Musharraf sees al-Qaida revival in Afghanistan

Benazir to end up in jail if returns, infiltration into Kashmir could be on

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has warned the al-Qaida network may be regrouping in Afghanistan because of the weakness of the Afghan government, raising new questions about the success of the US-led war on terrorism.

In a wide-ranging 45-minute interview with AFP at his colonial-era residence outside Islamabad late Monday, a relaxed Musharraf dressed in a grey suit spoke frankly about the huge problems facing

He conceded Osama bin Laden could be alive and living in Pakistan's tribal areas, and calling for "better politics" he warned former premier Benazir Bhutto she

would be arrested if she returned home. Turning to India, he repeated his offer of dialogue while at the same time conceding that rogue Islamic militants could still be infiltrating into Indian-held territory. Musharraf said the failure of US-led

forces and the Afghan administration to establish control outside Kabul since the fall of the Taliban militia meant conditions were ripe for al-Qaida to re-group. "The writ of this Afghan government is not spreading all over Afghanistan, which it should have," the Pakistani military ruler

said, referring to the transitional govern-"This is tribal country tribal environment, warlords reigning supreme in various pockets, the same Taliban-cum-albecause this government does not exercise control."

Reviewing the campaign since the launch of US aerial bombardments last October Musharraf described the early phase as a "success".

But he guestioned the effectiveness tions by the now 10.000-strong coalition

"Initially it was certainly a success, definitely. When the Taliban government

fell, with that the al-Qaida fell," he said. But he said fighters from bin Laden's etwork were now "running helter-skelter between the borders, maybe coming

over to the Pakistan side."

Musharraf has played a lynchpin role in the US-led coalition campaign, executing a costly U-turn in his country's policy backing the fundamentalist Taliban militia, which ruled neighbouring Afghanistan for five years. In addition to abandoning the militia.

lusharraf provided logistical support for US-led operations, opening air corridors and providing air bases for coalition troops.

Musharraf said most of the leadership of al-Qaida and the Taliban were

either killed or forced to into hiding by the ferocity of the US campaign. Responding to reports bin Laden and Taliban spiritual leader Mullah Omar could be hiding in Pakistan's western border tribal belt, Musharraf said he

could not rule out such a scenario

But he said it was more likely that, if hey were alive, the pair were sheltering

Turning to domestic politics,



Pakistan as planned to contest Octobe

"She goes to jail" as a convicted absconder, the military ruler said when asked about Benazir's much vaunted

US launches drive against Taliban, al-Qaida

AFP, Islamabad

US forces have launched a largescale operation to hunt down al-Qaida and Taliban suspects in the troubled eastern Afghan province of Paktia, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported Tuesday.

The operation, continuing for the past two days, has targetted Zurmat district, 27 km west of the provincial capital Gardez, the Pakistan-based private news service said

US troops have started houseto-house searches to cleanse the area of Taliban and al-Qaida suspects, it said.

While ground troops conducted the search operation US military planes and helicopters circled overhead providing air cover, AIP said, quoting local residents.

The operation included fresh US troops, airlifted from Kabul two or three days ago to reinforce American forces already stationed at a base in the nearby Khost region, it said.

The US forces targetted Zurmat because the area is considered a base for pro-Taliban commander Maulawi Saifur Rehman Mansoor, the agency said.

3 killed in Israeli hunt for militants

Two Palestinians and an Israeli soldier were killed in separate incidents Tuesday, as the army continued its sweep for wanted militants while kicking off in Bethlehem a plan to withdraw from some reoccupied areas.

Israeli troops raided Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern West Bank, sparking clashes that left one Palestinian militant dead and at least three other people wounded, security sources on both sides said.

Issam Jayusi, a 27-year-old member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed offshoot of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah group, was killed in an exchange of fire, Palestinian security sources said.

The army recently killed the group's Tulkarem leader in one of its so-called "targeted killings".

Palestinian witnesses had said earlier that four Palestinians were wounded in the operation in Tulkarem, which the army says is a launchpad for suicide bombers to cross the "Green Line" and blow themselves up inside Israel.

A military spokesman said the army arrested at least 15 suspected militants there, as its tanks and armoured personnel carriers invaded the camp, backed by heli-

West Bank two months ago, the army has systematically cracked down on militants, but has also tried to deter attackers by rounding up their relatives and threatening them

with expulsion to the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, an Israeli soldier was killed by a sniper from the Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades near the Jewish settlement bloc of Gush Katif in the central Gaza Strip Tuesday morning, the army said.

The military wing of the radical Hamas group said in a statement faxed to AFP that the attack was in revenge for the killing by the army two weeks ago of one of their members, Hossam Hamdan.

