

PHOTO: AFP
Talk Show host Oprah Winfrey hosts the "Prayer For America" memorial service at Yankee Stadium on Sunday to remember the victims of the World Trade Center attack.



PHOTO: AFP
Sgt. Elisa Anders (R) of the New York City Police Department comforts a woman during the "Prayer For America" memorial service at Yankee Stadium on Sunday.

Pak army fears border clashes with Taliban

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistan's army fears it may have to engage fleeing Taliban fighters if the United States takes military action against Afghanistan, provincial government sources said Monday.

Sources close to the governor of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), an unruly tribal belt along the border with Afghanistan, warned armed Taliban members may attempt to seek safe haven across the border.

"The threat of violence from Islamic fundamentalists inside Pakistan is not our biggest worry," a source close to the governor of NWFP told AFP.

There have been a series of anti-US demonstrations across Pakistan, but the rallies have been largely small scale and calls for general strikes have not been heeded.

"Any problems Pakistan has will likely be along the border with Afghanistan. As you know it is a porous border and the Taliban have a habit of coming and going when

they please," the source said on condition of anonymity.

"Pakistan is a likely destination if they are attacked, which is a potentially explosive scenario."

A military source north of Peshawar added: "(A Pakistani) military engagement with the Taliban is not out of the question. If there is a panic anything can happen, but we are ready to do our job."

Refugees fleeing Afghanistan say the Taliban have stepped up their presence along main border crossings, and Pakistani troops posted on the Khyber Pass have been seen reinforcing hill-top posts that overlook Afghanistan.

Taliban-controlled Afghanistan is facing the prospect of punitive strikes by the United States, in retaliation for its refusal to hand over Saudi-born alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden.

bin Laden has been blamed for masterminding the September 11 kamikaze passenger jet attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington.

UN prepares for massive humanitarian crisis

AFP, Islamabad

The United Nations has launched an unprecedented operation to prepare for a "massive crisis" in Afghanistan as people scramble to escape feared US-led military strikes, a UN spokesman said Monday.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Peter Kessler told AFP an emergency contingency operation in neighbouring Pakistan was the biggest in the agency's history.

Crisis management specialists and equipment to deal with hundreds of thousands of refugees were continuing to pour into Pakistan, on Afghanistan's eastern border, amid reports that more than a million people could try to flee in the event of US strikes.

"It's fair to say that never before have we needed an operation so large ahead of a possible crisis," Kessler said from the UNHCR's headquarters in the Pakistani capital.

"We are following our long experience in northern Iraq, the Balkans and Kosovo.

"The situation inside Afghanistan is so precarious that if it deteriorates it could become a massive crisis if we're not prepared."

Hundreds of thousands of people are believed to be on the move inside Afghanistan as the United States builds a formidable strike force from land, air and sea platforms around the landlocked country.

The ruling Taliban militia, accused of harbouring alleged terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden, is rallying its people for jihad, or holy war.

There are already some 3.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran left over from the last Afghan jihad against the 1979-89 Soviet invasion, which resulted in a humiliating withdrawal for the Red Army.

Another 900,000 people had become homeless due to relentless civil war and a severe drought in the 12 months leading up to the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, which bin Laden is suspected of organising.

Russia mulls joining war to contribute to fall of Taliban

Moscow may send paratroops to Tajikistan

AFP, Moscow

Russia is preparing for a new military campaign in Afghanistan if the United States should launch reprisal strikes following the September 11 terror attacks, the Russian media warned Monday.

"Russia will launch a new campaign in Afghanistan to contribute to the fall of the Taliban," the daily Izvestia wrote.

It said President Vladimir Putin had discussed the possibility of "a direct Russian involvement in the conflict" with senior ministers during a meeting at the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

Izvestia cited "sources close to the government" but gave no further details.

For the business daily Vedomosti, "the Kremlin has understood that not only must it prepare for a war, it must also take part in it with the means at its disposal to help the Americans."

"The stability of central Asia depends on the effectiveness of Russia's collaboration with the Northern Alliance," it wrote, referring to the anti-Taliban coalition of forces that maintains pockets of resistance in northern Afghanistan.

