

## Anthrax scare shuts 11 US postal bldgs

REUTERS, Washington

The US Postal Service shut down 11 postal facilities in the Washington area late on Thursday after preliminary tests indicated possible anthrax at a US Navy mail handling center, officials said.

The Navy closed the automated mail handling operation at its naval air station in Washington on Thursday to run additional tests after sensors detected traces of a substance that could be anthrax, a Navy spokeswoman said.

The substance was identified late on Wednesday by equipment that routinely samples the air in the facility and preliminary tests indicated that it could possibly be anthrax, a deadly bacterial disease, Lt. Corey Schultz said. More definitive testing was underway, she added.

"Almost all the mail that's processed there is irradiated, so it's likely the substance would be inactive," Schultz said. She also noted that it was "very unlikely" that the few people who work in the facility were at risk of exposure, but said that they were being evaluated as a precautionary measure.



PHOTO: AFP  
Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf (L) speak with staff members during a press conference in Seoul yesterday. Musharraf said his country was fully justified in developing missiles and nuclear weapons to counter the threat posed by India. Concluding a three-day visit to South Korea, Musharraf said Pakistan would never compromise on national security.

# Pakistan vows to match Indian arms buildup

## Islamabad admits Pak missiles came from N Korea

REUTERS, Seoul

President Pervez Musharraf vowed yesterday that Pakistan would match what he called a huge arms buildup by rival and fellow nuclear power India that had upset the balance of forces in South Asia.

Musharraf, wrapping up a three-day state visit to South Korea, also restated his earlier denials that Pakistan had traded its nuclear weapons expertise for North Korean missile technology. The communist North says it has atomic capability.

Musharraf told a news conference that peace with his giant neighbor India was maintained by keeping a balance of forces.

"This balance of forces was tilted -- and imbalance created -- when India

went for the nuclear and missile forces, and similar imbalance is being created now through massive acquisition of arms by our adversary, India," he said without elaborating.

"We will respond to this imbalance, we will rectify this imbalance in the future through all means possible," said the army general, who took power in a bloodless 1999 coup.

Musharraf said it was the threat from India that had driven Pakistan to conduct its first nuclear tests in 1998. He said Islamabad had never proliferated nuclear technology to Seoul's communist neighbor although it had bought North Korean missiles.

He said reported visits to North Korea by nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, revered by many in

Pakistan as the father of the country's nuclear bomb, were connected to purchases of conventional short-range missiles.

"We have purchased these missiles from North Korea. We have also had a transfer of technology of these missiles. We now manufacture ourselves these missiles in the same organization that Dr. A.Q. Khan headed," he said.

"Therefore, I don't know how many times he has visited, but maybe his interaction was in this respect," Musharraf said. He said Pakistan now had no arms collaboration with North Korea.

Some media reports say Khan made a dozen trips to North Korea. A Pakistani firm Khan once headed was

slapped with US sanctions last March, after Washington accused it of transferring nuclear-capable missiles from North Korea to Pakistan.

AP adds: Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf said yesterday that his country obtained short-range missiles and technology from North Korea, but has not given the communist state any nuclear weapons secrets in return.

The transfer of missile technology between the two countries is over, and Pakistan now makes those missiles on its own, Musharraf said in a news conference in Seoul.

So today, "there is absolutely no interaction with North Korea whatsoever on any defence related matters," he said.

# Nuclear deterrent ready for use, says N Korea

## US to offer security assurance to DPRK

REUTERS, London

North Korea's envoy in Britain said on Thursday that Pyongyang had a nuclear deterrent that was ready to use and powerful enough to deter any US attack.

Ambassador Ri Yong Ho told Reuters in an interview that North Korea would only use its capability in self-defense. Asked if North Korea had a nuclear bomb, he said: "What we are saying is, a nuclear deterrent capability."

North Korea has long hinted that it had a nuclear bomb. It said last month it was prepared to demonstrate the existence of its nuclear deterrent "when an appropriate time comes."

But Thursday's comments appear to be the first time it has explicitly stated that it has a nuclear weapon ready to

deploy.

Ri said the deterrent was made of plutonium, most of which was recently reprocessed but was extracted before a 1994 freeze on its nuclear weapons program under a pact with Washington. It was ready to use should the United States attack, he said.

In response, State Department spokesman Adam Ereli repeated the long-standing US position that, "we have no intention of attacking North Korea."

The latest crisis in North Korea-US relations erupted in October 2002 when US officials said the communist state was pursuing a clandestine nuclear weapons program that violated its international commitments.

In an apparent bid to defuse the

crisis, Washington last month offered Pyongyang unspecified security assurances for the first time, in exchange for a complete, verifiable and irreversible end to its suspected weapons program.

Washington has ruled out a formal non-aggression treaty.

