

Mullah Omar urges Taliban to be patient

AFP, Islamabad

Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar yesterday urged his followers to be patient and predicted the United States would be defeated, the Afghan Islamic Press reported.

The reclusive leader made the comments in his first public statement since Saturday which was relayed over the Taliban's internal wireless network on yesterday morning, AIP said.

"Everyone has to die one day. We are not afraid of dying and we should die as Muslims," Omar reportedly said in his message to followers of the radical Islamic militia.

"I urge you to be steadfast in all tribulations. We have fought against the Russians and this is another jihad against infidels. It is a test. People are in pain but God will grant them success. Our enemies are infidels who are not acceptable to any Muslim."

Omar's statement follows 48 hours of intense US attacks on the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar, where Omar is based. Last week he survived a missile attack on his residence, according to witnesses.

His last statement came on Saturday when he rejected a US offer of a second chance to hand over Osama bin Laden and halt the bombing.

5 killed in Tamil Tiger rebel attack

AP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels shot to death three soldiers and two civilians in a northeastern village yesterday, police said.

Eight rebels attacked Manikienya, 190 kilometres north-east of the capital, Colombo, killing two civilians and wounding one, said a policeman from the local station, who spoke by telephone on condition of anonymity.

He said the guerrillas then shot dead three soldiers who arrived at the village after hearing the earlier gunshots.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, fighting since 1983 to carve out a homeland for minority Tamils, hold pockets of land in the northeast. The rebels have in the past attacked villages bordering these areas.

Putin reshuffles cabinet

AP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed two ministers, awarded a deputy prime minister with the leadership of the ministry of industry and created a new post for coordinating federal agencies and nationalities policy, the Kremlin press service said yesterday.

Putin named Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov minister of industry, science and technology. Klebanov has been responsible for the industrial sector, including the military and space industry, and has headed the investigation into the August 2000 sinking of the nuclear submarine Kursk. Klebanov replaced Alexander Dondukov.

Putin dismissed Alexander Blokhin from the post of minister of federal, national and migration policies and created a new ministerial post for strengthening coordination of the executive organs of government in implementing nationalities policy.

'Mr. Bean' fears ban on religious jokes

AFP, London

Rowan Atkinson, the rubber-faced star of hit comic film "Bean," complained yesterday that new anti-terrorist measures in Britain could lead to jail for comedians lampooning religious figures.

In a letter to The Times, he said he was "aghast" at the measures which he feared could make it illegal to ridicule religions or make religious jokes.

The proposals which Home Secretary David Blunkett wants to make law would, as well as combating terrorism, make incitement to religious hatred a formal criminal offence with a maximum jail term of seven years.

It is designed to prevent "racists, bigots and hotheads" stirring up racial hatred in the wake of the September 11 atrocities in the United States.

"I have always believed there should be no subject about which one cannot make jokes, religion included," Atkinson wrote.

"For telling a good and incisive religious joke, you should be praised. For telling a bad one, you should be ridiculed and reviled."

"The idea that you could be prosecuted for the telling of either is quite fantastic."

Atkinson is one of Britain's most enduringly popular comedians.

Aid groups call for pause in US bombing to allow food supply

AFP, Islamabad

Six international aid agencies yesterday called for a pause in the US bombing of Afghanistan to allow food supplies cut off by the military campaign to be delivered before the severe winter sets in.

The relief groups warned hundreds of thousands of Afghans could starve to death over winter, which begins in less than a month, unless food deliveries resumed.

The organisations issuing the appeal were Oxfam International, Britain's Islamic Relief, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tear Fund and ActionAid.

"It is evident now that we cannot, in reasonable safety, get food to hungry people," Oxfam director Barbara Stocking said in a statement released in Islamabad.

The aid groups said 500,000 people in remote areas would be cut off from food aid by snow within the next four weeks and could starve to death unless the deliveries made it through.

Christian Aid spokesman Dominic Nutt said US President George W. Bush risked sacrificing the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent Afghans in his military pursuit of Osama bin Laden and others for their

alleged role in the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

"There should be justice for the people of America, that is beyond of doubt," Nutt said.

"But the scales of justice can not, and will not, be balanced by the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent Afghans."

