

Vajpayee says 'no' to talks with Musharraf

REUTERS, New Delhi
 Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has ruled out talks with Pakistan for now, saying conditions were not right, local media reported yesterday.
 Vajpayee told reporters in Moscow that guerrilla violence in the disputed Muslim-dominated territory of Kashmir had increased in recent weeks, including in areas on the border with Pakistan, and innocent people were being targeted.
 "This is not a conducive atmosphere for talks, and until a proper climate can be created there can be no talks," the Hindustan Times quoted him as saying before he left

Moscow for Washington where he will hold talks with President George W. Bush.
 Nuclear rivals India and Pakistan both back the US-led war on terrorism and they are under pressure from the international community to contain tension over Kashmir while the war against the Taliban rulers of neighbouring Afghanistan is on.
 The Taliban are sheltering Osama bin Laden, prime suspect in the September 11 attacks on the United States.
 Fresh violence erupted in Indian-controlled Kashmir today when Muslim militants threw a grenade in a crowded street in Srinagar, the state's summer capi-

tal, killing a woman and wounding five people, including a one-year-old baby.
 India accuses Pakistan of supporting the Muslim separatist rebels who have been fighting its rule in the Himalayan region since late 1989. India has demanded that Pakistan stop backing the guerillas but Pakistan says it only offers them moral support.
 India has also sought to widen the global war on terrorism to include the rebels in Kashmir.
 Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf is also due in the United States this week for the UN General Assembly session and a meeting with Bush in New York.

Indian MPs form Indo-US forum

AFP, New Delhi
 Indian MPs Thursday formed an Indo-US parliamentary forum aimed at developing closer political and economic ties between the two nations in the wake of US-led strikes on Afghanistan.

Launched by Rajiv Shukla and Kapil Sibal, both members of the Indian parliament's upper house, the forum has around 120 members.
 "The aim and objective of the forum is to act as a bridge and consolidate relationships between the two countries and to vigorously protect India's interests," said Shukla.

Living with cannibals

AFP, Sydney
 A woman who cooked up her murdered husband to serve to his children was jailed for life Thursday.
 Katherine Mary Knight, 45, was sentenced in the New South Wales State Supreme Court, sitting in Newcastle, north of Sydney.
 Knight, an abattoir worker, had pleaded guilty to murdering John Price, 44, in February last year. She had stabbed him 37 times, decapitated and skinned his body, and then cooked parts of his flesh before serving them up on plates with vegetables and gravy.
 Price's head was found in a cooking pot on the stove in the kitchen.

'Laden has less than 50 million dollars'

AFP, Riyadh
 The wealth of prime terror suspect Osama bin Laden, estimated by western reports to be in billions, is no more than 50 million dollars, the former head of the Saudi secret service said Thursday.
 "Westerners have estimated it at between one and five billion dollars," Prince Turki al-Faisal said in an interview with the English-language Arab News and London-based Saudi-owned MBCV.
 "But our estimate, made when I was director of the intelligence, put

it at between 40 and 50 million dollars at the most," the prince added.
 Prince Turki was relieved of his post at "his own request" at the end of August after 25 years in the service. He is known for closely following the career of bin Laden.

"There are different methods of hiding money, from secret accounts to other criminal ways. He, like any other criminal, follows these well-known paths," the prince said about bin Laden's way of hiding his wealth.



PHOTO: STAR
 Mohammad, one of the sons of prime terror suspect Saudi born Osama bin Laden, is seen with a rifle slung over his shoulder in this frame grab taken from the Qatar based al-Jazeera satellite news channel on Wednesday. Bin Laden's four sons accompanying Taliban and "Afghan Arab" fighters on a search of a purported US base in central Afghanistan were shown on the news channel.

Bush, Blair jointly predict victory in anti-terror war

AFP, Washington
 US President George W. Bush and visiting British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Wednesday took mounting criticism of US-led raids on Afghanistan head on and sunnily forecast victory in the war on terrorism.
 "We both recognise that we wage a fight to save civilisation and that we must prevail, and not only must prevail (but) will prevail," Bush told reporters during a joint appearance in the White House residence.
 "The determination to see that justice is done is every bit as strong today as it was on September the 11th," said the British leader, the president's closest ally in the campaign.
 Their second meeting since the terror onslaught against the United States came amid ebbing support for the military campaign to dislodge Afghanistan's Taliban rulers for sheltering suspected terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden.
 The attacks have come under fire for civilian casualties, even as some have called for greater attention to the humanitarian plight of the Afghan people and for a clearer vision of a stable, post-Taliban Afghanistan.
 Bush and Blair took those criticisms head on, even as the British leader denied media accounts that support for the president's campaign against terrorism is slipping among European leaders once solidly behind Washington.
 "That coalition, if anything, is even stronger today," he said. "From the discussions I had with European leaders just a few days ago, their commitment is real

