

Musharraf, Vajpayee may meet in NY next month

AFP, New Delhi

The leaders of nuclear-powered rivals India and Pakistan may meet on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York in November, a newspaper reported yesterday.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf would both be in the city to attend the General Assembly in the second week of November, the Asian Age said.

"New York might once again become the venue for talks between Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf," it said.

Vajpayee and Musharraf were due to meet in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly last month, but the meeting was cancelled following the September 11 terror attacks on the United States.

The Indian foreign office dismissed the report as "hypothetical" but the newspaper said the Pakistan foreign office had "hinted strongly" at a possible meeting.

The Asian Age said the dates for Musharraf's address to the General Assembly were being worked out with an eye on Vajpayee's visit to New York.

"If the dates coincide, as Islamabad hopes, the two leaders could meet to comply with Washington's request to bring down the rising temperatures in the region," it said.

Indian editor gets possible anthrax-laced letter

AFP, Guwahati

The editor of a newspaper in insurgency-torn northeast India has received a letter containing a suspicious white powder, a police spokesman said yesterday.

Atin Das, the editor of a Bengali language daily in Silchar, some 345 kilometres south of Guwahati, the state capital of the northeastern state of Assam, received the letter through the post on Saturday.

It was later rushed to a forensic laboratory in Guwahati to be tested for anthrax, police investigators said.

"On opening the letter, I found a white paper inside coated with a powdery substance," Das told AFP by telephone from Silchar.

"I immediately kept the envelope outside my house and informed the police who came and collected it."

Das said he had received a letter a week ago from a group called the Islamic Jihad Force in Assam warning him against carrying unfavourable reports about Osama bin Laden in his newspaper.

"I got the threatening letter last week and now an envelope containing some powdery substance. There is bound to be some apprehension no doubt," Das said.

Communication Minister Pramod Mahajan said on Saturday that employees at India's four international mail offices would be given masks and gloves to combat the threat of anthrax, as scares were reported from all over the country.

Ex-Yugoslav army general to surrender to UN court

AP, Podgorica

A former Yugoslav army general charged with destroying much of the ancient port town of Dubrovnik during the Croatian war boarded a flight to the Netherlands yesterday to answer to the UN war crimes court.

Retired Gen. Pavle Strugar, 68, and three other former Yugoslav army and naval officers are indicted for suspected murder, plunder and the destruction of nearly 70 per cent of Dubrovnik in an attempt to incorporate the 17th century town into Serbia, the dominant Yugoslav republic.

The artillery siege began after Croatia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, setting off a decade of wars in the Balkans.

Strugar, who would be the first Yugoslav citizen to voluntarily surrender to the Netherlands-based court, left for The Hague from the Montenegrin capital of Podgorica.

Before leaving on a private aircraft, Strugar told Montenegrin state television he was convinced he would prove his innocence in the Hague court.

"I am also convinced that it is an honourable court as it could be here in Yugoslavia. I was soldier for 42 years. I always have been working in dignified and human manner, towards people and my country," he said.

"I have been dignified and human in a war, too. I am not a criminal. I expect fair trial where I will prove my innocence," he said.

Israeli troops hold positions in West Bank cities

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli troops remained in and around major Palestinian cities in the West Bank yesterday in the most comprehensive offensive on Palestinian-ruled areas in a year of fighting.

Soldiers continued to battle with Palestinian gunmen overnight after eight Palestinian fighters and civilians were killed Saturday and Israeli missiles battered a building in Bethlehem, wounding eight others.

Israeli officials stressed the army's entry into five Palestinian-ruled cities and a town this week did not signal the imminent demise of the Palestinian Authority.

Palestinian officials accused Israel of wrecking attempts to find a way back to stalled Middle East peacemaking.

"The Israeli army has a plan to escalate militarily and it is pursuing this plan, in direct challenge to all international efforts to calm the situation and to revive the peace process," Palestinian President Yasser Arafat told reporters in Gaza after meeting Russian envoy Andrei Vdovin.

Vdovin warned that the recent violence marks "a military escalation and there are many dangers to the peace process...we will exert maximum effort to stop the logic of the military and to stop the logic of terrorism."