The aid groups called for a pause in the military campaign of at least one month to allow food to be distributed.

They said labourers and truck drivers were becoming increasingly afraid to load and unload food and drive it into remote areas of the country because of the conflict.

The US bombings of a Red Cross warehouse and a World Food Program building in the capital of Kabul over the past two days had significantly increased the fears of local aid workers inside Afghanistan, they said.

The United Nations estimates 50,000 tonnes of food must get into Afghanistan in the next month to stop people starving this winter. Only 10,000 tonnes have made it during the past month, during which deliveries have been affected either by the fear or the reality of US bombing.

Pak Islamic leader charged with treason

AFP, Islamabad

Police have charged one of Pakistan's most prominent Islamic radicals with treason amid a crackdown on opponents of the government's support for US attacks on Afghanistan, police said yesterday.

Fazlur Rehman, the leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) party, was charged in his home town of Dera Ismail Khan, where he has been under house arrest for over a week.

"We have registered a case against him. He will be prosecuted in the normal way," local police chief Arif Nawaz told AFP.

Rehman's brother Ata-ur-Rehman and another senior JUI leader, Abdul Qayyum, have also been charged with treason.

Rehman is one of the leading figures in the movement of opposition to Pakistan's support for the US air strikes.

His JUI party has close links to the ruling Taliban in Afghanistan and Rehman has urged his followers to storm Pakistani airbases if the government allows them to be used for any attacks on the neighbouring country.

JUI officials said Rehman had been charged because President Pervez Musharraf had taken exception to a speech in which he accused the military ruler and the army of having "sold the country to the United States."

Treason carries the death penalty in Pakistan but the case will only go to trial if a magistrate agrees there are grounds to support the charges registered by the police.

"This is a highly foolish step," JUI spokesman Hafiz Riaz Durrani told AFP on Wednesday.

"We reject the sedition charges and we will launch a countrywide campaign against the government's action from Friday."

Russia, China want broad coalition govt for Afghanistan

AFP, Shanghai

The Russian and Chinese foreign ministers yesterday agreed on the need for a broad coalition government in Afghanistan which can coexist with its neighbours, officials said.

Meeting in Shanghai on the sidelines of a Pacific-Rim gathering, Igor Ivanov and his Chinese counterpart Tang Jiaxuan also discussed their mutual suspicion of US plans for a missile defence system, a Russian spokesman said.

The foreign ministers "were in agreement on the necessity of supporting a democratic coalition government" to replace Afghanistan's Taliban regime, he said.

China's official Xinhua news agency said the ministers believed

"the future government of Afghanistan should have a broad basis and extensive support and should be able to represent the interests of all Afghan ethnic groups."

The Russian spokesman said Tang and Ivanov also discussed the proposed US shield against ballistic missiles, which both Russia and China oppose as a move that would tear up existing arms-control treaties.

Despite the Russian official's statement, communist China has made no public mention of supporting democratic changes in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The ministers met in China's commercial capital on the sidelines of an annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) gathering.

China's official Xinhua news agency said the ministers believed



Afghan refugee families fleeing US bombardments in Afghanistan cross the border into Pakistan at Chaman on Tuesday. Refugee numbers are rising as the retaliation for the September 11 destruction in New York and Washington continues into its second week amid claims the military action is taking an increasing toll on civilians.

US Congress agrees to lift sanctions on Pakistan

AFP, Washington

The US Congress has authorised President George W. Bush to lift sanctions against Pakistan in a bid to strengthen the US-led alliance against international terrorism.

In a voice vote Tuesday, the House of Representatives passed a bill giving Bush power to lift the sanctions. The bill had unanimously passed the Senate October 5.

Sponsored by Republican Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas, the bill authorises the president to "exercise waivers of foreign assistance restrictions with respect to Pakistan through September 30, 2003."

It also authorises providing aid to Pakistan and India if the president determines that it is in the national interest of the United States and important to US efforts to "respond to, deter, or prevent acts of interna-

tional terrorism."

While the bill formally gives equal treatment to the nuclear-armed South Asian rivals, it is primarily applicable to Pakistan because most sanctions against India have already been waived.

