

## KSA urges US to avoid a new Vietnam in Iraq

AFP, Dubai

Billionaire Saudi businessman Prince Al-Walid bin Talal bin Abdul Aziz on Tuesday urged the United States to avoid getting dragged into another Vietnam in Iraq.

"I am one of the biggest investors in the United States, if not the biggest one, and I say this as a very close friend and ally of the United States," he said in an interview with CNN.

"We don't want to have another Vietnam; we can't afford another Vietnam," stressed Walid, a nephew of King Fahd.

He rejected criticism of Saudi Arabia's public stance against a new war to oust President Saddam Hussein.

"It's the same position of almost all Arab countries, of almost all the world, that is to give more time to Iraq to abide by UN resolutions and not to attack.

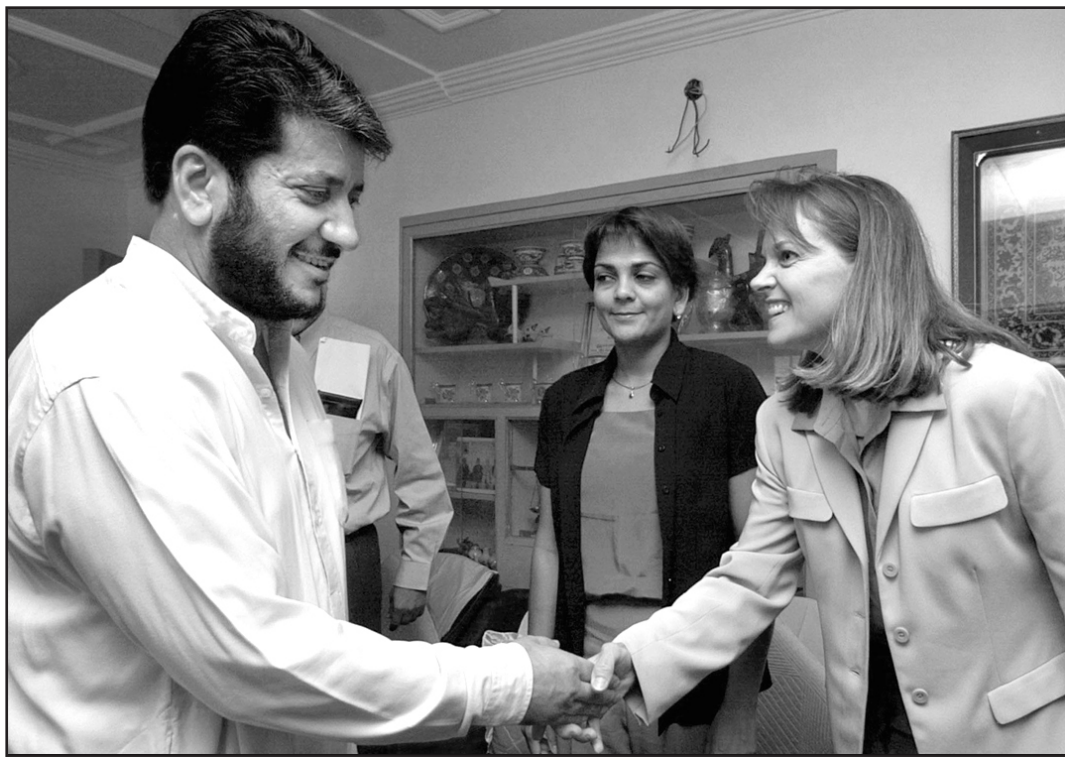


PHOTO: AFP

Lisa Curtis (R), the senior advisor to US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca, shakes hands with Kashmiri separatist leader and Democratic Freedom Party (DFP) chairman, Shabir Shah (L), ahead of a meeting in Srinagar on Tuesday. Curtis held a series of meetings with leading separatists in the disputed region of Kashmir ahead of the four-phase elections for the state assembly which begins September 16.

# US in persuasion to bring Kashmir rebels to polls

AFP, Srinagar

The United States on Tuesday made a last-ditch attempt to persuade Kashmiri separatists to take part in forthcoming state polls, with a senior American diplomat continuing a series of meetings with rebel leaders.

However the American delegation's chances of success looked slim with leaders opposed to Indian rule in the region insisting they would participate only if they are "linked to the resolution of the Kashmir problem".

