

Sean Lennon, the son of John Lennon, performs during the concert called "Come Together: A Night For John Lennon's Words And Music" at Radio City Music Hall on Tuesday. The concert is dedicated to New York City and its people to benefit relief efforts after the attack on the World Trade Center.

US briefs China on Laden evidence

AFP, Beijing

China said Wednesday it had been briefed by US diplomats about evidence linking Osama bin Laden's militant network to last month's devastating attacks in the United States.

"The US embassy Wednesday reported to China about the relevant state of affairs," the Chinese foreign ministry told AFP in a written reply to a question if China had been presented with the evidence.

On Tuesday the US State Department said diplomats had begun sharing with selected foreign governments classified information proving that Afghan-based bin Laden and his al-Qaeda group were behind the attacks.

Iraq will resist any US attack: Aziz

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq will resist any US-led strikes in retaliation for the New York and Washington terror attacks, Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz vowed Wednesday.

"If America is preparing another attack under a new pretext, we will face it as we have done in the past," Aziz told reporters.

"We have not asked for guarantees that an attack will not be carried out against us. This aggression has gone on for years and we have resisted it with courage and patience," Aziz said after opening a conference in Baghdad to show solidarity with Iraq.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell on Monday hinted that Washington might target Iraq in a later phase of its anti-terror campaign launched after the September 11 attacks on the United States that left thousands dead.

South Korea pushes for inter-Korean land route

AFP, Seoul

South Korea will push for the opening of a historic land route this year that would follow a path through the decades-old Cold War division of the Korean peninsula, officials said Wednesday.

The South will propose the construction of a temporary, dirt path through the demilitarised zone this year as a paved road is not expected to be in place before October next year, they said.

It will table this idea when the two sides convene talks at the North's scenic Mount Kumgang this week to discuss ways of increasing numbers of South Korean tourists to the communist country.

A 26-member delegation led by Cho Myung-Kyun, a director of the unification ministry, left here Wednesday for the talks which will start in earnest on Thursday.

Kashmir CM weeps for victims of suicide attack

AFP, Srinagar

Kashmir's chief minister broke down in tears Wednesday as legislators returned to their assembly building two days after suspected Islamic militants killed 38 people in a suicide bomb attack on the complex.

In a speech to the reconvened assembly, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah paid tribute to the memory of the victims and urged tough action against militants and those who shelter them.

The Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed Islamic group had initially claimed responsibility for the attack, which also left 60 people injured, but on Tuesday denied any involvement.

Terrorism in Kashmir won't be ignored, US tells India

Militants slam Powell remarks on terrorism

AFP, Washington

The United States on Tuesday assured India that its anti-terrorism campaign will not stop with Osama bin Laden but target extremist violence worldwide including the type India faces in Kashmir.

Secretary of State Colin Powell gave the message to his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh at a meeting here in which he expressed Washington's condolences for the victims of Monday's suicide attack on Kashmir's state assembly.

Powell called the attack on the legislature in Srinagar that began when a member of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed Islamist group blew himself up in a car a "terrible terrorist" and "heinous act."

"It is this kind of terrorism that we are united against," he said, referring to the campaign launched after the September 11 attacks in Washington and New York for which India has pledged full support.

"We are against terrorism, this clearly was an act of terror," Powell said of the Kashmir attack that killed 38 people.

"We are going after terrorism in a comprehensive way, not just in the present instance of al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, but terrorism as it affects nations around the world to include the kind of terrorism that affects India," he told reporters.

US officials have blamed Afghanistan-based Saudi militant bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network for masterminding the attacks on the World Trade

Center and Pentagon which left about 5,700 people missing or dead.

Indian officials say the militants that carried out the attack in Srinagar are also linked to al-Qaeda and have accused rival Pakistan of harboring the group. This could possibly place the United States in a difficult position as it seeks to hold New Delhi and Islamabad together in the anti-terrorism coalition.

The assistance of Pakistan in retaliating against bin Laden and his hosts, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban, will be crucial to the success of the global campaign.

Pakistan has vowed to assist the United States but has already expressed deep reservations about the larger battle against terrorism targeting Islamic militants who operate in Kashmir, many of whom it trains and equips.

Earlier Tuesday, New Delhi demanded that Islamabad restrain such groups and, after meeting Powell, Singh hinted that Pakistan was not fulfilling its pledge to combat all forms of terrorism.

Meanwhile, Pakistan-based militant groups Wednesday denounced US Secretary of State Colin Powell for saying that Washington's war on terrorism extended to the type of extremist violence India faces in Kashmir.

Powell's remarks were "ridiculous, unrealistic and ignored the historical facts," the United Jihad Council (UJC), an umbrella organisation of more than a dozen militant groups based in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, said in a statement.



