

Laden vows fight to death in interview aired by CNN

AFP, Islamabad

Osama bin Laden used his only television interview after the September 11 attacks to justify the killing of innocents and vowed to pursue his battle with the United States to the death.

"The battle has moved to inside America," the alleged mastermind of the attacks on New York and Washington told the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera network in an interview conducted in October but only aired for the first time this week.

"We will work to continue this battle, God permitting, until victory or until we meet God," bin Laden said.

Al-Jazeera never broadcast the hour-long interview and a tape was obtained by the US network CNN, which aired excerpts for the first time late Thursday, sparking a row between the two international broadcasters.

"I tell you, freedom and human rights in America are doomed," bin Laden said in the interview, which took place at an undisclosed location on October 21, two weeks after US-led forces began a military campaign in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime and bin Laden's al-Qaida network.

"The US government will lead the American people -- and the West in general -- into an unbearable hell and a choking life," bin Laden said in what may have been his last recorded interview.

It is not known whether the Saudi-born dissident survived the US bombing of al-Qaida hideouts in Afghanistan.

Asked about his alleged involvement in the September 11 attacks, bin Laden said: "America has made many accusations against us and many other Muslims around the world."

"Its charge that we are carrying out acts of terrorism is unwarranted."



However, bin Laden added: "If inciting people to do that is terrorism, and if killing those who kill our sons is terrorism, then let history be witness that we are terrorists."

Later in the interview, bin Laden said: "We will kill the kings of the infidels, kings of the crusaders and civilian infidels in exchange for those of our children they kill. This is permissible in Islamic law and logically."

Bin Laden was asked by the Al-Jazeera reporter: "So what you are saying is that this is a type of reciprocal treatment. They kill our innocents, so we kill their innocents?"

He replied: "So we will kill their innocents, and I say it is permissible in Islamic law and logic."

In a statement, the director-general of Al-Jazeera, Mohammed Jassim al-Alfi, slammed the Atlanta-based CNN for broadcasting the tape.

"Al-Jazeera denounces the fact that CNN resorts to such illegal ways to obtain this tape," he said. "Al-Jazeera would have expected CNN to use its judgement and respect its special relationship with Al-Jazeera by not airing material that Al-Jazeera itself chose not to broadcast."

"Al-Jazeera does not feel it is obligated to explain its position and its reasoning of why it chose not to air the interview," Alfi said.

He added that Al-Jazeera will "sever its relationship with CNN and will take the necessary action to punish the organisations and individuals who stole this video and distributed it illegally."

CNN responded by saying it had done "nothing illegal in obtaining this tape, and nothing illegal in airing it -- our affiliate agreement with Al-Jazeera gives us the express right to use any and all footage owned or controlled by Al-Jazeera, without limitation."

Hume receives Gandhi Peace Prize

AFP, New Delhi

John Hume, one of the main architects of the 1998 Northern Ireland peace accord, on Friday expressed the hope that India and Pakistan would follow the example of Britain and Ireland and begin a dialogue to solve bilateral differences.

