

## Hardline groups in Asia slam US strikes as attack on Muslims

AFP, Jakarta

Hardline Islamic groups in Asia reacted angrily Monday to the US-led air strikes in Afghanistan, with thousands of Pakistani protesters taking to the streets and an Indonesian group warning of attacks on US interests.

In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-populated country, the Front for the Defenders of Islam urged Jakarta to sever diplomatic ties with Washington and its allies and expel their citizens.

"They are terrorists who should be expelled from the soil of Indonesia," said its chairman Habib Muhammed Riziq Shihab.

If the Indonesian government fails to act, he said, all Indonesian Muslims should attack the embassies of the United States and its allies, conduct "sweeps" to drive out their citizens and destroy their assets.

The Indonesian Council of Ulemas, the highest Islamic authority, condemned the attacks "in the strongest possible terms".

"It is a manifestation of genuine arrogance and tyranny which is against humanitarianism, justice and the truth," the council said in a statement.

The council urged the government to freeze temporarily diplomatic relations with the US and its allies until they stop the raids and called on the UN to impose sanctions on the US.

It urged Indonesian Muslims to put "pressure on the US interests and other methods to stop the tyranny."

Council secretary general Din Syamsuddin said Muslims

should not show solidarity for Afghans in violent ways.

But he said "we will not stop people who wish to wage a jihad (holy war or struggle) in terms of physical struggle because that is part of Islamic teachings."

Laskar Jihad leader Ja'far Umar Thalib said the US had declared its enmity against Muslims "and this position will endanger the United States very much."

In an interview with Metro TV, he urged those who could do so to go and fight in Afghanistan despite a Jakarta government ban.

"For those who are not able to do that, express this enmity against the United States and its allies in whatever form they can," he said without elaborating.

Sunday's air and missile strikes on targets in Afghanistan sparked a wave of anti-US protests in the Pakistani cities of Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Lahore.

In Peshawar several thousand students pulled down sign boards, burnt tyres and shouted slogans against the US and in support of Afghanistan's Taliban rulers. In Rawalpindi around 500 protesters shouted slogans against President George W. Bush.

The Taliban themselves called the attacks a "terrorist" assault on the whole Islamic world.

"This action is not only against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan but this is a terrorist attack on the whole Muslim world," said Taliban ambassador to Pakistan Abdul Salam Zaeef.

Violent demonstrations broke out in India's Muslim-majority

Kashmir state with people pouring onto the streets of the capital Srinagar, stoning taxis and chanting slogans against the US.

In a message broadcast Sunday by Qatar's Al-Jazeera satellite channel Osama bin Laden -- Washington's chief suspect in the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US -- vowed no peace for the US until the Palestinians also enjoy peace and American troops pull out of the Arabian peninsula.

"To America, I have only a few words to say: I swear by God that America and those who live in America won't dream of having security before we have it in Palestine and all infidel armies depart from the land of Mohammad," he said.

Some mainstream Asian Islamic leaders also condemned the air strikes.

Fadzil Noor, president of Malaysia's largest opposition party the Parti Islam SeMalaysia, said the attacks were a direct assault on Muslims.

"America attacked a small and defenceless country like Afghanistan without showing the world strong reason or proof, they are war criminals," he said.

"If the US are really waging a war against terrorism, why don't they attack Israel, who are terrorists against the Palestinians?"

"This proves they are not fighting terrorism, they are fighting the Taliban who are Muslims."

