

Ashcroft, Evans Resign From Bush Team

WASHINGTON, Nov. 10—They served President Bush in different ways, but both will leave large, empty chairs in the Cabinet Room: Attorney General John Ashcroft, the face of the administration's tough tactics against terrorism, and Don Evans, the long-time friend who headed the Commerce Department, are leaving the president's team, AP reported.



John Ashcroft



Don Evans

Both resigned Tuesday, the first members of the Cabinet to leave as Bush heads from re-election into his second term.

The gospel-singing son of a minister, Ashcroft is a fierce conservative who doesn't drink, smoke or dance. His detractors said he gave religion too prominent a role at the Justice Department—including optional prayer meetings with staff before each work day.

He has also been a willing lightning rod for critics who said his policies for thwarting terrorists infringed on the rights of innocent people.

Ashcroft championed many of the most controversial government actions following the Sept. 11 attacks, most notably the USA Patriot Act. It bolstered FBI sur-

veillance powers, increased use of material witness warrants to hold suspects incommunicado for months and allowed secret proceedings in terrorist-related immigration cases. When there was a break in a terror case, he was the man at the lectern soberly informing the American people.

"The objective of securing the safety of Americans from crime and terror has been achieved," Ashcroft said in his handwritten resignation letter to the presi-

dent, dated Nov. 2—Election Day. "Yet I believe that the Department of Justice would be well served by new leadership and fresh inspiration," said Ashcroft, whose health problems earlier this year resulted in removal of his gall bladder. "I believe that my energies and talents should be directed toward other challenging horizons," he said.

Evans, Bush's 2000 campaign manager and close friend of more than three decades, said he longed to return to Texas.

Romanian Politicians Threaten Reporters

BUCHAREST, Romania, Nov. 10—Two Romanian journalists have been threatened by politicians from the ruling ex-communist party, in the latest incident against media freedom shortly ahead of Nov. 28 polls, Reuters quoted a media rights group as saying.

The European Union has criticized Romania, which hopes to join in 2007, for failing to protect reporters from violent attacks and allowing media debts to the state to balloon, compromising editorial independence.

The media monitoring agency (MMA) said in a statement that members of the ruling Social Democrat Party (PSD) in the central Francea county threatened to punish journalists Sebastian Oancea and Gabriel Sava of the Ziarul de Vrancea daily while they were covering an election campaign event.

He said that the former prefect of Vrancea, now running for parliament for the PSD, had told Oancea that reporters deserved to be beaten for what they wrote in the newspaper. Local authorities have launched 160 court cases against the daily.

The former prefect admitted that he made

such statements but said they were in response to articles about his family life.

"I regret this event, albeit I only jokingly threatened them. My statement was in response to the newspaper's untrue articles about me and my wife," George Baesu told Reuters.

Another PSD member told Sava that journalists should have only restricted access to politicians "as it is in the civilized world," the agency said.

"The agency and Reporters without Borders are worried about these new attempts by local authorities to intimidate the press," the MMA said.

The local press has played a key role in exposing sleaze and often explained wealth within the ranks of the ruling ex-communists. Critics say the government has failed to deliver on its pledges to boost media freedom.

Over 20 journalists, many investigating corruption cases around the country, have been beaten in the past 18 months.

The PSD faces a centrist opposition alliance in Nov. 28 presidential and parliamentary elections, with analysts and opinion polls predicting a tight race.

Thaksin Action Inviting Terrorism

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, Nov. 10—Prominent Malaysian politician Anwar Ibrahim has accused Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra of "arrogance" over Muslim unrest in the south of the country and warned that his attitude could spark further terrorism, AFP reported.

Thaksin's initial response to the deaths of 87 Muslim protesters two weeks ago, most of them in army custody, was "pathetic", Anwar told AFP in an interview at his home here.

"What's brewing up in Thailand is causing concern," said the former Muslim youth leader and deputy premier who was once tipped to become Malaysia's prime minister.

"Either you resolve it and make a political resolution now or you

are just inviting this utter disgust and frustration that will lead to the mushrooming of terrorist cells."

"Thaksin's initial reaction seems to be pathetic, to completely ignore the problems and to be so arrogant and to accept in total the arguments by the security forces," Anwar said.

He was voicing a popular view among Malaysian Muslims, who share a kinship with Muslims across the border in mainly-Buddhist Thailand, although the government of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has been more restrained in its criticism.