India's Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh (L) and US Secretary of State Colin Powell (R) prepare to address reporters on Tuesday outside of the US State Department in Washington, DC. Singh, who also serves as India's Defence Minister, held talks at White House on Monday with US President George W. Bush's National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, to discuss the fight against terrorism. India condemned the assaults and offered to allow Washington to refuel its planes on or over its territory, as well as logistical help should Bush choose to strike suspected terrorist bases in Afghanistan.

Afghan opposition meets US officials to plot strategy

AFP, Jalal Seraj

Afghanistan's anti-Taliban Northern Alliance said Wednesday it had met with US officials to discuss coordinated military action.

"I met American officials face to face a few days ago. It was not in Afghanistan. The outcome was good. We discussed every aspect of the current situation and the prospect of cooperation," said the alliance's chief spokesman, Dr Abdullah Abdullah.

"In immediate terms it will be a military situation," he told a press conference in this Afghan town, some 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of Kabul.

He refused to elaborate and say where and when the meeting was

held, nor would he identify who else participated in the talks.

But for the first time, Dr Abdullah confirmed the alliance had received help from Russia and Iran in its five-year campaign against the Taliban militia, which ousted the government when it seized the capital Kabul in 1996.

"Yes in the past, Russia and Iran have been supportive. They have renewed their commitments in case we need more, they are ready to do it," he said.

He added the alliance had partly paid for military supplies from Afghanistan's two neighbours, while the rest had been supplied on a long-term credit basis.

But he would not go into details of how much credit was extended, nor

how much the supplies had cost and what the alliance had received.

"Despite receiving support from these countries, supplies have been a problem. We have been surviving on a minimum," he added.

Dr Abdullah, foreign minister in the Afghan government in exile, also said he would be willing to meet US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in Uzbekistan if necessary.

Such a meeting had not been discussed, he said, but Rumsfeld left Tuesday on a short tour of Middle East and Central Asian countries which is due to take him to Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt and Uzbekistan.

13 Afghans, Pakistanis held in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

A total of 13 Afghan and Pakistan nationals were detained in Japan on suspicion of illegal entry Wednesday.

The detention was unrelated to last month's terror attacks in the United States, an immigration spokesman said.

The Tokyo immigration bureau raided the homes of the 13 men in Tokyo and Chiba, some 50 km east of the capital, and detained them for questioning, the spokesman said.

"We are currently questioning them as they are suspected of illegally entering Japan," said spokesman Shinya Tanaka.

"We have been tracking them for months, so the detention today had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks (on September 11)," Tanaka said.

Musharraf calls on ex-king to talk post-Taliban govt

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has invited former Afghan king Mohammad Zahir Shah to send an emissary to Islamabad as soon as possible to discuss a post-Taliban government, Italy's minister of state for foreign affairs said Wednesday.

Margherita Boniver told reporters here after meeting Musharraf for 40 minutes that the Pakistani leader believed Shah had a role to play in helping form a unified government in Afghanistan should the Taliban regime fall.

"The Pakistanis are now realising that the old king can be a direct person with whom to engage in a peace process," Boniver said.

"He (Musharraf) has asked me to convey to the king the fact that Pakistan wants an emissary -- a person close to the king -- to come to Islamabad as quickly as possible."

Shah, who has lived in exile in Rome since being overthrown in 1973, has over the past week discussed with Afghan opposition leaders plans for a new, broad-based government to replace the hardline Taliban.

Pakistan is the only government that still recognises the Taliban, which the United States has targeted for protecting Osama bin Laden, the Saudi-born militant accused of masterminding the terrorist attacks in the US that killed an estimated 5,700 people.

Boniver also said Musharraf had

suggested the United Nations send a force into Afghanistan to oversee an eventual peace process, in a similar operation to Kosovo.

"He did not mention any concrete plans so far but we agreed this was a very good idea to deal with the build-up of arms in Afghanistan," she said.

Pakistan has withdrawn its diplomats from Kabul and Boniver said it was preparing for a new government there.

"He (Musharraf) did not mention bin Laden but he definitely spoke all the time of this post scenario... when Afghanistan will be liberated by the terrorist presence of bin Laden and he also acknowledged that the Taliban regime could not have any role from now on," she said.



US Coast Guard boat patrols the Hudson River near the site of the World Trade Center on Tuesday. Recovery work continues at the site almost three weeks since the World Trade Center Towers were destroyed by terrorist attacks.

Indonesia reshuffles military

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's armed forces have replaced the regional military commander for East Java as part of a major reshuffle involving 94 senior officers, it was announced Wednesday.

Major General Sudi Silalahi is to become a secretary to the Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Armed forces spokesman Air Vice Marshall Graitto Usodo described the changes in the country's powerful armed forces as routine.

"The reshuffle, to take effect as of October 1, is part of the development of officers which we carry out every April and October each year," Usodo told reporters.

