



Former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto and her two daughters arrive at a press conference in Dubai yesterday. Benazir confirmed that she will return home today after eight years of self-imposed exile despite government pressure to delay her homecoming.

## 20,000 police to guard Benazir amid al-Qaeda threat

AFP, Karachi

Benazir Bhutto will be guarded by 20,000 police, anti-sniper shields and the sheer number of her own supporters when she returns home today amid warnings of al-Qaeda attacks, officials said.

Government and security officials told AFP that police marksmen will stand guard on rooftops and flyovers as the former premier leads a planned 18-hour procession from Karachi airport to the mausoleum of the country's founder.

"The threat of suicide bombing is there. There are two or three groups of suicide bombers operating in Karachi, according to intelligence reports," Sindh province home secretary Ghulam Mohammad Mohtaram told the news agency.

The groups were linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, Afghanistan's hardline

Taliban militia and a Pakistani pro-Taliban militant leader who has reportedly threatened to "welcome" Bhutto with suicide bombers, he said.

"Whatever we can we will do for the protection of Benazir Bhutto. The person of Benazir Bhutto will be covered. But it will be very difficult to prevent such bombings if they happen in the mob."

Her Pakistan People's Party (PPP), however, said it expected that Bhutto would in fact be protected by the one million supporters it estimates will flood the streets on her homecoming.

"It's a mixture of our own die-hard supporters who will be surrounding her to keep her safe, and the administration, which has promised foolproof security," Senator Saifur Abbasi, a PPP central executive committee member said.

The party said that she would be behind bullet-proof screens as she

rides a specially modified 20-feet (six-metre) shipping container attached to the back of a lorry through the teeming city.

Security officials yesterday said a total of 10,000 police and paramilitary forces would guard the route.

Police commandos and sharpshooters will be deployed on "all high-rise buildings and on all bridges," a senior Karachi security official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Bhutto herself will be surrounded by three separate security cordons, the official said. The outermost will prevent all access to Bhutto's lorry and about ten cars for her senior party workers. In the second, plain-clothed and uniformed officers will ride in and among the party cars.

And the innermost cordon will be security officials with Bhutto on her truck.

On arrival at the huge white

marble mausoleum for Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the country's founding father, she will give a speech from behind more bullet-proof screens.

Bhutto said earlier this week she was more worried that former army officers could try to assassinate her than that Al-Qaeda or the Taliban would launch suicide attacks against her.

She said on Wednesday in Dubai: "I don't believe that a true Muslim will make an attack on me... Islam forbids suicide bombings."

Bhutto's own family has been scarred by violence. Her brother Murtaza Bhutto was shot dead in a murky attack in Karachi in 1996 that Benazir Bhutto blamed on groups linked to Pakistani intelligence.

Her father, prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was himself hanged in 1979 by military dictator Zia-ul-Haq.

## 4 NLD men jailed in secret trials in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

Four members of Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party have been sentenced to more than seven years in prison in secret trials in western Myanmar, a spokesman said yesterday.

The four were arrested near the western port city of Sittwe, one of several places around the country where Buddhist monks led marches against the military government in the biggest pro-democracy protests in nearly 20 years.

"So far we have confirmation that four people were each sentenced to seven and a half years in prison. They were accused of taking a leading role in the monks' protests" in Sittwe, said Han Thar Myint, spokesman for the National League for Democracy (NLD).

Among those sentenced was 85-year-old Kyaw Khine, the head of the NLD chapter in Taunggyi township outside Sittwe, the spokesman said.

## UN envoy to visit Myanmar in November

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari said yesterday he has been invited to make another visit to military-run Myanmar next month, following the junta's violent crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

"I have confirmed an invitation to Myanmar, to visit by the third week of November. And I intend to honour that invitation. But there is a possibility of going earlier," he told a press conference.

Gambari did not say who he would meet with during his trip, but indicated that a meeting with the regime's leader Senior General Than Shwe would be a top priority.