Meanwhile, the United States will offer North Korea a two-step security assurance in a bid to restart talks aimed at diffusing the crisis over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program, a Japanese daily reported yesterday.

The Yomiuri Shimbun, quoting sources in Washington, said the United States would first present North Korea with a document guaranteeing its security for the duration of multilateral talks on the nuclear issue.

Vajpayee says

## Justice will be done over Gujarat riots

PTI, London

Condemning the Gujarat violence, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has said that those found guilty of carrying out the atrocities during the riots in the state last year will be punished and "justice will be not only seen to be done, it will be done."

"There is no doubt that those perpetrating in such violence should be punished. Our public, media and judiciary are following it closely.

Justice will not only be done, it will be done," Vajpayee told the Financial Times.

In a wide-ranging interview, Vajpayee also expressed "disappointment" with Pakistan's failure to take steps to dismantle "the infrastructure of cross-border terrorism". But he said he would stick to his "step-by-step" approach to normalising relations with Pakistan.



PHOTO: AFP  
Sri Lanka Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe (C left), surrounded by party members, admirers and security personnel addresses the media on his arrival at Bandaranaik International Airport, Katunayake yesterday. Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga withdrew tough emergency laws as Wickremesinghe returned to Sri Lanka from Washington via London to face an unprecedented political crisis triggered by Kumaratunga's sacking of three cabinet ministers on November 5.

## Thousands give Lankan PM hero's welcome

AFP, Katunayaka

Tens of thousands of supporters, many dancing or waving flags, have given Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe a hero's welcome home.

Buddhist and Hindu monks were at the airport to bless Wickremesinghe, who was mobbed by journalists as he arrived at the international airport near Colombo.

Saffron-robed monks carried out an abridged version of a ritual to tie a blessed thread on Wickremesinghe's right wrist to invoke divine help and he was covered in multi-coloured silk shawls by Hindu leaders representing the minority Tamil community.

Outside the airport, Wickremesinghe had more down-to-earth support from tens of thousands of party loyalists who choked the kilometers-long Canada-Sri Lanka Friendship road connecting the airport with the main highway.



PHOTO: AFP  
Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (C) receives a model of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) from Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) G. Madhavan Nair (R) and member of Space Commission Dr. P.S. Goel (L) during a function at Vajpayee's residence in New Delhi yesterday. India successfully put a 1,360-kilogramme (2,992 pound) remote sensing satellite Resourcet-1 into space on October 17, the launch comes after China sent a man into space to join an elite club alongside Russia and the United States.

## Taliban threaten death to taxi drivers carrying foreigners

AFP, Peshawar

Afghanistan's former Taliban rulers are threatening to kill taxi-drivers and other Afghans if they work with foreigners, according to a pamphlet received yesterday.

The pamphlet, typed in Pashto-language and signed by a man calling himself the Taliban's "cultural and information officer" for eastern Afghanistan's Laghman province, was sent to Pakistani newspapers in north-west city Peshawar this week.

It says taxi-drivers must "avoid picking up and dropping foreigners, otherwise the foreigners will be killed and their luggage set on fire."

"If the driver and the owner of the taxi were killed, the Taliban would not be responsible," the pamphlet stated.

It also threatened the "death penalty" to Afghan women "who do not leave their jobs" and to "Afghans spying for the US and its allies."

# Bush urges ME states to embrace democracy

## Iraq must show the way

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush has urged Middle East leaders from Iran to Syria to embrace democracy, and warned the United States must install democratic freedoms in Iraq or risk increased terror attacks.

"As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export," Bush said Thursday in a forthright speech to the National Endowment for Democracy.

He also warned that it was imperative to rebuild war-ravaged Iraq and transform it into a democracy after the fall of president Saddam Hussein.

"We know the stakes: The failure of Iraqi democracy would embolden terrorists around the world and increase dangers to the American people and extinguish the hopes of millions in the region," he warned.

"Success will send forth the news from Damascus to Tehran that freedom can be the future of every nation."

After praising nations like Bahrain, Morocco, and Oman for embracing reforms, the US leader scolded Iran -- which he once labelled part of an axis of evil -- along with North Korea and Iraq -- and warned its leadership must follow suit or "lose its last claim to legitimacy."

He also prodded staunch US ally Egypt, saying it "should show the way toward democracy in the Middle East,"

and urged another US ally, Saudi Arabia, to "demonstrate true leadership" by seeking reforms.

But the president's remarks stretched beyond the Middle East, as he declared that the US "commitment to democracy is tested in Cuba and Burma and North Korea and Zimbabwe -- outposts of oppression in our world."

He also cited China, saying: "That nation now has a sliver, a fragment of liberty. Yet, China's people will eventually want theiity "for decades to come".