Russian forces kill 19 Chechen rebels in raids

AFP, Moscow

Russian forces killed 19 Chechen rebels in the mountainous south of the breakaway republic over the past 24 hours, military officials in the capital Grozny said Wednesday.

The rebels were killed in a series of special operations backed by helicopter strikes in the regions of Itum-Kale and Nozhai-Yurt, the officials said, as quoted by the ITAR-TASS news agency.

More than 30 people were arrested and several arms caches uncovered, they said.

The rebels launched 17 attacks on Russian positions without causing casualties, the officials added.

'10,000 ready to quit Taliban'

AFP, Jalal Seraj

Some 10,000 men are ready to switch sides and fight alongside the opposition Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the alliance's chief spokesman said Wednesday.

Dr Abdullah Abdullah said the alliance had been in contact with dozens of commanders fighting with the Taliban Islamic militia recently.

"It will not be exaggerating if I say that with those contacts 10,000 men in different parts of Afghanistan" could desert the Taliban, he told a press conference here, 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of Kabul.

"It was surprising for me. They are willing to change sides, today or wait until something happens and coordinate efforts with us. We prefer the latter," he added.

His comments came as US strikes on Taliban bases seemed imminent after the Islamic militia refused to hand over Osama bin Laden.

Britain to toughen asylum, immigration laws

AFP, Brighton

Britain is to introduce emergency laws to toughen its asylum and immigration rules in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the United States, Home Secretary David Blunkett said Wednesday.

Blunkett also said that new legislation would be brought in to make incitement to religious hatred a crime.

The move was prompted by fears of an anti-Muslim backlash over the attacks in America on September 11, which have been blamed on Islamic fundamentalists.

Blunkett was due to outline the proposals in a speech later Wednesday to the ruling Labour Party's annual conference in Brighton, southern England.

Blunkett told GMTV television that he hoped to have the proposed laws ready to take to parliament in two or three weeks.

"I want to report in detail to parliament in two or three weeks' time when we've actually finished drafting the emergency legislation and therefore to be able to update them properly on the exact detail," he said.

"I shall be spelling out changes which I hope will prevent incitement by ensuring that people cannot promote hatred on the grounds of religion as well as race."

"It's about recognising that our community, our citizenship, is built on understanding that we have in common the most basic of all tenets, which are security, order and freedom from fear."

Blunkett promised to publish details later this year on how the asylum system should be reformed.

The British government has often accused in the past of being lax on asylum and soft on extremists.

Last year, more than 80,000

people claimed asylum in Britain, according to official figures, in a process that can last years.

In many cases they simply vanish. The Immigration Service Union calculates that at least one million immigrants are living illegally here at any time.

Abroad too, Britain has been accused by the likes of Algeria, Egypt, India and Turkey of harbouring groups considered extremist in their homelands.

They include groups tied to Algeria's Armed Islamic Group, Egypt's Islamic Jihad, Sir Lanka's Tamil Tigers and Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Party.

In a television interview Sunday, Prime Minister Tony Blair said Britain could not be a "safe haven" for terrorists.

"I hope in this new situation, people realise we have got to act," he said then.

Evidence on Laden

US envoys'trip to capitals

AFP, Washington

US diplomats Tuesday began sharing with select foreign governments classified information that Washington says proves that Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network masterminded last month's terrorist attacks, the State Department said.

"We sent information out ... to large numbers of nations," Secretary of State Colin Powell said.

"I think (the information) powerfully made the case that the al-Qaeda organisation led by Osama bin Laden was responsible for what happened on the 11th of September," Powell told reporters.

He and other officials declined to detail the information that was being shared but said it "traced the history of this organisation, its recent activities and events around the 11th,

before and after."

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said earlier that US ambassadors in "like-minded nations" were briefing those governments as part of a "back-and-forth process of sharing information."

And he insisted that the start of the process did not herald an imminent military response against bin Laden or his hosts, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia.

"The fact that we're sharing this information with other governments at this point does not indicate any particular decisions about our response options," Boucher said.

"It does not indicate that it's not a prelude to something else other than a continuing process of sharing information."

Boucher noted that State Department's counter-terrorism chief Frank Taylor had briefed NATO

on the evidence earlier Tuesday in Brussels and that US ambassador to Pakistan Wendy Chamberlin had done the same with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

Both NATO, with the full military might of its 19 member countries, and Pakistan with its links and proximity to Afghanistan will be key players in a US-led anti-terrorism campaign aimed first at the Saudi militant and the Taliban.

But reaction to the information varied widely between NATO and Pakistan.

NATO Secretary General Lord George Robertson pronounced the facts "clear and compelling" after the alliance was briefed but the Pakistani foreign ministry said it had yet to see conclusive evidence that bin Laden was responsible for the attacks in New York and the Pentagon.