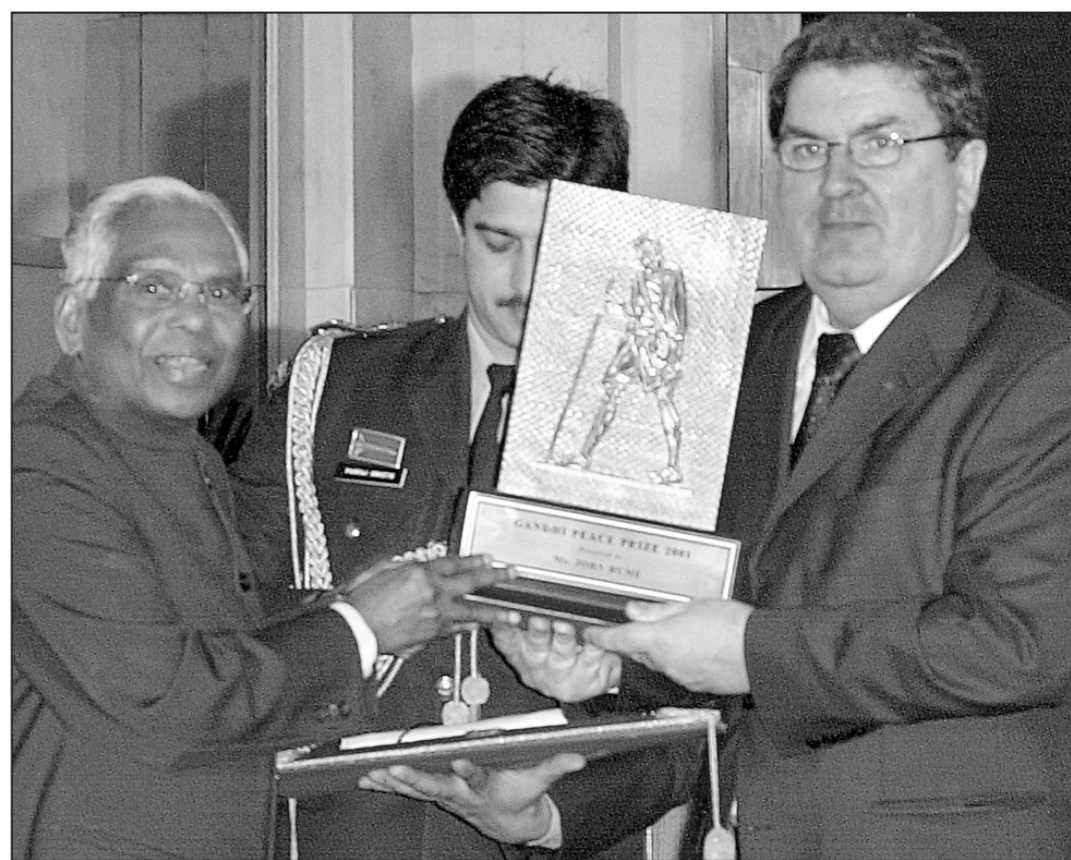
Hume was in the Indian capital to receive the international Gandhi Peace Prize for 2001.

In his acceptance speech, Hume said he believed India's independence hero, Mahatma Gandhi, would have wanted to see India's "troubled relationship with Pakistan" harnessed into "a transforming energy."

Citing the "transformation" in relations between the islands of Britain and Ireland, Hume said "dialogue and partnership" could replace "alienation" in the most difficult of circumstances.

"If there is anything we can share of value, we are more than ready to do so... What I am certain is that change is possible," Hume said.

India and Pakistan are currently poised for war, with hundreds of thousands of troops massed on their common border following an attack on the Indian parliament which New Delhi has blamed on Pakistan-based militants.



John Hume (R), one of the main architects of the 1998 Northern Ireland peace accords, receives the International Gandhi Peace Prize from Indian President K.R. Narayanan (L) at the presidential palace in New Delhi on Friday. John Hume expressed the hope that India and Pakistan would follow the example of Britain and Ireland and begin a dialogue to solve bilateral differences.

Japan names Yasuo FM

AFP, Tokyo

Japan Friday named environment head Yoriko Kawaguchi as its new foreign minister to replace the ousted Makiko Tanaka, after former UN refugee chief Sadako Ogata turned down the post.

"We decided to appoint Environment Minister Kawaguchi as foreign minister, a post now being filled concurrently (with the premiership) by Prime Minister (Junichiro) Koizumi," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda said.

"She is talented and we call her a tough negotiator," he said, adding she had broad views and was also well-versed on foreign affairs.

Eurotunnel asks French court to shut refugee camp

AFP, Lille

Channel Tunnel operator Eurotunnel went before a French court on Friday to force the closure of a French refugee camp the firm claims encourages illegal immigrants trying to sneak into Britain.

The firm, which enjoys the implicit backing of the British government, is to ask a court in Lille to approve an emergency order to shut the Red Cross centre in Sangatte, near the tunnel.

