

War on terror won't last for yrs: US

American jets back opposition push for taking control of Mazar-i-Sharif

AFP, New Delhi

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld Monday warned there was no time-frame for the US campaign on terror which was bigger than just Afghanistan, but said it would not last years as he wrapped up a whirlwind five-nation tour.

"The effort against terrorism will be something we have to pursue over a period of time," Rumsfeld said in a joint press conference with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes.

"The effort against terrorism is a global one and involves terrorists wherever they are. This is much bigger than Afghanistan," he added.

Afghanistan only "happens to be the first problem. The president (George W. Bush) has been unambiguous that we will tackle terrorism wherever it is," he added.

But asked if the campaign would take years and he said "No, I don't."

"How long it will take I can't guess. Certainly we all hope it will take the least possible time."

Rumsfeld, speaking after talks in India at the end of his three-day trip through five countries to shore up support for the US-led campaign, also brushed aside fears that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal could fall into the wrong hands.

"I do not personally believe that there is a risk with respect to countries that have nuclear weapons," Rumsfeld said in response to a question about Pakistan.

"The countries that have nuclear weapons have a healthy respect of the power and lethality of these weapons and they

take steps to manage their safe handling."

Rumsfeld left for Washington after talking to Fernandes "about terrorism in the broader sense, which has affected both our countries."

Rumsfeld's remarks come amid Indian calls for tougher action against anti-Indian Muslim militants based in Pakistani territory, who New Delhi says are engaged in terrorism in the disputed state of Kashmir.

Fernandes last month pledged to be "ruthless" against border infiltrators, after India shelled 11 Pakistani posts across their de facto border on October 15 in a "punitive" operation.

The United States and other Western powers have urged India to show restraint, fearing an outbreak of Indian-Pakistani violence as they try to hold together the coalition against the Taliban.

Rumsfeld's tour has taken him to Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan -- all allies in the war launched after the Taliban refused to surrender Osama bin Laden, accused of masterminding the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States that left more than 5,000 dead.

Public backing in many of the coalition members has begun to flag almost a month since the launch of US strikes.

Rumsfeld termed the US operation "an exercise in self-defense" and, amid rising concern about civilian casualties, said the bombing "cannot be any more attentive or precise."

The comment comes a day after Rumsfeld in Islamabad accused the Taliban of "actively lying" in reporting that as many as 1,500 people have been killed by the US bombing.

Fernandes, who had said Sunday he would press the United States to remove sanctions on military exports in place since the Cold War, said he spoke with Rumsfeld on building "a mutual defense-related partnership -- certain items that we need to acquire, collaborations that we can have."

Rumsfeld for his part also stressed the need "to be able to strengthen military-to-military ties" which he said were "so important".

He said most sanctions have been lifted or waived but said the "status of some other sanctions which I think are related to nuclear or missile technology is something which the State Department and the government of India will discuss."

Meanwhile, US warplanes struck Taliban positions in northern Afghanistan on Monday, hoping to pave the way for a renewed push by opposition forces toward the key city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

Opposition officials and the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported strikes in Balkh and Samangan provinces not far from where the Taliban and rebel Northern Alliance troops were locked in battle for a strategic district.

Little movement was reported around Aq-Kupruk district, 70 kilometers (45 miles) south of Mazar-i-Sharif, which the opposition claimed to have taken on Saturday only to have the Taliban later reclaim a portion.

If the opposition can hold Aq-Kupruk it would mark their first significant advance towards Mazar-i-Sharif -- potentially a crucial supply and staging point -- since US forces began bombing Afghanistan nearly a month ago.



United States Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (2nd R) is introduced to members of Pakistan's government by President General Pervez Musharraf (R) at the executive's residence in Islamabad on Sunday. Rumsfeld stopped briefly in Pakistan on his trip through the region to discuss the ongoing U.S.-led military operation in neighbouring Afghanistan.



Former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto talks as she walks past a jet fighter during the opening of the international Dubai 2001 Airshow on Sunday. 450 companies from 33 countries including the US, UK, France, Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, South Africa, Canada, The Netherlands and Canada represented at Dubai 2001.

