

International

Netanyahu asks Arafat not to declare independent state unilaterally

WASHINGTON, Apr 27: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Sunday that "another Iraq" could be created in the Middle East if a Palestinian state is created without Israel's consent, reports AFP.

Speaking on the Fox Television Network, Netanyahu advised Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat against unilaterally declaring an independent state. If something is done to create a Palestinian state, it could turn out to be another Iraq, another Iraq on our door step," Netanyahu said.

"And you can imagine that we feel more than uncomfortable with that unhappy thought," Netanyahu was responding to questions about Arafat's declaration that he may declare an independent Palestinian state if there is no move to final status negotiations by May 4.

"What we want is a negotiated solution that will give the Palestinians the ability to run their own lives but none of the abilities to threaten our lives," Netanyahu said, adding: "We think such a balance could be struck."

Netanyahu reiterated that Israel's negotiating stance is based on security considerations.

"Suppose you give up ... too much land when you give up too much land, you end up having 40,000 kids who are travelling on the roads of Judea-Samaria, and their bus gets blown up. The ticket comes to me. The responsibility is mine," Netanyahu said.

At this stage, I'm here to forecast on preparing for the May meeting," he said "what we are doing is making every effort to try to ensure that we can in fact break through."

Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat said Arafat had reiterated his position to continue doing his best to restore confidence and credibility to the peace process and to put it back on tracks.

Ross was scheduled to meet again in Jerusalem on Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and for additional meetings in Ramallah in the West Bank with Erakat, Palestinian number two Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) before meeting again with Arafat in Gaza City.

Ross has been trying during this latest shuttle to narrow differences between Israeli and Palestinian positions on the Israeli military withdrawal from the West Bank before Arafat's separate London meetings with Netanyahu and Arafat.

Another AFP report from New York: The Mideast peace process is in 'grave danger,' US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told an audience in New York late Sunday, adding that the US "cannot" let it fail.

Albright's remarks came just hours before she embarked on a trip that will take her to Asia, and eventually to Europe for meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

21 slaughtered in Pakistan-ruled Kashmir

MUZAFFARABAD, Apr 27: Unknown gunmen slaughtered 21 people in a remote village in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, the authorities said Monday, reports AP.

Overnight Sunday several gunmen roared into Bindala Samahani, some 275 kilometres southeast of the Kashmir capital of Muzaffarabad and massacred two unrelated families. Another three people were injured. The assailants escaped, said officials in the area.

While no one has taken responsibility for the massacre, authorities in the village are blaming neighbouring India.

The disputed border that divides the former princely state of Kashmir between India and Pakistan has been the flash point of two previous wars between the uneasy neighbours. The village straddles Pakistan's disputed border with India.

Renewed fighting in Somalia: 37 killed

MOGADISHU, Apr 27: Three days of renewed heavy fighting for the control of the southern Somali port of Kismayo has claimed at least 37 lives, ham radio operators reported Monday, reports AP.

Kismayo remains the only flashpoint in Somalia since a December peace conference in Cairo, when 26 rival factions agreed to put their differences aside and form the first post-war national government at a reconciliation conference scheduled for May 15.

Gunmen kill policeman in Karachi

KARACHI, Apr 27: Gunmen opened fire on a police post in the troubled port city of Karachi on Sunday killing one policeman and injuring three others, the authorities said, reports AP.

The shooting incident came just hours after police found the bullet-riddled body of Karachi Police Inspector Zafar Piracha, who had been kidnapped earlier in the day.

No one has taken responsibility for either killings, but police officials fear they may have been carried out by members of the Mohajir Qami Movement (MQM).

The movement represents Indian Muslims who settled in Pakistan after 1947 when the Asian subcontinent gained its independence from Britain.

Piracha was actively involved in police operations against militant members of the movement, who were believed to have been involved in a series of ethnically motivated deaths.

Opposition calls for mass protest in Nigeria

LAGOS, Apr 27: The United Action for Democracy (UAD) opposition coalition called Sunday for a nationwide mass protest on May Day against the regime of military ruler Sani Abacha, reports AFP.

"On this historic day, we call on the Nigerian people, workers — farmers, traders, professionals, students and youths — to organise and participate in mass actions all over the country to free our nation from dictatorship and chase out the Abacha junta," the UAD said at a press conference.

The UAD, which groups 26 pro-democracy and human rights bodies, said workers should demonstrate and march next Friday, vendors and merchants should shut their stalls and drivers should keep their vehicles off the roads.