"It is important to meet the Senior General as it gives an authoritative response to any of the queries made," he said.

Gambari visited Myanmar last month to convey international outrage over the regime's violent crackdown on peaceful anti-government rallies, which left at least 13 people dead.

## Putin bolsters Iran ties in historic visit

AFP, Tehran

Russian President Vladimir Putin left Iran yesterday after a trip which saw him reinforce ties with the Islamic republic and distance himself from Western warnings over its nuclear programme.

Putin attended a summit of Caspian Sea states and held talks with top Iranian leaders in the first visit by a Kremlin chief since World War II -- a boost for Iran at a time of increasing Western pressure.

His trip was marked by the heaviest security following a report a squad of suicide bombers planned to kill him and even his departure time was kept closely under wraps by Russian and Iranian officials.

The president left Iran around midnight (2130 GMT) after an exhausting one day visit that lasted around 16 hours and included talks with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and supreme leader Ali Khamenei, Iranian news agencies reported.

He warned the West not to launch

an attack over the Iranian nuclear programme, insisted Iran's Russian-built first nuclear power plant would be finished on schedule and backed its right to nuclear energy.

A joint statement issued by the Iranian presidency emphasised "the closeness of Russian and Iranian positions over the key world questions and the development of cooperation to establish a world order that is more just."

The language was a marked contrast from the West's stance over the Iranian nuclear programme. The United States and allies like France accuse Iran of seeking nuclear weapons and want to impose more UN and unilateral sanctions.

Iran however insists its nuclear programme is peaceful while Russia has said there is no evidence to back the Western claims.

Unsurprisingly, Iran's headline press was keen to play up the significance of Putin's visit as a sign of the differences between Russia and other world powers.

"May be the most important result of Putin's trip is to show the

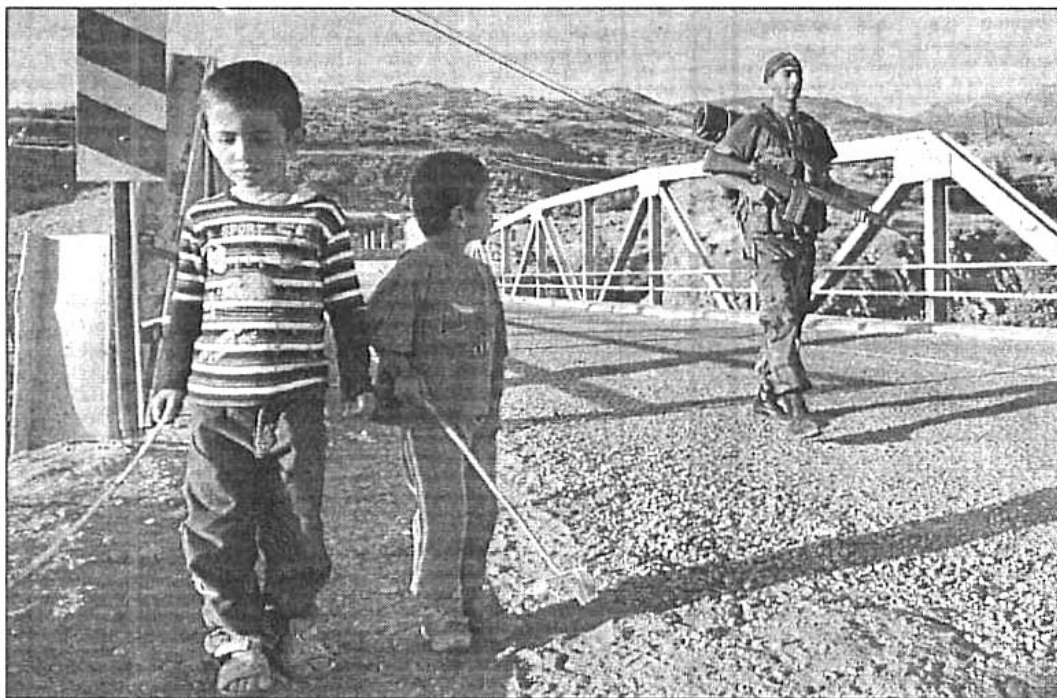
independence of Russia towards America and the West," said Kayhan, the mouthpiece of Iran's clerical authorities.