It is the company's second attempt to secure such an order, which would close the camp while a case is brought to challenge a French government order in 1999 to requisition the camp to house migrants seeking to reach Britain.

Dostam denies seeking Indian hardware

AFP, New Delhi

Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam Friday denied reports that he was seeking Indian military hardware to help strengthen his war-ravaged country's defences.

The ethnic Uzbek warlord, who is deputy defence minister in the interim Afghan administration, held talks here Thursday with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes.

"We did not say anything about providing defence supplies," Dostam said in an interview with the Star television channel.

"Actually we spoke about India sending a field hospital for the Afghan people, and artificial limbs for disabled people," he said.

Britain hit by more gales

AFP, London

Heavy rain and gales again hit Britain on Friday, in a week when some of the worst storms in years claimed nine lives and caused millions of pounds of damage.

About 1,000 homes were left without electricity in Northern Ireland as gales hit power lines for the second time in a week.

Ferry services between Northern Ireland and Scotland were severely disrupted. Coastguards said the forecast was for storm Force 10 conditions and rough seas.

A coastguard spokesman said commercial vessels were waiting for a break in the weather before venturing out into the Irish Sea.

Forecasters said wet weather and strong winds in other parts of Britain were expected to last well into next week.

Afghan leader presses Blair for more troops

AFP, Kabul

Afghan interim leader Hamid Karzai has reiterated pleas for more foreign security forces in Afghanistan after his handpicked governor in an eastern province was routed in heavy tribal fighting.

Karzai urged a wider role for international peacekeeping troops during talks in London but Prime Minister Tony Blair said Britain's military involvement had limits.

While assuring Karzai there would be a "long-term" international commitment, Blair did not promise to extend Britain's presence in Afghanistan, where bloody tribal infighting erupted this week.

Karzai's choice for governor of eastern Paktia province, Pashtun tribal chief Padsha Khan, was forced into a humiliating retreat Thursday after two days of heavy fighting against rival warlord Saif Ullah.

The clashes around Gardez, 100

km south of Kabul, left around 50 people dead and highlighted the frailty of the UN-backed interim government set up following the collapse of the Taliban regime in December.

The fighting started Wednesday when Ullah, who took control of the local tribal council after the Taliban evacuated, ordered his men to open fire as Khan's forces tried to raise the new national flag over the governor's mansion.

US warplanes circled above the rundown town of about 50,000 people and according to local Afghan garrison commander and Khan loyalist Ghalam Mehdi, US special forces were nearby watching the battle.

The town remained tense throughout Friday night following the retreat from Khan's troops from the surrounding hills. Khan himself appeared furious at his commanders and has not conceded defeat.

Ullah is loyal to pre-Taliban president Burhanuddin Rabbani, the figurehead of the Northern Alliance which helped oust the Taliban from power, and Khan is loyal to Karzai's royalist faction and ex-king Mohammed Zahir Shah.

Interim Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, speaking to reporters in New York Thursday, described the battle as "a single unfortunate incident".

But he conceded it was a telling illustration of the problems facing Afghanistan as it struggles to emerge from 23 years of foreign invasion and civil war, with "at least" 700,000 people still bearing arms.

"The interim government should interfere in that issue and solve it," he told a news conference on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum, though disarming warlords was "an issue that has to be dealt with in a process -- it is not just a decision for today or tomorrow."

Sat debris falls into Egyptian desert

AFP, Washington

The Extreme Ultraviolet Explorer, a US science satellite launched in 1992, burned up on re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere, possibly spreading debris across the Egyptian desert, the US space agency NASA said Thursday.

The spacecraft entered the atmosphere at 0415 GMT and began disintegrating at an altitude of 80 kilometers (50 miles), NASA said.

"The actual location of the satellite's re-entry was within the predicted orbit track," said Scott Hull, an engineer at NASA's Goddard Spaceflight Center in suburban Greenbelt, Maryland.

The satellite, launched July 7, 1992, was the first designed to observe light emitted by objects in space from the extreme ultraviolet spectrum. Its scientific mission ended in December 2000.