'Sorcerer' to die for killing 42 women in Indonesia

LUBUKPAKAM, Indonesia, Apr 27: An Indonesian court on Monday condemned to death a self-proclaimed sorcerer who was found guilty of killing 42 women, purportedly in order to strengthen his magic power, reports AP.

Some onlookers in the sweltering courthouse cheered when a three-judge panel read out the penalty for Ahmed Suradji, who was convicted in the town of Lubukpakam on Sumatra island. Suradji, 47, remained impassive and was driven away in a van by police after the three-and-a-half-hour hearing.

Also known as Nasib Kalewang, Suradji was arrested in April last year after the discovery of a victim's body in a sugarcane field near his house. Dozens of bodies were discovered later in the same field.

Afghan peace talks enter second day

ISLAMABAD, Apr 27: Peace talks between Afghanistan's Taliban Islamic militia and the rival northern alliance entered a second day here today, officials said, reports AFP.

The meeting jointly sponsored by the United Nations and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), opened Sunday in a bid to find ways to resolve the factional war in Afghanistan.

The two sides discussed procedural issues during two working sessions on the first day besides agreeing on a moratorium on major military offensives against each other. UN officials said.

OIC assistant secretary general Ibrahim Saleh Bakr told reporters the immediate task before the two delegations was to agree on an agenda, "once they finalise an agenda the talks will progress," he added.

Bakr is co-chairing the meeting with the head of the Islamabad based UN special mission for Afghanistan, James Ngobi.



Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat and former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres during a press conference after their meeting at Arafat's office in Gaza City on Sunday. — AP/UNB photo.

UNSC begins review

US to veto any move to end sanctions against Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 27: The United States faces a major test Monday of its ability to hold the line on sanctions against Iraq when the Security Council reviews the status of the 7-year embargo and the UN campaign to rid the country of illegal weapons, reports AP.

The 15 council members will undoubtedly continue the sanctions for now. No council member, including Iraq's sympathisers, is prepared to call for lifting the sanctions, imposed in 1990 after President Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, touching off the Gulf War.

US Ambassador Bill Richardson told CNN's "Late Edition" on Sunday that he would veto any move to end the embargo.

During the review, council ambassadors will discuss a recent report by the UN Special

Commission, which performs the inspections. The report said inspectors had made "virtually no progress" in determining whether Iraq had destroyed its banned weapons.

Iraq must convince UN arms inspectors that it has destroyed all banned weapons, including long-range missiles and chemical and biological weaponry, before the council will lift the sanctions.

But Monday's deliberations will show whether support for a hardline stand on the sanctions is eroding Iraq's foreign minister, Mohammed Sa'eed Al-Sahhaf, told The New York Times that support for the embargo is weakening "whether the Americans like it or not."

A growing number of council members privately suggest that the sanctions have run their

course. Rather than forcing Iraq to comply, they believe the sanctions have destroyed the Iraqi middle class and caused unacceptable suffering among Iraq's 22 million people.

The review will be the first by the council since Secretary-General Kofi Annan struck a deal with the Iraqis in February to open all sites to UN inspectors, including Saddam's eight presidential compounds.

After the formal review Monday morning, Al-Sahhaf will meet informally with council envoys in the afternoon to issue a personal appeal for ending the sanctions.

He is expected to argue that Iraq has met the conditions for ending the sanctions and that the United States and Britain are manipulating the inspection programme to prolong the sanctions indefinitely.

Purulia arms drop case Latvian official to meet 5 arrested in Calcutta

RIGA, Apr 27: The Latvian government has dispatched a senior official to Calcutta to meet the five pilots implicated in the case related to the dropping of arms over an eastern Indian area, reports IANS.

A spokesman for the Latvian Foreign Ministry said here that Legal Department director Raimonds Jansons has been given permission by India's External Affairs Ministry to meet the pilots.

Riga had approached New Delhi to check on reports of deteriorating health of one of the pilots and the status of legal proceedings against all five of them. They were arrested after allegedly dropping arms and ammunition from an AN-26 plane, formerly owned by Latvian carrier Latvair, over Purulia in West Bengal in December 1995.

The five pilots — one of them a Russian national and four permanent residents of Latvia (though not ethnic Latvians or Latvian citizens) — have been in

custody in India since then. According to the family of the pilot who has reportedly taken ill, a lung disease afflicting him has aggravated and he has been placed in the prison hospital, the spokesman said.

Jansons apparently told Indian officials that Riga would be following the legal proceedings and requested that the pilots' rights, especially access to health care, not be denied.

He also reminded New Delhi of Riga's proposal to conclude an agreement by which the pilots could return to Latvia after the Indian court judgement.