Shortly after the incident, Iman Zorb, a 15-year-old Palestinian was shot dead by soldiers posted near the Jewish settlement of Morag in the southern Gaza Strip, Palestinian medical sources said.

The latest deaths bring to 2,451 the number of people killed since the intifada, or uprising, erupted on September 28, 2000, including 1.806 Palestinians and 602 Israelis.

Even as the Palestinian Authority was taking over security responsi bility for the West Bank town of Bethlehem, following two months of Israeli re-occupation, the army continued its operations only a few

Stoning death Nigerian mother loses appeal

REUTERS, Funtua

An Islamic court in northern Nigeria ruled Monday that a woman must face death by stoning according to Muslim law for having a child outside marriage.

The decision, upholding a verdict by a lower court, looks set to reignite international outrage against Nigeria and could stoke sectarian tensions in the country's largely Islamic north.

The judge said the stoning would not be carried out until Amina Lawal Kurami, 31, had weaned her eightmonth-old daughter Wasila, which may not be for another two years.

Holding the baby in her arms Kurami remained calm as the verdict was announced and was quickly whisked away by her lawyers who said they would appeal against the decision.

"We hereby uphold the judgement of the (lower) Bakori sharia court that decreed that you be sentenced to death by stoning," said court president Abdullahi Aliyu Katsina, to chants of "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greater) from the largely male audience.

Kurami was sentenced to death in March by a lower court in her state of Katsina, which like a number of others in northern Nigeria has adopted Islamic Sharia law.

20 troops killed in ambush in Tripura

AFP, Guwahati

At least 20 Indian paramilitary soldiers were killed and four critically wounded Tuesday when tribal militants ambushed a patrol in the northeastern state of Tripura, a police spokesman said.

The soldiers from the Tripura State Rifles were ambushed at Amarendra Nagar, 60 km southeast of the state's provincial capital Agartala, at about 9.00 am (9: 30 am BST).

The patrol was hit by suspected separatist militants belonging to the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), the police spokesman said.

"The patrol vehicle was on its way to Agartala carrying some sick soldiers when a big group of NLFT militants triggered grenade blasts and opened fire with automatic weapons, killing 19 on the spot," the spokesman told AFP by telephone from Agartala

Snap polls may jeopardise

President tones down her anti-PM rhetoric

AFP. Colombo

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga Tuesday pleaded with her cohabitation government against calling a snap election, as her own executive powers were threatened by a hostile parliament.

Kumaratunga in a letter to parlia-

It was in sharp contrast to her earlier statements hinting that the government of her arch-rival. Premier Ranil Wickremesinghe, will be sacked when it completes one

December 5

"In the present context, the dissolution of parliament could have Kumaratunga said.

ernment issued an ultimatum to Kumaratunga to agree to constitutional amendments to take away her power to sack parliament after one year in office or face fresh elections

to sack the administration undermined political stability which was essential for the success of the peace bid aimed at ending the separatist war which has claimed over 60.000 lives

"It would be unrealistic to expect any progress in the (peace) talks without a minimum degree of political stability," Constitutional Affairs Minister G. L. Peiris said.

plan to head home after four years in self-

Moreover, rogue Islamic militants

may still be crossing the Line of Control

dividing the disputed Himalayan region of

Kashmir into Indian-held territory,

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharra

"The possibility is there...it's like the Afghan border, only much worse," General Musharraf told AFP in an exclu-

sive interview at his official residence

Yes, sympathisers. A possibility of

individual small groups going across is there, because when 700,000 troops of

Indians can't block the borders, how can

However Musharraf, who is also

Pakistan's army chief, said there had

been no large-scale or government-sponsored movement of Islamic rebels

over the de-facto border since he

pledged to halt the incursions earlier this

year.

"There's no massive activity, no

government-sponsored activity," he said.

"The possibility (of incursions by small

individuals) cannot be ruled out because

this is a porous border, it's a very very difficult terrain. The possibility exists."

fighting Indian rule in the disputed region

is at the heart of the high stakes eight-

month military stand-off between the

Incursions by Pakistani-based rebels

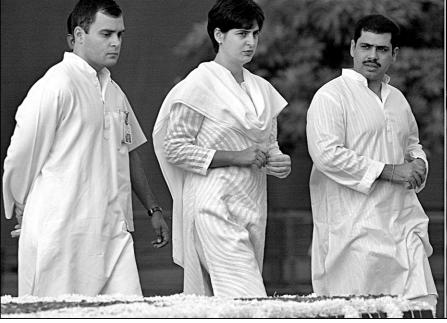
they expect us to block the borders?'

