

## Pressure mounts on US, Iraq amid fear of strike

Europe seeks to head off attack

REUTERS, AFP, Cairo

Muslim and European states kept up pressure on Washington on Thursday to avert an attack on Iraq but Vice President Dick Cheney brushed aside their concerns and hammered home the case for preemptive action.

Islamic countries said an attack, which Washington says is justified by President Saddam Hussein's development of weapons of mass destruction and links with terrorism, could unleash fresh turmoil by widening a gulf between Muslims and the West.

European countries put the emphasis on resuming U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq ordered after the 1991 Gulf War, but, in a subtle shift led by Belgium, they reminded Iraq to abide by U.N. resolutions or risk the consequences.

Some analysts say U.S. allies in Europe, which have long expressed concerns over possible U.S. action, may now be turning to the United Nations to get political cover for eventually falling in behind an American war on Iraq.

French President Jacques Chirac warned strongly against a US go-it-alone attack, but sources close to him said concerns that Baghdad might

build weapons of mass destruction meant the UN Security Council might ultimately agree to use force.

Iraq joined the debate Thursday by saying there was no point in allowing UN weapons inspectors back into the country, because an "insane, criminal" U.S. administration was determined to attack and oust Saddam Hussein.

Cheney, speaking to Korean War veterans in San Antonio, Texas, repeated charges from Monday that the Iraqi leader posed a "mortal danger" to the United States.

AFP adds: President George W. Bush will consult with the US Congress and Washington's allies before attacking Iraq, Vice President Dick Cheney promised, as European leaders sought to end the deadlock with Baghdad over arms inspections and Iraqi officials rallied supporters.

Cheney's promise came Thursday after days of tough rhetoric that led many observers, especially in Europe, to conclude Washington was prepared to act unilaterally to oust Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, despite Bush's promise to the contrary.

"I am confident that he will, as he said he would, consult widely with our Congress, with our friends and allies around the world before deciding on a course of action," Cheney told a gathering of Korean War veterans here.

## Swede charged with attempted hijacking

AFP, Vaesteraas

A Swede of Tunisian origin with a pistol packed in his baggage was charged Friday with attempted hijacking following his arrest as he prepared to board a flight from Sweden to Birmingham, England via London, police said.

"He is suspected of preparing a hijacking and breaking the law on weapons," the police said in a statement.

Police said only the man was 29 and had a criminal record including theft and assault, but would not disclose details of the case. The arrest took place Thursday at Vaesteraas airport in eastern Sweden.

Twenty other people including two children, who were due to take Ryanair flight FR-685 with 189 passengers on board, and some of whom had already boarded the plane were also arrested and questioned.



A Chinese man carries vegetables and wades across the flooded doorway near the Yangtze River waterfront in Nanjing in China's eastern province of Jiangsu on Thursday.

## US backs off from Sept 11 flight ban

REUTERS, Washington

The Bush administration doused a military proposal on Thursday to bar foreign-owned airlines from flying into and out of New York and Washington on Sept. 11 and 12 as part of tighter security for the anniversary of the hijack attacks.

Seeking to quell a controversy that boiled over earlier in the day, a Transportation Department official said limiting some flights involving a mix of aircraft remained an option, but the draft proposal advocated by military authorities to restrict only foreign-owned carriers was not viable.

"One thing we will not have is international carriers being banned

and allowing U.S. airlines to fly," said Len Alcivar, a Transportation Department spokesman.

"We're opposed to the international flight restrictions," he said.

Alcivar said the administration was concerned about violating international aviation agreements by only imposing restrictions on international service.

U.S. domestic and international flights were banned in the days immediately after the Sept. 11 attacks by four hijacked jetliners -- two each from American Airlines and United Airlines -- that killed more than 3,000 people.

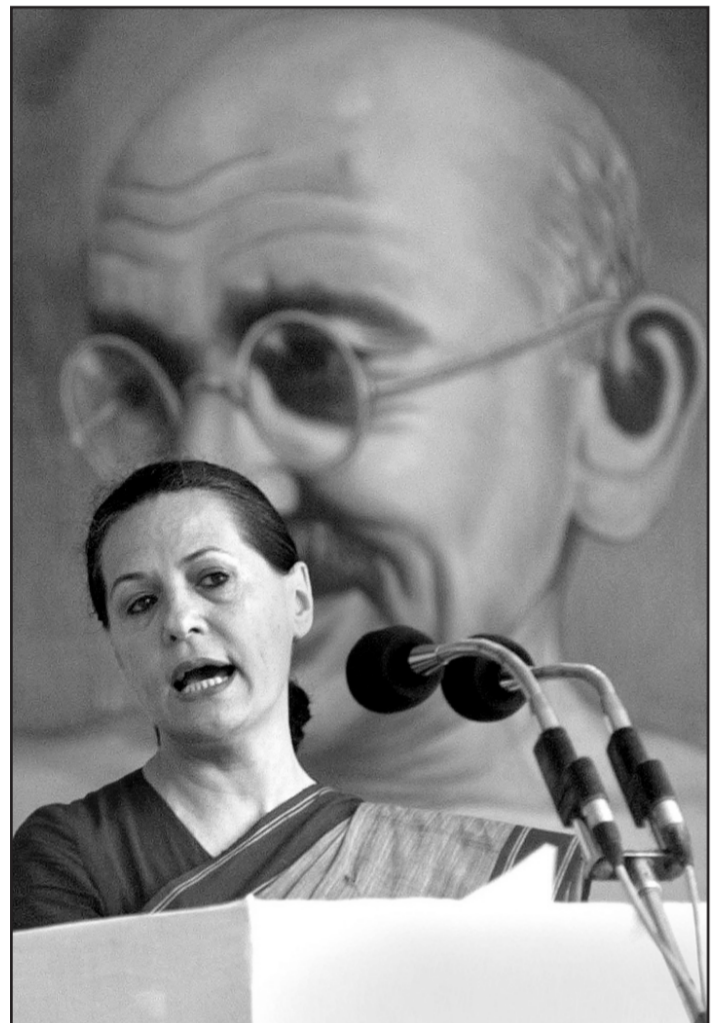
A meeting between transportation and military officials was set for Friday where a decision on flight