Latvian officials said that while the "attitude of India was generally positive," it is not known when preparation of the agreement could get under way and when it could be signed.

Russian newspaper Ivestia said that Jansons' first mission to India was the first time that the Latvian authorities showed any concern over the pilots' fate since their arrest.

New Japan-US defence guidelines Tokyo for expanding geographical scope

TOKYO, Apr 27: Japan is to define the geographical scope of new Japan-US defence guidelines to include the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula and the disputed Spratly Islands, a daily said today, reports AFP.

The Yomiuri Shimbun, quoting government sources, said the decision came ahead of parliamentary deliberation on legislation related to the new guidelines due on Tuesday.

Japan and the United States agreed in September 1997 on the guidelines allowing Tokyo to give logistic support to Washington in regional crisis, including the use of Japanese minesweepers in international waters.

However, a specific geographic scope of the guidelines has until now been described only by the vague term, "situations in areas surrounding

Japan", in a bid to avoid irritating neighbouring countries, including China.

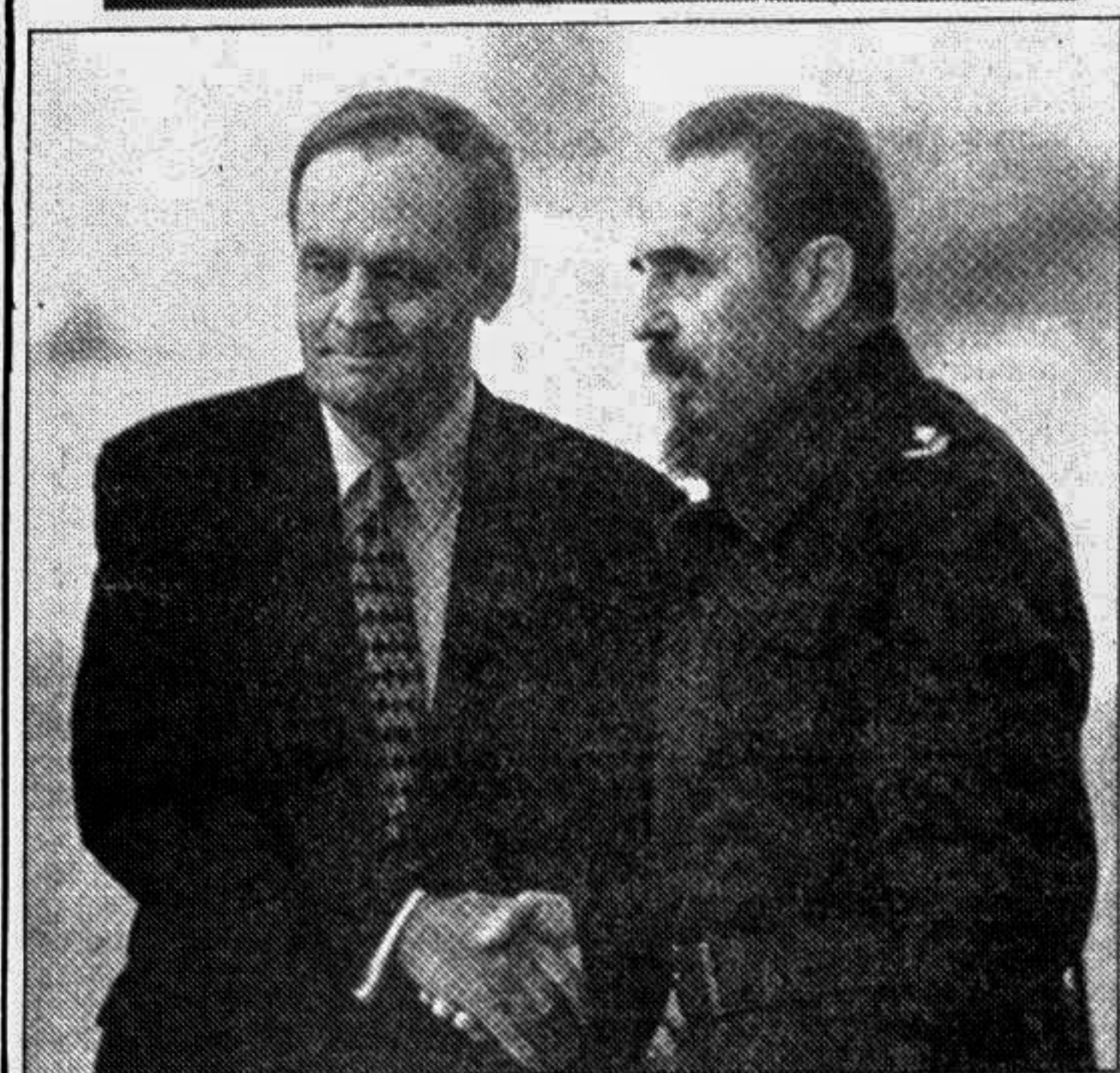
Under the new government position, the area would be within "the Far East and its periphery," covering part of the Russian island of Sakhalin, the entire Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait.

