

EU meets for reforming anti-terrorist laws

AFP, Brussels

EU justice and home affairs ministers went into special session here Thursday to consider sweeping legal reforms to put teeth in the EU's fight against terrorism, following the terror strikes in the United States last week.

"I think our state of mind today is a mix of indignation, compassion and determination," said at the start Interior Minister Antoine Duquesne of Belgium, which holds the current EU presidency.

"The tragedy facing the United States today -- the abominable act that strikes at the most basic values of democracy -- must reinforce our conviction that terrorism constitutes a major challenge to the security of all of our states and societies."

Troops clash with Moro rebels: 10 killed

AFP, Zamboanga

Ten civilians were killed and two soldiers wounded Thursday as government troops clashed with a group of armed former Muslim separatist rebels in the southern Philippines city of Marawi, the military said.

A battalion of infantry surrounded a three-storey building downtown at noon (0400 GMT) after flushing out about 30 former fighters of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) from a nearby neighbourhood, officials said.

20 rebels killed in Chechnya

AFP, Moscow

Russian troops destroyed a group of some 20 rebels in a battle in Argun, 10 kilometres (six miles) east of Chechnya's capital Grozny, Russian military officials said as quoted by the Interfax news agency.

Under intense fire, Russian sappers managed to blow up the building that sheltered the guerrilla group, a military spokesman said Wednesday, adding that the rebels' bodies were later found in the debris.

Rebels had earlier this week made a bid to capture both Argun and Chechnya's second largest city Gudermes, where an attack by some 300 rebels Monday left at least 10 Russian soldiers dead, not counting two generals and 10 other officers killed when a military helicopter was shot down near Grozny.

NATO begins final phase of arms collection in Macedonia

AFP, Skopje

NATO troops began the final phase of Operation Essential Harvest to collect weapons from Macedonia's ethnic Albanian rebels Thursday at a site near the northwest village of Radusa, a spokesman said.

The collection centre was established late Wednesday and was due to open at 1000 am (0800 GMT), the military spokesman said.

The operation is being run by the French battle group with troops from Germany and Spain.

It is the second time that a collection site has been set up in Radusa and, as was the case the last time, the rebels are expected to hand over a captured Macedonian army tank.

Maoists close schools in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Most schools and universities were closed Thursday in Nepal's Kathmandu valley after Maoist activists threatened to attack any school that defied their order to shut, police said.

Officials said Maoist supporters threw stones at five buses heading to schools Thursday morning, slightly injuring several students.

Oil tanker sinks off China

AFP, Beijing

A tanker carrying 8,600 tonnes of diesel oil sank Thursday morning off the coast of southeastern China after colliding with a container ship, a maritime official said.

All 23 crew members on the Chinese-registered tanker were rescued after the collision near Xiamen city in Fujian province, said an official at the Xiamen Maritime Affairs Bureau who identified himself as Pan.

