

## Laden hits out at US 'crusade'

### Taliban to hang captured supporters of Afghan king

AFP, Washington

The United States warned Thursday it would not halt its heavy bombardment of Afghanistan during Ramadan, after terror suspect Osama bin Laden called on Pakistanis to reject what he branded as America's "crusade" against Islam.

As US planes blasted Taliban positions in a second day of carpet bombing raids, Washington launched a new diplomatic drive to firm global support for its war against bin Laden, whom it believes plotted September 11 attacks on New York and the Pentagon.

And Turkey, the only NATO member with a majority Muslim population, pledged to send 90 elite troops to join the US effort in Afghanistan, as the Pentagon signalled it was ready to deploy more US special forces.

President George W. Bush's National Security advisor Condoleezza Rice rejected calls from some Muslim states and European governments for a freeze on the US air raids during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month due to begin in mid-November.

"We can't afford to have a pause," Rice told reporters.

"The best thing we can do for the world, for all of the allies in the coalition, whether they are Muslim or not, is to make certain that this war on terrorism succeeds, and that means we have to finish the mission," said Rice.

"They've (the Taliban) never demonstrated that they were observant of any kind of rules of civilisation before," she said.

In the latest salvo of an accelerating propaganda war, Bin Laden, who is sheltered by Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, took indirect aim at Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, who has risked the ire of radical Muslims in his country by supporting the US war.

He called on Muslims in Pakistan to "confront the crusade against

Islam" in a statement broadcast by Qatar's satellite TV channel Al-Jazeera.

Bin Laden accused the Pakistani government of "standing under the banner of the Cross while Muslims are being slaughtered in Afghanistan."

Al-Jazeera said it obtained a copy of the statement carrying a signature which was "the same signature which appeared in a previous statement" by bin Laden.

A day after US officials confirmed that mighty B-52 bombers were pounding Afghanistan, Taliban Education Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said US raids severely damaged the Kajaki hydroelectric complex in Helmand province, knocking out power for Kandahar and Lashkarga.

B-52 bombers dropped thunderous payloads on Taliban positions close to the border with Tajikistan for more than four hours from 4:00 am (2330 GMT Wednesday) Thursday morning, reporters in the region said.

But the Pentagon denied reports that its planes struck a medical dispensary and house in Kandahar, saying they had hit a facility linked to the al-Qaeda terror network.

Taliban officials took foreign journalists to the site where they were told 13 civilians were killed on Wednesday, including five women and children.

Meanwhile, the Taliban on Friday threatened to hang captured supporters of a top aide to exiled former king Zahir Shah who is on an undercover mission in Afghanistan, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported.

The Islamic militia was reported to have captured 25 followers of former Afghan deputy foreign minister Hamid Karzai in an overnight confrontation in Deharwad in Uruzgan province.

Karzai followed in the footsteps of another former resistance fighter in trying a secret mission into Afghanistan to counter the Taliban. Abdul Haq, a former guerrilla commander, was caught and executed by the militia a week earlier.



Activists from Jamat-e-Islami, a Muslim fundamentalist group, shouts pro-Taliban slogans as they start an anti-US demonstration from a mosque after offering Juma (Friday prayers) in Peshawar. Hundreds of Jamat-e-Islami activists took part in the protest march seeking opportunities to fight for Afghanistan in its Jihad, or holy war against the US.

## India begins war games in Bay of Bengal

AFP, New Delhi

India's army, navy and air force on Friday began an eight-day amphibious exercise off the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, a defence ministry spokesman said.

Warships, maritime strike aircraft, helicopters, transport planes and special forces units were taking part in the exercise, codenamed "AMPHEX," he said.

The exercise is the first of its kind to be conducted since the establishment of the tri-service Andaman and Nicobar Command on October 1.

The spokesman said a 3,000-strong army mountain brigade, amphibious operation specialists, air defence artillery and the coast guard were among units participating in the exercise.

## Vajpayee to sign N-plant accord with Russia

AFP, Moscow

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will sign a framework agreement on a three-day visit here starting Sunday that paves the way for Russia's construction of a nuclear power plant in southern India, officials said Friday.