"The Russian statements showed a deep difference of opinion between Russia on one side and America and France on the other side in dealing with Iran's nuclear case," added the hardline Jomhuri Islami.

Ahmadinejad and Putin in their joint statement emphasised "the necessity of solving as quickly as possible the situation over the Iranian nuclear programme through politics and diplomacy."

They also reaffirmed Russia's commitment to finishing Iran's first nuclear power plant in the southern city of Bushehr "in line with the agreed calendar" although Putin complained about its "worn-out equipment".

It also said that Russia and Iran would speed up their discussions for the sale and construction of Tupolev 214 and 334 aircraft to Iran and spoke of increased cooperation in energy and aerospace.



A Turkish soldier patrols a road in the province of Sirnak, near the Turkish-Iraqi border in southeastern Turkey yesterday. Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi spoke yesterday of a "new atmosphere" in diplomatic efforts to prevent a Turkish military incursion against Kurdish rebel bases in northern Iraq.

## Iraq determined to purge Kurdish rebels

### Maliki tells his Turkish counterpart

AFP, Ankara

Baghdad is "absolutely determined" to end the presence of Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki told his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the telephone Wednesday, the Anatolia news agency reported.

Maliki said his government "is absolutely determined to end the activities and the presence of the PKK terrorist organisation on Iraqi territory," the semi-official agency said, quoting unidentified sources.

He said he had given orders to the autonomous Kurdish administration in northern Iraq to take action against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), listed as a terrorist group by Ankara and much of the international com-

munity, Anatolia reported.

The report came shortly before the Turkish parliament was to vote on a government motion seeking authorisation for a cross-border operation into neighbouring northern Iraq to pursue PKK rebels taking refuge there.

Maliki asked for "a new opportunity" to resolve the issue through diplomatic means and proposed talks, according to Anatolia.

Erdogan responded that he was willing to meet Iraqi officials to discuss the issue, but warned that Ankara cannot tolerate "further waste of time," the agency reported.

On Tuesday, Maliki held an emergency cabinet meeting and decided to send a high-level delegation to Ankara for talks.

Turkey says the PKK enjoys free

movement in northern Iraq, is tolerated by the region's Kurdish leaders and obtains weapons and explosives there for attacks across the border in Turkey.

Faced with mounting PKK violence, the Ankara government says it is left with no choice but military action because neither Washington nor Baghdad are helping curb the rebels.

Turkey and Iraq signed an accord last month to combat the PKK but failed to agree on a clause allowing Turkish troops to engage in "hot pursuit" -- as they did regularly in the 1990s -- against rebels fleeing into Iraqi territory.

The PKK has waged a bloody campaign for Kurdish self-rule in southeast Turkey since 1984. The conflict that has claimed more than 37,000 lives.

## Four killed in Kashmir violence

AFP, Srinagar

Three militants and a policeman were killed in separate incidents in Indian Kashmir after rebels ended a brief unilateral truce in the region, police said yesterday.

The militants were killed in a four-hour-long gun battle in southern Doda district late Tuesday, a police statement said.

It said militants also shot dead a police officer inside his home in northern Kupwara district, bordering Pakistan-ruled Kashmir.

The violence came three days after an alliance of rebel groups fighting Indian rule in Kashmir ended a brief truce on Sunday evening.

The ceasefire was declared to mark Eid-ul-Fitr, the biggest holiday on the Muslim calendar at the end of fasting month of Ramadan.

It was the first truce declared by the rebels since July 2000 when the Hizbul Mujahedin, the leading rebel group in the council, announced a unilateral ceasefire.

That truce ended after only a fortnight when India refused to hold talks with Pakistan and Kashmiris on the future of the restive region.

