

Bush calls for action against terror

US warns of more terrorist attacks

AFP, United Nations

It is time for the world to take action in order to prevent more terrorist attacks, possibly using nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, US President George W. Bush warned Saturday, as forces opposed to the Taliban consolidated recent gains in Afghanistan.

"The time for action has now arrived," Bush said at the opening of the annual debate of the UN General Assembly in New York.

"As we meet, the terrorists are planning more murder, perhaps in my country or perhaps in yours. These same terrorists are searching for weapons of mass destruction, the tools to turn their hatred into holocaust."

His dark warning followed a threat brandished earlier by Osama bin Laden, the Afghan-based Saudi-born radical blamed by Washington for the September 11 terror attacks on US cities, who told a Pakistani newspaper he had nuclear weapons.

"We have chemical and nuclear weapons as a deterrent," bin Laden claimed, according to Hamid Mir, the editor of the Urdu-language Ausaf.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said he could not

imagine bin Laden had nuclear weapons, despite the claims.

The Pentagon also expressed doubts, while Bush said he was not sure whether to believe bin Laden's claim but said the statement was "all the more reason" to hunt him down.

In the field, Afghan opposition forces capitalised on their capture of the strategic northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

If it holds, the Northern Alliance victory could mark a turning point in the US-led military campaign against Afghanistan's ruling Taliban and the extremists they protect, as it enters its sixth week.

It also gave a major psychological boost to the US military, which backed the opposition push with bombing raids directed by special forces on the ground.

Opposition commanders said Saturday they would press on with their offensive, driving Taliban fighters out of a swath of territory near Uzbekistan, where more than 1,000 US troops are deployed.

The Taliban, past masters of the surprise counterattack, admitted they had been forced to withdraw from the city, but claimed to have saved much of their artillery and avoided major casualties.

They also dismissed opposition claims that 1,500 Taliban fighters had surrendered.

US warplanes chased retreating Taliban forces Saturday after the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif, keeping up the pressure as Afghan opposition forces consolidated their hold on the key northern city, a Pentagon spokesman said.

"We have been trying to exploit the situation around Mazar-i-Sharif," said Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel David Lapan. "As the Taliban come out of hiding and start moving away, we're conducting strikes on those forces when we find them out in the open."

But after meeting with Musharraf, Bush said the Northern Alliance should push south but not take Kabul.

"We will encourage our friends to head south across the Shumali Plains, but not into the city of Kabul itself," he noted.

Meanwhile, the British newspaper The Sunday Telegraph reported bin Laden has implied in a video address to his supporters that he and his al-Qaeda network were responsible for the attacks on the United States.

On the diplomatic front, Bush held a series of meetings on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, notably with his key frontline ally, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

Bush later praised Pakistan's cooperation in the war against terror.



US President George W. Bush (L) makes remarks at a luncheon hosted by United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (2nd L) and joined by Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (2nd R) and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on Saturday at the United Nations.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (L) and Thabo Mbeki, (R), the president of the Republic of South Africa talk during their bilateral meeting at the United Nations General Assembly on Saturday at the United Nations in New York.

Warlords talk power-sharing

AFP, Kabul

Anti-Taliban warlords installed themselves in their newly captured northern Afghan stronghold of Mazar-i-Sharif on Sunday to coordinate military strategy and thrash out power-sharing arrangements.

The talks will provide the first indication of whether the disparate ethnic factions that make up the Northern Alliance can marry their competing agendas into a blueprint for common governance.

The meeting was led by ethnic Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam, Tajik commander Atta Mohammad and Haji Mohammad Muhaqiq who heads the faction representing the Shiite Hazara community.

"They are working out how to chase the Taliban in other northern provinces and establish law and order in Mazar-i-Sharif and other provinces now under alliance control," said Mohammad Sardar Saedi, a top advisor to Muhaqiq.

Saedi told AFP by telephone from Mazar-i-Sharif that the warlords would also nominate the city's administrative governor, chief of police and regional military commander.

The meeting followed a four-day push that saw the Northern Alliance secure control over five northern provinces and capture Mazar-i-Sharif on Friday.

The Taliban have confirmed the loss of four provinces, following what they described as a "strategic withdrawal" by militia troops.

Saedi said the meeting had not discussed a possible offensive against Kabul.

"It is not their responsibility," he said, suggesting that plans for an assault on the Afghan capital would have to include commanders on the frontlines just north of Kabul.

Saedi said there was no US military presence in Mazar-i-Sharif, but confirmed that US military advisors had been working with Dostam.

The Northern Alliance has a core army of about 15,000 troops, which it claims has grown as the move toward Mazar-i-Sharif has gathered pace.

Its myriad factions, dominated by ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras, guard competing agendas, bitter rivalries and little influence in areas of southern Afghanistan dominated by the dominant ethnic Pashtun community.

