

Bush urges Asian nations to rise up against terrorism

AP, Shanghai

US President George W. Bush yesterday mourned two US soldiers who died while supporting the first commando raid into Afghanistan and urged Asian leaders to stand up to terrorism.

"There is no isolation from evil," he said. As the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit opened, Bush courted Asian leaders to his war coalition with several face-to-face meetings and, separately, addressed a gathering of businessmen. "Our enemies are murderers with a global reach," Bush said in the centerpiece address of his four-day trip. "They seek weapons to kill on a global scale. Every nation must oppose this enemy or turn into its target."

"The terrorists tried to shatter confidence in the world economic system, but they failed. The terrorists hoped markets would collapse, but markets have proven their strength."

"We know a future of greater trade and growth and human dignity is possible and we will build it."

Earlier, Bush met with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who has urged the United States to halt its Afghanistan bombing campaign.

"It went very well," Mahathir told reporters without elaboration.

Bush said Mahathir "is concerned about the deaths of innocent people in Afghanistan and I assured him I am, too." Malaysia and Indonesia, both predominantly Muslim countries, are fighting to prevent APEC from backing

the US-led bombings.

Other Pacific Rim leaders said the mere act of gathering under one roof showed they won't be deterred by the global terrorism crisis.

"It sends an important message to those who would seek to undermine all that we collectively stand for, not only at a political level but also at a business level," Australian Prime Minister John Howard said in a speech to business leaders.

Bush praised Koizumi for supporting the US-led effort in Afghanistan, and Koizumi in turn said, "I sense excellent chemistry between the president and me."

The president met Chinese President Jiang Zemin for the first time Friday and praised him for sharing intelligence on terrorists' activities and helping to cut off financing to their organizations.

The Chinese leader cautioned Bush to avoid the deaths of civilians in Afghanistan, underlining the difficulty of keeping his fragile coalition together.

The APEC leaders are expected to approve a statement against terrorism without mentioning the military campaign. Malaysia and Indonesia would not be able to endorse a statement supporting the strikes that have killed some Muslim civilians in Afghanistan, various APEC officials have said.

4,000 Afghan refugees cross border into Pakistan

AFP, Chaman, Pakistan

Up to 4,000 Afghan refugees crossed into Pakistan at the Chaman border post yesterday, another sharp increase in numbers fleeing US bombardments in Afghanistan, witnesses said.

An AFP photographer said the 4,000 were mainly women and children.

Thousands more people were stranded on the Afghan side, unable to cross after Pakistani authorities cracked down on illegal crossings, the photographer said.

Other witnesses at the border said up to 10,000 refugees were stranded in Afghanistan. An official from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) said she was not in a position to confirm the numbers.

On Friday, the UNHCR said 3,500 Afghans crossed at Chaman, the largest single daily movement of refugees since the United States began its bombing campaign on October 7 in response to the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington.

Most were carrying their only possessions and the UNHCR has said many were forced to bribe border officials in order to cross.

The UNHCR has warned of a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and is struggling to prepare refugee settlements for up to 200,000 refugees in southwest Pakistan where the longest drought in living memory has generated a chronic water shortage.

UN prosecutor plans more charges against Milosevic

REUTERS, The Hague

The chief U.N. war crimes prosecutor Carla Del Ponte plans to extend charges against the former Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic, her spokeswoman said Friday.

The additional charges include sexual assault and others linked to the recent discovery of bodies in the Belgrade suburb of Batajnica, spokeswoman Florence Hartmann said.

She said a motion to extend the charges would be filed on October 29.

Milosevic, 60, who was handed over to the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia in June, has been indicted for "ethnic cleansing" in Croatia in 1991-1992 and for crimes against humanity in Serbia's Kosovo province in 1999.

Del Ponte has said she will also submit an indictment for alleged crimes in Bosnia, including the tribunal's gravest charge of genocide.

A civil war involving Serbs, Muslims and Croats raged in Bosnia from 1992-1995.

Milosevic, who is awaiting trial in a U.N. detention centre near The Hague, has so far refused to appoint defence counsel or enter a plea on the charges.

He is due to go before a panel of judges for his third pre-trial hearing on October 29.