Pak Jamaat leader faces sedition charges

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's military government has filed sedition charges against a leading Islamic cleric for allegedly stirring revolt against Islamabad's support for the US-led raids on Afghanistan, police and party sources said on Monday.

Authorities in Northwestern Frontier province placed Qazi Hussain Ahmed, head of the right-wing Jamaat-i-Islami party, under house arrest on Saturday to prevent him from travelling to the volatile Bajaur tribal rim bordering Afghanistan to lead an anti-US rally.

"He has been booked under sedition charges for speaking against the government", Liaquat Ali Khan, Superintendent of Police in northwestern Mardan town, told Reuters by telephone.

Sedition can carry a maximum life sentence if proven.

Ahmed on Friday addressed a rally in Mardan calling on the army to remove President General Pervez Musharraf if he does not

withdraw support for the US-led attacks on neighbouring Afghanistan.

"The government has registered a sedition case against Qazi Sahib but it has not yet given us details of the charge," said Professor Mohammad Ibrahim, provincial head of Jamaat-i-Islami.

Muslim Pakistan, walking a political tight rope, dropped its support for the Taliban under US pressure. It allowed Washington use of its air space and several bases for unspecified logistical support for US air raids designed to flush out Osama bin Laden, prime suspect in September 11 attacks on the United States, and his ruling Taliban protectors.

Musharraf's support for the United States has met with noisy protests from hardline Islamic groups which at times have turned violent.

Thousands of armed tribesmen in Bajaur agency have crossed into Afghanistan to join Taliban's jihad, or holy war, against the United States.

India puts BSF on alert as Pakistan masses troops

Heavy exchange of fire across Kashmir border

AFP, Jodhpur

India on Monday said it had put its army and paramilitary border guards on alert because of Pakistani troop build-up on the countries' border.

B.D. Sharma, deputy inspector general of India's Border Security Force (BSF) at Jodhpur in the desert state of Rajasthan, said the forces were keeping a vigil on India's 1,050-kilometre (650-mile) western border with Pakistan.

"We can see Pakistani soldiers belonging to the 191, 35 and 10 infantry brigades amassing some 15 kilometres (nine miles) from the zero line (outer limit of the shared border)," Sharma said.

"We can also see some offensive formations comprising infantry and tank divisions near the border. There is a build-up near

Ganganagar, Kishangar and Longewal in Rajasthan. It is not normal."

He added: "The presence of Pakistani Rangers on border posts cannot be ignored. That is why the BSF has been alerted."

Sharma said the Indian Air Force was also on alert.

"All the information is being evaluated and future strategies developed. We are in constant touch with our border posts and also in touch with army headquarters in Jodhpur," said Sharma.

The alert was sounded as US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld concluded a visit Monday to India and Pakistan, amid increased international concern over a possible flare-up

between the South Asian powers in disputed Kashmir.

Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy mortar fire overnight and Monday on their disputed border in Kashmir. Two residential houses were damaged in shelling.

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 Kashmiri separatist insurgency in 1989.

Meanwhile, Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy mortar fire overnight and Monday on their disputed border in Kashmir, an Indian army spokes-

man said.

The spokesman said Pakistani troops Sunday evening resorted to "indiscriminate and unprovoked" mortar firing in the Tangdar and Karna sectors of northern Kupwara district from across the Line of Control (LoC) -- the de facto border that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Two residential houses were damaged in the shelling.

"The Indian army in its exercise of its right to take appropriate action carried out retaliatory engagement against military targets in the general area opposite Tangdar," an army spokesman said, adding damages on the Pakistani side were unclear.

Another exchange of fire between the two armies along the LoC was reported Monday. No casualties or damage was reported.

Ex-Afghan minister in Pakistan for talks

AFP, Islamabad

A senior Afghan exile was in Islamabad Monday for talks on a future political set up in Afghanistan should the Taliban militia be ousted.