The separatists are pushing for a self-rule referendum or for dialogue on the future of Kashmir involving Kashmiris, India and Pakistan.

Lisa Curtis, senior advisor to US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca, has been holding a series of meetings over the past two days with leading separatists in Kashmir.

She has been bringing them the message that state polls are "an opportunity for the separatists to establish peace" one leader told AFP.

Similar efforts in 1996 by the then US ambassador to India Frank Wisner failed to persuade separatist leaders to contest the state polls.

Curtis met with Abdul Gani Bhat, the chairman of Kashmir's main separatist alliance, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference on Monday.

She also met Molvi Umar Farooq and Javed Mir — two other senior Hurriyat leaders.

On Tuesday Curtis held a closed-door meeting with senior separatist leader Shabir Shah, whose Democratic Freedom Party (DFP) is not part of the Hurriyat.

"We urged them to see an opportunity in these elections," Curtis told reporters after meeting Farooq.

Curtis said she told the separatist leaders the elections were a chance to establish peace in the disputed Himalayan region, where a 13-year Muslim insurgency has left 36,500 people dead, according to officials.

Nearly a dozen Muslim rebel groups are engaged in the anti-Indian rebellion in Kashmir, which is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed by both.

Most of the groups want to secede Muslim-majority Kashmir from India and join it with its Islamic neighbour Pakistan.

Militants have called for a boycott of the four-

phase polls, which start on September 16, and have threatened participants with death.

Separatist organisations, including the Hurriyat — a conglomerate of 23 groups — have ruled out their participation in the polls, which have been marred in the past by allegations of vote-rigging.

"We are not averse to holding of elections in Kashmir," Farooq told AFP.

"But if the polls are being held, as in the past, for electing governments, the exercise will serve no purpose and we will not be part of it," added Farooq, who has served as the chairman of Hurriyat and is also Kashmir's "Mirwaiz" or chief priest.

"We (the Hurriyat leaders) will take part in polls that are linked to the resolution of the Kashmir problem," he said.

Farooq, who held a 90-minute meeting with Curtis on Monday, said the United States saw the polls as "an opportunity for the separatists to establish peace" in the revolt-wracked state.

"We have made our position clear that any polls linked to the resolution of Kashmir issue will be welcomed by the separatists.

# Cheney lays out case for pre-emptive Iraq action

## Bush needs lawmakers' approval for attack: Congress

REUTERS, AP, Nashville

Vice President Dick Cheney on Monday laid out the White House's case for pre-emptive action against Iraq, citing mortal danger to the United States and labelling critics as guilty of "wilful blindness."

Cheney used a gathering of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to reject fears, expressed publicly by some senior members of his own Republican Party and others, that such action would undermine the global U.S. war on terrorism and mark a radical new departure for American foreign policy.

Citing what he said was the danger that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction could fall into the hands of terrorists, Cheney said America could not afford to sit by idly. It

would, if necessary, fight a war of liberation, not of conquest.

The risk of inaction is far greater than the risk of action," he said, in remarks clearly designed to win over public opinion at home and address skepticism abroad over military action to oust Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

"And the entire world must know that we will take whatever action is necessary to defend our freedom and our security."

The vice president, who served as secretary of defence during the 1991 Gulf War, said Iraq's development of advanced weaponry, its refusal to allow UN inspectors to monitor its weapons programs and its general hostility had produced "an imperative for pre-emptive action."

"What we must not do is in the

face of a mortal threat is to give in to wishful thinking or wilful blindness. We will not simply look away, hope for the best and leave the matter for some future administration to resolve."

Cheney's remarks, a strong rebuke to recent words of caution several Republican Party luminaries in recent weeks, came as the administration asserted its legal authority to attack Iraq without advance approval from Congress.

Spokesman Ari Fleischer said White House lawyers had concluded President Bush had authority under the Constitution and subsequent acts of Congress to take military action against Iraq, without special congressional approval.

But he held out the possibility the president would consult Congress all the same. "The president, aware

of this determination, if he makes a decision about the use of force, will make the decision about a congressional vote on more than legal factors alone," Fleischer said.

AP adds: Legal questions aside, lawmakers say President Bush needs to seek Congress' approval before sending American troops to attack Iraq because it's the right thing to do. Vice President Dick Cheney warned of grave consequences from not acting quickly against Saddam Hussein.