The daily Vremia Novostei said the Alliance would be "the main participant in the land operation being prepared by the United States in Afghanistan, with Moscow serving as intermediary."

The paper believed Moscow had encouraged Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

to offer Washington the use of their bases, despite the official position that Russia was opposed to such a development, or at best undecided.

"Moscow is not opposed to Tashkent and Dushanbe taking part in a US military operation, and even contributed to the taking of a decision (on the use of their bases)," it said.

On Saturday an Uzbek military official, insisting on anonymity, told AFP that US military aircraft had already landed at a base in Uzbekistan.

There have however been no indications that Tajikistan will allow its bases to be used by US forces.

Moscow's last intervention in Afghanistan, launched by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev on December 25, 1979, ended in a humiliating withdrawal that was completed in 1989.

Meanwhile, Russia may send paratroops to Tajikistan, but they would act in a purely defensive role along the nation's border with Afghanistan, a Russian military source said Monday.

The troops would be sent as reinforcements for Russia's 18,000 troops already deployed in Tajikistan in the event of an incursion by militants of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban, the source said, as quoted by the Interfax news agency.

Moscow already has 11,000 troops deployed as border guards along Tajikistan's 1,200 kilometre (800 mile) border with Afghanistan, along with 7,000 troops of the 201st division posted elsewhere in the country.

UN approval not necessary for US strikes: Rumsfeld

AFP, Washington

Pressing ahead with preparations for war, the US administration said Sunday it did not need UN approval to strike back at terrorists, and dismissed claims that Afghanistan's ruling Taliban could not find chief suspect Osama bin Laden.

The tough statements came as the first confirmed report emerged of a surveillance mission over Afghan territory, the most likely target of military strikes.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the United States lost an unmanned spy plane that had been surveying Afghanistan. He did not, however, confirm a Taliban claim the aircraft had been shot down.

US officials declined to comment on a claim the Taliban shot down a second plane Sunday.

Two US aircraft carrier battle groups are in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, more than 100 extra war-

planes have been deployed to the area and two more carriers and a 2,200 strong force of Marines are on the way.

As the deployment of firepower continued, US administration officials said they had no doubt bin Laden was responsible for the suicide attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and that striking back amounted to self defence.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said the United States would demonstrate to the world that the Saudi-born Islamic militant was responsible for the September 11 assaults that left more than 6,800 people presumed dead.

"I think his guilt is going to be very obvious to the world," Powell said in an appearance on the ABC television network.

National security adviser Condoleezza Rice said the US administration would present the evidence to its allies.

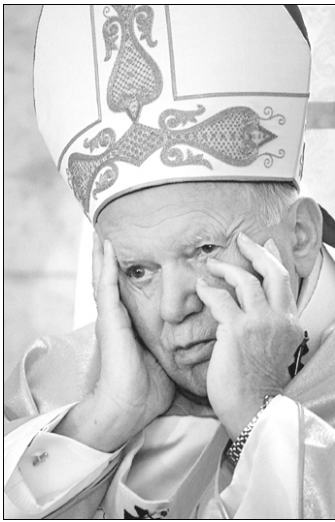


PHOTO: AFP
Pope John Paul II prays at Astana's cathedral during a mass with priests, monks and seminarians of Kazakhstan and Central Asia on Monday on the third day of his four day pastoral visit in Kazakhstan, followed by an apostolic voyage in Armenia, on the occasion of the 1700 years of Christianity in the country.

Israel sets up 'buffer zone'

Sharon rules out truce talks

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli army on Monday created a "buffer zone" along a northern stretch of the West Bank on the boundary with Israel, the army said in a statement.

"Entry into this zone is from now on forbidden to all (Palestinian) residents of the West Bank unless they have a special permit," the statement said.

Israel decided to create a special closed-off area on September 16.

The army says that the new conditions, which will place severe restrictions on Palestinians, were taken to prevent "terrorist attacks" in Israel and to prevent Palestinians entering Israel illegally to work without permission.

The zone stretches at least 30 kilometres (20 miles) between the north-western town of Tulkarem and Jenin in the north, and is up to two kilometres deep in places.