Bush, who already has announced his intentions to lift the sanctions, is expected to sign the bill, but it is not clear if he will do it before leaving Wednesday for Shanghai for a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group.

In Islamabad, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, currently on a tour of South Asia to reconcile India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir, pledged Tuesday to reward Pakistan for its cooperation in the international coalition against terrorism.

Citing US national security interests, Bush last month lifted sanc-

tions imposed on India and Pakistan after their successive series of nuclear weapons tests in 1998.

But Bush lacked the authority to lift the sanctions imposed by the US Congress in the aftermath of a bloodless 1999 military coup that brought General Pervez Musharraf, the country's current president, to power.

Those measures barred the US government from providing Pakistan more than 50 million dollars in foreign aid a year, ruled out debt rescheduling for the country as well as US balance of payment support, according to congressional officials.

"This bill lifts those restrictions and authorises the president to offer assistance to Pakistan and India in order to respond to, deter and prevent acts of international terrorism," Brownback said after the Senate approved the measure.

Laden may flee Afghanistan

AP, Washington

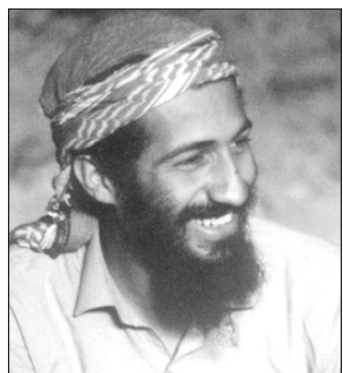
Osama bin Laden uses misdirection, look-alike decoys and fake caravans to foil pursuit. He is thought to have moved around Afghanistan hidden in an ambulance.

U.S. intelligence officials believe bin Laden has remained in Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan since Sept. 11, the day jetliner hijackers allegedly sent by bin Laden attacked the United States. The officials are worried now, however, that bin Laden may be planning to leave for Chechnya, Somalia or Sudan - all war-torn, relatively lawless areas like Afghanistan where he can again hide.

His mobility is both a defence and a vulnerability, said Sen. Richard Shelby, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. "If he's moving from post to post, place to place, cave to cave, town to town, sooner or later, we're going to find him," said Shelby, R-Ala.

Sen. Bob Graham, the committee's chairman, said this week that he has information that makes him confident bin Laden will be found and captured or killed before mid-November. Like Shelby, the Florida Democrat receives classified briefings from U.S. intelligence agencies.

"I am confident we will be able to



locate and take - as a prisoner or through death - bin Laden," Graham said.

In general, bin Laden is believed to move frequently among his al-Qaida terrorist camps and deep caves honeycombing the mountain ranges that crisscross Afghanistan. He's usually with one or more of his wives, sometimes with some senior lieutenants, always with a security force. He normally stays out of cities and away from the Taliban's front lines with the rebels of the northern alliance.

If he has held to those routines, bin Laden probably is in southern or eastern Afghanistan, where the Taliban's hold is strongest. Most of his camps - many the targets of U.S. airstrikes - are in that region,

although they have largely emptied since the terror attacks in New York and Washington.

Bin Laden could try to sneak across a border, although the possibility exists he could try to fly out, despite danger from airstrikes.

As the hunt for the No. 1 terror suspect continues, U.S. officials won't say for the record whether they believe bin Laden is moving or has hunkered down in one location for the past five weeks.

A Pakistani intelligence official said bin Laden moved within hours of Oct. 7 onset of attacks, but President Pervez Musharraf said this week his country does not know precisely where bin Laden is.

A British newspaper quoted bin Laden's 18-year-old son as saying his father took 300 fighters and satellite communications equipment into the mountains, where he would hide in a cave and direct fighting against both Western commandos and Afghanistan's northern alliance.

U.S. intelligence agencies have had a bead on bin Laden at least twice in recent years. After two U.S. embassies were bombed in Africa, the Clinton administration retaliated with a missile attack in August 1998, sending Tomahawk cruise missiles into his eastern Afghanistan training camps.

Vajpayee to visit Washington on Nov 9

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has accepted an invitation from US President George W. Bush to visit Washington on November 9, Secretary of State Colin Powell said yesterday.

"We know Prime Minister Vajpayee is coming to the United States for the UN General Assembly in November and my president has extended an invitation to him to come to Washington," Powell told a joint press conference.

