

US, UK may extend war on terror

Somalia, Sudan, Yemen top the hit list

AFP, London

The United States and Britain are planning to extend the war on terrorism to Somalia, Sudan and Yemen as soon as the campaign in Afghanistan is over, The Sunday Times reported.

A defence ministry spokeswoman played down the report, but did not rule out future action in the three new countries.

The spokeswoman told AFP: "You can't discount any ideas but we are focusing on Afghanistan and we have no plans to do anything else. We still have work to do in Afghanistan."

"But it would be stupid to narrow what we are going to do in terms of the military aspect."

The US and Britain are considering targets linked to alleged terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden in the three countries, The Sunday Times said, citing senior official sources in London and Washington.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush had agreed that the momentum created by the anti-terror coalition's recent successes in Afghanistan must be maintained with swift action elsewhere, the paper added.

"We have the wind at our backs and we don't want to lose it," the broadsheet quoted a senior Washington source as

saying.

The British defence ministry spokeswoman added: "We analyse the military situation day by day."

"I am not ruling anything out. Military planners are looking at a range of aspects."

Intelligence officers from both Britain and the US have been on the ground in all three countries to gather information about terrorists and ascertain their links with bin Laden's Al-Qaida organisation.

The British and their CIA counterparts have been assembling evidence to be used as the basis for attacks on bin Laden's associates and terrorist training camps, The Sunday Times reported.

Military preparations have also begun, though plans to strike specific targets have not yet been finalised, the paper added.

The first targets, according to the broadsheet's British sources, could be hit as early as late January if the war in Afghanistan is nearing its final stages by then.

Al-Qaida supporters have established bases in the northern mountains of Yemen, where 17 US sailors died in a suicide bomb attack on the USS Cole off Aden last year, The Sunday

Times said.

It added that US officials hoped to secure the cooperation of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who visits Washington this week.

In Sudan, where bin Laden lived until 1996, the Bush administration is expected to pursue followers of Hassan al-Turabi, a former parliamentary speaker who gave bin Laden sanctuary for five years, according to The Sunday Times.

Possible targets in Somalia include the Al-Itihaad group, which has been linked to bin Laden through Muhammad Atef, his deputy, who was killed by an US missile in Afghanistan, the paper added.

Officials believe that extending the campaign to Sudan, Somalia and Yemen will keep Al-Qaida on the run. A British Ministry of Defence source told the paper: "We are focused on Afghanistan."

"However, this is part of a wider war on terror, wherever that may be, so it should not be a surprise to learn that military planning may be under way in other parts of the world."

"While we cannot confirm targets, the three countries mentioned have all been linked to terrorist activity."



Former Pakistan prime minister and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chief, Benazir Bhutto (L), meets Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani (R) in New Delhi on Sunday. Benazir, who is living in exile in London and Dubai, last visited India in 1991 to attend the funeral of Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. Benazir urged Islamabad to "respond in a substantive way" to the strong initiatives taken by India in Kashmir, and suggested a broad-based relationship and the creation of "safe and open borders" between the two neighbours.

Taliban office in Karachi sealed

AFP, Karachi

Pakistani authorities swooped overnight on the Taliban office in the southern port city of Karachi and detained 15 Afghans before sealing it, police and witnesses said Sunday.

A police officer who requested anonymity said among those arrested was Abdur Rehman Haleem, the head of the office, which was being run in the Afghan consulate in the Soldier Bazar area of the city.

"The Taliban office, which was run under the supervision of Afghan Consul General Rehmatullah Kakazada has been sealed and 15 Afghans detained, including in-charge Haleem," the police officer said.

US, Kuwaiti forces to hold war games near Iraq

AFP, Kuwait City

US and Kuwaiti troops are preparing for routine joint exercises in the northern Kuwaiti desert near Iraq as part of a continued deterrent to Baghdad, a US defence source said Sunday.

The source told AFP that around 2,000 US troops, who arrived in the emirate over the weekend, are currently distributed between Camp Doha, northwest of Kuwait City, and a US encampment 40 kilometres (25 miles) from Kuwait's northern border with Iraq.

"Some of our forces are at Camp Doha, while others are out at the site where they've been for 10 years," the source said.

"It's too strong a statement to say the 2,000 (recently deployed US troops) are lined up along the border with Iraq."

Preparations for a royal birth

AFP, Tokyo

Preparations for Japan's new imperial baby have been completed and Crown Princess Masako is in the final days of her pregnancy, news reports said Sunday.

Medical staff have been on duty around the clock since last week at Togu Palace, the residence of Crown Prince Naruhito, 41, and the 37-year-old crown princess, Kyodo News agency and newspapers said.

The hospital has arranged to ensure she does not need to move during the entire delivery process as she is to lie on the same bed through labor, delivery and recovery.