A small child sleeps as her mother takes part in a noisy demonstration in Colombo on Friday called by Sri Lanka's main Marxist party, the JVP, or People's Liberation Front. JVP opposes the new government's effort to revive a Norwegian-backed bid to end the island's drawn out Tamil separatist war.

Indian rules out troop pullout until 20 wanted criminals extradited

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes ruled out Friday any withdrawal of troops massed along the border with Pakistan until Islamabad extradites 20 alleged criminals and terrorists wanted by New Delhi.

"We are not withdrawing troops. We have told Pakistan to send us the 20 persons and end cross-border terrorism," Fernandes was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India (PTI).

India has handed Pakistan a list of 20 alleged criminals and terrorists who it claims are sheltering in Pakistan.

The arrest and extradition of those named in the list has been set as a condition for India to withdraw hundreds of thousands of troops sent to the border in the wake of the December 13 attack on the Indian parliament.

Indian blamed the attack on two Pakistan-based militant groups. "There is no de-escalation on their (Pakistan) side as well," Fernandes said. "Their armoured units stayed behind after their exercise and we have had suspicions since then."

The minister said there had been some reduction in the infiltration of militants across the disputed Kashmir border with Pakistan.

"It's down a little bit but not mentionable," he said.

Asked to comment on Islamabad's move to set up special courts for trying terrorists, Fernandes asked: "Why don't they hand us those Indians and Pakistanis who have committed crimes in our country. Why are they not doing it?"

US troops confined to Philippine base after plane shot at

AFP, Manila

Hundreds of US troops were confined to their base in the northern Philippines Friday after one of their planes was hit by small-arms fire, allegedly by communist rebels opposed to US anti-terror actions here.

The MC-130 special forces plane was hit by two bullets on Thursday while on a low-flight training mission over a mountainous area on the main island of Luzon, the two governments said.

None of the crew were wounded and the plane returned safely to Clark Air Base, the staging ground of one of two simultaneous joint military exercises in the country.

Philippine officials acknowledge that communist New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas operate in the area as well as in the Pinatubo volcano near Clark, where an American mountain climber was killed in a separate gun attack on Wednesday.

"We are investigating the incident," Filipino Air Force spokesman Major Art Orticio told AFP referring to the attack on the plane. At this point "we can't say who were responsible for this."

A Filipino military source said on condition of anonymity earlier that the ground fire came from Abra. But a Filipino government commission later said the M-14 bullets were fired from the adjacent province of Kalinga.

"It was in Abra and you know there are NPA over there," the source told AFP.

The plane and its crew were taking part in an exercise called Balance Piston that is focused on special operations and counter-terrorism.

The airmen are based at Clark, the former headquarters of the 13th US Air Force that Washington returned to the Manila government in 1992.

The 400-odd US troops have been "ordered to remain inside the base as a result of the shooting incidents," said Jaime Yambao, executive director of the Filipino government commission that oversees the manoeuvres.

VHP slams Vajpayee's apathy over temple-mosque row

AFP, New Delhi

Hardline Hindus on Friday accused Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of doing nothing to resolve a highly volatile dispute over plans to build a temple on the ruins of a mosque razed by Hindu zealots in 1992.

"We are not happy. We went to him (Vajpayee) with certain expectations and we came back empty handed," said Vishnu Hari Dalmiya, head of the right wing Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP or World Hindu Council).

"All the assurance we got was that he will ask the law minister to examine the legal and constitutional aspects of our demand," Dalmiya said in a television interview to be broadcast on Saturday.

In December 1992, the 16th century Babri Mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya was destroyed by Hindu zealots, sparking some of India's worst ever Hindu-Muslim violence in which some 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed.

Hindu hardliners like the VHP believe the mosque was built over the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram and have given the government until March 12 to give the green to their

plans to build a Ram temple over the remains of the destroyed mosque.

The disputed site is currently under the protection of the courts.

On Sunday, a delegation of VHP leaders called on the prime minister at his residence and demanded that they be given a large plot of land around the disputed site to allow preparations for the temple's construction.