Prison security stepped up in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Security has been stepped up in and around prisons in Indian-administered Kashmir to foil escape bids amid anti-US protests by Islamic militant inmates, reports said yesterday.

"The steps were taken after intelligence reports about jailbreak attempts by militants and also possible suicide attacks to free inmates were received," the English-language daily Greater Kashmir said, quoting sources from Kashmir's prison department. The high-security Kot Balwal jail in Kashmir's winter capital Jammu has been put under 24-hour supervision by different security agencies, including commandos in plain clothes.

Nearly 100 militants, 42 of them of foreigners, are detained in half a dozen jails in the Hindu-majority Jammu region of Kashmir. Most are at Kot Balwal.

During the past six years, 52 militants, 16 of them non-Kashmiris, have escaped from Jammu jails, including Kot Balwal.

Security along roads leading to the prisons has also been tightened, with night curfews imposed around the jails, the newspaper reported.

"The troublemakers have been kept in isolated cells to avoid problems," the Greater Kashmir quoted an unidentified source as saying.

The source said the strict measures were taken after regular protests in the jails against the United States, which is bombing Afghanistan to root out Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

Powerful explosive found in Philadelphia bus station

REUTERS, Philadelphia

Powerful military explosives and detonation cord were found in a suitcase at a busy Greyhound Bus Station in Philadelphia on Friday and removed without injuries or incident, police said.

"If it had gone off, it would have blown up the whole terminal," Sgt. Roland Lee, a Philadelphia police spokesman, told Reuters. "It was very disturbing because that location is heavily traveled."

The discovery comes amid heightened security in the United States around transport facilities following the Sept. 11 hijack attacks that killed nearly 5,400 people.

The five ounces of C-4 explosive, about the size of a bar of soap, was found in a suitcase along with about 1,000 feet of detonation cord. It had been checked in a locker at the Greyhound station on Sept. 29, police said.

Police said there was no threat of explosion because no detonation cap was attached to the plastic explosive.

"My sense is that whoever put it there ... meant to just store it for a short period of time and pick it up, and for some reason never showed up or showed up too late," Philadelphia Police Commissioner John Timoney told CNN.



PHOTO: AFP

Stepping into what are said to be the biggest shoes in the world, German shoemaker Heinz Plate, poses in front of the German shoe museum in Hauenstein, south-western Germany, on Friday. The giant shoes, measuring 1.65 metres and fitting for customers with size "247", were awarded an entry into the Guinness Book of Records in 1998. It took shoemaker Plate, 70, two years to make the mega slippers worth some 30,000 German marks (some 15,300 Euros).

Land mine blast kills seven in Bihar

AP, Patna

Suspected Maoist guerillas triggered a land mine in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, killing seven people including six policemen, officials said yesterday.

The explosion in Masaurhi, 40 kilometres south of the state capital, Patna, blew up the vehicle in which the policemen were travelling late Friday, said Ashish Ranjan Sinha, additional director general of Bihar police.

The policemen were on their way to a village near Masaurhi after they received reports of a shootout there.

The land mine, planted on the road leading to the village, went off as the police jeep drove over it. The policemen and their civilian driver died instantly, Sinha said. Police had cordoned off the area around Masaurhi and a search was on for the culprits.

Rebels of the outlawed People's War Group were responsible for the explosion, Sinha said.

The PWG, one of the several outlawed guerilla groups fighting to establish communism in Bihar, one of India's poorest states.



PHOTO: AFP
Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) shakes hands with his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin before their bilateral talks in Shanghai yesterday. Putin is in Shanghai to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit.

China, Russia urge rapid shift to political solution for Afghanistan

AFP, Shanghai

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin yesterday called for US-led military operations in Afghanistan to give way rapidly to a political solution, officials said.

"It is necessary to pass from the military phase to the use of political means in the settlement in Afghanistan as soon as possible," Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said after the leaders met in Shanghai.

He said they backed the creation of "a new coalition government in which all ethnic groups would participate."

"They also agreed on trade

cooperation in energy fields and transportation," Ivanov said ahead of a summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum here also being attended by US President George W. Bush.

A Russian presidential spokesman added that Putin and Jiang wanted a "political settlement in Afghanistan in accordance with relevant UN decisions and norms."

"They stated that both countries strongly support the joint effort in the fight against international terrorism," the spokesman told AFP.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said Jiang and Putin shared "identical views".