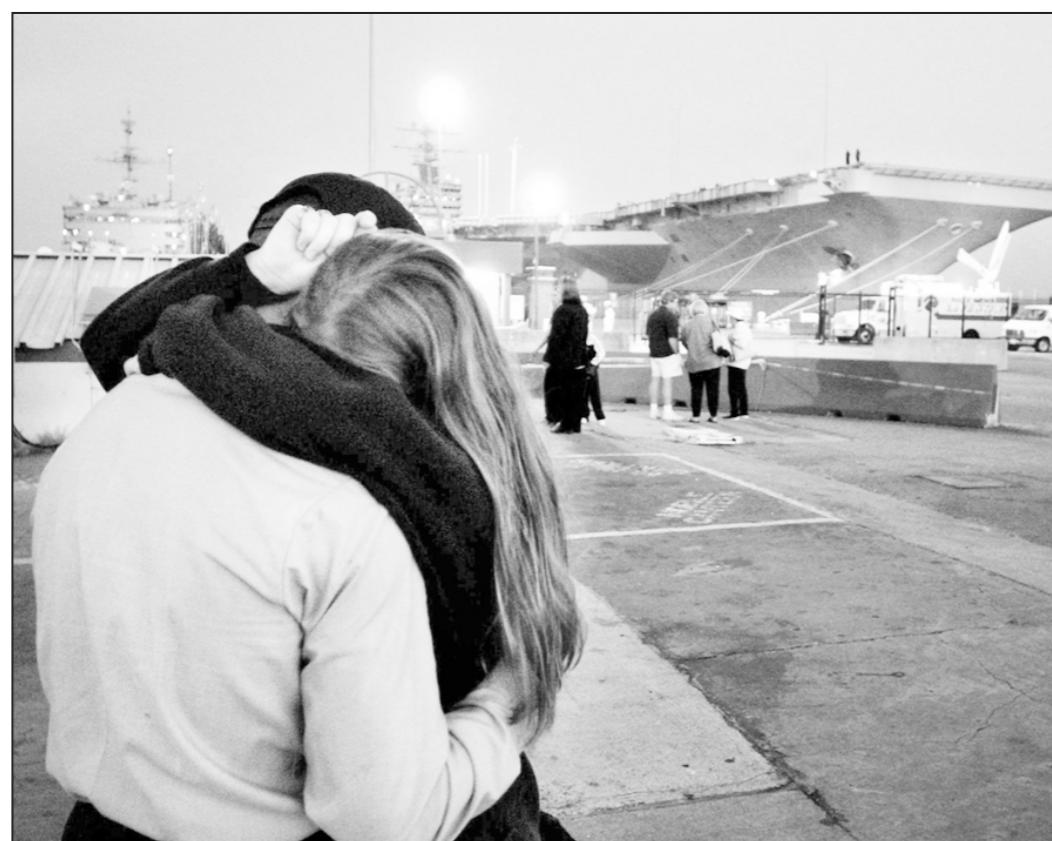


PHOTO: AFP

Kitt, an airman aboard the Theodore Roosevelt, says goodbye to his wife Jennifer before his deployment on Wednesday from Norfolk Naval Base, Norfolk, US. As the battle group got underway, the area swarmed with military helicopters and police boats.

Pak frontline province not ready to greet US troops

AFP, Quetta

Anti-American sentiment is on the rise in this sprawling southern city as its half million inhabitants nervously watch and wait for Washington's wrath to be unleashed on neighbouring Afghanistan.

Situated at the heart of the huge dustbowl province of Baluchistan, the city lies less than 200 km from Kandahar, the southern Afghan city that is home to Osama bin Laden and top of the likely list of US targets.

Its bustling bazaars are normally a picture of frenetic activity but a sombre mood has descended on the city in recent days and brought the

wheels of commerce grinding to a halt.

By late afternoon only a handful of customers are left in the markets and the only thing anyone is buying are newspapers for an update on developments in a crisis that some fear could tear Pakistan apart.

"I swear I have not sold even one meter of cloth since this morning," said Haji Ghulam Rasool, who runs a big shop on Jinnah Road, one of the city's main thoroughfares.

Like many Baluchis, Rasool believes that the United States has nothing to gain from attacking war-ravaged Afghanistan.

"They will find nothing to destroy

and they may not even get Osama. The only certain thing is that they will trigger a crisis in Pakistan."

President Pervez Musharraf has ordered the United States the use of its airspace and logistical support for a possible attack.

But there is huge opposition across the country to US troops being allowed to use Pakistan as a launch pad for an attack.

If they are, Quetta's airport and Baluchistan's main port, Gwadar, could be key entry points and that will not go down well with the locals, many of whom have shared ethnic and cultural bonds with the Afghans living on the other side of the border.

US preparing to ease sanction on Pakistan

Pak parties rally behind Musharraf

AFP, London

The US is preparing to ease economic sanctions on Pakistan, a key potential ally in its war against terrorism following last week's devastating attacks in America, the Financial Times reported Thursday.

Proposals to ease sanctions on Pakistan, as well as on India, imposed after the two carried out nuclear tests in 1998, are expected to be presented to members of the foreign relations committee of Congress Thursday, the FT said.

They represent a clear incentive for Pakistani cooperation with the US in dealing with Osama bin Laden, the chief suspect behind the September 11 attacks, and the Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan, which harbours him.

The move to court Pakistan is the latest step by the Bush administration in the task of building a coalition of allies to back retaliation against those responsible, the FT said.