Israel said the incursions aim at apprehending Palestinian militants planning attacks on Israelis. It pledged to withdraw troops wherever the Authority acted to thwart such assaults.

Israeli officials could not say how long the operation, which the United States criticised Friday, would last. But Foreign Minister

Shimon Peres said he did not know "of any decision to bring about the collapse of the Palestinian Authority."

The raids followed the assassination Wednesday of ultra-nationalist Israeli cabinet minister Rehavam Zeevi, the first ever killing of an Israeli minister by Palestinians.

Peres is due to visit Washington this week to discuss developments with senior U.S. administration officials. European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana was expected to visit the Middle East soon.

The United States has urged both sides to uphold a cease-fire and renew peace talks which it views as crucial to maintaining Arab support for its war on terrorism after the September 11 suicide plane attacks in New York and Washington. But violence on the ground lent substance to fears that Israeli-Palestinian bloodshed is spinning out of control as Israeli troops pushed several hundred yards into the West Bank cities of Tulkarm and Qalqilya Saturday.

The raids followed similar moves into Ramallah and Jenin and troops were seen strengthening their hold on Bethlehem, revered as the birthplace of Jesus, and nearby Beit Jala.

The army cordoned off entry points to the cities and said it had killed or arrested some 20 people from various militant groups, including a potential suicide bomber.

The toll since Zeevi's assassination, which ended a brief lull in the fighting during which leaders on both sides had hoped to resume peace talks stalled since last year, is 20 Palestinians and one Israeli killed, and dozens wounded.

Israel has demanded the Authority hand over those involved in Zeevi's killing, outlaw groups it defines as "terrorist" and arrest militants on a most-wanted list.



An Israeli tank drives over a car during an incursion into the West Bank town of Beit Jala on Saturday. Israel's military might rained down on Palestinian territories as Israeli forces shot dead five Palestinians, including three security force members, while making incursions into West Bank towns overnight.

US forces seizes intelligence on Taliban

REUTERS, Washington

U.S. special operations forces in a night parachute raid seized intelligence from a complex in Afghanistan where Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar lived, hoping for clues to help hunt down top Taliban and al Qaeda leaders, US officials said on Saturday.

American troops penetrated the buildings of the large complex, which serves as one of the Taliban command and control compounds, searching for intelligence and knowing that senior leaders were not expected to be inside, officials said.

While other Taliban command posts were bombed during U.S. strikes on Afghanistan that began on Oct. 7, this one was untouched by the bombardment and viewed by the U.S. military as a potential stash of intelligence.

"You could simply take the targets out perhaps with bombs, but that would deny you the capability to get the intelligence," Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said.

The United States has targeted the Taliban for harbouring Saudi-born militant Osama bin Laden and



Afghans look at a destroyed house in Prodza-e-Jadeed village in Khair Khana area in the northeast of Kabul yesterday. Two small girls were injured by a bomb dropped by an American plane.

his network al Qaeda whom America blames for orchestrating the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

In a surgical operation, special forces troops parachuted into southern Afghanistan near the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar to hit two

news briefing. "We gathered up some intelligence, some items, and we're going to evaluate that," he said.

Another U.S. defence official, without commenting on what intelligence was actually seized in the raid, said the troops probably searched for items such as maps, documents, correspondence, ledgers, arms, computer disks and communications equipment.

"The type of information that could lead to some intelligence value," the official said. "All you are picking up is raw stuff, which has to go back and be assessed," he said on condition of anonymity.

Another U.S. official said the intelligence gathering was aimed at producing "any leads that would tell them about Taliban hide-outs, places where the senior leadership might go, plans, defenses and further insights into the leadership."

Photos, letters, and even medication which would indicate whether Omar or any top officials had physical health problems, would be helpful, the official said.

targets selected mainly for their intelligence value.

"I'll characterise the one target as one of the locations where Omar lives. And it's a fairly large complex.

It's a command and control compound for the Taliban leadership," Myers told reporters at a Pentagon

Investigators battle to track down origin of bioterror

AFP, Washington

With 45 cases of anthrax infection and exposure emerging in recent weeks in the United States, investigators battled Saturday to track the source of what President George W. Bush termed "an act of terror."