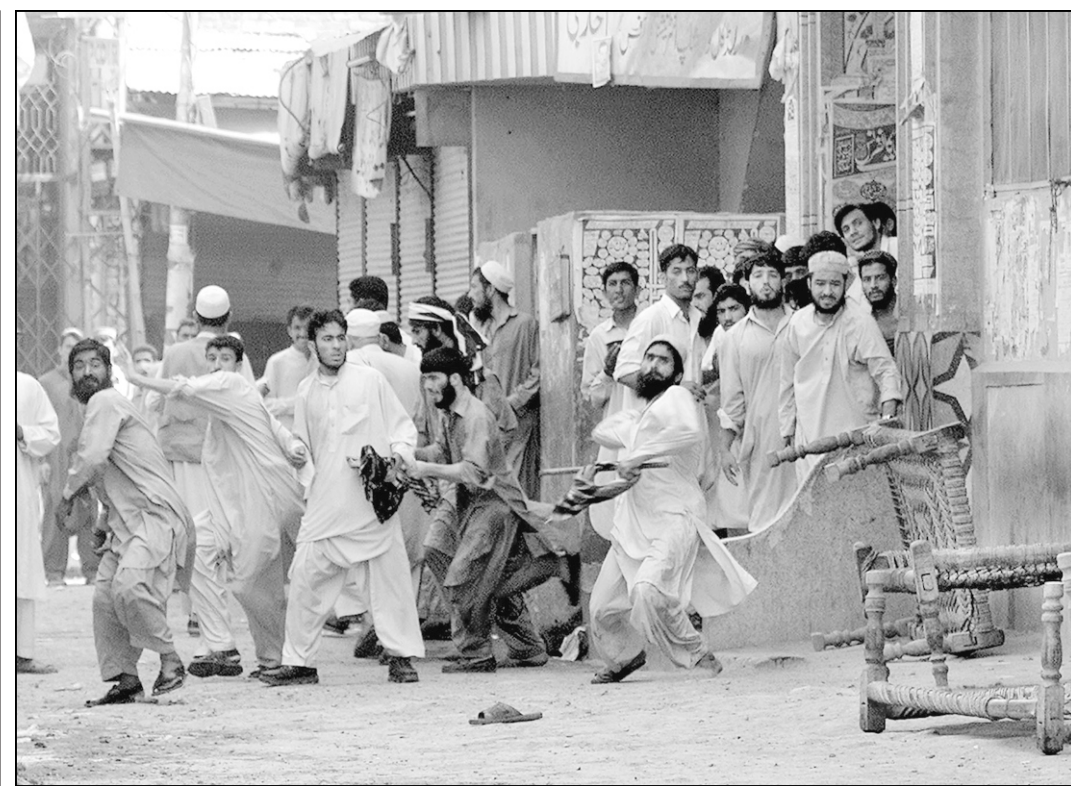


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani radical Muslims throw stones at police during riots in downtown Peshawar on Monday after protesters turned violent in opposition to the US-led military strikes on Afghanistan on Sunday night. More than 10,000 demonstrators set fire to buildings and damaged vehicles in protest after a chief Muslim cleric announced over the public address system that a Jihad or holy war was now "mandatory" for Pakistani Muslims.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian police arrest a demonstrator from the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) rally close to Kolkata's International Airport on Monday. The CPI demonstrated as six Japanese transport aircraft on their way to Pakistan with relief goods, were refuelling in Kolkata.

## Powell to visit Pakistan, India to shore up support

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Colin Powell will travel to India and Pakistan in the coming days to shore up support for strikes against Afghanistan and try to keep the two nuclear powers and traditional enemies from coming to blows, a senior State Department official said Sunday.

President George W. Bush "has asked the Secretary to go to India and Pakistan later this week," the official said.

Exact dates for the travel had not yet been set, but another department official said the trip would precede Powell's planned attendance at an October 17 and 18 meeting in Shanghai of foreign ministers from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. The Indian foreign ministry said earlier Sunday that Powell would visit India in the third week of October.

"The secretary has been very careful all along to manage our relationships with India and Pakistan so that we don't see any tensions arising over this," the senior official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

"Each of them has offered strong support for the coalition and obviously each of these countries will support it in a slightly different way. So we want to work with both of them and not allow any problems to arise."

Last week, Powell himself acknowledged having to walk a fine diplomatic line with India and Pakistan as the United States manoeuvres for support in its war on terrorism.

