the Sept. 11 attacks.



BUSH

Bush's signature came two days after the House gave final approval to the legislation over objections that it infringes on Americans' privacy. The president said the law has been vital to protecting Americans from terrorists.

"The Patriot Act has accomplished exactly what it was designed to do," Bush said during a signing ceremony at the White House.

Sixteen provisions of the old law were set to expire Friday. Political battles over the legislation forced Congress to extend the expiration date twice.

WASHINGTON

Chertoff: Bird flu could be in U.S. within months

A deadly strain of bird flu could appear in the United States in the next few months as wild birds migrate from infected nations, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said Thursday.

Chertoff said there will be a possibility of a domestic fowl outbreak as migrating birds mix with ducks, chickens and other birds in the United States. But he cautioned against panic, noting the Agriculture Department has dealt with other strains of bird flu for years.

The H5N1 strain has killed at least 95 people since 2003, mostly in Asia, according to the World Health Organization, and has devastated poultry stocks. Scientists are concerned that the virus could mutate into a form easily spread among people, sparking a pandemic.

If a bird flu case is confirmed in the United States, Chertoff said the Homeland Security Department would have specific plans to deal with it.

LOS ANGELES

Scientists find evidence of water on Saturn moon

The orbiting Cassini spacecraft snapped images of what appear to be water geysers on one of Saturn's icy moons, raising the tantalizing possibility that the celestial object harbors life.

Excited by the discovery, some scientists said the moon Enceladus should be added to the short list of places within the solar system most likely to have extraterrestrial life.

The images do not actually show any water in liquid form, but scientists believe the ice and vapor must be coming from underground reservoirs of water close to the surface.

The findings were published in today's issue of the journal Science.

THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM



U.S. soldiers walk through halls in Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad, Iraq, on May 5, 2004. The U.S. military said Thursday that a new facility for its Abu Ghraib prisoners will be completed in three months, after which Abu Ghraib will be returned to Iraqi authorities.

Abu Ghraib prisoners to move to new facility

U.S. will turn old building over to Iraqi authorities in three months

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

The U.S. military said Thursday it would begin moving thousands of prisoners out of Abu Ghraib prison to a new lockup near Baghdad's airport within three months and hand the notorious facility over to Iraqis as soon as possible.

Abu Ghraib has become perhaps the most infamous prison in the world, known as the site where U.S. soldiers abused some Iraqi detainees and, earlier, for its torture chambers during Saddam Hussein's rule.

The sprawling facility on the

western outskirts of Baghdad will be turned over to Iraqi authorities once the prisoner transfer to Camp Cropper and other U.S. military prisons in the country is finished.

The process will take several months, said Lt. Col. Barry Johnson, a U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad.

Abu Ghraib currently houses 4,537 out of the 14,589 detainees held by the U.S. military in the country.

Iraqi authorities also hold prisoners at Abu Ghraib, though it is not known how many.

Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said

the United States wants to turn Abu Ghraib over to the Iraqi authorities as fast as possible.

"There are facilities being built so that the U.S. can pull out of Abu Ghraib. Then it will be up to the Iraqi government to decide what they want to do. I do not know that the Iraqi government had decided. It's an Iraqi decision. I just don't know that they've made that decision."

But the Iraqis were all but certain to use Abu Ghraib as a jail for some time at least, because they do not have the money to build new ones.

Also on Thursday, the Iraqi Cabinet announced that it

hanged 13 insurgents, the first executions of militants since the ouster of Saddam.

Capital punishment was suspended during the formal U.S. occupation, which ended in June 2004. The Iraqis reinstated the penalty two months later for those found guilty of murder, endangering national security and distributing drugs, saying it was necessary to help put down the persistent insurgency.

The authorities also wanted to have the option of executing Saddam if he is convicted of crimes committed by his regime. Under the former dictator, 114 offenses were punishable by death.

Rumsfeld: U.S. troops would rely on Iraqis if civil war starts

By ROBERT BURNS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Dealing with a civil war in Iraq would be the responsibility of Iraq's own security forces, at least initially, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told Congress on Thursday.

Testifying alongside senior military leaders and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Rumsfeld said he did not believe Iraq would descend

into all-out civil war, though he acknowledged that sectarian strife had worsened.

Gen. John Abizaid, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East, said the situation in Iraq had evolved to the point where Sunni-Shiite violence was more of a threat to



RUMSFELD

U.S. success there than the insurgency, which continues taking a deadly toll on Iraqi and American troops, and to impede efforts to stabilize the country.

Rumsfeld previously had been reluctant to say what the U.S. military would do in the event of civil war, but in an appearance before the Senate Appropriations Committee he was pressed on the matter by Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va.

"The plan is to prevent a

civil war, and to the extent one were to occur, to have the — from a security standpoint — have the Iraqi security forces deal with it, to the extent they are able to," Rumsfeld told the committee.

Asked about the prospects for a U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq, Rumsfeld said it would be counterproductive to set a timetable, stressing that he's confident the Iraqis realize the enormity of the stakes at this stage of the process.

CEO visits Indy to promote toll road

By MIKE SMITH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

The chief executive officer of one of two foreign companies that would pay the state to lease the Indiana Toll Road visited Indianapolis on Wednesday and Thursday in hopes of helping Gov. Mitch Daniels sell legislation that would authorize the deal.

Stephen Allen from the Australian-based Macquarie Infrastructure Group met with Daniels and some lawmakers Wednesday night, had breakfast with more lawmakers Thursday morning, and conducted a news conference to promote the plan.

Legislation that would essentially ratify the deal and possibly allow Daniels to make the planned extension of Interstate 69 through southern Indiana a toll road and lease it is in jeopardy of failing to pass by Tuesday's deadline for lawmakers to adjourn.

Allen's visit was the latest sign of intensified maneuvering in the battle over the bill.

Daniels wants to lease the northern toll road to a partnership of Macquarie and Cintra, a company based in Spain.

The state would get an upfront payment of \$3.85 billion from the companies, with the money used to fund many transportation projects.

The companies would then operate and maintain the 157-mile highway for 75 years and collect its toll revenue.

Allen said Macquarie operates many toll roads around the world and is committed to improving Indiana's toll road through such things as expanded lanes and electronic tolling.

"We are hoping to write a large check up front, make a big payment to the state, and we are going to take a risk that we can operate this facility in such a way that it will attract people onto it," Allen said.

OTHER NEWS

Lawmakers struck a tentative deal on a bill allowing Indiana residents to set off fireworks on their property, but the compromise legislation would not hold users strictly liable for injuries or property damage their fireworks cause.

Gov. Mitch Daniels signed a bill into law that would prohibit certain sex offenders from living with 1,000 feet of a school or public park, or within a mile of their victim's residence.

The bill also would prohibit so-called "sexually violent predators" from working or volunteering at schools, parks or youth centers.

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