restrictions would be finalised.

Alcivar would not say what flight restrictions, if any, might emerge. But he stressed that no final decision had been made as of Thursday.

Some U.S. carriers already plan to reduce domestic operations on Sept. 11.

Under a proposal that emerged on Thursday and was advocated by the Defence Department and the joint US-Canadian North American Aerospace Defence Command, international passenger and cargo carriers that would normally operate within a 30-mile radius of New York and Washington would be prohibited during much of the peak morning and evening travel times on Sept. 11 and 12.



India's main opposition leader and Congress Party president, Sonia Gandhi, delivers a speech in front of a billboard depicting Mahatma Gandhi during the Congress National Seminar on the problems of lower cast peoples in New Delhi on Friday. Sonia expressed her party's inability to reduce poverty and unemployment in the country without a majority in the parliament.

## Talks on future of Kashmir after polls

Election a contest among pro-India parties

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian government will initiate dialogue on the future of Kashmir with elected representatives and other organisations after local elections in the disputed Himalayan state next month, a senior government official said Friday.

"The elections in (Indian) Kashmir are a milestone for the Indian government," the official told AFP, on condition of anonymity.

"We do not know now who the people will choose and who the representatives will be. So we will wait till after the elections to find out who the real representatives are and the prime minister will talk to them," the official said.

Indian Kashmir is set to go to polls in four phases beginning September 16.

The official's comments come a day after talks between a private committee backed by the Indian government and moderate separatist leader Shabir Shah in New Delhi.

The Kashmir Committee, headed by former law minister Ram Jethmalani, was formed earlier this month to persuade Kashmiri separatist groups to participate in the polls.

But even after several rounds of talks, no Kashmiri separatist leader has filed his nomination to contest the polls, although two members of the separatist People's Conference

resigned to contest the polls as independents.

After his meeting with Shah on Thursday, Jethmalani said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had "assured us that the Indian government will continue the talks with all elements... after the polls."

On Friday, the government official pointed out that Vajpayee in a speech to mark India's 55th Independence Day on August 15 had promised to "talk to elected representatives and other organisations."

Meanwhile, with Kashmir's Muslim separatists shunning next month's elections in disputed Kashmir, the balloting will see a contest among parties aligned to India, analysts say.

Kashmir, ravaged by a 13-year Muslim insurgency which has so far claimed 36,500 lives, is set to elect a new legislative assembly in a four-phased voting between September 16 and October 8.

The Indian government had been trying to woo the separatists, who are opposed to New Delhi's rule in the Himalayan region, to take part but so far the efforts have only managed to win over a party of former militants.

A last-ditch effort by Lisa Curtis, senior advisor to the US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca, earlier this week failed to persuade the separatists to back the India-sponsored vote.

## Shabir Shah takes U-turn, says no to Kashmir polls

PTI, New Delhi

Shortly after announcing that the Democratic Freedom Party would participate in the coming Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir if his seven conditions were met, Shabir Shah on Friday made a volte face and ruled out his party's participation in the polls.

"Let me make it clear that we are not participating in the forthcoming Assembly elections," Shah told reporters after meeting Congress president Sonia Gandhi here.

His remarks came shortly after a joint declaration issued after a marathon meeting between him and the Kashmir Committee, headed by Ram Jethmalani, said "...The DFP led by Shabir Shah has in principle agreed to participate in the elections."

## Sept 11 TV viewing could be hazardous to your health

AFP, New York

Watching television on September 11 could seriously damage your health.

That is the warning emerging from two recent scientific studies which explore the possible link between repeated exposure to graphic television images of last year's attacks on the United States and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Both studies point to a correlation between the prevalence of PTSD or depression and the amount of time spent watching television coverage during and immediately after the attacks.

They also suggest that families - especially those directly affected by the attacks - should exercise caution concerning the blanket television coverage planned for the first anniversary of the September 11 strikes.