"I don't play this game so much on what's legal and what's not legal," Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., said of a U.S. attack on Iraq. "If the president is going to commit this nation to war, he'd better have the support of the Congress and the American people with him."

## Benazir sees pre-polls rigging on in Pakistan

PTI, London

Alleging that the military regime in Islamabad was resorting to "pre-election rigging", former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has urged the Commonwealth to prevail upon President Pervez Musharraf to hold "free and fair elections" under a neutral administration.

"I have been to the Commonwealth Secretary General and my party has been in touch with the Commonwealth through Islamabad also," the two-time Prime Minister said.

"There is pre-election rigging was taking place. The Government Houses of Punjab and Sindh have been turned into campaign Headquarters against the Pakistan People's Party. One of my demands is to have a neutral administration in place so that there is level playing field," she said.

Bhutto demanded that the ballot count should be done in the pres-

ence of representatives of candidates as in other Commonwealth countries including India and England.

"Unless the vote count is changed, I doubt this election will have anything to do with fairness or impartiality or neutrality," she told PTI in an interview here last evening.

"I hear that our candidates are being approached by police and Colonels of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. They are being asked not to file papers under the PPP or face NAB (National Accountability Bureau) cases or face increased utility bill and they have been told clearly that we are not going to allow PPP to win, that the elections are pre-judged and the electoral seats are pre-decided."

"All these activities are contrary to the public claims of General Musharraf that he is going to hold fair elections," Bhutto alleged.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian policeman passes a burning building in a bus station in Srinagar on Tuesday after a policeman was shot dead by suspected militants. Witnesses said police personnel allegedly set fire to the building in retaliation for the killing of their colleague.

## Australian aborigines get their land back

AFP, Barrow Creek

The first land lost by the Kaytetye people of central Australia was returned to them Tuesday in a ceremony in which the queen's representative apologised for a massacre here 130 years ago.

Governor-General Peter Hollingworth flew with his wife, Ann, to this sacred, sunbleached spot 290 kilometres (180 miles) north of Alice Springs, to officiate in his first land hand-back as Australia's head of state.

The 12.5 square kilometre (five square mile) area claimed under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act area was the first piece of land taken from its traditional owners and is the first to be handed back.

It surrounds the historic Overland Telegraph Station, which became the first permanent European settlement in the area in 1872.

## China calls for end to US sanction over missile sale

AFP, Beijing

China on Tuesday urged Washington to lift a series of sanctions imposed for alleged weapons proliferation, only hours after a senior US envoy left Beijing with a key deal on mutual anti-terrorism efforts.

US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage left for Tokyo early Tuesday pledging Washington's efforts to cut the flow of funding to Muslim separatists in China's west-ern regions.

In an apparent return concession — although neither side mentioned a link — China agreed to address US criticisms over missile proliferation, a major source of tensions between the countries in recent years.

The deals were announced during Armitage's visit that included talks with Vice President Hu Jintao, China's likely heir to President Jiang Zemin, as well as other senior leaders.

But soon after Armitage left, China's top arms control official demanded that the mutual pledges should be followed by further US action.

Liu Jieyi, director general of arms control and disarmament at China's foreign ministry, urged Washington to lift sanctions including a ban on the launch of US-made satellites by Chinese rockets.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian supporters sing anti-Israeli slogans at the Nasrec expo' centre in Johannesburg, the venue of the Civil Society Global Forum on Monday. South African police ordered yelling Jewish students out of a meeting here of Palestinian delegates to the non-governmental Global Forum, a parallel event to the UN Earth Summit. The Palestinians were mounting a campaign to free Marwan Barghout — a Palestinian leader detained by Israel.

# US braces for terror strike

## Al-Qaida preparing new attacks: Ridge

AFP, Washington

One year after the tragedy of September 11, the United States braces for a possible new terror onslaught, convinced it is better armed to deal with the terrorists but also aware that it cannot thwart all their plans.

"There is no question in my mind. We will be attacked again," said former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) counterterrorism chief Dale Watson, who recently resigned his post.

Members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terror network are still operating in the United States and preparing new attacks, the Director of Homeland Security Tom Ridge said in a BBC interview Monday.

At the end of June, Central Intelligence Agency chief George Tenet briefed the US Congress on how the nation's security chiefs plan to use a combination of espionage, infiltration and destruction to shield the nation with a strategic safety net.