Standard & Poor's rating agency said Wednesday that Pakistan could face US sanctions or financial aid depending on its reaction to the terrorist attacks.

"Pakistan could look forward to financial assistance by cooperating with the United States, including the removal of sanctions, the receipt of additional funding from official creditors, rescheduling bilateral debt and even bilateral debt forgiveness," the agency said.

Nonetheless, Standard & Poor's said, it was unclear whether Pakistan would be able to offer stronger support to the United States such as permiss-

sion to station troops on its soil.

In another development, Pakistan's two biggest political parties Thursday signalled they would back President Pervez Musharraf's call for national unity amid the looming crisis over threatened US military action against neighbouring Afghanistan.

Despite concerns that a conflict could consolidate the military's grip on power, both the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League indicated they would not support protests by Islamic parties.

The president, who has offered the country's airspace and logistical support for any US attack, said in a national television broadcast on Wednesday night that he had been forced to choose between saving Pakistan or saving the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan.

"I'm the chief of the Pakistan army and my first priority is the defence of Pakistan. The rest follows after," he said.

"Some elements want to take advantage of this (crisis) to pursue personal or party agendas. They want to create anarchy and damage the country."

PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar acknowledged Pakistan had little option but to go along with the international community or face diplomatic isolation and a worsening of a severe economic crisis.

"We have to support the international fight against terrorism for the maintenance of law and order," Babar told AFP.

US, UK mull strategy for 10-yr war

REUTERS, London

The United States and Britain are producing secret plans for a 10-year "war on terrorism," dubbed Operation Noble Eagle, to eliminate hostile networks and cells around the world, a British newspaper said yesterday.

But despite a build-up of US forces in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, there would be no massive land invasion of Afghanistan comparable to the 1991 war against Iraq, The Times quoted defence sources as saying.

Washington and London have rejected the idea that a US-led coalition would attack Afghanistan from all sides for harbouring Osama

bin Laden, the man the United States suspects was behind last week's attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, The Times said.

US and British planners were working on the basis that military strikes would only take place as part of a broader, global "counter-terrorism" operation, embracing diplomatic, economic and political action.

"There's no point in firing a lot of missiles at bin Laden if they miss their target, or launching Tomahawks at bin Laden training camps if they are empty," the newspaper quoted a defence source as saying.

Bush igniting World War: Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Baghdad warned US President George W. Bush Thursday he could spark a global war "with dire consequences" if he resorts to force in retaliation for the September 11 attacks in New York and a

Wuhan. "Bush seeks to spark a global world war, without thinking of the dire consequences it will entail and the reactions it will trigger," said Ath-Thawra, mouthpiece of Iraq's ruling Baath Party.

Such a war would harm all sides, including those who imagine they can be safe, the daily said.

The United States is preparing to retaliate for the attacks and trying to build an international anti-terror

coalition. Afghanistan, which hosts Saudi-born Islamist dissident Osama bin Laden, Washington's prime suspect in the terror attacks, is expected to bear the brunt of US wrath.

"Bush wants to launch a crusade outside the framework of international law and without providing concrete evidence to back up his charges against 60 countries classified as terrorist states, states that harbour terrorists, or states that abet terrorism," Ath-Thawra wrote.

Denouncing Bush's attempts to "drag as many countries as he can" into his "crusade," Ath-Thawra said it was necessary to guard US leaders against the grave consequences of their plans for the United States and "humanity at large."

Flight attendant gave details of hijacking

AFP, Los Angeles

A flight attendant aboard an American Airlines jet that was crashed into one of the towers of New York's World Trade Center gave a chilling account of the unfolding tragedy by telephone, the Los Angeles Times reported Thursday.

American Airlines flight 11 was en route from Boston to Los Angeles when it was hijacked by five men shortly after take-off on September 11. The plane was carrying 81 passengers, nine flight attendants and two pilots.

The Boeing 767 slammed into the northern tower of the World Trade Center just 18 minutes before a hijacked United Airlines jetliner of the same make plunged into the

southern tower.