In the latest incident, Capitol Police confirmed Saturday spores were found on a mail-sorting machine in one of the office buildings serving the US House of Representatives.

The spores, found in the Ford building, have yet to be linked to those found Monday in the office of Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle.

"This was not an unexpected situation. We've been trailing the mail through the Capitol complex now for quite some time," said Capitol Police Lieutenant Dan Nichols.

The spores were found in a bundling machine that processes letters bound for the Longworth building, Nichols said, where House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt has his office.

Washington Mayor Anthony Williams said later Saturday that a postal employee who works in a mail-sorting facility that processes letters sent to the Capitol was in hospital, being treated for an illness that could be related to the letters sent to the legislature.

But the mayor stressed it was as yet unclear the man was infected

with anthrax and that links between his illness and his job had yet to be established.

"These attacks once again reveal the evil at the heart of terrorism, the evil we must fight," Bush said in a radio address from Shanghai, where he was attending a summit of Pacific Rim leaders, though he admitted no evidence suggested links to the terror attacks September 11.

"We do know that anyone who deliberately delivers anthrax is engaged in a crime and an act of terror, a hateful attempt to harm innocent people and frighten our citizens."

Eight people in Florida, New York, and New Jersey have been infected with anthrax, including a photo editor who died of respiratory anthrax October 5.

Thirty-seven others, mostly US Senate employees, have been exposed to the rare bacteria.

Investigators have linked the sudden appearance of anthrax to one possible source. Tests have shown that strains of anthrax sent to NBC news in New York, a tabloid newspaper in Boca Raton, Florida, and the Senate in Washington are "indistinguishable." Homeland Security Chief Tom Ridge said Friday, adding the samples had not been "weaponised."

Weaponising anthrax reduces the size of the particles, making them easier for victims to inhale. Officials say weaponised anthrax

could indicate the bacteria were cultivated abroad and not by an individual.

Results of tests to determine whether spores sent to media outlets were from the same batch have not been publicly revealed.

Officials believe anthrax-laced letters sent to NBC television anchor Tom Brokaw and Daschle passed through the same sorting centre in Hamilton, New Jersey, where two postal workers were infected.

Investigations were complicated by hundreds of anthrax hoaxes and false alarms spreading across the United States and elsewhere.

Authorities warned of stiff penalties for "terrorist hoaxes."

"Our health care laboratories and law enforcement officials continue to work overtime to test samples, to track leads, to prosecute hoaxes that have been reported not only across America, but across the world," said Bush.

Maxine Waters, Democratic Representative from California, said she was not surprised traces of the sometimes-fatal bacteria were found on the House side of the Capitol.

The government has warned doctors to be alert for any indication of other germ attacks.

In its weekly health bulletin, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention urged doctors to watch for signs of smallpox, food poisoning or deadly viruses such as Ebola.



The spaceship Soyuz TM takes off from Baikonur cosmodrome yesterday carrying French astronaut of the European Space Agency Claudie Haignere and her Russian colleague commander Viktor Afanasyev and cosmonaut-engineer Konstantin Zoloyev to the International Space Station.

India will attack militant camps in Pakistan: Farooq

AFP, Srinagar

The chief minister of Indian-administered Kashmir said yesterday India would attack militant training camps in Pakistan after the US military action in Afghanistan was over.

"I am sure we will go after these militant training camps across the border (with Pakistan) once the crisis in Afghanistan is over," Farooq Abdullah told reporters in Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital.

"The negotiation era has ended," he said.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since 1947 -- two over the disputed region of Kashmir, which is divided between the two countries and claimed by both.

"The fourth (war) will settle the issue (of Kashmir) forever," Abdullah said.

Last week Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani ruled out the prospect of Indian troops crossing the border into Pakistan in order to eliminate Kashmiri militants.

Asked if India's campaign against the Islamic insurgency would include "hot pursuit" of militants into Pakistani territory or attacks on guerrilla training camps, Advani said: "At the moment, no."

But the chief minister said Advani: "He has his own opinion. But I don't support his views."

Abdullah demanded "strict action" against Pakistan for "abetting insurgency".

"India should act now to eliminate militant camps operating in Pakistan," he said.