"Every day we sort of make sure that we are calibrating between the two nations, knowing of the tension that exists in the region," Powell said on October 3.

## Violent anti-US protests across Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Violent anti-US protests broke out in several Pakistani cities on Monday, with police firing volleys of tear gas and witnesses reporting exchanges of automatic weapons fire.

In the largest demonstrations, between 10,000 and 15,000 radical students and members of hardline Islamic groups took to the streets of the western city of Quetta, burning down a cinema and setting fire to a block of flats, a shopping plaza and several other buildings.

Chanting "Down with America" and "Death to President Bush," the crowds smashed the windscreens of parked cars and threw stones at police.

As the violence intensified, police fired scores of tear gas canisters. Journalists on the rooftop of the city's luxury Serena hotel could hear repeated automatic weapons fire.

There were no immediate reports of any casualties.

The protests came after the chief clerics of several mosques in

Quetta reacted to the nighttime US military attacks on Taliban targets in Afghanistan by announcing over their public address systems that jihad (holy war) was now "mandatory" for Pakistani Muslims.

The anti-US sentiment of the protests swiftly took on a more general anti-foreigner tone and as the demonstrators marched towards the Serena Hotel -- base for several hundred foreign journalists -- police had to fire more tear gas shells to keep the crowds away.

Makeshift barbed-wire fencing was hastily erected across access roads to the hotel, and all guests were ordered to stay in their rooms.

In an attempt to ward off the student demonstrations, the Quetta authorities late Sunday had closed the city's schools, colleges and universities for three days.

"A cinema was burned to the ground, and we have heard reports of at least one bank being looted," a police spokesman told AFP.

"We don't know how many protesters there are. There are just so many of them," he said.

From the hotel rooftop, 11 sepa-

rate plumes of dense, black smoke could be seen rising from different sectors of the city.

Another rally of 10,000 people was held at the border crossing of Chaman, around 100 km northwest of Quetta.

The participants denounced Pakistan for backing the US and British strikes and burned effigies of President Pervez Musharraf before dispersing peacefully, witnesses said.

Police also fired tear gas in the northwestern city of Peshawar as they tried to disperse 1,500 slogan-shouting protesters.

The demonstrators, mostly supporters of the pro-Taliban Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) party, pelted police with stones and pushed foreigners away from the city's mosques.

In the capital Islamabad, another 1,500 students armed with canes and shouting anti-US slogans marched towards the American Centre, which was cordoned off by a heavy police presence.

## World tightens security as bombs fall in Afghanistan

AFP, Paris

Governments around the world were nervously boosting security measures Monday as the US-led military assault on Afghanistan heightened fears of revenge attacks by Islamist militants.

Nowhere were those fears higher than in the United States itself, still coming to terms with the deadly suicide attacks in New York and Washington last month which left thousands dead and put the whole world on security red alert.

The United States warned its citizens abroad to "limit their movement," fearing that the military strikes in Afghanistan which began Sunday could trigger reprisal attacks on Americans and American interests.

The State Department said any US civilians now in Afghanistan should leave the country immediately and that Americans in other parts of the world should "monitor the local news, maintain contact with the nearest American embassy or consulate and limit their movement in their respective locations."

Police in Indonesia, the world's

most populous Muslim nation, on Monday erected extra barbed-wire barricades outside the US embassy as a hardline Muslim group threatened retaliatory attacks.

Police posted water cannon and armoured cars at city centre locations amid plans by several Muslim groups to stage protests later Monday outside the embassy.

US President George W. Bush announced, in an address to the nation, that security measures at home were also being further ratcheted up.

"At my request, many governors have activated the National Guard to strengthen airport security. We have called up reserves to reinforce our military capability and strengthen the protection of our homeland."

Security was also being boosted in Britain, the only other country to take part in the first wave of hostilities in Afghanistan.

A spokeswoman for London's Metropolitan Police said security was being stepped up in the capital and at Heathrow airport, while appealing for people to go about their business as normal.