The periphery would also include Hong Kong, the Philippines, Micronesia and the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, the daily said.

The Spratlys are claimed in whole or in part by Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. All claimants but Brunei have troops posted on some of the rocky outcrops.

The Malacca Strait, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean remain outside the area.

BRIEFLY



Cuban President Fidel Castro, right, shakes hands with Canadian Premier Jean Chretien on Sunday during a welcome ceremony at the Jose Marti Airport in Havana, Cuba. Flouting US efforts to isolate Cuba, Chretien took a subtle dig at the American embargo of Cuba while his host, Fidel Castro, lashed it as "genocide." The Canadian prime minister is one of the most important Western leaders to visit Cuba in years. His trip comes amid a string of victories in Cuba's efforts to break out of a US-backed diplomatic isolation. — AP/UNB photo.

19 die in floods in Tajikistan:

At least 19 people were killed and 16 were injured in floods and landslides caused by torrential rains in this Central Asian nation, officials said Monday, AP reports from Dushanbe.

The landslides on Sunday, which also left more than 400 people homeless, were the worst in about 30 years, said Ismat Eshmirzoyev, the country's deputy premier.

Detained Briton returns home:

A British national detained in Iran on spying charges has been released and has already returned home. Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi announced yesterday, AFP says from Tehran.

The Jumhuri-Islami newspaper reported on Sunday that a Briton identified as Robert Gavin had been arrested "recently" while filming army installations in a military zone in Iran's Kurdistan region.

Canadian PM in Cuba:

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien began a historic visit to Cuba on Sunday, telling communist leader Fidel Castro that he opposed the policy of isolation espoused by Washington, Reuters says from Havana.

But Chretien, on the second visit here ever by a Canadian Prime Minister after a 1976 trip by the left-leaning Pierre Trudeau, treaded softly on the issue of human rights. Canadian officials said that during the two-day visit there would not be an echo of Trudeau's controversial "Viva Castro" remarks, which caused consternation in the west.

Iranian diplomat jailed:

A senior Iranian diplomat was sentenced to three years in prison by a Tehran court on corruption charges, the daily Qods newspaper said on Sunday, Reuters reports from Tehran.

"Iran's ambassador to South Korea Javad Angaji has been sentenced to three years in prison," the paper said. It did not specify whether he was the current ambassador to South Korea or when he was sentenced. Angaji was also fined 255,000 dollars. It said the ambassador was convicted of "accepting commissions and cheating in transactions" the newspaper did not give further details or say where the crimes were committed.

Blast kills 3 minors in Hanoi:

Three children have been killed and another five seriously injured after a war-time artillery shell exploded in a southern Vietnam province, a report said yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

The children, all for whom were pupils of a primary school in Ninh Thuan province, found the shell on the school grounds during a break last Friday, the official Nhan Dan daily reported. The shell exploded suddenly while the children were playing with it, the paper said.

Quakes jolt central Japan:

Two moderate earthquakes jolted Tokyo and other central Japanese areas early yesterday, but there were no report of casualties or damage, the meteorological agency and police said, AFP says from Tokyo.

An earthquake, measuring 4.3 on the richter scale, hit the northern part of Saitama prefecture north of Tokyo at 22:06 GMT, the agency said. An earlier earthquake measuring 4.4 on the richter scale hit the south of Tokyo, the agency said. The quake was also felt in Yokohama, southwest of Tokyo.

4 die as aircraft collide:

Four people were killed when two former military jet aircraft used in air shows and for stunt flying collided over Central Brittany on Sunday, police said, Reuters reports from Rennes, France.

The aircraft, Fouga-Magister trainers, each carried a pilot and a passenger and were heading for an air show in nearby Normandy, police said. The reasons for the collision were not immediately known.

4-year-old shoots 6-year-old:

A four-year-old boy has shot dead a six-year-old playmate in the North Carolina town of Greensboro, police said on Sunday, Reuters says from Greensboro.

They said Carlos Gilmer was shot in the neck on Saturday, his birthday, after the children found a loaded 39 caliber semi-automatic handgun in a purse. Police would not say who owned the gun, but were investigating whether to file misdemeanor charges against the owner for leaving a loaded weapon where a child could find it.