The agreement will determine how many reactors will be set up at the Kudankulam plant, in the southern Tamil Nadu state, Nuclear Power Minister Alexander Rumyantsev told Interfax.

## 24 Afghans thrown out of Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Twenty-four Afghans involved in riots that rocked this southwestern town after the US started bombing Afghanistan were thrown out of the country on Friday.

"They have been thrown out and they will never be allowed back into Pakistan," a senior police source told AFP, adding that they were bused over the nearby border crossing at Chaman.

At least five people were killed and another 29 injured here in the immediate aftermath of the US bombing blitz that started on October 7.

## 22 killed in Indian trucks' collision

AFP, New Delhi

Twenty-two people were killed and another 24 injured when their truck rammied into a steel-laden lorry in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, the Press Trust of India reported yesterday.

The dead included five women and six children. Eighteen people were killed on the spot, while four died on their way to hospital, PTI said, quoting Bijapur district's police superintendent Charan Reddy.

Sixty people were travelling in the truck on their way to the western state of Maharashtra in search of work when the accident occurred Thursday, he said.

## California bridges next terror targets?



AFP, Los Angeles

California Governor Gray Davis warned Thursday that "credible threats" had been made against landmark suspension bridges in San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego.

Davis said the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges in San Francisco, the Coronado Bridge in San Diego and the Vincent Thomas Bridge in Los Angeles had been targeted.

"We believe there's a credible threat that there will be an effort made between November 2 to November 7 to destroy one of those bridges," Davis said here.

The governor said the bridges were already being watched by the state's highway patrol, the National Guard and the US Coast Guard.

"We have tightened security even more since we received those threats," he said. "We are bound and determined to protect Californians and the vital assets of this state."

## Bush extends sanctions on Sudan

AFP, Washington

President George W Bush on Thursday extended US sanctions on Sudan by one year, citing "continuing concern" about Khartoum's record on terrorism and human rights.

The punitive measures were imposed on Sudan in November 1997 by then US president Bill Clinton.

In late September, the UN Security Council lifted UN sanctions imposed on Sudan after a 1996 attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Bush, in a statement released by the White House, cited "continuing concern about (Sudan's) record on terrorism and the prevalence of human rights violations," including slavery and restrictions on religious freedom.

## Thousands call for end to US strikes at Pak rally

AFP, Quetta

Armed police closely watched as several thousand people marched through Quetta after Friday prayers damning the United States and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf for the military campaign against the Taliban.

Demonstrators brandished portraits of accused terrorist leader Osama bin Laden and chanted "Down with America, Down with Musharraf" as they marched toward a football stadium in the western city near the Afghan border.

The streets filled as men left Friday prayers in mosques.

Radical Muslim groups have condemned Musharraf, a military president, for giving Pakistan's support to the US-led international

anti-terrorism coalition set up after the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington.

Hafiz Hussain Ahmad, a local leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) party, said Pakistanis were unanimous in supporting the Taliban against the United States. Musharraf insists most Pakistanis support him and has called the demonstrators "extremists".

Quetta has witnessed more than a dozen, often violent, rallies of some 20,000 people each since the United States began bombing Afghanistan on October 7.

Banks have been looted and police stations, United Nations offices, cinemas and shopping malls gutted.

However, an anti-US rally on Monday drew barely 4,000 supporters.

## BJP meet to restore image

AFP, New Delhi

Leaders of India's ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party began a two-day meeting on Friday to salvage the party's declining stock before key elections in three states.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee took part in the two-day gathering of the BJP's national executive in the northern Indian town of Amritsar despite pressing matters of state, an official of the prime minister's office said.

The executive is the BJP's highest policy-making body with about 150 members.

Media reports said the meeting in the Sikh holy city would be dominated by discussions on the US-led war against terrorism and India's stance at next week's World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meet in Doha.

The meeting comes a day before Vajpayee embarks on a 10-day tour of Russia, the United States and Britain.

The meeting was expected on Saturday to set out the party's strategy for upcoming provincial

elections in three states -- Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

The party holds power in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand but its popularity has waned considerably forcing it to effect leadership changes.

Political analysts believe it is crucial for the BJP to retain both states, especially Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state with some 140 million people, to remain at the helm of the federal coalition.

The BJP fared badly in provincial elections in five states held in May, with the main opposition Congress party winning two of them.

