

Negroponte to visit Afghanistan, Pakistan

AFP, Washington

Deputy US Secretary of State John Negroponte is to make a week's visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan from September 10 as part of consultations with the key partners in the "war on terror," the State Department said Wednesday.

In Afghanistan, he is scheduled to hold talks with President Hamid Karzai and other officials and civil society groups on counter-terrorism and reconstruction cooperation, a department statement said.

Negroponte, who is the deputy to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, will hold talks with Pakistan military ruler General Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and civil society representatives during his visit to Islamabad.

Pak lawyers boycott courts to pressure Musharraf to quit

AP, Islamabad

Hundreds of lawyers rallied and boycotted courts across Pakistan yesterday in a renewed campaign to force President Gen Pervez Musharraf to step down as supporters of former premier Nawaz Sharif prepared for his promised return from exile.

Courts in major cities including Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, Islamabad and Rawalpindi were largely deserted and lawyers hoisted black flags, witnesses said.

In Lahore, about 500 lawyers

wearing black armbands marched on a road chanting slogans against Musharraf. Dozens of lawyers rallied in Quetta chanting "Go Musharraf, Go!"

Lawyers have been at the forefront of a campaign against military rule in Pakistan since Musharraf, who seized power in a 1999 coup, tried to sack the chief justice in March. The move sparked anti-government rallies until the Supreme Court reinstated the judge in July.

"This is the second phase of our protest, and God willing, we will again be successful," said

AP, Kabul

which "destroyed the positively identified enemy firing positions with precision guided munitions," it said.

The coalition said "more than 40 insurgents" were killed, while Afghan and foreign forces suffered no losses.

Taliban spokesmen were not immediately available for comment and it was not possible to independently confirm the death toll.

Afghan and coalition forces claim to have killed several hundred Taliban insurgents in central and southern Afghanistan in recent weeks. The Taliban have admitted some losses, but say many of the dead are civilians a charge denied

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