Court rules in favour of 3 women

Japan to compensate former sex slaves of ROK

TOKYO, Apr 27: In a landmark victory, a court on Monday ordered the government to pay 300,000 yen (dls 2,300) each in damages to three South Korean women forced into sexual slavery by Japanese soldiers during World War II, reports AP.

The Yamaguchi District Court, in southwestern Japan, rejected claims by seven other women, who had been forced to work in Japanese military plants during the war, a court official said.

But the ruling was a surprising admission of wrongdoing from Japan, which has persistently refused to pay individual redress to former sex slaves and other victims of war, arguing that postwar treaties settled all wartime claims.

Handing out a shockingly harsh condemnation of government policy for a Japanese judge, Hideaki Chikashita called the suffering of the former sex slaves, which he said continued even after the war, a violation of human rights and an example of sexual and ethnic discrimination, semi-public NHK-TV reported.

Both the Japanese Foreign Ministry in Tokyo and a Foreign Affairs Ministry official in Seoul declined comment until the ruling could be studied more thoroughly.

Monday's ruling was the first in compensation lawsuits filed by former sex slaves in Japan. Five other cases are pending in a Tokyo court.

Monday's ruling is likely to have a profound effect on the other cases and may encourage others to come forward and file new lawsuits.

Lee Soon-dok, a 79-year-old former sex slave, and the nine others had demanded a total of 564 million yen (dls 4.2 million) in compensation for the pain they had suffered at the hands of the Japanese military during the war.

It was only in 1992 that after many years of silence, the Japanese government finally admitted that the imperial army was involved in setting up and running the front-line brothels. The women filed their lawsuit that year.

Historians say as many as 200,000 Asian women, euphemistically referred to as "comfort women," were taken to the brothels and repeatedly raped by the soldiers.



Iraqi school girls celebrate on Sunday, in front of a giant poster of the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein during a private celebration for the 61st birthday for the Iraqi leader in Saddam ballroom. — AP/UNB photo.

Why pressure is on for Afghan warriors to make peace

ISLAMABAD, Apr 27: With the effects of 20 years of war in Afghanistan spilling beyond its borders — from the young nations of Central Asia to the United States — the pressure is on for Afghan warriors to make peace, report AP.

Afghanistan is the source of many of the world's illegal drugs and a training ground for Islamic militants linked to terrorist attacks worldwide. Rich oil companies want to move gas through the war-ravaged country.

So the United States sent its UN ambassador, Bill Richardson, to Afghanistan earlier this month, and he persuaded the Taliban religious army and its northern-based opponents to agree to their first face-to-face talks. They began Sunday in neighbouring Pakistan.

The heat is on for results. Insurgencies in the new former Soviet Central Asian countries are headquartered in Afghanistan, and their governments fear the Taliban wants to export its brand of Islamic rule beyond its borders.

Taliban leaders have barred girls from school and women from the workplace and forced

men to grow beards and pray since capturing the capital Kabul, in 1996.

Uzbekistan's border with Afghanistan is patrolled by elite troops guarding against an invasion by the Taliban, which rules 85 per cent of Afghanistan. Russia has 25,000 soldiers deployed in Tajikistan along its border with Afghanistan to stop the flow of arms and rebels.

Then there are the drugs: The United Nations says Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium, the raw material used to make heroin.

Afghan heroin and hashish are sold on the streets of Europe and the United States, smuggled out through Pakistan and increasingly through Central Asian neighbours.

The unstable situation also has hurt US interests, which have been targeted by terrorist attacks linked to veterans who sided with Soviet troops against rebels bankrolled by the United States in 1980s Afghan war.

Ramzi Yusuf, convicted of masterminding the 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New

York and planning attacks on Americans worldwide, was a veteran of the Afghan war.

The Taliban also is host to Osama Bin Laden, a billionaire Saudi financier of Islamic militants worldwide. Washington blames Bin Laden for a 1996 bombing in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 American servicemen.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles-based Unocal Corp wants to move billions of dollars worth of gas from energy-rich Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to markets in Pakistan and India. But Unocal says it can't begin construction on a pipeline until there is peace in Afghanistan.

Afghans themselves have said that they want peace, but Sunday's talks were the first attempt at negotiations between the Taliban and the opposition.

Still, few are optimistic that they will bring a lasting peace. Since 1992 various warring factions have signed and broken four different peace pacts, and there have been few signs that the warring factions or Afghanists' neighbours are ready to do what it takes to end the fighting.