Violence erupts after killing of Papuan leader

AFP, Jakarta

Protestors set fire to the main market in the hometown of Irian Jaya independence leader Theys Hiyu Eluay, whose body was found Sunday after he was abducted, an activist said.

"I have just received a report that the main market in Sentani has been set on fire, with angry people first setting fire to the Aloha shop," said Aloysius Renwarin, the deputy director of the human rights group Elsham.

Speaking to AFP from Jayapura, Renwarin said that the people had been angered by the discovery of Eluay's body near the border between the Indonesian province and Papua New Guinea earlier Sunday.

Irian Jaya police chief, Senior Commissioner Bekto Suprpto, said that the police has been anticipating an outbreak of violence.

"We already have prepared patrols, both involving police and the TNI (the Indonesian armed forces)," Suprpto told the Metro private television station.

7 children die in shantytown fire in India

AFP, New Delhi

At least seven children were killed Sunday when a fire swept through a shantytown in the western Indian city of Bombay, police said.

They said five more children were injured in the blaze which destroyed around 200 huts in the district of Bandra.

Firefighters rushed to the scene of the fire to try to save the rest of the crowded shantytown from the blaze.

Nepali Maoists shelve demand for republic

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoists Sunday officially said they had "deferred" their demand for a republic ahead of a third round of peace talks with the government.

Chairman of the Maoist party, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, alias Prachanda, said in a statement: "Our demand for a republic has been deferred for the third round of talks."

The issue had been a major

stumbling block in two previous rounds of talks between the two sides.

The Maoists had insisted that negotiations could only succeed if the government agreed to end the system of constitutional monarchy, but the government has refused to discuss the issue.

Last week Maoist sources indicated that they were ready to "defer" the demand for a republic, but Sunday's statement was the first official confirmation that they had formally changed their agenda.

Pakistan redeployed its N-arms after US anti-terror strikes

AFP, Washington

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf ordered an emergency redeployment of the country's nuclear arsenal following the start of the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan, the Washington Post reported Sunday.

The government moved Pakistan nuclear weapons to at least six secret new locations and reorganised military oversight of the nuclear forces in the weeks since Pakistan joined the US campaign against terrorism, senior officials in Islamabad told the daily.

The government is fearful of possible strikes against the country's nuclear facilities, and worry that its nuclear devices and fissile material could be vulnerable to attack or theft.

Pakistan's military also underwent a shakeup beginning October 7 to sideline officers considered too sympathetic to the Taliban or other

extremist religious factions, officials said.

The Post reported that Pakistan is believed to have the materials to assemble between 30 and 40 warheads.

Lankan fighting claims 5

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger guerrillas shot dead three government soldiers after losing two of their own fighters in attacks in eastern Sri Lanka Sunday, officials said.

Government troops killed two members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the eastern district of Ampara while the rebels retaliated by killing three soldiers in a separate encounter in the same region, local military officials said.

Musharraf's talks with Western leaders produce mixed results

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf is claiming success after four days of talks with western leaders aimed at bringing Pakistan back into the diplomatic fold for its role in the US-led war on terrorism.

But if Musharraf received a warm welcome in France, Britain and the United States, his trip produced mixed results, including vague promises of economic aid and a US refusal to release new jet fighters to Islamabad.

The United States and Britain also turned a deaf ear to his appeals for a halt in the US bombing in

Afghanistan during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan beginning later this week.

Musharraf, who flies home Monday, was counting on his trip to burnish his image after the cool reception he received from the west for the military coup that brought him to power in 1999.

After talks with US President George W. Bush on Saturday outside the UN General Assembly both addressed in New York, Musharraf hailed "the dawn of a new era in the relationship between Pakistan and the United States."

But if Musharraf's gamble in supporting the US military offen-

sive on a neighboring Muslim country has paid off handsomely in the short term, he showed concern whether the benefits would last over the long haul.

He told reporters that Islamabad was trying to cope with the economic fallout of its move to provide logistical facilities and intelligence cooperation to the US effort.

"I am sure the (US-led) coalition would understand Pakistan's concerns and the burden that it is having and we look forward to economic assistance to alleviate our burden," he told reporters in New York.

Myanmar sacks 7 ministers

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta has sacked seven ministers in a sweeping reshuffle aimed at rooting out endemic corruption that has undermined the economy and embarrassed the military regime, analysts said Sunday.

Lieutenant-General Win Myint, Third Secretary of the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and Lieutenant-General Tin Hla, a deputy prime minister and military affairs minister, were the first to go Saturday.

Then the state-run media Sunday announced the "retirement" of five more ministers, including deputy premiers Rear Admiral Maung Maung Kin and Lieutenant Tien Tun, who were in their late sixties.

The elderly pair had been widely expected to be

pensioned off, but the other casualties -- Culture Minister Win Sein, Cooperatives Minister Aung San and Immigration and Manpower Minister Saw Tun -- made surprise departures.