But US authorities are maintaining a veil of secrecy over their successes in the battle against the al-Qaida network and its leader, bin

Laden, blamed by Washington for last year's deadly kamikaze strikes on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

Both the CIA and the FBI were criticised for not predicting the attacks, but now say they are working together better, have hired more Arabic speakers and that information gleaned by the US military in Afghanistan contributes to preventing new attacks.

But "no one can be secure against this sort of thing. You cannot totally prevent it but you can make it more difficult for terrorists, surely," argued Marc Burgess of the Centre for Defence Information think tank.

"Today, America is less vulnerable, the level of awareness is up, concrete things are done. To what extent are they effective? I'm not in a position to say," he added.

Information gleaned in Afghanistan has shown al-Qaida has practised using chemical weapons, undetectable explosives and urban warfare.

Strategists at the Pentagon, quoted by the Time magazine, estimate that even if al-Qaeda's has been severely disrupted and its

leaders forced to flee, its members will regroup and plan new attacks against the United States. The organisation clearly has scouted a wide range of targets — maps of US nuclear facilities were found in al-Qaida hideouts in Afghanistan.

The Americans also fear the explosion of a radioactive "dirty bomb", which can be made by wrapping radioactive material around conventional explosives.

Water reservoirs and food stocks are under close surveillance. Authorities have put tighter control on trucks that could be laden with bombs and considerably increased security at airports.

Meanwhile, members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terror network are still operating in the United States and preparing new attacks, the Director of Homeland Security Tom Ridge said in an interview broadcast here Monday.

Ridge, who took up his post last year in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, said America had become much safer since then but warned, on BBC radio, that al-Qaida cells are still waiting to strike.

## Veerappan threatens to behead Nagappa

AFP, Bangalore

India's most-wanted bandit has kidnapped a former state government minister and is threatening to behead him, police sources said Tuesday.

M. Veerappan, who hit the headlines two years ago when he abducted a movie star and held him captive in a forest for three months, said in a taped message that he would list his demands soon and if they were not fulfilled he would kill H. Nagappa, a former minister in the southern state of Karnataka.

"On earlier occasions, Krishna (the current chief minister of Karnataka) and Karunanidhi (former chief minister of the state of Tamil Nadu) have deceived me and this time I think you will coolly agree to my demands which will be presented to you in my next tape," the tape said according to the Times of India.

"Any misdemeanour on your part will be dealt with seriously," the brigand was quoted as saying.

## Verdict on Pak gang-rape postponed

AFP, Dera Ghazi Khan

The verdict in the trial of 14 men accused over a gang-rape case which shocked Pakistan has been postponed until Saturday.

Elite police commandos had ringed the court here ahead of Tuesday's expected verdict after a month-long hearing into the case which created an international outcry and shamed this Islamic nation of 145 million people.

"The judge has fixed August 31 to announce the verdict in this case," public prosecutor Ifkhar Ahmed told reporters outside the court.

Prosecutors have demanded the death penalty for 14 men, including members of a tribal council accused of ordering the rape of 30-year-old Mukhtiar Mai and the four men who allegedly carried it out.

Judge Zulfikar Ali Malik hinted he would announce the verdict on Tuesday after the prosecution and defence wrapped up their arguments on Saturday.

# Pakistan scrutinising nomination papers

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani election officials on Tuesday began scrutinising nomination papers for candidates in October's general election, with public interest focused on the applications of two former prime ministers banned from politics by the military government.

An advocate filed nomination papers for exiled two-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his wife Khusroo Nawaz and younger brother Shabbaz Sharif in their home city Lahore, the capital of Punjab province, late Monday, according to party sources.

Supporters of another former two-time prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, who has been living in self-imposed exile since a corruption conviction in 1998, said she had already filed nomination papers from her home town of Larkana in southern Sindh province last week.

The two leaders are seeking to contest elections in defiance of decrees imposed by President

Pervez Musharraf to prevent them from participating in the October 10 polls.

Members of the Sharif family have been living in Saudi Arabia since they were exiled in December 2000 under a clandestine deal between Musharraf's military regime and the Saudi government.

Musharraf, who seized power in a bloodless coup in October 1999 and appointed himself president in June last year, has vowed not to let Sharif family members return to the country in breach of the agreement, the details of which he has said cannot be disclosed for reasons of confidentiality.