Fears were also high in Israel that Palestinian fighters would seek to take revenge for the military attacks by the United States, seen in the region as Israel's main champion.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, while voicing support for the US-led action, called a late-night meeting of senior defence officials to discuss its ramifications.

A statement from Sharon's office said that all necessary measures had been taken to ensure the Israeli population's security, without elaborating.

Over the past several weeks, Israelis have rushed to gas mask distribution centres, from fear of a remake of the 1991 Gulf war, when Iraq launched missiles against Israel in revenge for the US-led strikes which followed Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Egypt sent extra troops to guard foreign embassies in Cairo on Sunday night, especially those of the United States and Israel, sources close to the security services told AFP.

## Americans cautiously welcome strikes Reprisal fears mount

AFP, New York

From New York to California, Americans on Sunday warily welcomed US-led air and missile strikes on terror targets in Afghanistan, but jitters mounted across the nation over possible reprisals.

The nation, still shell-shocked following last month's hijack assaults on New York and Washington, broadly backed President George W. Bush's decision to hit out at those suspected of targeting America.

"The Taliban has had ample warning," said Jill Cerino, 36, as she strolled in the autumn sunlight of New York, just a few blocks from where suicide attackers felled the World Trade Center.

"These are legitimate enemies and we don't have any choice," she said.

Just hours earlier, US and British bombers and missiles had targeted the Afghan Taliban militia and Washington's number one terror

target Osama bin Laden in the first wave of military action taken by a global coalition against terrorism.

"I think it's good," said Greg Barrett as he sat drinking a beer in a bar in Sioux City, Iowa.

"Bush kept his word after what happened September 11 to us. He gave them a couple of weeks and now he's striking back."

"I don't think we had a choice," said Tom Nicholson, who was out in Hollywood, California on Sunday. "Otherwise I don't think there is an end to what they do."

Political leaders of all colours maintained a united approach to the crisis, lining up behind the administration, saying the tough action was needed to send a strong message about how the United States deals with terrorists.

"We strongly support the operation President Bush ordered our military forces to carry out today," the Republican and Democratic leaders of Congress said in a statement.

## Japan apologises to China

AFP, Beijing

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on Monday expressed his "heartfelt apology and condolences" to Chinese victims of Japan's aggression during World War II, while visiting to a war memorial in Beijing.

"I watched various exhibits with my heartfelt apology and condolences to the Chinese victims of aggression," Koizumi told reporters after seeing the memorial honouring Chinese wartime resistance against Japan.

The memorial, in southwest Beijing, is next to the Marco Polo bridge, the place where Japan's brutal eight-year war of occupation is considered to have officially begun in 1937.

Although a similar apology has been proffered by a Japanese premier previously -- Tomiichi Murayama in 1995 -- the issue has bedevilled bilateral relations in recent years.

In late 1998 China was greatly angered by Japan's insistence an apology be removed from a joint declaration signed by then-Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and Chinese President Jiang Zemin during a landmark summit in Tokyo.



PHOTO: AFP

Chinese President Jiang Zemin (L) clasps hands with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (R) before their meeting at the Zhongnanhai leadership compound in Beijing on Monday. Koizumi arrived in Beijing on a one-day visit offering strong support for US-led strikes on Afghanistan carefully balanced with a "heartfelt apology" for Japan's past wartime aggression.

## 9 killed as rebels shoot down UN helicopter in Abkhazia

AFP, Moscow

Nine people, including six UN observers, were killed Monday when rebels shot down a helicopter in Georgia's breakaway republic of Abkhazia, ITAR-TASS reported.

The Mi-8 helicopter, with six UN observers and three crew onboard, set off from Sukhumi airport at around 9:00 am Moscow time (0500 GMT) and was shot down 15 minutes later over a region known to be a stronghold of Georgian and Chechen rebels.