and their determination is also absolute to see this thing done."
 So far, at least five European countries -- Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain -- are taking part in or have promised to contribute to the military operation.
 Britain's own military contribution has been small in comparison to the US firepower being directed at Afghanistan, but Blair has tirelessly worked to shore up the global coalition behind Washington.
 Bush said they had discussed "our great compassion" for the Afghan people and "how to make sure that we fulfil the mission not only militarily, but fulfil the mission of helping people in need."
 The prime minister said the two nations were "doing everything we possibly can to help the plight of people in Afghanistan," and noted that 4.5 million of them were refugees prior to September 11.
 He also said he and Bush discussed how to "construct a broad-based regime that is representative of all the different groupings in Afghanistan, and offer some hope and stability and prosperity for that part of the world" once the Taliban are gone.
 Both leaders also said that progress towards peace in the Middle East was not a condition for winning the war against terrorism and accused bin Laden of insincerely embracing the Palestinian cause for public relations gain.
 "There's no doubt in my mind we'll bring (bin Laden's) al-Qaeda (network) to justice, peace or no peace in the Middle East," said the president.

Bush in balancing game

AFP, Washington
 President George W. Bush is about to join the intricate and decades-old diplomatic game of balancing US relations with bitter rivals India and Pakistan.
 Bush will roll out the White House red carpet for Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Friday -- making a simple point: Washington will not forget its friends in New Delhi in its desire to bind Pakistan into its war on terror.
 Then, on Saturday, and with far less fanfare, Bush will hold talks with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.
 Intrigue-hungry South Asian journalists, analysts and officials will be quick to note that there was no White House invitation for Musharraf, whom the United States has strongarmed into its war against Afghanistan's Taliban.
 Washington's role in South Asian geopolitics has become even

more finely balanced since terror attacks on New York and the Pentagon on September 11.
 Policymakers must reconcile a long-term goal of developing ties with India with their need for Pakistan's help in the battle against terror suspect Osama bin Laden.
 As US planes pound Afghanistan, officials are conscious that they must avoid actions that could bolster the cause of militant Islam in Pakistan -- no one in Washington wants nuclear-armed Pakistan to fall under the control of Muslim radicals.
 That's partly the rationale behind a series of recent financial grants made by the United States worth 100 million dollars, ostensibly to shore up Islamabad's shaky economy but which also help Musharraf's prospects.
 "No less important than clearing Afghanistan of its terrorist parasites is a preventative operation that will help ensure that Pakistan, a nuclear weapons power

with a significant military capability, neither 'fails' nor falls under the control of Islamic zealots," said Stephen Cohen, a South Asia expert at the Brookings Institution.
 But, in US South Asia policy, each action on one side of the India-Pakistan divide triggers a reaction on the other.
 Before September 11, Pakistan, a former US Cold War ally, skulked in the diplomatic doghouse, scolded for usurping democracy and accused of seeking Chinese missile technology.
 But bartering with its proximity to Afghanistan and links to the country's Taliban rulers, Pakistan engineered a return to the forefront of US foreign policy -- causing consternation in India, which had rushed to offer its airbases for any US air raids.
 "When the US plumped for Pakistan, India was peeved," said Zia Mian, of the Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs at Princeton University.

India, France begin joint exercise

AFP, Bombay
 Indian and French warships Thursday began a three-day joint naval exercise in the Arabian sea, the longest ever conducted between the two countries.
 The exercise, entitled Varuna, "is another significant step in a substantial naval cooperation," the French embassy in New Delhi said in a statement.
 Four French warships had been due to participate in the exercise, but support ship Bougainville had to drop out, a French official told AFP.
 "The other three warships sailed into the waters and commenced the exercise," the official said.
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Woman killed in Kashmir explosion

AFP, Srinagar
 A Muslim woman was killed Thursday and six other people, including two border guards, were injured in a grenade explosion in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said.
 Police said suspected militants hurled a hand grenade towards a security force patrol in the Nowhatta area of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar.
 The explosion killed a woman who was selling fish by the roadside, while four civilians and two border guards suffered injuries.
 "Two of the injured civilians are in a critical condition," a police spokesman said, adding the injured were taken to Srinagar's main hospital.

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Aga Khan Foundation to help Afghans

AFP, Colombo
 Sri Lanka's indigenous people have voiced disgust with all political groups which have ruled the island since independence from Britain 53 years ago and will boycott the December polls.
 Veddha chieftain, Uruvarige Wannila Atto, told reporters his clan of 1,675 will not support any political party in the December 5 parliamentary elections.
 He told the state-run Daily News quoted he was hiding in the jungle to avoid candidates canvassing his support.
 "What I would like to tell whoever comes into power is that we are not asking for part of the country, but to leave us alone to live as alone to live as a free community

and to safeguard our traditions," he said.
 The Veddhas, who form the main part of Sri Lanka's small aboriginal community numbering in the thousands, have a nasty experience with Sri Lankan polls.
 The former Veddha chief, Tissahamy, who died in May 1998, apparently returned from the grave to vote at local elections almost a year later.
 Those responsible for rigging the vote in the aboriginal constituency of Mahiyangana used his name to cast a ballot.
 Sri Lanka's election chief Dayananda Dissanayake announced last month he was taking measures to ensure the names of dead people will not be used to stuff ballot boxes this time round.