Palestinians have strongly criticised the creation of the zone, saying that it is a preparation by Israel to annex the land in the area.

"We condemn this decision by Israel, and Palestinian President (Yasser) Arafat has sent a letter to this effect to the US President George W. Bush, because this will destroy the lives of thousands of Palestinians and the Oslo peace accords," Palestinian information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said at the time.

Meanwhile, a senior Israeli official on Monday ruled out truce talks between Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres "in the present circumstances," following the killing of an Israeli woman.

"No decision has been taken but it is difficult to imagine that the prime

minister (Ariel Sharon) would give the green light in the present circumstances," said the official, who asked not to be named.

The official, close to the prime minister's office, recalled Sharon's demand that there be 48 hours of absolute calm before he would allow Peres to meet with Arafat.

He said the killing of the 24-year-old Israeli woman earlier in the day in the Jordan Valley in the West Bank was "apparently carried out by the Tanzim," as Israel calls the armed wing of Arafat's Fatah movement.

Two Jewish settlers, a school teacher and a bus driver, were killed in the Jordan Valley on September 9.

Moreover, Europe and the United States piled the pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon Monday to allow his Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, although the killing of an Israeli woman by Palestinian gunmen dented hopes of a swift meeting.

"This meeting is urgent, not to settle everything, but to start a de-escalation," said French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, leading a European diplomatic offensive to see peace talks on steady a fragile truce take place.

He was echoing the words of US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who phoned Peres Sunday to tell him his planned meeting with Arafat was "urgent".

And British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who is due to arrive here from Iran on Tuesday, told the BBC the meeting should take place as soon as possible, "if possible" on Monday.

But the slaying of a young Israeli woman on a road in the West Bank appeared to bury hopes of an immediate meeting.



PHOTO: AFP
Heavy earth moving equipment is used in the construction of tunnels and galleries in the Jalalabad region, in the mountains of Afghanistan where it was believed that Osama bin Laden had his base in this 1988 photo. Bin Laden is the prime suspect in the September 11 suicide attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington.

Arabs reluctant to join war

AFP, Cairo

Arab countries are increasingly reticent about joining the US coalition against terrorism, fearing its goals are murky and will ignore the festering sore of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

From Egypt to the Gulf monarchies, Arab leaders are becoming increasingly critical of US pressure to join the effort amid as Arab public opinion blames US policies in the Middle East for provoking the attacks on September 11.

During a visit Sunday to Jordan, Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa renewed warnings to the United States about the type of military response it launches.

"Clearly, we would never accept a strike against an Arab country, no matter what the circumstances," he said.

And he called for a review of the 11-year-old sanctions on Iraq, echoing Arab reservations about joining a coalition with ill-defined goals which could allow the United States to strike the targets it likes, particularly Baghdad.

On Friday, Musa had already set limits to Arab participation, saying Arab states could not join an anti-terrorist alliance that included Israel.

Musa also said Sunday that the Arabs were enraged over the plight of the Palestinians and appealed for a remedy for the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

Czech president hospitalised

AFP, Prague

Czech President Vaclav Havel was rushed to hospital with heart problems on Monday, forcing him to cancel an official visit to Italy, presidential spokesman Ladislav Spacek said.

Havel, who turns 65 next month, suffered his latest bout with ill health during a summer vacation in Portugal. He was treated with antibiotics after catching a chill.

C'wealth summit to go ahead

AFP, Canberra

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is expected to go ahead in Brisbane next month as scheduled despite the risk of imminent war, officials said Monday.

The three-day conference is due to be opened by the head of the Commonwealth, Britain's Queen Elizabeth, on October 6.

Andrew Reynolds, director of external communications for the meeting, said the crisis over the

terrorist attacks in the United States had not yet caused any cancellations among the 45 Commonwealth leaders expected to attend.

He dismissed media reports that some leaders might cancel for fears of their safety, saying he was confident there would be a full attendance at the meeting. "My view is that it's going to go ahead," he said.

Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer raised doubts on Sunday that it would go ahead because some leaders may have to cancel if the United States launches

retaliatory attacks on Afghanistan before CHOGM begins.