## Japan's cabinet okays Afghan mission bill

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's cabinet yesterday endorsed a bill to continue support for US-led forces in Afghanistan, setting the stage for a bitter fight in parliament.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's cabinet approved the bill allowing Japan to refuel coalition ships and jets in the Indian Ocean, sending the proposed legislation to parliament, a Cabinet Office official said.

The opposition, which won control of one house of parliament in July elections, has vowed to end the mission, saying that the officially pacifist nation should not be part of "American wars."

Fukuda's predecessor Shinzo Abe resigned as premier last month, citing his failure to extend the mission, which is set to expire November 1 without further legislation.

Fukuda has narrowed the scope of the mission, including restricting support for US ground operations in Afghanistan, in a bid to reach a consensus.

## Maldives takes tough measures to curb Islamic extremism

AFP, Male

The Maldives yesterday unveiled tough measures to combat Islamic extremism and protect its vital luxury tourism industry after an unprecedented bombing wounded British, Japanese and Chinese holidaymakers.

An order from President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom said fundamentalists should not be allowed to conduct religious services and that foreign clerics should not be able to enter the country without special permission.

The decree, which also outlaws head-to-toe covering for women, comes in the wake of a bombing on September 29 which wounded two Britons, two Japanese and eight Chinese tourists visiting a park in the island capital of Male.

The bombing has unsettled the Maldives, a nation of 330,000 Sunni Muslims who have been practising a liberal form of the religion and built South Asia's most successful economy with the region's most exotic and upmarket destination.

## Karzai to visit Britain

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai is to visit Britain and meet Prime Minister Gordon Brown, the Queen and Prince Charles, a presidential spokesman said Tuesday.

The trip would be "in the near future," Homayun Hamidzada told reporters. Karzai's movements are often kept under wraps for security reasons.

It will be his first meeting with Brown, Hamidzada said, and the main purpose "strengthening bilateral relations."

Britain is one of Afghanistan's top backers after the United States. It helps to fund post-Taliban reconstruction and assists in efforts to defeat an insurgency by the hard-line Taliban movement, which was in government between 1996 and 2001.

About 7,000 British troops are in Afghanistan -- the second-highest contingent after the United States in the United Nations-sanctioned, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

## India accuses Pakistan of inciting Sikh radicals

AFP, New Delhi

India's top national security official has accused Pakistan of trying to stir up Sikh militancy in the northern state of Punjab, reports said yesterday.

The accusation by National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan came in the wake of a bomb blast Sunday in a packed cinema in the state's industrial city of Ludhiana that killed six people and injured 32 others.

"There has been a manifest attempt in Pakistan to build up a radical Sikh environment," Narayanan was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency.

"We had intelligence about four to six months back that a lot of

effort was going into attempts to foment militancy," he said.

"We have tracked intelligence information, we have studied the way such attacks take place and we can read a pattern."

Punjab, India's only Sikh-majority state with a population of about 25 million, was wracked by a separatist revolt in the 1980s which claimed thousands of lives before it was quashed.

A home ministry official and the state's former police chief earlier this week also blamed Sunday's attack on Sikh separatists, who have links to Islamic rebels allegedly backed by Pakistan.

Former police chief Kanwar Pal Singh Gill, who is credited with wiping out the Sikh militant move-

ment in the 1980s in a merciless crackdown, pointed a finger at a group called the Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF).

The group wants an independent state called Khalistan carved out of India and has been linked to Kashmir-based Islamic rebel groups.

The allegations come ahead of a scheduled October 22 meeting in New Delhi of senior Indian and Pakistani officials on efforts to combat cross-border militancy.

India accuses Pakistan of not doing enough to prevent Islamic extremists from using its soil as a springboard to launch attacks, especially in Kashmir where a separatist revolt has claimed more than 44,000 lives since 1989.



France's President Nicolas Sarkozy (L) welcomes his Iraqi counterpart Jalal Talabani prior to a meeting at the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris yesterday.

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