But a spokesman for Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) said the filing of his nomination papers should put an end to what he termed "government-sponsored speculation" that the former prime minister did not want to come back.

"Nawaz Sharif is eager and ready to come back to his mother-

land and play his role in the country's politics for the restoration of the constitution and democracy," Siddiqui Farooq told AFP.

He said there was no agreement or deal with Musharraf which barred Sharif from returning home.

"The only thing that Musharraf has said publicly is that he would not let Sharif or his brother return to the country and contest the elections."

"Musharraf knows he is rootless and if Nawaz Sharif returns people will rise against his unpopular and dictatorial rule."

The self-declared president has also barred Bhutto and Sharif's candidacies under a new decree banning ex-premiers from a third term in office.

Musharraf has said that Bhutto, who has lived in Dubai and London since leaving Pakistan, would be arrested if she returns as she faces around a dozen more corruption-related charges and has been convicted of "absconding" from justice.

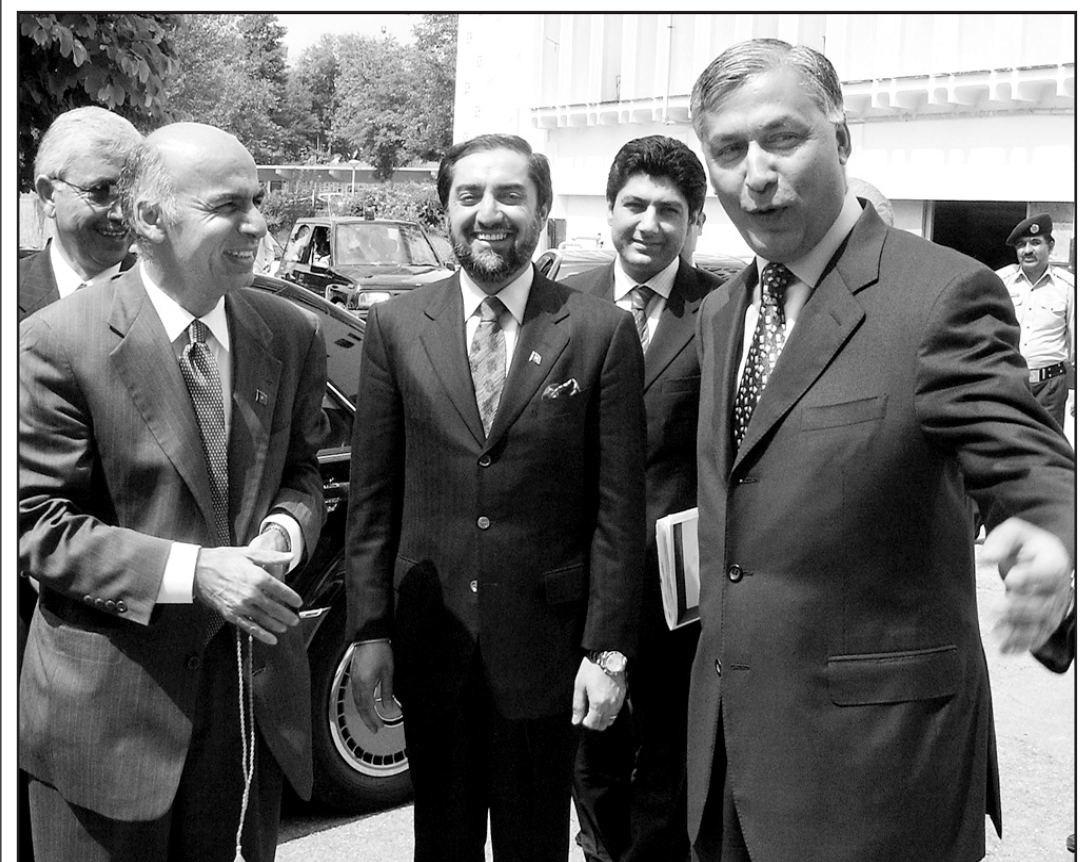


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz (R) escorts his Afghan counterpart Ashraf Ghani (L) and Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah (C) for talks at the finance ministry in Islamabad on Tuesday. Pakistan and Afghanistan revived a joint ministerial commission to promote economic ties between the two countries.