After the plane took a sudden detour, flight attendant Madeline Amy Sweeney called airline flight services manager Michael Woodward in Boston, according to a document compiled by the FBI and reviewed by the Times.

"This plane has been hijacked," Sweeney told Woodward.

Sweeney, a 35-year-old mother of two young children, worked for American Airlines for 12 years.

When Woodward asked Sweeney whether she knew her location, her chilling reply was: "I see water and buildings. Oh my God! Oh my God!" according to the FBI report.

The water Sweeney saw was the Hudson River, which flows



PHOTO: AFP

Former Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev (R) arrives on Wednesday accompanied by his daughter Irina Virganskaya, in Berlin. Gorbachev will receive the eastern German media award "Golden Hen" for his work for German unity.

Thousands join anti-US protest in Peshawar

AFP, Peshawar

Thousands of radical Pakistani students paraded through the streets of Peshawar Thursday, chanting "Bush is a dog" and burning an effigy of the US president.

In a 3,000-strong show of support for alleged terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden and his Afghan hosts the Taliban, the student wing of the radical Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) also attributed last week's devastating attacks on New York and Washington to a Zionist-US conspiracy.

"Bush is a dog! Death to America! Long live Osama! Long live the Taliban!" the crowd chanted as scores of police armed with batons and tear-gas guns kept a close watch and traders pulled down their shutters.

"We are not afraid. Allah is with us," declared a JUI

student leader, as petrol was poured over a shabby doll dressed up in denims and a tie to represent Bush.

"Dog Bush," as the doll was named, then went up in flames to cries of "Allah-u-Akbar" (God is greatest).

The student leader then went on to explain to the crowd that last week's attacks on the World Trade Center's twin towers and the Pentagon were in fact the work of Israel, India and the United States, which he accused of seeking a pretext to wage war on Islam.

"The Afghans live in the mountains. They cannot fly planes. How could they have carried out these attacks?" he reasoned.

Peshawar is located in northwestern Pakistan close to the border with Afghanistan and has been the first stopping off point for hundreds of thousands of refugees from the conflict that has raged in the neighbouring state for the last 22 years.

China reserves right to protect its borders

AFP, Beijing

China stressed Thursday it would do whatever necessary to protect the "security and stability" of its borders following the attacks on the US, indicating it was anxious to prevent Muslim-inspired unrest leaking over its frontiers with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Those borders, which span China's predominantly Muslim westernmost region of Xinjiang, have reportedly been closed in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

"In order to safeguard the security and stability of China's border area, China is entitled to take all necessary measures," spokesman Zhu Bangzao said at the foreign ministry's regular briefing.

However, Zhu declined to say whether the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan, or the two former Soviet republics of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, had been sealed.

The issue of Xinjiang has come into sharp focus for Beijing following the catastrophic terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon near Washington D.C.

Muslim separatists in Xinjiang have used violent tactics in the past, and according to some reports they maintain close connections with Afghanistan which harbors Osama bin Laden, the chief suspect in last week's attacks.

A bulldozer, accompanied by two troop carriers, levelled 1.5 hectares (3.7 acres) of Palestinian farmland near the Jewish settlement of Morag before pulling out again, the head of the Palestinian-Israeli liaison committee, Colonel Khaled Abu Ula said.

He called the brief operation into Palestinian-controlled territory "a violation of the ceasefire" that both sides pledged to observe on Tuesday.

The truce, urged by the United States in the aftermath of the mas-

teries, came shortly before a woman settler was killed and her husband seriously wounded by Palestinian shooting near the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

"Arafat has prevented attacks in the past few hours, and we have appreciated his intervention in this prevention," Peres said, without giving any details of the attacks that were averted.

"Palestinians have been making serious efforts, but Yasser Arafat has his own problems with Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah, which cannot be sorted out at the press of a button," he added.

That was a reference to three militant Islamic groups that are violently opposed to the peace process with Israel.

National Communist Party-Maoist Central leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara (L) answers journalists at a joint press meeting in Kathmandu on Thursday. Maoist leader Mahara said present government activities forced Maoists to go back to the jungle and resume an armed revolution. The press meeting was attended by Narahari Acharya (C) from the government and National Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist's K.P. Oli (R).



PHOTO: AFP