"And the Palestinian leaders who block and undermine democratic reform, and feed hatred and encourage violence are not leaders at all. They're the main obstacles to peace, and to the success of the Palestinian people."

## Former POW Jessica Lynch was raped in Iraq

AFP, Washington

Former US Army Private Jessica Lynch, the rescued Iraq POW who became an American heroine, was raped by Iraqi captors after her convoy was ambushed in Iraq in late March, a newspaper report said Thursday.

The Daily News of New York said Lynch's authorised biography, which is due to hit bookstores next Tuesday, reveals she was raped after being taken from the wreckage of her Humvee, which had crashed in the ambush.

The paper said medical records prove she was raped, but Lynch, 20, said she has no memory of the assault.

"Even just the thinking about that, that's too painful," she told ABC News in the first of a series of interviews.

# Is US turning to Vietnam exit strategy in Iraq?

AFP, Washington

Moving to pull US troops from Iraq amid intensifying attacks, replacing them with a hurriedly trained Iraqi force, Washington is accused of seeking an exit strategy similar to the Vietnam war.

The move to "Iraqify" military and police forces is reminiscent of the option taken by Washington over the so-called Vietnamisation that came before south Vietnam collapsed before northern forces in 1975, observers and politicians say.

Former president Richard Nixon chose to "Vietnamify" -- progressively putting heavier military responsibility on the south Vietnamese so as to disengage the United States, which lost 58,000 soldiers in the tortuous war.

Though the Iraqi conflict is quite different and US casualties nowhere near the levels seen in Vietnam, the analogy is being seen increasingly, after Washington said it may cut US troops from 132,000 to 105,000 by next spring. Parallely, the United States is aiming

to take the number of Iraqi security forces -- army, police and border guards -- from 118,000 men to 170,000 by early 2004.

Concerns have been raised over the policy, with claims the US administration is more interested in improving public opinion ahead of the November 2004 elections -- in which Bush will seek a second term -- than in Iraq's stability.

"Frustrated by the lack of quick progress on the ground and fading political support at home, Washington is now latching on the idea that a quick transfer of power to local troops and politicians would make things better," states columnist Fareed Zakaria.

"Or at any rate, it would lower American casualties. It was called Vietnamization; today it's called Iraqification," Zakaria wrote in a column in The Washington Post and Newsweek.

While political commentator Thomas Friedman said there was "no question this is necessary," he added: "But it's not sufficient".

"We could have 100,000 Iraqis in the police and army and it would not be enough without one other person. We need an Iraqi leader (or a leadership council) elected as a result of an Iraqi constitutional or political process," wrote Friedman in The New York Times.

Republican Senator John McCain, a former pilot and Vietnam war veteran has added his voice to the debate, saying US forces in Iraq must be increased not reduced in number.

"When our Secretary of Defense says that it is up to the Iraqi people to defeat Baathists and terrorists, we send a message that America's exit from Iraq is ultimately more important than the achievement of American goals in Iraq," McCain said Wednesday.

"To win in Iraq, we should increase the number of forces in-country, including Marines and Special Forces, to conduct offensive operations," said McCain underlining his belief that at least one more full division should be added to US troops there.

# Malaysia ready for snap polls: PM

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's new Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi declared yesterday that the ruling coalition is ready for a snap election as he moved to consolidate public confidence in his week-old administration.

Abdullah said the top priority of the multi-racial National Front coalition now was to "campaign to get as many supporters as possible," as the opposition Islamic Party (PAS) expressed confidence of capturing four more states in upcoming polls.

Asked after chairing his first meeting of the National Front Supreme Council if the coalition is prepared to face an election in the next two months, he said: "Anytime."

"Even if next week I dissolve parliament and the Election Commission announces the election dates, we can do it. We must be ready anytime. We must be in a state of preparedness."

Elections are not due until the end of 2004 but Abdullah has signalled at the weekend that polls could be called early as he sought to win his own mandate from voters after taking over last Friday from Mahathir Mohamad, who

retired after 22 years in power.

A snap election will also allow his United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the linchpin of the coalition, to capitalise on the high and generally positive profile generated by Mahathir's retirement.

UMNO faces a tough challenge for the votes of the country's Muslim majority from the hardline PAS, which wants to turn moderate Malaysia into an Islamic state complete with punishment Islamic Party (PAS) expressed confidence of capturing four more states in upcoming polls.

In the last election in 1999, PAS made major dents into UMNO's powerbase, tripling its parliamentary seats and taking control in a second of the country's 13 states.

PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang said Friday he was confident the party, which now rules eastern Kelantan and Terengganu states, can also wrest control of Perlis and Kedah in the north as well as central Pahang and Selangor with cooperation from its allies.

PAS' confidence was based on feedback obtained by its election machinery, he was quoted as saying by Bernama news agency.