During the meeting, the prime minister assured the activists that he would ask the law ministry to look into their demands.

But Dalmiya was clearly dissatisfied.

"All that he had to do was to convince the other side (Muslims) that their claim is unjustified and they should accept the position taken by the VHP," he said.

Dalmiya reiterated the VHP stand that the courts could not resolve the dispute.

"The court case is not progressing. It is already pending in the courts for the last 50 years and the way it is going on, it will take another 50 years," he said.

Bush speech close to war declaration: North Korea

AFP, Seoul

The North Korean government on Friday condemned what it called the "moral leprosy" of US President George W. Bush and said the communist state was powerfully equipped for any conflict.

In the first official reaction to Bush's outspoken State of the Union speech, a Pyongyang foreign ministry spokesman said: "We are sharply watching the disturbing moves of the United States that has pushed the situation to the brink of war."

North Korean state media said meanwhile that US warplanes had carried out scores of reconnaissance flights in recent weeks in preparation for an attack, stepping up the propaganda war with the United States.

The foreign ministry spokesman, quoted by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), said the United

States had become a terrorist target because of Bush.

He said the September 11 attacks and scandals such as the collapse of the US energy giant Enron were "entirely attributable to the unilateral and self-opinionated foreign policy, political immaturity and moral leprosy of the Bush administration".

In a speech to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, Bush labelled North Korea, Iran and Iraq an "axis of evil" and said North Korea was building weapons of mass destruction while letting its people starve.

He warned the three nations could become targets of the anti-terrorism war unless they end support for extremist groups and curtail the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The US Central Intelligence Agency later said in a report that

North Korea had remained an active seller of missiles last year to the Middle East and other tension zones.

But the Pyongyang spokesman said Bush's speech was "little short of declaring a war" and justified the communist North's anti-US stand.

"The prevailing situation where the US openly disclosed its intention to stifle the DPRK (North Korea) by force of arms makes us keenly realise once again what a just stand the DPRK took when it has followed the US with vigilance and what a far-sighted policy it has pursued to equip itself with powerful offensive and defensive means, tightening its belt."

Despite US declarations that it is still open to talks with North Korea, the speech has heightened anxiety in South Korea where Bush is due to visit next month.

US, Britain slam harsh Zimbabwe press law

AFP, Washington

The United States and Britain Thursday strongly condemned the passage by Zimbabwe's parliament of a tough law limiting the freedoms of the independent and foreign press ahead of crucial presidential elections.

The joint rebuke came after Secretary of State Colin Powell and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw met here and discussed possible punitive measures they might take against Zimbabwe.

"I wholly condemn the passage of these press laws," Straw said at a news conference with Powell after their talks.

"I find it almost impossible to comprehend how free and fair elections can be held in Zimbabwe when such laws have been passed."

Straw added passage of the law would be "a matter that will have to be weighed very carefully in the balance by the European Union to

decide whether the sanctions, which in principle were decided upon earlier this week, ought to be triggered."

EU foreign ministers on Monday gave Zimbabwe until February 3 to accept observers for the polls or face sanctions, including a suspension of EU aid, as well as travel bans and the freezing of assets for President Robert Mugabe and 20 others in his inner circle.

Powell echoed Straw's remarks and noted his own past criticism of Mugabe, adding Washington is "in close coordination with our British colleagues and with others as to what action might be appropriate as we move forward."

The media bill requires journalists to seek accreditation every year from a panel hand-picked by Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, which has wide-ranging powers of discretion.

Foreigners are already unable to work full-time in Zimbabwe.

The law forbids journalists from reporting on meetings of the cabinet or other government bodies and those who violate its provisions face stiff fines and up to two years in prison.

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) condemned the new law, calling it the latest attempt by Mugabe to retain power, following a recently approved security law and changes to electoral rules.

MDC deputies, however, neither voted nor resisted the media bill as it sailed through parliament, despite having engaged in a fierce five-hour debate before passage.

The tough new security law, muscled through parliament earlier this month, effectively outlawed political meetings and makes criticism of the president a criminal offence.