Both Win Myint and Tin Hla had been deeply involved in the economic workings of the military state and headed its state business enterprises -- Myanmar Economic Holdings and Myanmar Economic Corporation.

According to the state media, both were given "termination notifications", the most severe form of dismissal which indicates the junta was deeply unhappy with their performance.

Observers in Yangon said the sackings appeared to be a repeat of a dramatic 1997 sweep when four ministers -- for trade, tourism, agriculture and transportation -- were fired after foreign investors accused them of graft.

KSA praises US for 'new language' on ME peace

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister praised Sunday the speech of US President George W. Bush to the UN General Assembly, saying it heralds a "new language" for Washington in the Middle East.

Bush's speech involved "mentioning the Palestinian state by equating it with Israel and holding all parties responsible toward stopping violence," said Prince Saud al-Faisal, quoted by Al-Hayat newspaper.

"This represents a new language which affirms that the responsibility is on Israel as much as it is on the Palestinians (to stop violence). Violence does not come from Palestinians, it comes from Israel which is a fact. This is a new language," the prince said.

"The speech also called on the need to continue political dialogue without guarantees that there would be no incidents here or there... These are three important elements, I believe they are good and important," he said.

ME, Africa dominate 2nd day debate at UN

AFP, United Nations

After a day of debate and meetings dominated by the threat of international terrorism, the focus at the UN General Assembly shifted on Sunday towards conflicts in the Middle East and Africa.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's first scheduled appointment was with the president of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, who was due to speak from the Assembly rostrum in the morning.

While they are meeting in Annan's 38th-floor office here, US Secretary of State Colin Powell will hold private talks in New York's Waldorf Astoria hotel with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

US President George W. Bush, one of the first speakers after the seven-day annual debate of world leaders opened Saturday, said he was committed to "a just peace" in the Middle East including a Palestinian state.

"We are working toward the day

when two states -- Israel and Palestine -- live peacefully together within secure and recognised borders as called for by the Security Council resolutions," Bush declared.

But Peres, in an interview broadcast Saturday by Swedish radio, said it would be a mistake for Arafat to unilaterally declare statehood.

"It would be a declaration of a state without borders and without a decided territory" and would "not solve other issues which are on the table," he said.

Powell has also scheduled talks with Faruq al-Shara, foreign minister of Syria, a key player in the Middle East conflict and a state official described by the United States as a sponsor of terrorism.

The theme of terrorism dominated the first day of the debate, which was postponed for almost seven weeks after the destruction of New York's World Trade Center on September 11.

Storms kill over 300 people in Algeria

AFP, Algiers

Ferocious storms have killed more than 300 people in northern Algeria, including 287 in the capital Algiers, emergency services said Saturday after homes collapsed and dry gullies became torrents.

Many of those who died were crushed when their homes were destroyed by torrential rain and very high winds or swept away by flash floods, officials said.

Interior Minister Yazid Zerhouni said the official toll on Saturday evening in Algiers was 287 people killed and 294 injured, and in the rest of the country around 20 people were thought to have died.

He said rescue services were being hampered by difficulty in moving around because so many roads had been blocked by floods and falling debris.

Zerhouni said the country was suffering from a "catastrophe" and called for "international solidarity" to help it cope.

Since the storms began on Friday morning, eight people were known to have been killed and some 20 injured in road accidents in the east of the country, according to the emergency services.

The known casualty figures were rose swiftly during the day as reports came in from across the Mediterranean coastal region, particularly around the capital.

Witnesses in the working-class Bab-el-Oued district of Algiers said that bodies were being found there that had been washed down from higher ground in the city, which is partly built on hills like other coastal towns.

Algiers was practically paralyzed on Saturday morning, because the storms caused power blackouts and flooded numerous districts, making driving almost impossible.



A resident tries to tow his car away from a flooded road in Dely Ibrahim, near Algiers, after fierce storms on Saturday. Heavy storms have killed at least 300 people in Algeria, including 287 in the capital, emergency services reported on Saturday. The official casualty figures from more than a day of torrential rains and strong winds have been rising rapidly throughout the afternoon as the full extent of the damage in the north African country became known.

US satisfied with Russian aid in war on terror

AFP, Washington

The United States sees Moscow as a "good partner" in the war on terrorism and hopes to build on its former Cold War rival's support when Russian President Vladimir Putin visits here next week.

"We've been very satisfied with the cooperation we've received thus far," a senior administration official recently told AFP on condition of anonymity. "They've been a good partner."

Putin, who arrives late Monday, will meet with US President George W. Bush a day later at the White House. He and his wife will then travel to Bush's ranch in tiny Crawford, Texas, on Wednesday and leave for New York on Thursday.

US officials have sharply downplayed the likelihood of reaching any breakthrough deals on reductions in Cold War-era nuclear arsenals or on the missile shield Bush plans to deploy, which Moscow has opposed.