"A fundamental resolution of this issue should rely on the Afghan

people themselves," he told reporters.

"The future government of Afghanistan should be broadly based and represent the interests of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan."

China believed the strikes against Afghanistan should be carefully targeted and avoid civilian casualties, Zhu reiterated.

"And the move should be in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter as well as the universally recognised norms governing international relations," he said.

"And we should also give full play to the United Nations and its Security Council."

9 militants killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Nine Islamic militants were shot dead by security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir overnight and yesterday, following skirmishes between Indian and Pakistani troops over their disputed border, police and army sources said.

Indian forces killed four Islamic militants overnight at the village of Sharatpora, near Shopian township, 50 km south of Srinagar, the Himalayan state's summer capital, police said.

The encounter erupted during a cordon and search operation launched in southern Kashmir after reports of a large presence of Islamic militants in the area.

An Indian army soldier was also injured in the seven-hour battle.

On Thursday, four militants and three soldiers were killed in the

same area. A total of 50 militants, including top commanders of hard-line Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba group, have been killed in the Shopian belt this year.

In a separate clash that ended Saturday morning, the Indian army shot dead five militants in an encounter at Eagle Post, in the Nowgam sector of Kupwara district, 110 km north of Srinagar along the disputed border with Pakistan.

An army spokesman said four of the dead were identified as Pakistanis while the other was a "local militant." He said the five were trying to escape to Pakistani-run Kashmir when the encounter broke out.

Meanwhile, the guns were silent Saturday along the Line of Control, the de facto border that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan, after a fierce overnight

exchange of fire between Indian and Pakistani troops left four civilians injured in the Poonch sector.

"Intermittent exchanges of fire continued for several hours and came to a complete halt in the morning hours on Saturday," an army official said.

He blamed Pakistan for opening indiscriminate mortar fire at Indian villages in Poonch sector and said Indian troops acted in retaliation.

Tensions have been running high along the border since Monday, when the Indian army shelled 11 "local militant." He said the five were trying to escape to Pakistani-run Kashmir when the encounter broke out.

The attack came as US Secretary of State Colin Powell arrived in South Asia seeking to soothe tensions over Kashmir while US-led forces strike Afghanistan.

Indian postal employees to be given gloves, masks to combat anthrax

AFP, New Delhi

Employees at India's four international mail offices will be given masks and gloves to combat the threat of anthrax, officials said yesterday, as a scare over the disease spread across the country.

The four foreign mail centres -- in New Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta -- will also be equipped with laboratories and x-ray machines to test or screen any suspect letters or packages, said Communications Minister Pramod Mahajan.

"We will create lab infrastructure at the four foreign post offices where postal personnel handling

the international mail will be given protective masks and gloves," said Mahajan, quoted by Press Trust of India (PTI).

Mahajan stressed the measures were a precaution and said he had also asked courier companies to be careful.

He said the government was planning a massive public awareness campaign in the coming days, with television advertisements giving tips about how to tackle anthrax infection.

Meanwhile, the anthrax scare in India was spreading fast with reports of people receiving "suspicious white powder" coming in from different parts of the country.

A senior police official in Barabanki in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh said he had received an envelope with some "white powder."

"I immediately sent the envelope to Lucknow, where they said there was no cope of investigation," said Sriram Tripathi, superintendent of police in Baabanki.

"The envelope will now be sent to New Delhi for investigation," he told AFP.

A PTI report from the eastern state of West Bengal said panic gripped residents of Murshidabad district when an envelope containing 25 grammes of white powder was discovered inside a post box.