"We are pleased the prime minister has accepted the invitation to visit Washington. He will be coming on November 9 for a working visit with the president."

Last month, Vajpayee cancelled his visit to New York for the UN General Assembly session because of the terror attacks in the United States on September 11.

Vajpayee had been scheduled to leave on September 20 for Cyprus en route to New York, where he would have addressed the general assembly on September 25.

He had also been expected to meet Bush and speak in New York with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf.

Key anthrax clues found

REUTERS, Washington

Amid mounting fear over anthrax, U.S. officials on Tuesday found key similarities in two letters that contained the potentially deadly bacteria but struggled to stem a surge of hoaxes relating to the biological warfare agent.

FBI Director Robert Mueller said that since Oct. 1, his agency had received 2,300 reports involving anthrax or other dangerous agents, although the overwhelming majority turned out to be "false alarms or practical jokes." The Justice Department announced that federal prosecutors in Connecticut had brought charges against two men relating to hoaxes.

"Hoaxes, pranks and threats involving chemical or biological agents are serious crimes and warrant a serious response," Mueller said during a Washington news conference with Attorney General John Ashcroft.

Also on Tuesday, a U.S. Army facility in Maryland confirmed that a letter sent to the highest-ranking U.S. senator, South Dakota Democrat Tom Daschle, contained anthrax bacteria spores. Searches of media offices in New York, however, failed to detect fresh traces of anthrax.

Two people linked to New York news offices, the 7-month-old son of an ABC News employee and an NBC News employee who handled a tainted letter, have contracted skin anthrax.

No new cases of anthrax were

confirmed on Tuesday. State health officials in Florida backtracked on whether a second employee at American Media Inc., which publishes supermarket tabloid newspapers, had contracted anthrax, as they had said on Monday. And Sen. Charles Schumer, a Democrat from New York, called on the government to increase the supply of the antibiotic Cipro, the only approved oral treatment for anthrax, by purchasing cheaper generic versions of the drug.

Health and Human Service Secretary Tommy Thompson said the Bush administration this week would ask Congress to approve extra funds to boost Cipro stockpiles. The U.S. government currently has enough Cipro to treat 2 million people for 60 days. Thompson said the administration would like to increase that by 10 million. Meantime, German drugmaker Bayer AG, agreed to boost production of the antibiotic.

With fears about anthrax gripping Americans and people around the world, U.S. law enforcement officials pieced together clues relating to the few confirmed cases of anthrax being sent through the mail as powdery bacterial spores.

Mueller said there were similarities in the handwriting in anthrax-containing letters sent to anchorman Tom Brokaw of NBC News in New York and to Daschle in Washington. The Justice Department released a copy of the front of each envelope. Both were

postmarked from Trenton, New Jersey, and both handwritten in similarly printed letters and numerals.

Ashcroft said authorities believe there may be other similar envelopes out there somewhere.

Ashcroft said investigators had not yet linked letters tainted with anthrax to those responsible for the Sept. 11 plane attacks on New York and Washington that killed more than 5,000 people.

"Any time someone sends anthrax through the mail, it's an act of terror. It's terrorism, and we treat it as an act of terror and terrorism," Ashcroft said. "While we have not ruled out linkage to the terrorist attack of Sept. 11 or the perpetrators of that attack, we do not have conclusive evidence that would provide a basis for our conclusion that it is a part of that terrorist endeavour."

President Bush on Monday said "there may be a possible link" between U.S. anthrax cases and Saudi-born Islamic militant Osama bin Laden, accused by the United States of masterminding the Sept. 11 attacks.

Although there is no confirmed link between the cases, fighting bioterrorism has become a top priority for the U.S. government, Tom Ridge, director of the White House Office of Homeland Security, said on Tuesday. "It's the number one priority this week and for the weeks ahead," Ridge said in an interview on NBC.

Night shift linked to breast cancer

AP, Washington

Women who work nights may increase their breast cancer risk by up to 60 per cent, according to two studies that suggest bright light in the dark hours decreases melatonin secretion and increases estrogen levels.

