



President Bush leaving the White House to begin his journey to Ireland where he is meeting with EU leaders. / AP

Mass protests in Ireland as Bush seeks support from EU leaders

Thousands of police and security forces deployed for Bush visit

A massive security operation is under way in the west of Ireland in preparation for President Bush's arrival for talks with European Union leaders.

Thousands of police and soldiers, together with 700 security personnel and four naval ships are to be deployed for the president's 18-hour visit to Dromoland castle.

The general aim of the summit is to stress accord between the EU leaders despite the significant differences that exist over Bush's policy regarding the Iraq war and the Middle East peace process.

Protesters have been getting ready for what are expected to be huge street marches in protest at the president's visit. In the past, anti-war protesters have targeted Shannon airport, which is used as a refuelling stop for American military aircraft.

After spending 18 hours talking with European leaders, President Bush will be flying on to attend a NATO summit in Turkey.

At a press conference, the White House National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice told reporters that the EU talks in Ireland would focus on the progress that has been made in "countering terrorism, combating the spread of weapons of mass destruction and spreading prosperity through open and free trade".

She said that the president "looks forward to the visit to Turkey, and the opportunity to strengthen our strategic partnership with a leading secular democracy within the Muslim world". She added that the NATO summit will be used to discuss the alliance's work in Afghanistan, where it has a contingent of peacekeeping troops.

This visit to Ireland will be President Bush's second visit to Europe in a month, after he made an appearance on the beaches of northern France to mark the anniversary of D-Day. With presidential elections looming in November, the Bush administration is very keen to shore up

as much international support as possible for its presence in Iraq. Domestic opinion polls show there is falling support for the Iraq occupation, as a series of deadly bomb attacks overshadow a planned hand-over to an interim Iraqi government on Wednesday. In response to these attacks, the new Iraqi prime minister has said that he intends to "stamp out" the perpetrators of these attacks within Iraq.

Meanwhile in Ireland, a spokeswoman for the Irish government has criticised the fact that Bush has showed no interest whatsoever in the problem of terrorism within Ireland, and compares this with the way President Clinton made great efforts to encourage the peace process in her country.

Last night, thousands of people took part in an anti-war "cacerolada" in central Barcelona, coming out onto the streets and their balconies to bang pots and pans in protest against the Bush Administration's Iraq policy.

MIDDLE EAST

U.S. stages Falluja air strike

Yesterday U.S. forces carried out an air strike on a suspected militant hide-out in the Iraqi city of Falluja, U.S. military sources have reported. This is the third such raid on Falluja - where the U.S. leader believes a key al-Qaeda leader is hiding - this week. Earlier, the interim Iraqi Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, vowed to crush insurgents after one of the most violent days for months. More than 100 people died in a wave of attacks on Iraqi cities on Thursday, and in continuing outbreaks of violence, three policemen died in an attack on a police station in Baquba overnight and a policeman was killed by a roadside bomb in Baghdad. Hours before the latest air strike, U.S. troops killed at least two militants in clashes in Falluja. A U.S. military statement said that the latest air raid targeted a "known Zarqawi network safe house" in south-eastern Falluja. "Wherever and whenever we find elements of the Zarqawi network, we will attack them", the statement said. The U.S. accuses Abu Musab al-Zarqawi of leading al-Qaeda militants inside Iraq and has offered a reward of 10 million dollars for his capture. The two U.S. air strikes that were carried out this week on suspected militant hideouts linked to Zarqawi in Falluja have been reported to have killed at least 40 people, and residents and security forces said that civilians had been included among the dead.



THE WAR ON TERROR

Gates installed at leaning tower

The leaning tower of Pisa has defied gravity for over 800 years, but now authorities are concerned that it might be the target of a terrorist attack. The first of several gates aimed at protecting the tower as well as the adjacent medieval cathedral has been put into place. The tower scores high on a list of monuments and buildings at risk of attack which was drawn up by security chiefs last year. However, Antonio Paolucci, the regional superintendent for the artistic and historical heritage of Tuscany said "if al-Qaeda want to carry out an attack, a few gates are not going to stop them".

ENVIRONMENT

Australia signs up to water deal

Environment experts have issued warnings that more than a quarter of Australia's rivers are in danger of drying up this year, amid the worst drought in 100 years. At a meeting in Canberra, leaders approved a plan which will see a reduction in the amount of water drawn for irrigation and a new national water commission. Prime Minister John Howard called it an historic agreement, saying "this has been a tremendous day for the future security of the water supply in this country". However, Western Australia has still failed to sign the deal.



MIDDLE EAST NEWS

Scores die in Iran tanker accident

At least 90 people are said to have died and scores more have been injured in a blaze which began when a fuel tanker crashed into buses in south-east Iran. The petrol tanker ran into vehicles which had stopped at a police post outside the city of Bam, a local official told state TV. He said that 90 bodies had been recovered, some of which had been charred beyond recognition. An inquiry has begun into the crash on the main road from Iran to Pakistan, which occurred when the tanker struck the buses as they were undergoing routine checks at the police post.

Wrangling in Brussels over NATO training of Iraqi armed forces

NATO countries were locked in argument in Brussels yesterday over how far to go in responding to the new interim Iraqi government's request for the alliance to help train its armed forces, diplomats have said. Echoing last year's debates over the U.S.-led war to overthrow Saddam Hussein, NATO ambassadors debated the issue all morning and were expected to continue in the evening, three days before an Istanbul summit of the 26-nation alliance.

President Bush will urge NATO

allies at the summit on Monday and Tuesday to help train Iraqi security forces as part of its mission to "spread freedom and liberty, U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said yesterday.

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said he expected allies to agree to a request from Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi for "some form of training".

However, diplomats have said that there were differences over whether NATO should train Iraqi

officers inside the country under a NATO flag, or limit its role to training outside Iraq and acting as a clearing house for national efforts. There were also disputes regarding a more far-reaching military involvement at a later stage.

The United States and Britain were pushing for the most forthcoming response to the request from Allawi, whose controversial interim administration is due to be sworn in after the coalition forces pull out on June 30.