## Tribesmen blockade Pak-Afghan road link

AFP, Peshawar

Around 1,500 armed tribesmen protesting electricity charges have blocked a major highway passing through the famous Khyber Pass in Pakistan's lawless northwest, severing the main artery into Afghanistan, witnesses said Friday.

The dispute flared after local authorities in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) began cutting power supplies after announcing they would begin installing electricity meters in private homes in the semi-autonomous region where the local people are known for their warrior tradition and fierce independence.

## Koreas agree to resume rail link

AFP, Seoul

South and North Korea on Friday agreed to resume work next month to relink railways and roads, which have been cut off by a military border for 50 years, a joint statement said.

Both sides would start the construction work on September 18, said the statement released after three days of economic talks held in Seoul.

The South also agreed to offer 400,000 tonnes of rice and 100,000 tonnes of fertiliser to the famine-hit North, it said.

## Al-Qaida able to hit again: UN

AP, United Nations

The global campaign against terror has pushed al-Qaida underground but hasn't stopped the flow of money and fresh recruits to carry out new attacks, a UN draft report says.

Nearly a year after al-Qaida attacked the United States on Sept. 11, the terrorist network has established cells in at least 40 countries and is well entrenched in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and many parts of Asia, the report released Thursday says.

The network has developed operational links with other militant Islamic groups, gained new recruits, and found new ways to channel millions of dollars and a variety of weapons to its supporters, it said.

"Al-Qaida, despite the successful inroads made against it over recent months is, by all accounts 'alive and well' and poised to strike again how, when and where it chooses," the report said.

The draft report was prepared by an expert group authorised by the UN Security Council to monitor UN sanctions.

Under a council resolution adopted unanimously in January, all nations must freeze the finances and impose arms embargoes and travel bans on individuals and groups associated with Osama bin Laden, al-Qaida, and the Taliban wherever they are in the world.

A total of 234 individuals and groups are currently on the U.N. list of those whose assets should be frozen, but the report criticizes many countries for failing to add suspected al-Qaida members, and some European countries for hesitating to freeze assets. It cited 43 individuals who should be on the list, but aren't.

The United States and Italy said Thursday they want 11 other individuals and 14 organizations with alleged ties to al-Qaida put on the list. Italy's Economic Ministry said in a statement that "many of the individuals on the list are formally under investigation in Italy and some of them

have already been convicted for terrorist and al-Qaida-related crimes."

The draft report, which will be presented next week to the Security Council committee monitoring sanctions, said sanctions and other measures adopted by the international community have had "a marked impact" on al-Qaida, causing it to go underground, "to reposition its assets and resources, and to seek new recruits."

But the terrorist network continues "to pose a significant international threat," in part because of its loose worldwide structure, its ability to work with and within Islamic groups in militant countries, its backing from extremists inspired by bin Laden, and its continuing financial and logistical, it said.

Despite initial successes after Sept. 11 in locating and freezing some \$112 million in assets belonging to al-Qaida and its associates, the report said only about \$10 million has been frozen since January.

The U.S. Treasury Department countered that the money seized was "the narrowest measure of success" and what counts is destroying the financial infrastructure of terrorism.

Citing information from government officials and other sources, the UN experts said al-Qaida is continuing to receive financial support from bin Laden's personal inheritance and investments, from its own members and supporters, and from charitable organisations.

Estimates of the value of the portfolio managed on behalf of bin Laden and al-Qaida, by unidentified intermediaries, range from \$30 million to \$300 million including investments in Mauritius, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Panama, the report said. But it provided no sources or details.

"Private donations to al-Qaida from wealthy supporters, estimated at up to \$16 million per year, are believed to also continue, largely unabated. Al-Qaida also is believed to extort money sometimes using threats to businesses or individuals," it said.

## US soldiers in line of fire at Earth Summit

AFP, Johannesburg

US troops are under fire at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, accused of ravaging the environment and causing great human tragedies at bases in South Korea, Japan and Italy.

Greens are demanding that they quit those bases, calling them an ecological menace.

Lee Yujin, an activist with the Green Korea United Organisation, which claims 15,000 members, said the US presence was a major threat in her country.

"There are currently 37,000 US troops stationed at 93 bases in Korea, covering a total of 60,700 acres (24,280 hectares). During the time of the posting of the US troops in 1945 to the present, environmental pollution has been constant."

She said studies conducted at a US bombing range showed the soil was contaminated with an arsenic

level of 5.37 milligrams per kilogram, 13 times the national average.

"Cadmium was found to be 37 times higher than average and copper was 13 times higher," she said.

Lee charged that the US military was also guilty of widespread environmental damage with a series of oil leakage accidents from US bases.

Japanese activist Kaori Sunagawa, a researcher with the Okinawa Environmental Network, said the group of islands making up Japan's southernmost prefecture of Okinawa housed 25,000 of the total 52,000 US troops in Japan.

"The military bases occupy 11 percent of the prefectural land," she said, adding that "noise pollution, destruction of forests, forest fires from military exercises, soil erosion from bombings" were common.



Michael Jackson makes a V-sign at the MTV Video Music Awards on Thursday in New York. Jackson received the Performer of the Millennium Award.