Abdus Samad Hamid, 65, who served as deputy prime minister during the reign of former Afghan king Mohammed Zahir Shah, arrived on Saturday to take part in discussions on the creation of a new broad-based government in the war-torn central Asian state. "He is in town," foreign office spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan confirmed to AFP.

"He met with some foreign office officials and discussed the

general situation and developments in Afghanistan."

Khan said the purpose of Hamid's visit was "to help the UN in finding a solution" to the current Afghan crisis, triggered by the devastating September 11 terror strikes on New York and Washington that left more than 5,000 dead.

The US-led coalition launched a military campaign on October 7 against the Taliban for refusing to hand over Saudi militant Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of the attacks on the United States.

"We are meeting all those Afghans who want to discuss any idea or plan for the future of Afghanistan," Khan said.

Anthrax found at NY City Hall

AFP, New York

A package sent from NBC News to New York's City Hall containing a videotape has tested positive for anthrax, city health officials said Sunday.

"Very low levels of anthrax were found on the package that contained the tape. It is highly likely that that was due to cross-contamination," Sandra Mullin, spokeswoman for the New York City Health Department, told AFP.

The tape was sent from NBC News to city chief of staff Tony Carbonetti sometime in late September or early October, in what Mullin said was a "routine gesture".



Israeli Merkava tanks leave the Palestinian self-rule town of Qalqilya, in the northern West Bank early Monday. After the longest incursion into Palestinian controlled territory that lasted for more than two weeks, Israeli tanks withdrew last night from this Palestinian town located some 25 kms north-east of Tel Aviv.

Israeli troops quit WB town

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli tanks and troops withdrew from another Palestinian West Bank town at dawn Monday, but they still held four cities, with no talks on the horizon and low-level violence still continuing.

The Israeli army has withdrawn from the positions it occupied for more than two weeks, a military spokesman said, but stressed that "the Israeli forces remain around Qalqilya to continue to thwart terrorist activities in the area".

The army "will continue to do whatever is necessary to guarantee the security of civilians and Israeli military personnel," the spokesman added.

Palestinian security officials

confirmed that some 30 Israeli tanks had left Qalqilya, a process which took several hours, but said the army was keeping up road blocks around the area.

Israeli forces moved into six Palestinian towns after the October 17 slaying of tourism minister Rehavam Zeevi by Palestinian extremists.

The move, unprecedented in scale since the Palestinian autonomous zones were created in 1994, has been widely criticised by the world community, which said it would escalate tensions.

A week ago Israel pulled out of Bethlehem, one of the six towns its troops had entered, as well as nearby Beit Jala.

Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer was quoted

by army radio as telling a weekly cabinet meeting Sunday that he was also in favour of withdrawing from the four other towns -- Nablus, Ramallah, Tulkerem and Jenin -- still surrounded or partly occupied, but did not fix a date.

There were fears that the Qalqilya withdrawal might be cancelled at the last minute, after a Palestinian gunman shot up an Israeli bus in occupied east Jerusalem, killing two Israelis and wounding 35 other passengers before Israeli security forces shot him dead.

The Palestinian Authority condemned that attack, claimed by the radical Islamic Jihad movement, and rejected Israeli accusations that it was responsible for the violence.

ASEAN worried at attacks on Afghans

AFP, Bandar Seri Begawan

Southeast Asian leaders expressed concern Monday over the heavy civilian casualties resulting from US military strikes in Afghanistan, Brunei's Sultan Hassanah Bolkiyah said after chairing their annual meeting here.

The leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) "expressed their concern for the welfare of innocent people as a result of the military action on Afghanistan", the sultan told a news conference.

The US launched the strikes following the deadly terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, which Washington claims were masterminded by

Saudi-born dissident Osama bin Laden who is hiding in Afghanistan.

A joint statement by the ASEAN leaders after their working dinner Sunday did not refer to the US retaliatory strikes on Afghanistan, which have been strongly criticised by predominantly Muslim nations Indonesia and Malaysia.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri have particularly called for a halt to attacks during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, which starts in mid-November, warning that continued attacks could unleash anger from Muslims worldwide.