In his speech to the national executive, BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy urged the Vajpayee government to advance social welfare measures and ensure the interests of Indian farmers were safeguarded at the upcoming WTO meeting in Doha.

"I earnestly appeal to the government that the anomalies in the present set-up, especially the ones that adversely affect our farmers and small sector, be rectified,"

Krishnamurthy said, quoted by the Press Trust of India (PTI).

Krishnamurthy also urged party members to "close ranks and extend unstinted support to all the efforts of the government of the day ... when national security is under threat."

"No difference should be allowed to come in the way of securing and safeguarding the security of the nation," he said.

On India-Pakistan relations, Krishnamurthy said: "If President (Pervez) Musharraf and Pakistan shed their claws of terrorism first then they will find India extending its hand of friendship to them."

New Delhi, which is fighting a separatist uprising in Kashmir, accuses Pakistan of arming, funding and training militants for insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir, charges denied by Islamabad.

More than 35,000 people have been killed in violence in Indian Kashmir, since the launch of an armed Muslim insurgency in the region in 1989.

## Anthrax hits Pak daily

AFP, Karachi

The editor of Pakistan's biggest-selling daily confirmed Friday that suspicious white powder received by the newspaper last week contained anthrax spores.

Mahmood Sham told AFP the contaminated envelope was sent to a reporter for the Urdu-language newspaper Jang but no-one was believed infected.

"Last week we received this letter and we sent it to the hospital for tests and on Thursday the report confirmed it contained anthrax," he said.

Jang has closed its editorial section and staff were moved to other offices. Microbiologists were hired to disinfect the building, Sham said.

The editor said about 80 staff had been put on a 60-day course of antibiotics.

Anthrax attacks began in the United States after the September 11 suicide plane strikes on New York and Washington but US authorities have been unable to determine who is behind the bio-terrorist campaign.

Four people including a woman, a Florida journalist and two Washington postal workers, have died from the disease.

A Pakistani man was also reported to have contracted anthrax last week after a letter containing the potentially deadly disease was delivered to the foreign bank where he worked.

The man was admitted to the Agha Khan hospital in Karachi this week but his condition was not life-threatening, medical sources said.

Sham said the anthrax was contained in a letter that was hand-delivered to Jang's Karachi office. Suspicious letters had also been sent to its offices in Quetta, Rawalpindi and London, over the past two weeks.

Police had been informed and tests were being conducted on the other envelopes.

"We have sent the samples and are awaiting their reports," Sham said.

Jang management spokesman Sarmad Ali said preventive measures including the provision of gloves for staff were being taken.

## 'Blair should solve Palestinian problem created by Britain'

AFP, Dubai

Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair should show a commitment to resolving the Palestinian problem that his country created nearly a century ago, a United Arab Emirates newspaper said Friday.

The British government should "play an active role in resolving the problem it created" by expressing support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine 84 years ago Friday, Dubai-based GulfNews said.

The newspaper was referring to the Balfour Declaration, a letter written by then Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to a pillar of Britain's Jewish community, Lord Rothschild, on November 2, 1917.

The letter was aimed at garnering Jewish support for the Allies in the First World War and later became the basis for international support for the founding of the modern state of Israel.

Balfour said the government viewed "with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object."

He added, however, that it was "clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

Blair, who visited Israel and the Gaza Strip on the eve of the decla-

ration's anniversary to discuss the escalation of violence in the region, has "renewed his call for the creation of a Palestinian state," Gulf News said in its editorial.

"What Blair should (demonstrate) is ... an honest commitment

to solving the root of the Palestinian problem, just as the British government (did) when it gave its full support and commitment to creating a Jewish state," the English-language newspaper said.



Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat (L) greets British Prime Minister Tony Blair upon his arrival in Gaza City, the Gaza Strip on Thursday. Blair is on a Middle East tour to discuss international efforts in the battle against terrorism and to get the Palestinian-Israeli peace process back on track.

## IAEA mulls response to N-arms in wrong hands amid terror threats

AFP, Vienna

The UN's nuclear watchdog met in special session Friday seeking an urgent response to terror threats since September 11, including the "doomsday scenario" of extremists exploding an atomic bomb.