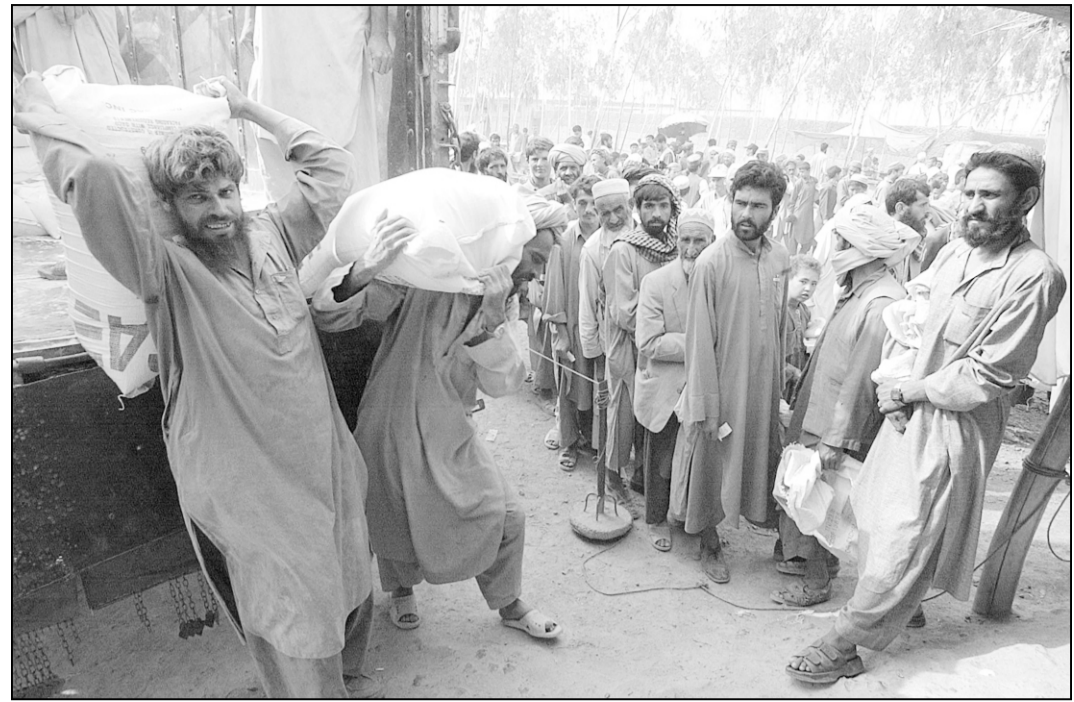


PHOTO: AFP
Workers download sacks of flour from USAID while refugees are waiting to get the sacks at the Shamshatu camp near Peshawar yesterday. Over two millions Afghan refugees live in Pakistan.

Taliban seeks opposition's help in fighting US attacks

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan's ruling Taliban wants to bury the hatchet with its longtime foes in the opposition and launch a joint defence against US attacks, Education Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said yesterday.

"Our appeal from all Muslims is to work with the Emirate (Taliban) against the assaults. We are also endeavouring to get the support of Jihadi (holy war) actions inside Afghanistan to this end," Muttaqi told Reuters.

"It is time to bury the hatchet and form one front against the attacks," Muttaqi said, referring to the opposition Northern Alliance led by president Burhanuddin Rabbani and thrown out of Kabul by victorious Taliban militia in 1996.

The two sides have been locked in a bitter civil war ever since.

The proposal was the latest and clearest sign of the pressure on the Taliban as US forces pounded their military positions for a 14th day, leaving the hardline militia few sophisticated weapons with which to retaliate.

A senior opposition told Reuters a

day earlier that the hardline Taliban had sent a mission across the front line to the Northern Alliance to request a truce but were rebuffed.

Muttaqi said the Taliban were indeed in contact with a number of opposition leaders, but refused to identify them.

"The time is not right to reveal their names," he said.

But sources in Afghanistan said Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar had sent a delegation, led by a Taliban identified only as Maulvi Abdul Rahman, to meet the military Commander of the Northern Alliance, General Mohammad Fahim, to discuss a joint operation against the United States.

The report could not be independently verified.

"Those who fought against the Russians have voiced their readiness to fight against the Americans too," Muttaqi said, recalling the 1979-89 war of resistance against occupying Soviet forces by the Mujahideen.

Even as the Taliban made such overtures to their fiercest foes, opposition forces were acting on plans to

surround the key northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif and squeeze the Taliban militia that control it into surrender.

With eight US intelligence or reconnaissance personnel on the ground with the Alliance in the north and special forces making raids into the south near the Taliban powerbase in Kandahar, the appeal underscores the desperation of the Taliban if it must play the nationalist card and turn to its enemies for help.

The US personnel had been with opposition warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum for several days, an opposition commander said.

