

# Pakistan a key partner against terror: US

REUTERS, Islamabad

The United States called Pakistan one of its most important partners in the war on terrorism in a report that praised recent efforts to crack down on Islamic militants near the Afghan frontier.

In its annual "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report released late on Thursday, the US State Department also referred to close cooperation between Pakistan's military and intelligence and the United States to track down suspects at home and abroad.

"Pakistan continues to be one of the United States' most important partners in the global coalition against

terrorism," the State Department said of the country that was the first recruit for President George W. Bush's war on terror after the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington.

Under US pressure, Pakistan has sent tens of thousands of troops into its semi-autonomous tribal areas and launched a series of operations against suspected al Qaeda and Taliban fighters living or hiding in the area.

In the latest clashes in March, not covered by the 2003 report, more than 120 people were killed in what experts say was a botched attempt to flush out foreign militants and local tribesmen fighting alongside them.

Keen to avoid a repeat of the bloodshed, the authorities have narrowed the hunt for militants to 25 key suspects, including al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The apparent softening in stance has raised fresh questions among Western diplomats over the level of commitment in Pakistan to pursuing militant suspects along the Afghan frontier.

But some Pakistani officials counter that aggressive US military tactics in Iraq have backfired and say there are some parallels with what could happen in tribal areas.

# Cinnamon may combat diabetes

HEALTHDAYNEWS

Cinnamon may merit a place in your medicine cabinet as well as in your spice rack.

The popular spice may help prevent and combat diabetes by acting as an insulin substitute for people with type 2 diabetes, according to cellular and molecular research done jointly by the University of California, Santa Barbara, Iowa State University and the US Department of Agriculture.

"Cinnamon itself has insulin-like activity and also can potentiate the activity of insulin. The latter could be quite important in treating those with type 2 diabetes. Cinnamon has a bio-active component that we believe has the potential to prevent

or overcome diabetes," researcher Don Graves said in a prepared statement.

The University of California researcher and his colleagues have been studying the effects of cinnamon on diabetic mice, which have been fed water laced with cinnamon. The study began six months ago and final results are expected in another six months.

"More than 170 million people worldwide suffer from diabetes, and for many, drugs or other forms of treatment are unavailable. It may be possible that many of these people could benefit from readily available natural products such as cinnamon," said Graves, an adjunct professor of molecular, cellular and developmental biology.

# Experts predict asthma epidemic from pollution

REUTERS, Washington

Poor and minority children are likely to develop asthma at worsening rates due to global warming and air pollution, environment experts predicted on Thursday.

They released a report showing that as the climate gets warmer, allergens such as pollen and mold will flood the air, interacting with urban pollutants such as ozone and soot to fuel an already growing epidemic of asthma.

"It is affecting the trees, the molds, the subsurface organisms," Dr. Paul Epstein of Harvard Medical School's Centre for Health and the Global Environment, told a news conference.

"The combination of air pollutants, aeroallergens, heat waves and unhealthy air masses -- increasingly associated with a changing climate -- causes damage to the respiratory systems, particularly growing children, and these impacts disproportionately affect poor and minority groups in the inner cities," the report reads.

such as coal and gas releases carbon dioxide into the air.

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The carbon dioxide forms a kind of invisible blanket that traps the sun's radiation.

While average temperatures warm, the effects are not predictable and even. Storms may become more severe and some areas may get colder weather.

The report finds that in some regions, winter is ending weeks earlier than before, and plants are releasing their pollen earlier than ever, accelerating the hay fever season.

Pollen and fungal spores can worsen asthma, a serious medical condition whose symptoms include shortness of breath, cough, wheezing, chest pain or tightness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said nine million US children have been diagnosed with asthma and more than 4 million

have had an asthma attack in the past 12 months.

The report makes clear links among asthma, allergies and urban air pollution.

"Rising levels of carbon dioxide, in addition to trapping more heat, promote pollen production in plants, increase fungal growth and alter species composition in plant communities by favoring opportunistic weeds like ragweed and poison ivy," the report reads.

"Diesel particulates help deliver and present pollen and mold allergens to the immune system in the lungs," it adds.

"The good news is we can do something about this," Epstein said. "Green" buildings with roof gardens to keep them cool and insulation to keep heat from leaking would help, as would improving public transport and encouraging the use of hybrid vehicles that rely less on fossil fuels.

# Qatar to seek review of al Jazeera under US pressure

REUTERS, Washington

Under US pressure, Qatar's foreign minister said on Thursday he would seek a review of Arabic television station al Jazeera's coverage of Iraq after Washington complained it was inaccurate and anti-American.

"I am not responsible (for) al-Jazeera," Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim said of the Qatar-based station funded by the Gulf ally's ruler.

"But we will take this concern back to al Jazeera and they have to review (it), because we need al Jazeera to be professional and we don't want anybody to send lies or to send (the) wrong information," he said after talks at the White House with Vice President Dick Cheney and Defence

Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

The Bush administration has warned Qatar its relations with the United States were clouded by what it called "inflammatory" coverage of Iraq by Jazeera, whose satellite broadcasts have a wide Arab audience.

The Bush administration says its Middle East policies promote freedom.

Many Arabs accuse the Bush administration of using double standards, by seeking to muzzle the media and what they see as valid criticism that U.S. troops have used excessive force in Iraq in an occupation opposed by many governments.

The Bush administration, whose officials have often given interviews

to Jazeera, has persistently criticised the station, but has never complained to Qatar's government in such a public way before.

A State Department official, who asked not to be identified, said earlier this week the United States sought to persuade Qatar to cut funds to Jazeera, arguing it was not in the nation's interests for anti-American sentiment to intensify in the region.

Hamad was noncommittal. "We have a free press in Qatar and this part of the free press," he said.

Jazeera's coverage of the war in Iraq includes more graphic images than its US counterparts of civilian casualties, especially children.

Many Arabs, including Arab-Americans, see the network as more accurate than US television.

# Mumbai court drops rape case against S African judge

REUTERS, Mumbai

A Mumbai court has dropped a case against a South African judge charged with raping a fellow delegate during an anti-globalisation meeting in Mumbai three months ago, a defence lawyer said yesterday.

Sirajuddin Desai, 53, a high court judge in Cape Town, was arrested in January after a South African woman accusing him of raping her when she visited his hotel room to discuss a project for the World Social Forum.

A lawyer for Desai denied the accusation at the time, saying his client had been framed. The South African judge was held for four days and then granted bail.

"The sessions court judge stated

yesterday that the complaint lodged by the complainant was false," said defence lawyer RA Shaikh. "He said there was no medical evidence to suggest Desai committed rape so the case against him was discharged."

The case had attracted huge media attention in South Africa with journalists flying to Mumbai for court hearings.

Four days after making her complaint to police in Mumbai, the South African woman filed an affidavit in the Indian consulate in Johannesburg withdrawing the rape complaint.

Shaikh said his client was present in the Mumbai sessions court during the three days of court hearings this week.