The helicopter was shot down over Abkhazia's Kodori gorge, "which is under the control of Chechen and Georgian terrorists, who have invaded Abkhaz territory from Georgia," Abkhaz "foreign minister" Sergei Shamba told Interfax.

Earlier, the republic's defence minister had warned of a possible attack by up to 1,000 Georgians and Chechen rebels, Interfax reported.



PHOTO: AFP

Indonesian Muslim students shout anti-US slogans in front of the US embassy in Jakarta on Monday. Muslim students staged a demonstration in protest against the US-led military strikes on Afghanistan. The US, British and French embassies warned its nationals to stay at home amid expected street protests.

## Troops guard US embassies in Asia amid fears of attack

AFP, Jakarta

Police and troops guarded US embassies and key installations around Asia Monday amid warnings that American and Western expatriates could be in the firing line of any reprisals for the US-led strikes on Afghanistan.

Regional governments, while mostly supportive of the US war on terrorism in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States, were nervously eyeing the situation fearing a backlash against US interests and communities of Western workers.

The US, British and French embassies in the Indonesian capital Jakarta warned citizens to stay home amid expected street protests over Sunday's US-led attacks against targets in Afghanistan.

Hardline Muslim groups in Indonesia -- the world's largest Muslim-populated nation -- have angrily denounced the strikes, saying Washington had declared war on Islam.

Barbed-wire barricades were erected outside the US embassy and police posted water cannon and armoured cars at city centre locations amid plans by several Muslim groups to stage protests later Monday.

Sunday's strikes aimed to punish the Taliban Islamic militia for refusing to hand over Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden, named as the prime suspect behind the terror attacks on New York and Washington.

The US State Department warned there could be reprisals.

The strikes "may result in strong anti-American sentiment and retaliatory actions against US citizens and interests throughout the world by terrorists and those who are sympathetic to or otherwise support terrorism," it said in a statement.

The US embassy in Jakarta reinforced the warning, urging "in the strongest possible terms that all Americans resident in Indonesia remain at home and exercise maximum caution."

It was echoed by the British embassy which told Britons to stay at home or in their hotels and keep in touch with local authorities amid fears of "a reaction on the streets of Indonesia."

Security was stepped up outside many diplomatic missions across the region.

The US embassy in Kuala Lumpur said police were protecting the embassy compound and patrolling areas with communities of Americans and other foreigners.

"They have assured us that they will continue to protect Americans and everyone else in Malaysia," the embassy said in a statement.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has criticised the strikes, saying innocent people would be killed and terrorism would not be wiped out.

"Our stand is that the problems that caused these terrorists to do what they did have to be looked into," he told reporters outside parliament.

## Anti-Taliban forces ask US to bomb frontline Civilians evacuated

AFP, Charikar

The Afghan opposition said Monday it has evacuated some 4,000 civilians from the frontlines north of Kabul, and urged Washington to bomb the area.

"We told the civilians to evacuate because we're afraid that US missiles could land on the frontline," said Northern Alliance commander Haji Almaz.

He said 4,000 people had been evacuated late Sunday from the frontline near the opposition-held town of Bagram and the central province of Parwan.

The evacuation came as US and British forces launched air and missile strikes on targets in Afghanistan mainly in Kabul, and Kandahar, the southern stronghold of the Taliban Islamic militia, in retaliation for the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington.

The opposition has said the eastern city of Jalalabad, Farah in the west, Kunduz near the border with Tajikistan, and the strategic northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif were also targeted on Sunday.

Once the US bombing was over the civilians could return home, said Almaz, interviewed in the staff headquarters in this town 60 kilometres (40 miles) north of Kabul.

He was watching the events unfolding on CNN with some 20 other commanders, relaxed and smiling, adding: "We are happy that our enemy will be destroyed."

Emboldened by the strikes, the opposition said it was gearing up for a push on the capital, Kabul, captured by the Taliban in 1996.

Almaz urged Washington to help them in their bid to topple the Taliban saying the United States should bomb the frontlines in the Shomali plains north of Kabul.