"The time for negotiations is over and it is high time to wind up camps where Kashmiri militants are trained."

Concert for New York

AP, New York

Paul McCartney, David Bowie, Elton John, Billy Joel joined other performers Saturday in a "Concert for New York," which served as a benefit for the city while celebrating its resiliency in a time of crisis.

David Bowie kicked off the mammoth concert with a poignant rendition of Paul Simon's "America," then rocked a crowd that included thousands of firefighters, police officers and rescue workers with the appropriately titled "Heroes."

"It's an absolute pleasure to play for you tonight," Bowie told the crowd at "Concert for New York," which was broadcast from Madison Square Garden live on VH1.

Despite the tragic circumstances that led to the concert, the star-studded event was anything but somber - instead, it was a raucous celebration.

One of the biggest ovations was reserved for the 6,000 firefighters, police officers and rescue workers honoured for their heroic efforts in the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center.

"Tonight is dedicated to you," comedian Billy Crystal said as the crowd roared its approval. Many in the audience held up pictures of police officers or firefighters who died.

"I met children who lost their daddies and I met a lot of people who survived," former President Clinton said backstage. "This is the first time they've had a chance to clap their hands and shout and dance. This is a great gift to them."

Celebrity presenters including Harrison Ford and Susan Sarandon brought rescue workers on stage and lauded them for their heroics. The guests then introduced performers.

Firefighters and police officers laughed and danced in the aisles. "Saturday Night Live" cast member Will Ferrell got laughs with his impersonation of President Bush, and Adam Sandler reprised his Operaman character in a risque segment that mocked Osama bin Laden.

"There's not a day that goes by that people don't want to laugh," Sandler said backstage. "People are in great pain and you want to just laugh and feel good for a minute and that's what comedy is trying to do right now."

When Joel sang the first few lines of "New York State of Mind," the crowd went wild.

"You look out from the stage, and you see a sea of blue," Joel said backstage. "You see firemen, you see cops, and these guys risk their lives everyday. They do this all the time... to be able to see a smile on some of these people's faces - they've gone through so much, they've lost so many of their friends."

Among the evening's most inspired performances included The Who, which energized the crowd with renditions of hits such as "Baba O'Riley," and "Behind Blue Eyes," and Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, who sang "Salt of the Earth" and "Miss You."

The evening also had its somber

India puts 40 defence officials on corruption watchlist

AFP, New Delhi

India has put at least 40 senior air force and defence officials on a watchlist in order to weed out corruption in arms and hardware purchases, a report said Sunday.

"As many as 40 serving Indian Air Force and ministry of defence officials are facing a court of inquiry on a range of charges from leaking sensitive documents to taking bribes from arms dealers," the Indian Express newspaper said, quoting unnamed air force officials.

Court martial proceedings have begun in the case of an air commodore and a wing commander in connection with bribery, the newspaper reported.

The Indian Air Force started its investigations in July following a military scandal when an Internet news website showed politicians, bureaucrats and army officials taking bribes from journalists posing as arms dealers.

Mullah Omar appeals to Pak tribes for jihad troops

AFP, Chaman, Pakistan

Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar has appealed to tribes in Pakistan provinces to provide thousands of men to fight the US-led coalition in Afghanistan.

The appeal was delivered through Abdul Bari Maroofi, a chief of the Rodi Alizei tribe, and relayed throughout the fiercely independent clans in Baluchistan province who hold mixed views of Omar, the Taliban and America's most wanted man Osama bin Laden.

"He came to me and we are in consultation on whether to provide them or not," Abdul Bari told AFP.

The initial meeting between Abdul Bari and Mullah Omar took place before the September 11 destruction in New York and Washington, over a cup of tea in

the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar.

The request has since been reaffirmed to tribal elders in Quetta, a Pakistani city just 280 kilometres southwest of Kandahar.

Abdul Bari said he was shocked by the September 11 attacks and that Omar had given no indication of what was to come. "He would not discuss this type of issue with us, it would be a very big secret."

There are about 50 main tribes of ethnic Baluch and Pashtun which can cross Pakistan's porous borders with Afghanistan and swell Taliban ranks by between 10,000 and 20,000 men.