Furniture used at Togu Palace by the crown prince and princess was moved to a room in the hospital to help her feel at home, Kyodo said.

4 cops killed in suicide attack in Kashmir

AFP, Jammu

Four policemen were killed and three seriously injured Sunday when a suicide squad of suspected Muslim militants attacked a police post in Indian-controlled Kashmir, a defence spokesman said.

Army Brigadier P.C. Das said the attack was carried out at a police post at Banihal, 180 kilometres (110 miles) north of the Kashmiri winter capital Jammu.

The policemen were asleep when the militants opened fire with rifle grenades and then sprayed the position with gunfire.

The area has been cordoned off and additional troops rushed to the spot to hunt down the militants, he said.

The hardline Kashmiri militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba claimed responsibility for the attack.

24 feared dead in Swiss plane crash

AFP, Zurich

At least 10 people were killed and nine were injured when a plane operated by the Swiss company Crossair with 33 people on board crashed near Zurich airport Saturday, police said.

Rescuers said the chances of finding any of the remaining 14 who were on the plane alive were very slim.

The Jumbolino aircraft, on a flight from Berlin, came down for unknown reasons in a forest in the Birchwil area at around 2100 GMT as it was making its approach to land at Zurich airport.

Rescuers said they had found 10 bodies and recovered nine injured survivors, three of them in critical condition. They expected to find more bodies near the burnt-out wreckage of the aircraft, which had caught fire on impact.

Company spokeswoman Diane Muller said flight LX3597 from Berlin-Tegel was carrying 28 passengers and five crew. She said weather conditions were normal for the time of year with sleet falling on the airport.

The plane flattened trees for a

distance of several metres (yards) before hitting the ground and breaking up into several pieces. Witnesses said the cockpit and rear of the 80-seater four-engine aircraft remained largely intact.

It had been due to use a runway reserved for night flights to avoid overflying neighbouring Germany, in line with an agreement reached last October in Berlin and Bern.

Airport director Josef Felder said both the plane's black box flight recorders had been recovered. Muller said the plane, built in August 1996, had put in 13,194 hours flying time and carried out 11,518 landings. The pilot had 13,000 hours flying experience.

It was the second accident involving a Crossair plane since the company was set up in 1975. On January 10 last year one of its planes, a Saab 340, crashed near Zurich on a flight from Germany, killing 10 people.

The latest crash comes at a particularly difficult time for Crossair which is due to expand next year and take over about two-thirds of its struggling former mother company Swissair's flight operations.



Rescue workers inspect the wreckage of the Crossair jet on Sunday morning at the crash site in Birchwil, Switzerland. The Jumbolino jet of Swiss company Crossair crashed late Saturday, during its approach to Zurich airport. At least ten people died and 14 others feared dead in the crash. The four engine aircraft with 33 people on board, on a flight from Berlin, came down in a wooded area in Birchwil near Zurich airport, at 21:08 GMT.

KL to deport Misuari

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia will deport detained Philippine Muslim leader Nur Misuari and not charge him with illegal entry, Deputy Premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said in remarks published Sunday.

Abdullah, who is also home minister in charge of police, was quoted by the Sunday Star as saying Malaysia had to hand Misuari over to Manila as the two countries were part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"If he is kept in Malaysia, we will be accused of harbouring him or even meddling in the internal affairs of the Philippines," he said.

"The Philippine government wants him. We will send him back."

Abdullah, who is on a visit to

Sabah state, was quoted by Bernama news agency as saying Sunday that the government had not yet decided when to return Misuari to the Philippines.

"The timing is not set yet," he said.

Asked if Misuari would be charged in court for illegal entry, he said: "We will see. It may not be necessary since we are going to send him back."

Misuari and six of his followers were arrested before dawn Saturday on Jampiras island off Sabah for entering Malaysia illegally via Jolo island in the southern Philippines.

Jampiras is the island closest to the Philippine-Malaysia international boundary and about 30 minutes by boat from the Sabah town of Sandakan.

World keeping close watch on Afghan talks in Bonn

AFP, Islamabad

When the various Afghan parties sit down in Bonn this week to hash out the future of their shattered land, countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Russia will be looking on with keen interest.

Like players in an updated version of the "Great Game" of global politics in Central Asia, each capital has its own agenda in the talks on Afghanistan, a hub of regional intrigue for centuries.

If the collapse of the hardline Islamic Taliban regime in Kabul presents new opportunities to rebuild a country torn by two decades of war, it also heralds a new period of uncertainty and instability.

For Pakistan, the last state to recognise the Taliban before switching over to the US-led campaign against terrorism, the current occupation of Kabul by Northern

Alliance troops is the worst of all possible outcomes.

It puts a hostile group of ethnic minorities in power just next door with the potential to create unrest along their common border or, even worse, team up with arch-enemy India to lock Pakistan in a diplomatic vise.