Senate passes US defence bill

AFP, Washington

The US Senate on Tuesday voted overwhelmingly to pass a 345-billion-dollar defence authorisation bill which included President George W. Bush's demands for flexibility on ballistic missile defence.

Senators voted 99-0 to pass the bill, a version of which passed the House of Representatives last week. A conference committee will work out the differences in the two versions before sending a final bill to Bush.

The bill did not include earlier Democratic provisions that Republicans and the White House felt would have undermined the president's authority to withdraw from the 1972 ABM treaty and constrained the development and deployment of a ballistic missile defence system.

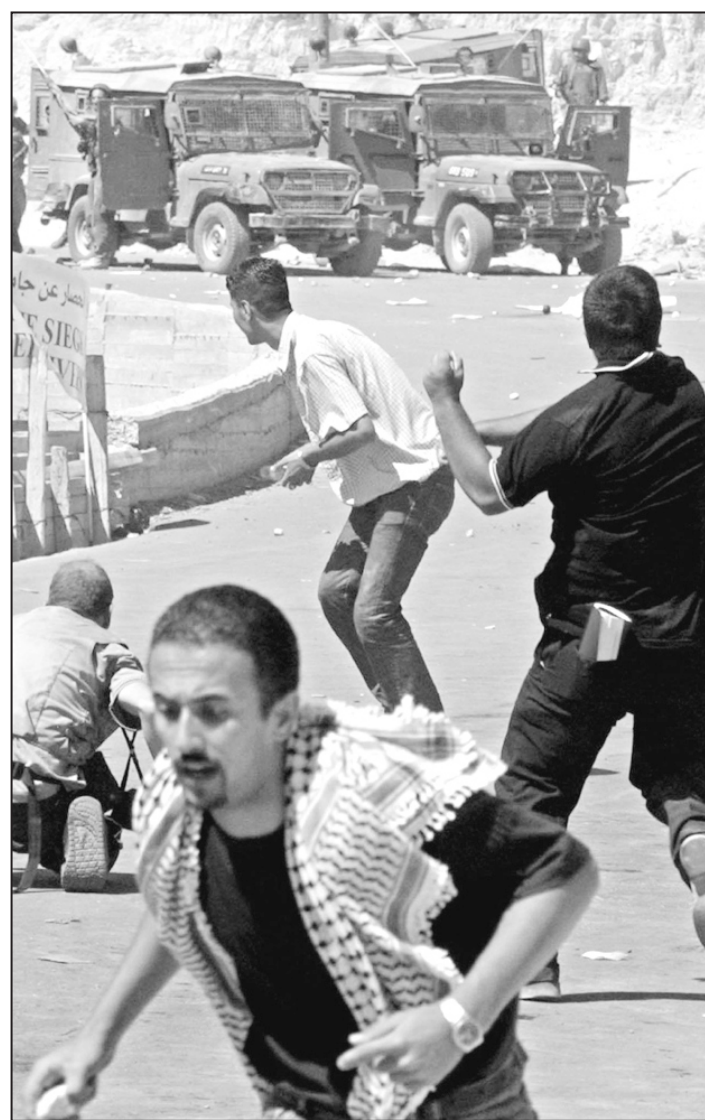
The only senator not to vote was Republican Strom Thurmond, who collapsed earlier in the day and was taken to hospital.

Democrats, in a show of support for Bush following September 11's devastating suicide attacks that left

some 5,700 dead or missing, opted to vote for the bill although earlier they had balked at Bush's request for 8.3 billion dollars for missile defence.

Democratic Senator Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, is to introduce a separate bill containing language constraining expenditures on missile defence.

The defence authorisation measure also calls for closing a number of military bases in 2003 and foresees increasing the salary of military personnel.



Palestinian protesters throw stones at Israeli jeeps during clashes near the Surda checkpoint, in the north of the West Bank town of Ramallah on Tuesday. Some 2000 students and faculty members protested against the closure of a road leading to Bir Zeit University outside Ramallah.

'Removal of Taliban not a specific military aim'

AFP, London

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said Tuesday that the military aims of the international coalition against terrorism did not include ousting the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Straw said the campaign against terrorism was not just about Osama bin Laden.

"It's about the key people in the al-Qaeda organisation, the break-up of the whole of its terrorist apparatus and proper inspection... is it a specific military aim to remove the Taliban regime? No, the specific military aim is to see an end to this terrorist threat and to bring those people to justice," he told BBC 2's Newsnight programme.

The foreign secretary said the Taliban knew that bin Laden was "up to his neck" in the attacks.

Straw said he has seen clear evidence that bin Laden was responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington but said it would not be shown to the Taliban.

"We know that the Taliban know about the culpability of Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda organisation and they know that we know so we're not going to play games with them."

"There is a way which involves the least amount of the use of force by which the Taliban and the al-Qaeda organisation can seek to bring themselves to justice without us having to resort to force but it is, as the prime minister said, their choice," he said.