Two independent studies, using different methods, found increased risk of breast cancer among women who worked night shifts for many years. The studies, both appearing in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, suggested a "dose effect," meaning that the more time spent working nights, the greater the risk of breast cancer.

"We are just beginning to see evidence emerge on the health effects of shift work," said Scott Davis, an epidemiologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle and first author of one of the studies. He said more research was needed, however, before a compelling case could be made to change night work schedules.

"The numbers in our study are small, but they are statistically significant," said Francine Laden, a researcher at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and co-author of the second study.

"These studies are fascinating and provocative," said Larry Norton of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. "Both studies have to be respected."

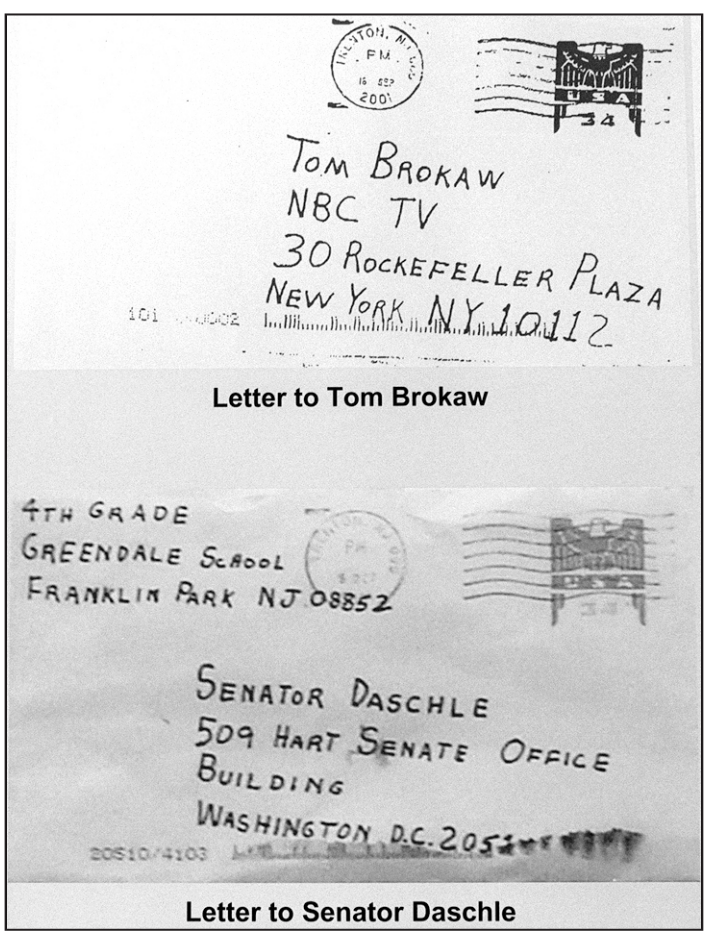
But Norton said the findings only hint at an effect and raise "questions that must be addressed with more research."

In Davis' study, researchers explored the work history of 763 women with breast cancer and 741 women without the disease. They found that women who regularly worked night shifts for three years or less were about 40 percent more likely to have breast cancer than women who did not work such shifts. Women who worked at night for more than three years were 60 percent more likely.

The Brigham and Women's study, by Laden and her colleagues, found only a "moderately increased risk of breast cancer after extended periods of working rotating night shifts."

The study was based on the medical and work histories of more than 78,000 nurses from 1988 through May 1998. It found that nurses who worked rotating night shifts at least three times a month for one to 29 years were about 8 percent more likely to develop breast cancer. For those who worked the shifts for more than 30 years, the relative risk of breast cancer went up by 36 percent.

The studies relate to working hours between 7 p.m. and 9 a.m. on shifts that include the peak melatonin secretion time of about 1:30 a.m., the researchers said.



This photo released by the FBI on Tuesday, shows the letters that were sent to NBC in New York and to the Washington, DC, office of US Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., and found to contain the anthrax bacteria. Anthrax was confirmed in the letter opened in Daschle's office. FBI Director Robert Mueller said earlier that there were similarities between the anthrax-contaminated letter sent to Daschle and one sent earlier to NBC television anchor Tom Brokaw in New York, including their origin - both were post-marked in Trenton, New Jersey - and handwriting on the envelopes.