Analysts in Islamabad say that if Pakistan feels threatened by the regime in Kabul it may be forced for the first time in half a century to deploy troops on its western as well as eastern borders.

Politically, the fall of the mostly-Pashtun Taliban has created feelings of bitterness and betrayal among ethnic Pashtuns who dominate Afghanistan as well as the frontier tribal areas of Pakistan.

Islamabad is now trying to include the Pashtuns in a new broad-based government for Afghanistan. But its fierce opposition to the Northern Alliance and past support for the Taliban leave it with little leverage.

US offers equipment to India to combat terror

AFP, New Delhi

The United States has offered India sensors, unmanned aerial vehicles and other technical equipment to combat the infiltration of militants from Pakistan into Kashmir, the Hindu daily said Sunday.

The offer was made when Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Washington earlier this month to discuss the global campaign against terrorism and the ongoing US-led military conflict in Afghanistan.

"If India is satisfied with the equipment, it would have the option of buying them in larger quantities to strengthen its surveillance," the

report said.

If confirmed, the offer would be the first shipment of American aid to India to counter the separatist insurgency in Kashmir, where thousands have died in the last 12 years.

Indian security officials say Muslim militants periodically cross over from Pakistan into Indian-controlled Kashmir where they lend support to the armed rebellion.

New Delhi and Washington have been working together for the last two years on the broad issue of counter-terrorism.

In September, US President George W. Bush partially lifted sanctions against India and

Pakistan which were imposed in May 1998 after the two countries carried out tit-for-tat nuclear weapons tests.

But the US has continued a longstanding ban on exports to India of certain strategic equipment.

However, US ambassador to India Robert D Blackwell recently said that restrictions on the sale of military supplies to India were likely to be lifted following Bush's summit with Vajpayee on November 9.

He said US was looking at striking a long-term defence cooperation deal with India as the country was likely to emerge as a key security power in Asia.

Israel pounds Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli helicopter gunships and ground-to-ground missiles rocked the Gaza Strip early Sunday in retaliation for a mortar attack on a Jewish settlement nearby that killed one soldier and injured two, Palestinian security and Israeli army sources said.

Gunships swooped down into the Palestinian town of Deir el-Balah in the central region of Gaza Strip, firing rockets at the district office of Yasser Arafat's Fatah party.

Meanwhile, in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip, a naval police base was slammed by Israeli rockets as gunships hovered nearby. Electricity in the town went out after

the attack.

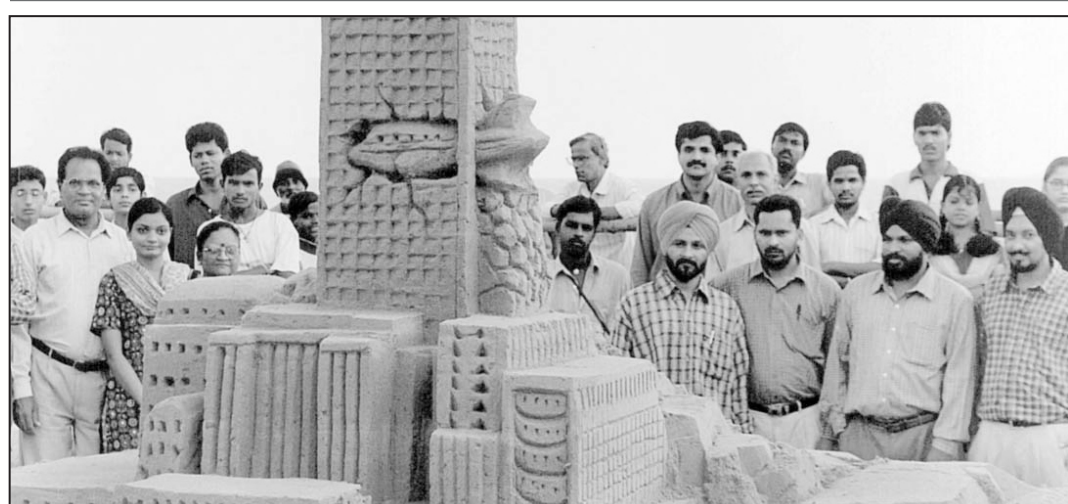
Israeli bulldozers earlier demolished a two-floor building in the town.

In Khan Yunis, Palestinian intelligence facilities were targeted. The military intelligence building was levelled in a blast, while a general intelligence building was seriously damaged.

Electricity to Khan Yunis was also cut after the attack.

No injuries were reported, according to hospital sources.

At the same time, Israel tanks and bulldozers made an incursion one kilometre (half a mile) into Deir el-Balah, destroying three family houses close to a Jewish settlement, witnesses said.



Passersby stop to look at a sand sculpture by artist Sudarshan Patnaik depicting the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on Saturday in Puri, Orissa state. The sand sculpture display is a part of the ongoing Puri Beach Festival.