Opening the meeting, the head International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said such a scenario was "unlikely" but could not be ruled out -- but highlighted other threats including so-called "dirty bombs."

The prospect of a hijacked airliner slamming into a nuclear power plant, a vivid threat since September 11, was also key on the agenda of the meeting at the IAEA's Vienna headquarters.

"The prospect of nuclear terrorism has been catapulted to the forefront," said IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei in opening remarks to the special session.

He described the threat of terrorists acquiring a nuclear bomb as the "doomsday scenario."

"That is obviously the most horrific scenario but in our

judgement the most unlikely scenario," he said, but added: "Nothing is excluded ... We need to take account of that possibility."

The IAEA, which monitors nuclear power facilities worldwide, says governments will have to pay to improve security, calling for an increase of up to 50 million dollars, or 15 percent, of its annual budget.

A more realistic threat, according to the IAEA, is that of a so-called "dirty bomb," made by packing conventional explosives around a radioactive material obtained from sources like hospitals, agriculture or industrial plants.

ElBaradei said there was cause for concern, but not panic. "We need to take preventive measures. We are not in any way trying to create panic ... but we need to be prepared. We need to be concerned," he said.

"These are unconventional threats that require unconventional responses," he said. "We are obviously not able to completely eliminate the risk, but we owe it to our societies to minimise the risks."

## Pakistan massing troops, tanks along border: India

AFP, New Delhi

India on Thursday said Pakistan had moved troops and tanks towards its borders near Akhnoor in Indian Kashmir and Ganganagar in the northern desert state of Rajasthan.

"Pakistan has moved some offensive formations comprising troops and tanks near the borders with India," a spokesman for the defence ministry said here, adding that the Indian army was on maximum alert.

The move came even as US Secretary of State Colin Powell recently visited the two countries, warned the South Asian rivals this week to take care and avoid a "flare-up" over Kashmir and instead concentrate on the US-led war on terrorism.

Both Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf were due to meet US President George W Bush in Washington on November 9 and 10 respectively.

On Wednesday, India's chief military commander in Kashmir warned Pakistan that New Delhi reserved the right to launch military strikes on Pakistan army and Muslim rebels if they continued "hostile acts" in the disputed Kashmir region.

Lieutenant General R K Nanavaty, who commands tens of thousands of Indian combat troops deployed along Kashmir borders,

said his statement should be seen as a "message for the Pakistan army."

He said that while New Delhi and Islamabad both possessed nuclear weapons, "space still exists" for limited conventional operations.

"While every effort must be made politically, diplomatically and economically to deter Pakistan, we must remain prepared to exercise the military option," he added.

India and Pakistan conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests in 1998, marking their entry into a select club of countries possessing nuclear weapons.

New Delhi, which is fighting an Islamic insurgency in Kashmir, accuses Pakistan of arming, funding and training militants and sending them into Indian-administered Kashmir -- charges denied by Islamabad.

More than 35,000 people have been killed since the start of the Kashmir separatist insurgency in 1989.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Monday ruled out meeting Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf until Islamabad stops promoting what New Delhi calls "cross-border terrorism" in Kashmir.

The two leaders met in the Taj Mahal town of Agra in July but the talks broke down with Kashmir

once again proving the stumbling block.

Meanwhile, suspected Islamic militants attacked the residence of a Kashmiri separatist leader overnight, while one person was killed and 14 others injured in separate grenade attacks in Indian Kashmir, police said on Friday.

Abdul Gani Lone, a senior member of the All Party Hurriyat (freedom) conference -- an amalgam of two dozen groups -- and his family were fired at assault rifles at about 9.30 pm (1600 GMT) on Thursday.

Police guards posted at Lone's residence returned the fire and the gunmen fled the area, a police spokesman said.

No one was injured in the attack, he added.

The firing lasted 15 minutes, sparking panic among the people of Rawalpindi, on the outskirts of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, the spokesman said.

In another incident on Thursday, a civilian was killed and six injured in a grenade attack at Kunzer, 30 KM north-west of Srinagar, the spokesman said.

Seven people were injured when suspected militants tossed a grenade at an army patrol, which exploded near a shop.

One person died while being taken to Srinagar for treatment.