Hurricane hits Cuba

AFP, Havana

Powerful Hurricane Michelle, packing sustained winds of 215 kilometers per hour (135 miles per hour) with higher gusts, smacked into the southern coast of Cuba on Sunday, with residents bracing for the worst.

The category four hurricane -- the second strongest on the Saffir-Simpson scale -- hit the Zapata peninsula on the island nation's southern coast, towards its western tip.

Wind gusts of up to 120 kilometers per hour (75 miles per hour) ripped through the capital Havana, and there was flooding in low-lying coastal areas.

The storm already has dumped heavy rains that flooded rivers and triggered mudslides across much of Central America, leaving at least 12 dead and thousands homeless.

'Dissident minister had plotted to kill editors to salvage Lankan govt'

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga has alleged that a senior minister who defected to the opposition had a plan to assassinate newspaper editors critical of the government, a state-run daily reported Monday.

Kumaratunga told a meeting of her ruling People's Alliance (PA) Sunday that S. B. Dissanayake had suggested killing editors to save the government from collapse, the Daily News said.

"Madam, the government is very weak and it could collapse at any time," Kumaratunga quoted the minister as saying. "If necessary I will kill an editor or two who is critical of the government."

The Daily News said the president had told the minister it was "not necessary to think that the government was weak when it had the support of 24 additional members."

Kumaratunga also accused Dissanayake and a businessman of trying to assassinate her with the help of an underworld gangster.

Dissanayake, who held the powerful post of parliamentary affairs and was general secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the main constituent of the ruling PA, defected to the opposition last month.

Bid to topple govt 26 Cambodians convicted

AP, Phnom Penh

Twenty six people were sentenced Monday to jail terms ranging from three to 15 years in the second mass trial of suspects accused of attempting to topple the government last November.

Family members wept outside the crowded courtroom as the verdicts were announced, with many saying the accused had cooperated with government investigators after receiving promises of leniency. Two people were freed because of lack of evidence.

"This is not justice," said Choum Samy, the mother of a 29-year-old customs official, Duong Sopheap, who was sentenced to seven years imprisonment.



The cast of "Sex and the City" Outstanding Comedy Series poses backstage at the 53rd Annual Emmy Awards Show in Los Angeles, California on Sunday. After two postponements attributed to the war on terrorism, the prestigious television awards show was finally held at the small venue Shubert Theatre.

'West Wing', 'Sopranos' share Emmy honours

AFP, Los Angeles

The hit television series "The West Wing," portraying the inner workings of a fictionalised White House, shared kudos Sunday with the Mafia drama "The Sopranos" at a toned-down Emmy awards ceremony here.

"West Wing" snapped up the prize for best drama series, while director Thomas Schlamme, supporting actor Bradley Whitford and supporting actress Allison Janney all walked off with awards at the twice-postponed event.

Originally set for September 16, the Emmy awards -- television's equivalent of the Oscars -- were postponed to October 7 after the devastating terror attacks of

September 11, then rescheduled again with the start of the October 7 US-led bombing campaign on Afghanistan.

Patriotic themes were inescapable during the broadcast, which opened with the song "America the Beautiful" and was followed by a short address by broadcasting icon, Walter Cronkite affirming the power of TV to inform and unify society.

"Television reminds us that entertainment can help us heal," he said in an address beamed from Toronto, where he is at work on a project.

Janney, like many of the evening's award recipients, used her moment at the podium to speak of the effects of the September 11

terror attacks in the United States.

She said she wanted to emphasise "how proud I am to be on a show that celebrates the process of freedom that makes this country great."

"The Sopranos," a gritty drama series profiling the US Mafia, came away with the prizes for the best leading actor and actress, as well as best writing.

The show's Robin Green and Mitchell Burgess won for outstanding writing in a dramatic series, while James Gandolfini, who portrays the central character Tony, garnered laurels for best lead actor in a drama series. He was not present at the occasion because of a prior engagement.