Pressure mounts on UN to end Afghans' plight

AFP, United Nations
 As the US-led war against terrorism ground through its fifth week with no end in sight, pressure grew on the United Nations to find solutions to Afghanistan's political and humanitarian crises.
 "I haven't heard or met anybody who didn't start his discussion of Afghanistan by saying that the UN should play a role," said Secretary General Kofi Annan's special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi.
 Brahimi was speaking in Tehran before winding up a 10-day visit to Pakistan and Iran and setting off to return to New York for the annual debate of world leaders in the UN General Assembly, starting Saturday.
 On his way, Brahimi held talks in Rome with former Afghan king Mohammed Zahir Shah, seen by many as the indispensable focus of efforts to forge a new regime should the Taliban Islamist militia fall.
 Brahimi was also to stop in Paris to meet French President Jacques

US may target Iraq next in its anti-terror war: Powell

AFP, Washington
 US Secretary of State Colin Powell has warned the United States could turn its attention to Iraq after achieving the goals of its military campaign in Afghanistan.
 "We must end Osama bin Laden's terrorist threat to the world, and deal with the Taliban regime, who has given them haven," Powell told reporters Wednesday, after talks with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Shaykh Sabah al-Hamad Al Sabah.
 He said that after the goals of Operation Enduring Freedom are achieved, the United States will turn its attention to terrorism throughout the world.
 "And nations such as Iraq, which have tried to pursue weapons of mass destruction, should not think that we will not be concerned about these activities, and will not turn our attention to them," Powell pointed out.
 An opinion poll by Zogby International revealed Wednesday that 80 percent of Americans believed that launching military strikes against Iraq and removing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power would be an

effective move in the war against terrorism declared by President George W. Bush.
 Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz was quoted Sunday by a Lebanese newspaper as saying that Kuwait had always been a part of Iraq.
 But Powell dismissed the remarks as inconsequential.
 "Well, Mr. Tareq Aziz has been making these rather ridiculous and threatening statements for many years, so I take them all with a grain of salt," the secretary of state said.
 The Bush administration has been under increased pressure from Republicans in Congress to move against Iraq in the wake of the September 11 attacks, even though administration officials have repeatedly said there is no credible evidence implicating Baghdad in the terrorist act.
 Late last month, Aziz told The Sunday Telegraph of London that the United States and Britain planned to launch 1,000 missiles at 300 Iraqi targets in a bid to topple Saddam Hussein under the pretext of waging war against terrorism.
 British officials have denied the charge.

7 killed in UN helicopter crash in Sierra Leone

AFP, Freetown
 Seven people, including two military officials, died after a United Nations helicopter crashed late Wednesday into the sea off the Sierra Leonean capital Freetown, the UN mission in Sierra Leone said Thursday.
 A statement by UNAMSIL, the UN mission in Sierra Leone, said the dead included "seven people including a four member crew, one civilian and two military personnel."
 It did not specify the nationalities of the dead.
 However, a military official said on condition of anonymity that the

dead included two Zambian officers who were heading to the Freetown airport to welcome incoming Zambian army chief of staff, lieutenant general Geogago Musengule.
 He identified the dead Zambians as lieutenant colonels Tim Asumu and David Mwale.
 The Ukrainian foreign ministry in Kiev, meanwhile, confirmed that four nationals had died in the crash.
 A UNAMSIL official said recovery operations had resumed "at daybreak today after being called off at midnight" and added that "three bodies had been recovered ... they were trapped in the debris of the helicopter."

Indigenous people to boycott Lankan polls

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PHOTO: STAR
 Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf is welcomed by French President Jacques Chirac on Wednesday at the Elysee Palace in Paris prior to their formal meeting for talks on latest Afghan situation.

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would enhance its prospects of helping to bring about a new regime.
 Limousines carrying world leaders to their annual debate at the UN on Saturday will have to negotiate around big orange trucks parked as roadblocks, a reminder that terrorism has set the agenda.
 To date, 48 heads of state or government and 114 foreign ministers are due to attend the week-long debate, the first major conference held in New York since terrorists destroyed the city's World Trade Center on September 11.
 One of the first speakers will be US President George W. Bush, who warned Tuesday that Osama bin Laden -- chief suspect behind the suicide attacks by hijacked airliners -- was seeking chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.
 Bush said he would use his speech at the United Nations, his first as president, to drive home the message that he wanted concrete action from countries he has enlisted as allies in the war against terrorism.



PHOTO: STAR
 Workers of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) shout anti-war slogans as they hold placards during a peace march in Karachi on Thursday. More than five hundreds of KMC workers took part in the march protesting the US-led strikes in Afghanistan, seeking an immediate end of the war.