These include British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien who would be expected to stay at home rather than travel halfway around the world.

Among 52 Commonwealth leaders eligible to attend, some have already declined invitations, including Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare.

Lankan constitution reform Tamil parties boycott debate

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's moderate Tamil parties Monday boycotted a crucial debate on constitutional reforms and urged the Marxist-backed government to open peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels.

Three Tamil political parties walked out of a debate on a constitutional amendment to establish independent commissions to run the police, the public service, the judiciary and the elections office.

The commissions are being introduced following pressure on the minority government by its new Marxist ally, the JVP or People's Liberation Front. The government is depending on the JVP to stave off an

opposition-led ouster bid.

The moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) said the concept of independent panels was a welcome one, but it did not address the burning issue of the separatist war in the island's north-east.

"The TULF cannot with justification partake in piecemeal constitutional reform, when no serious effort is in progress to resolve the Tamil national question," the TULF said in a statement.

Tiger guerrillas are leading a campaign for independence in the island's north and east and more than 60,000 people have been killed in fighting in the past three decades.

Iraq warns US against a 'suicidal war sans limits'

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi newspapers warned the United States on Monday against pitching itself and the rest of the world into a suicidal war "without limits" that will have serious socio-economic consequences.

"Everything indicates that America, with its eyes shut, is heading towards the unknown by launching itself into a suicidal war without limits," said Ath-Thawra, mouthpiece of the ruling Baath party.

"It seems Washington has nervously and hysterically fallen into the trap set for it by succumbing to internal and foreign pressures pushing it to involve itself in conflicts and confrontations without limits with several parties," Ath-Thawra said.

Babel, run by President Saddam Hussein's elder son, Uday, said the "Americans, and behind them, the Zionists, are working with all their might to transform this defeat (the attacks) into a victory, without considering the serious consequences of its action."

"These criminals resort to the language of blood, murder and terrorism while trying to make the world believe that they want to fight these methods," it charged.

"It is not in the interests of any of the world's countries, with the exception of the Zionist entity, to join up with a hateful and racist US camp and blow up the world.

Glimpse of comet's nucleus

AP, Los Angeles

A NASA spacecraft captured dozens of images of a comet during a weekend flyby, providing scientists only the second glimpse ever of the core of one of the glowing bodies of dust and ice.

Scientists said the Deep Space 1 probe flew within 1,360 miles (2,190 kilometres) of the comet Borrelly, capturing as many as 50 images of its nucleus at varying resolutions. Scientists expect to receive the last images and other data from the spacecraft by Monday.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration officials say they will not release any images or data from the flyby until Tuesday. However, scientists gave hints of what the

spacecraft saw and recorded, including pictures of dust and ice boiling off the comet's surface.

"This data set will make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge we have about comets," Robert Nelson, the mission's project scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, said Sunday.

Scientists are interested in comets because they are thought to contain pristine examples of the building blocks of our solar system from its birth 4.5 billion years ago.

The glowing veil of dust and gas that envelops Borrelly is perhaps as big as the Earth, but the comet's nucleus appears in the images to be just 2.5 miles (4 kilometres) wide by 5 miles (8 kilometres) long, Nelson said.

Borrelly was at its most active during Saturday's flyby, kicking off material that will give scientists clues about the comet's composition. The encounter, about 137 million miles (220 million kilometres) from earth, came about a week after the comet's closest approach to the sun on its seven-year orbital path.

Deep Space 1's instruments also measured ions, electrons, gases and Borrelly's magnetic and electrical fields.

"We collected a large amount of data on this previously completely mysterious body," said Marc Rayman, the mission's project manager. "It's going to take some time to understand all the secrets this body may be hiding."

Pakistan agreed in '99 to help capture Laden

AFP, London

The Pakistan government had as early as 1999 agreed to collaborate with the United States in the capture of Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, chief suspect behind this month's terror attacks in the US, a press report said Monday.

The Times of London said the deal was sown up with then prime minister Nawaz Sharif when he paid a visit to the US in July 1999.

The US government promised to pay 25 million dollars to help Pakistan's secret services set up special units to aid in the capture of Bin Laden in Afghanistan, the report said.