"A delegation of several people met recently with authorities of the United Front (Northern Alliance) close to the front line near Kabul," Kharim Khalili, leader of the Hezb-i-Wahdat Shia group in the multi-ethnic alliance, told Reuters late on Friday.

"Their offer was to have a truce with us and to join forces to fight off the attacks," he told Reuters by satellite telephone from his base in one of the pockets of central Afghanistan held by the opposition.

"Their offer was rejected," he said.

Libyan chemist implicated in bioterror plot: Report

AFP, Rome

An unidentified Libyan chemist has been implicated in preparations for bioterrorist attacks planned by Osama Bin Laden's organisation, the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera said yesterday.

The man's role came to light in a conversation between a Tunisian and another Libyan intercepted by Italy's DIGOS anti-terror squad, the report said, quoting anti-terrorist police sources.

The newspaper did not say when the intercept occurred, but it reported that the Tunisian -- identified as Essid Sami bin Khemais -- had been held last April in Milan

during an operation against an undercover network supporting bin Laden's organisation.

The other person on the telephone, Libyan national Lased bin Heni, was arrested last week in Munich, the report said.

During the conversation the two men were said to have discussed how to mix a toxic substance with explosives.

According to the newspaper report, bin Khemais is heard saying: "The Libyan, a chemistry teacher ... has the formula ... they've found a way of mixing the product with explosive ... it's easy, but I don't know how to do it."

Lased bin Heni is then allegedly heard saying: "There's lots of ways

of using the explosive with this product."

Investigators were quoted as saying the two men were members of an underground organisation called the Tunisian Fighting Group, which had been set up in Britain.

Five members of the group, including Khemais, had been arrested in Milan on April 3. Investigators made further arrests this month, including two in Milan and Lased bin Heni in Munich.

Italian Interior Minister Claudio Scajola has said the October 10 arrests were of major importance. He said those detained had been working to recruit and send men to training camps in Afghanistan.



PHOTO: AFP
Eric Clapton performs in Mexico City on Friday as part of a world tour, which is to be the last one of his musical career.

Modified banana could deliver anthrax vaccine

REUTERS, Shanghai

Genetically modified fruit and other food could be used in future to deliver medicine, including a vaccine against anthrax, an Australian bio-technology fund manager said yesterday.

"The distinction between food and drugs will gradually disappear," said Peter Carre, chairman of Xcelerator Lie Sciences Funds Group.

"Medicine will be in milk, it'll be in stuff we ingest every day. Food will be the most widely used form to distribute medicine," Carre said at a business conference on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic

Cooperation (APEC) summit.

Carre said bananas were already being genetically modified in research laboratories for all types of medicinal purposes, including immunisation against four strains of anthrax.

"Why bananas? They grow quickly, people like them and they took early. You could have done it in a tomato if you wanted," Carre told reporters after a speech to the conference.

Carre said Cornell University in upstate New York was leading development work on genetically modifying food to deliver medicines to people.

French woman to join space station crew

REUTERS, Baikonur

French astronaut Claudie Haignere will lift off for the International Space Station on Sunday accompanied by two Russian cosmonauts and her own personal mascot -- a teddy bear.

Space travel is a family affair for the 44-year-old engineer who met her future husband during training for a 1996 trip to Russia's veteran Mir space station and married him after both visited the now defunct craft.

Haignere, who will become the first French citizen to visit the ISS, told reporters on Saturday at the Baikonur cosmodrome on the Kazakh steppes she planned to add a personal touch to her eight-day stay, expected to be heavy on scientific research.

"I am taking with me books and photos which I will present to my friends after the mission," the flight engineer said in fluent Russian.

"I will certainly take a photo of my daughter and my personal talisman -- a teddy bear."

Also accompanying her on the trip will be the Haigneres' old friend Viktor Afanasyev, a Russian cosmonaut dubbed by the press "space commander of the Haignere family" for leading Claudie's husband, Jean-Pierre, on a flight to Mir in 1999.

Afanasyev, the crew captain, already has three missions under his belt.

The third person on the Soyuz craft, which is due to lift-off at 0959 GMT on Sunday, will be 34-year-old Russian flight engineer Konstantin Kozeyev.

Kozeyev confessed to feeling nervous ahead of his first trip into space. "All the same, I want to fly so much," he said with a smile.