"Militants going across (a possibility)?

outside Islamabad late Monday.

very vital amendments to the constitution in the next two weeks.

hoping to amend a statute which provides for the sacking of MPs if they violate party discipline at voting





Son Rahul Gandhi, daughter Priyanka Vadera and her husband Robert Vadera pay tribute to father and former prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi while Congress President Sonia Gandhi offers flowers at the memorial for her husband on the occasion of the 58th anniversary of his birth in New Delhi on Tuesday. Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated on May 21, 1991 in Tamil Nadu by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide bombers.

Bollywood stars shine with Rajiv awards

PTI, Mumbai

Bollywood (Western Metropolis of India) superstar Shahrukh Khan and leading heroines Aishwarva Rai and Kaiol were presented Raiiv Gandhi awards at a function here

The awards, instituted five years ago by Mumbai Pradesh Youth Congress (MPYC), are given every vear to personalities for their excellent contribution in various fields like media, entertainment, industry, science and sports.

Other awardees included Adi Godrej, Tarun Tejpal, Dilip Prabhavalkar, Ekta Kapoor, K Mallaeshwari, Piyush Pandey, Manish Malhotra and 16-year-old Udaipur-based Shaleen Harlalka, who has developed a technique to detect land mines.

At the instance of the demanding crowd, Shahrukh rendered dialoques from his latest blockbuster

peace effort: Chandrika

mentary Speaker Joseph Michael Perera argued that an early general election could jeopardise the ongoing Norwegian-backed efforts to strike a peace deal with Tamil

unexpected and unforeseeable effects on the peace process and jeopardise its beneficial results, Her remarks came as the gov-

The government said her power

"That is why we will bring two

He said the government was

The proposed conscience bill would mean that opposition MPs would be able to vote for Wickremesinghe's party. This could give the ruling party a two-thirds majority needed to check-mate the

US mulls attack on Iraqi arms site

Bush plays down 'war council' on Iraq

cussed a possible covert attack on a suspected chemical weapons operation believed to be run by members of al Qaeda in northern Iraq, U.S. television networks reported on Monday

ABC News and CNN said the

chemical weapons program was being run under the protection of the radical Kurdish group Ansar al Islam in a part of Iraq which President Saddam Hussein does not control. "The CIA and the Pentagon

began planning a covert operation into northern Iraq to destroy what appeared to be a budding chemical weapons laboratory several years ago, but late last week, the president called it off." ABC said. CNN reported no final decision

had been made on whether to act against the chemical weapons operation.

The White House declined comment on the reports.

the president," said White House National Security Council spokesman Michael Anton. "We don't confirm whether something was, is,

The ABC report said the United

States had been monitoring a small

or might be a military target.

group of al Qaeda operatives for weeks as they experimented with poison gas and deadly toxins, killing barnyard animals and at least one However, officials concluded the operation was so small and crude that in the final analysis it was not

worth risking American lives to go

after it and not worth the outcry that

might follow any U.S. operation

inside Iraq. ABC said. The network quoted U.S. officials as saying there was no evidence Saddam's government had any knowledge of the al Qaeda activities

The United States blames

policy, we don't discuss whether Laden and his al Qaeda network for Wednesday with Vice President ng was or was not briefed to the Sent 11 airplane attacks on New York and Washington that killed more than 3,000 people. Separately, CNN has broadcast

> which appear to show suspected al Qaeda members testing chemical weapons on dogs. The White House said on Monday U.S. officials will examine

> the tapes to see if they contain

videotapes obtained in Afghanistan

useful intelligence information. Meanwhile, the White House Monday dampened speculation a meeting between President Bush and his top national security advisers would be a war council on Irag. portraying it instead as a "big picture" defence policy and budget

planning session. But White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said Bush remained committed to removing Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. "Time is not on our side." he said.

Bush is scheduled to meet at his

"As a matter of White House Saudi-born militant Osama bin Crawford, Texas, ranch on Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, as well as national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and Gen Richard Myers, the chairman of the

> Joint Chiefs of Staff. The White House said the talks would focus on reforming the military's weapons, strategy and finances, and developing a system to defend against a missile attack on the United States. "This is an over-the-horizon, big picture look at the needs of the Defence Department," Fleischer told report-

ers in Crawford Bush has made ousting Saddam a top priority, and the world is watching closely for signs of action in what critics say would be a dangerous precedent. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has called such action an "adventure."

Voyagers edge to solar system

REUTERS, Washington

The little spaceships that could --NASA's twin Voyagers -- celebrate their 25th year on Tuesday by speeding toward the very edge of our solar system, carrying messages from Mozart, Bach and Chuck Berry.