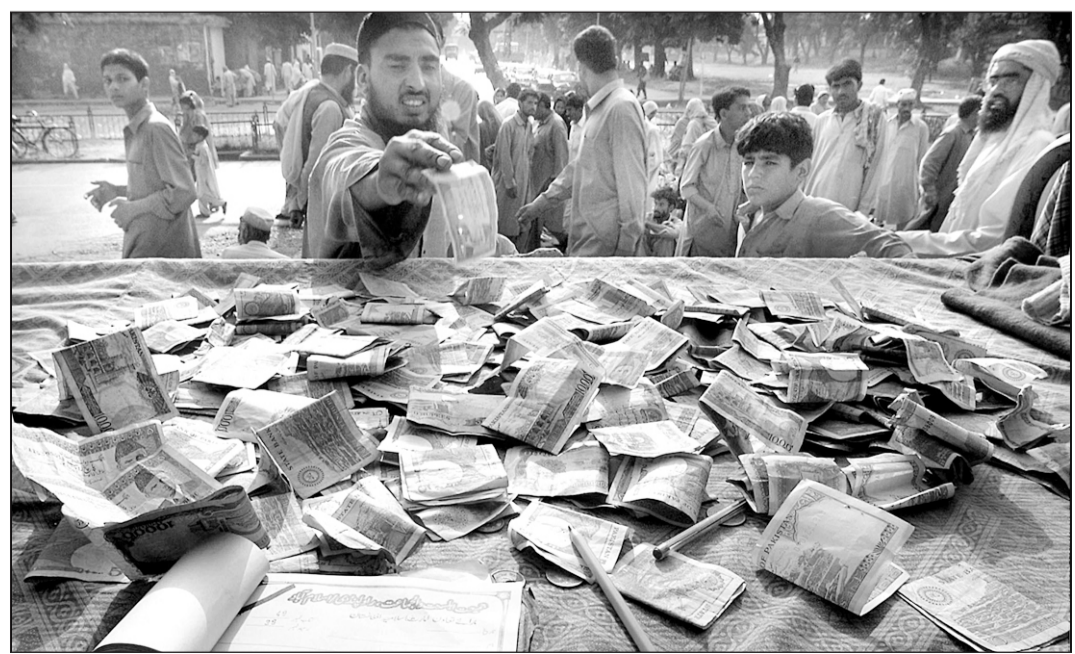
This would bolster Taliban troop strength to about 65,000 men who can easily move around the rugged mountain ranges that dominate Afghanistan's interior.

However, many tribes are aligned with the Durrani, one of two main Pashtun tribes whose allegiances largely lie with the ousted king Mohammad Zahir Shah, touted as a potential head of state in a post-Taliban Afghanistan.

The Taliban rely heavily on the largest Pashtun tribe, the Ghalzai, it fill their ranks and are opposed to Zahir Shah's return.

The Ghalzai and the Durrani have had a mixed relationship in the past and Omar's request was expected to sorely test old alliances.

Omar's relation with the tribal elders dates back to 1996 when he made three trips to Quetta to buy arms through the hardline Jamiat-Ulema-Islam (JUI) party for the Taliban's civil war against the Northern Alliance.



A Pakitani Muslim donates 10 rupees to a pro-Taliban fund at a street bazaar near a mosque yesterday in Islamabad. Pro-Taliban networks throughout Pakistan have set up donation tents in order to help fund the militant Islamic Taliban army in Afghanistan, and to also help recruit new young soldiers for the fight against the US-led military campaign.

8 killed in violence in Indonesia

AP, Jakarta

Clashes between Christian and Muslim gangs armed with knives and homemade guns left at least eight people dead, police and witnesses said yesterday.

Police Sgt. Pamrin said around 100 Christians attacked a Muslim district on the outskirts of Poso town, in Central Sulawesi province, late Saturday.

Security forces opened fire on the attackers, said Pamrin, who goes by a single name. Six unidentified corpses were later brought to the town's main hospital, witnesses said.

Shortly after, police shot and killed two members of the Muslim paramilitary group Laskar Jihad who were travelling toward the trouble spot, said another officer on condition of anonymity.