Anwar, who was released two months ago after six years in prison on a charge of corruption which he says was trumped up to

destroy his career, is barred from holding public office but remains a force in Malaysian politics.

He said Thaksin should call for an immediate ceasefire and replace the army in the area with other security personnel.

Those responsible for the deaths of the protesters, most of whom suffocated after being packed on top of each other in army trucks, should be "dealt with severely", he said.

"You legitimize the perception that there is oppression by condoning this sort of activity. They say they don't condone it but are slow to act, they try to rationalize and protect the perpetrators of the crime."

Describing the situation as a "national crisis", Anwar said.



Anwar Ibrahim

Saudi Qaeda Wing Urges Muslims to Defend Falluja

DUBAI, UAE, Nov. 10—The Saudi wing of Al-Qaeda has called on Muslims to rise up to defend the Iraqi city of Falluja from a "crusader campaign" by US-led forces, Reuters reported.

"O Muslim youth, obey God and mobilize. Honor is calling, so for how long will you remain on the sidelines?" the Al-Qaeda Organization in the Arabian Peninsula said in the latest edition of its online military magazine Muaskar Al-Battar.

US forces backed by Iraqi troops surged into the heart of Falluja on Tuesday to regain control of the Sunni Muslim

city from insurgents. "The US army launched a crusader campaign against the people of Islam and Sunna in Falluja and nearby areas and the mujahideen (holy fighters) there are determined to defend Islam," the statement said, adding that the Saudi Al-Qaeda wing would "do all they could" to help insurgents in Falluja.

Iraqi authorities said last month they had captured 24 suspected Saudi militants and diplomats say many more may have slipped across the border to fight in Iraq.

Prominent Saudi Sunni religious scholars have also declared support for militants fighting US-led forces in Iraq, saying last week that holy war against occupiers was a duty.

Iraqi and US officials say Al-Qaeda ally Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi's group, as well as Saddam Hussein loyalists, have turned Falluja into the epicenter of Iraq's bloody insurgency.

Saudi authorities are waging their own battle against supporters of Saudi-born Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who have launched suicide bomb attacks against foreign residential compounds and shot dead several foreigners in recent months.

Japan on Alert

TOKYO, Nov. 10—Japan was on alert Wednesday after a suspected Chinese nuclear submarine entered its territorial waters, setting off a chase on the high sea amid mounting disputes between the Asian powers, AFP reported.

The submarine was detected in Japanese waters near islands disputed with China about 300 kilometers southwest of Okinawa, a southern Japanese island home to a major US military base, officials said.

Japan was following the submarine with a PC-3 surveillance airplane, a destroyer and at least one navy helicopter, a military spokesman said.

"The submarine is cruising in international waters and it is not necessarily cruising straight. The PC-3 is continuing to follow it," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda, the government spokesman, told reporters.

The Kyodo News agency, quoting unnamed defense sources, said the vessel was a nuclear submarine from China.

The incident comes amid a series of disputes between Japan and China, including friction over the right to explore gas near

the maritime border in the East China Sea.

Japanese officials declined to place blame on China.

"We are not in the stage for passing judgment before knowing where the submarine is heading and other details," Hosoda said.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said only that the incident was "regrettable." "It certainly is not a good thing," Koizumi told reporters. "We have to continue to monitor the situation."

A Defense Agency spokesman said Japan had between Friday and Monday spotted two Chinese ships near southern Japan—one designed to rescue submarines and the other to tow wrecked ships.

The Chinese ships were in international waters some 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) south of Tokyo, the spokesman told AFP.

Japan wants the submarine to surface and show its flag, but has not given orders to attack the vessel as it is in international waters, the Defense Agency spokesman said.

Jiji Press said the vessel was in Japanese waters for about three hours.

French Leave Ivory Coast

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Nov. 10—France will begin evacuating its nationals from Ivory Coast as of Wednesday morning, AFP quoted the spokesman of French forces in the troubled west African country as saying.

An aircraft will leave the permanent French military base at Port Bouet, near Abidjan, where anti-French riots erupted at the weekend, with 270 people on board and under protection from the French military, Colonel Henry Aussavy said.

Elderly and ill people as well as women and children will be given priority for the first evacuation flight, which will take them to Paris, he said.