The first Voyager was launched Aug. 20, 1977, and was expected to take a quick four-year tour of Jupiter and Saturn, send back some data, and retire. The other launched Sept. 5, 1977, with a similar mission but a different route. Instead, the doughty robotic

probes have kept going and going and going, snapping never-before seen images of the outer planets, discovering volcanoes on Jupiter's moon lo and a massive atmospheric storm on Neptune. Vovagers are far beyond the

known planets now, but still sending back data as they head toward interstellar space, testing the limits of human-made spacecraft. But even if the Voyagers can no longer send back data, they still carry elaborate postcards from

Earth, fashioned in haste by a team led by the late cosmologist Carl Sagan, to convey to any extraterrestrial travelers what earthly life is like. Identical golden disks are

fastened to each of the Voyagers.

engraved with ambient sounds of

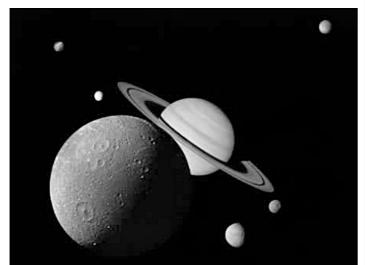
Iullaby, wind and water -- as well as images, written greetings from former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, and spoken greetings in languages ranging from

ancient Akkadian to modern Wu. The golden records also include 90 minutes of music, running the Brandenburg Concerto and Mozart's The Magic Flute to rock icon Berry's version of his own "Johnny B. Goode."

Bollywood star Shahrukh Khan (L) and actress Kajol Devgan wave to the audience during the Rajiv Gandhi awards

ceremony in Mumbai on Monday. The awards were instituted in the memory of the late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi

There are also symbolic descriptions of the spaceships' origins and instructions on how the records are to be played.



SHAH RUKH KHAN

and are presented to young leaders for their outstanding achievements in their respective fields.

The little spaceships, NASA's twin Voyagers, celebrate their 25th year on Tuesday by speeding toward the edge of our solar system carrying messages from Mozart, Bach, and Chuck Berry. This is an image montage of the Saturnian system taken by the Voyager probe spacecraft.

Aid workers rush relief as Asia battles floods

AFP, Hong Kong

KAJOL DEVGAN

Relief workers Tuesday battled to deliver aid to millions affected by Asia's devastating floods, as monsoon rains and storms continued to wreak havoc across the region.

While tropical storm Vongfong

skirted Vietnam, giving disaster

response teams breathing space to reach flooded regions, it dumped fresh rain on China, where an estimated 900 people have so far died in floods this summer. Flood waters from both countries were also moving south towards Cambodia's Mekong

Delta, threatening surrounding crops and villages, officials in Phnom Penh said. Chinese officials said the massive Dongting Lake, a buffer for the mighty Yangtze River, had surged above danger levels and could pose a threat to vast tracts of farm-

living around it. Chinese officials said there that if the lake were to breach its banks, areas around it could be hit by massive floods comparable to those of 1998 that left some 4,000

land and some 10 million people

"The lake is above warning marks in a number of places," an official from the Hunan Anti-Flood Bureau headquarters in the provincial capital of Changsha said. Up to 40,000 officials and work-

embankments around the 2,800 square kilometre (1,070 square mile) lake. Water levels in the traditional danger spot of Chenglingji, where Yangtze exits the lake, were

ers have been sent to fortify

already above warning marks At 8:00 am (0000 GMT) the waters were almost a metre and a half (five feet) above 32-metre (106-foot) flood warning marks, said an official at the anti-flood

bureau of nearby Changde city. The China Daily estimated that more than 10 million people and some 667,000 hectares (1.67 million acres) of farmland around the lake were under threat. The death toll from devastating

floods and landslides in China's

southwestern Yunnan province

meanwhile has hit 231, state media

It said that some 21 million

people have been affected in the

Meteorologists warned that Vongfong, which hit the southern province of Guangdong on Monday, was expected to dump additional rain over Hunan province as it moves across the country.

teams on Tuesday cleared roads to allow vehicles to reach flooded regions after Vongfong spared the Twenty-seven people died in flash floods in the mountainous

north in four days of flooding that

In Vietnam, disaster reponse

swept away houses, bridges and roads and triggered landslides. Most of the deaths were in the north-central province of Ha Giang, bordering China, in what is considered Vietnam's worst flooding in six

"The weather is good and we hope it will continue to get better now that the tropical storm no longer threatens us," Pham Ba Khoat, head of Ha Giang's Flood and Storm Control Committee, told