All those who will be evacuated spent the night at Abidjan's airport, which is near the French military base.

The airport has been under French control since Saturday, following clashes between French soldiers and Ivorian backers of President Laurent Gbagbo and government troops.

Ivory Coast's low-level



French army troops man a roadblock between the city and the airport of Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Nov. 10. (AP Photo)

civil war, which has been simmering since a failed attempt by rebels to oust Gbagbo in September 2002, escalated suddenly last week when government forces bombarded two key towns, Bouake and Korhogo, in the rebel-held north of the country.

In the last of the attacks, the Ivorian air force bombarded an encampment in Bouake housing French troops monitoring a buffer zone that cuts through the center of Ivory Coast, dividing it into the rebel-controlled north and pro-Gbagbo south.

The French retaliated swiftly and decisively, wiping out the Ivorian air force. That action sparked anti-French violence in Abidjan and San Pedro, the two largest cities in Ivory Coast, both in the government-held south.

Two further evacuation flights, carrying a similar number of passengers, were planned for later Wednesday, Aussavy said.

Around 1,300 Europeans, mostly French nationals, have sought refuge at the French base at Port Bouet, and another 1,600 at UN premises in Abidjan since the latest bout of unrest erupted.

Around 14,000 French expatriates live in Ivory Coast.

Protesters Clash With Kashmir Police

SRINAGAR, India, Nov. 10—Several people were hurt Wednesday when police baton-charged a group of Kashmiris protesting at the alleged rape of a Muslim girl and her mother by Indian troops, AFP quoted police and witnesses as saying.

The protest, the latest in a series in Indian Kashmir since the incident was reported on Saturday, was staged in the busy Miasuma quarter of the summer capital Srinagar.

Clashes broke out after several hundred Muslims, mostly youths, took to the streets chanting anti-government and anti-army slogans.

Riot police wielding bamboo sticks fired dozens of teargas canisters at the demonstrators before baton-charging them.

The protestors retaliated by hurling stones and bricks as well as teargas canisters back at police.

Police said at least six protestors were injured.

The army has denied the alleged rape, reported late Saturday near the northern town of Handwara, but has launched an investigation. The state government has also launched a probe.

A 15-year-old Muslim insurgency against Indian rule has killed tens of thousands in the state.

World News In Brief

Child Soldiers
COLOMBO—Sri Lanka's truce with Tiger rebels has brought fear instead of the expected peace dividend because of the continued forced recruitment of thousands of child soldiers, a rights group said.

\$3.2b Military Overbudget

LONDON—Britain's 20 biggest military procurement projects ran 1.7 billion pounds (3.2 billion dollars, 2.5 billion euros) overbudget in 2003, the National Audit Office said Wednesday.

Too Lenient

ANKARA—Turkey's top appeals court on Wednesday upheld a jail sentence of four years and two months for a policeman convicted of involvement in torturing to death a labor unionist, a ruling that a lawyer for the victim's family denounced as too lenient.

Cocaine Haul

MIAMI—US Coast Guard and Dutch Navy crews seized more than 4,000 kilos (9,200 pounds) of cocaine from two go-fast vessels and detained nine suspected smugglers off the coast of Colombia, the US agency said.

Zimbabwe Parliament Tightens Press Laws

tense debate and stiff resistance from opposition legislators, AFP reported.

Under the new regulations journalists who work without a government license now face a two-year jail sentence or a fine or both.

The new provisions tighten a law originally

passed following President Robert Mugabe's victory in presidential polls two years ago under which two independent newspapers have been shut down and several journalists arrested.

Zimbabwean Information Minister Jonathan Moyo has said

the amendments are intended to "protect the state from attacks by enemies of the country".

The original Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) bars foreign journalists from working permanently here, and says that only local reporters licensed

by a state-approved media commission can operate.

It was criticized by media watchdogs and human rights groups after it was passed, but the government has defended it, saying both it and the amended law are constitutional and aimed at instilling media

ethics. During debate last month opposition lawmakers were strongly critical of the proposed amendments, alleging that the information minister wanted "complete control" of the media.

Another amendment brought in by the bill is that only one organization, instead of two, has to nominate members to sit on the Media and

Information Commission (MIC), the body responsible for registering and deregistering journalists and newspapers.

Opposition legislators argued that this will mean only the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), which is dominated by journalists working for state-controlled media, will be consulted.