



PHOTO: AFP

Handout photo of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shows its Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie shares a laugh with Karenni refugee children during a visit to Ban Mai Nai Soi camp in northern Thailand. Hollywood star couple Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt visited Myanmar refugees in the Thai camp, including one woman who had been there for more than two decades.

## Jolie visits camp for Myanmar refugees

AP, Bangkok

Angelina Jolie, a Hollywood star deeply involved in the plight of refugees, has called on the Thai government to respect the human rights of Myanmar's Rohingya boat people whom Thai authorities have pushed out to sea in recent weeks, a UN spokeswoman said yesterday.

Jolie and her partner, Brad Pitt, are on a visit to Thailand, where on Wednesday they toured one of several camps along the Thai-Myanmar border sheltering refugees from Myanmar's military regime.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees spokeswoman Kitt McKinsey told AP Television News that it was a coincidence that Jolie's visit came just as the plight of the Rohingyas was catching world attention.

The Rohingyas, denied citizenship in their native

land, have been trying to land in Thailand after treacherous sea journeys only to be towed back to sea and cast adrift by the Thai Navy. Indian officials, who rescued some, believe hundreds perished.

"She was extremely touched by the plight of the Rohingya people. She expressed the hope that the human rights of the Rohingyas people will be respected just as the human rights of everyone in the world should be respected," McKinsey said.

"I also hope the Rohingya situation stabilizes and their life in Myanmar improves so the people do not feel the desperate need to flee, especially considering how dangerous their journey has become," Jolie was earlier quoted as saying.

The Rohingyas, from western Myanmar, represent just a part of Myanmar's refugee exodus.

## Gates ignoring Obama on Guantanamo

Says Rights Group

AFP, Washington

A leading US rights group Thursday slammed Defence Secretary Robert Gates for not backing President Barack Obama's executive order to halt proceedings against terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay.

"Despite President Obama's orders to close Guantanamo and halt proceedings, it appears this has not filtered down through the Department of Defence," said Anthony Romero, head of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

"Secretary Gates has not stepped in to enforce the promise Obama made to halt all military commission proceedings.

# UN chief, Maliki discuss lifting Iraq sanctions

AFP, Baghdad

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in Baghdad Friday that the United Nations is considering scrapping sanctions imposed on Iraq during Saddam Hussein's regime before the 2003 US-led invasion.

Ban, on a surprise visit to Iraq, met with senior Iraqi officials including Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to discuss the issue one day after the Shia premier's allies swept to victory in provincial elections.

"The UN is in the process of reviewing all the resolutions and on my return I will discuss this issue with the Security Council," Ban said at a joint press conference with the premier.

Maliki said: "We discussed the ending of UN sanctions on Iraq, which were (imposed) after the aggression of the

previous regime. We asked for a review of all the resolutions imposed on Iraq so we can return to the rank of normal nations."

The UN slapped comprehensive sanctions on Iraq after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Although many of those were lifted after 2003, an arms embargo and some financial restrictions were left in place.

Up to 1.7 million Iraqis may have died as a result of the tough sanctions that savaged the economy and crippled the country's health care system, according to a previous UN report.

Ban met President Jalal Talabani soon after his arrival in the Iraqi capital.

"I came to Iraq today in order to congratulate the Iraqi people and the Iraqi government after last Saturday's provincial elections and to show the support of the international community during this momentous time," he said.

The UN chief's previously unannounced visit came after preliminary results of Saturday's election showed that candidates backed by the premier dominated a poll that is expected to reshape Iraq's fractured political landscape.

The United Nations provided the Independent High Electoral Commission with assistance in organising the poll which was held in 14 of 18 provinces.

The result was a major vote of confidence for the prime minister, whose standing has grown steadily both at home and abroad over the past year.

Candidates backed by Maliki dominated in Baghdad and in eight of the country's nine Shia-majority provinces.

Just over half of the Iraqi electorate voted in the provincial poll, which was seen as a vital test of the country's progress since the US-led invasion ousted Saddam from power almost six years ago.

## Kashmir issue key to global peace

Says Pak PM Gilani

IBNLIVE ONLINE, Islamabad

Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani while stressing the need to resolve the long-standing Kashmir dispute said on Thursday that this dispute is central to Pakistan-India relations and holds the key not only to regional but also to global peace.

"The world powers have, once again, reiterated their concern on the centrality of this festering dispute to the peace efforts and called for its early resolution. We fully support, and indeed encourage, international efforts to this end."

"We also believe that no solution of the issue can be durable if it does not reflect the genuine aspirations and wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmiris should therefore be associated with the dialogue process", Gilani said while addressing the Kashmir

Convention held here at PNCA auditorium in connection with the Kashmir Solidarity Day.

Yasin Malik, Chairman Kashmir Committee, Maulana Fazalur Rehman and President Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Pakistan occupied Kashmir) Raja Zulfikar Ali Khan Zardari also addressed the convention.

Meanwhile, Yusuf Gilani demanded an end to human rights violations in the Indian Occupied Kashmir and urged the international community to play its role for a just resolution of the lingering dispute.

Addressing the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir's Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly and Council on the Kashmir Solidarity Day here at the PM House, Gilani said the Kashmir issue needs to be resolved according to the UN Resolutions and aspirations of its people.

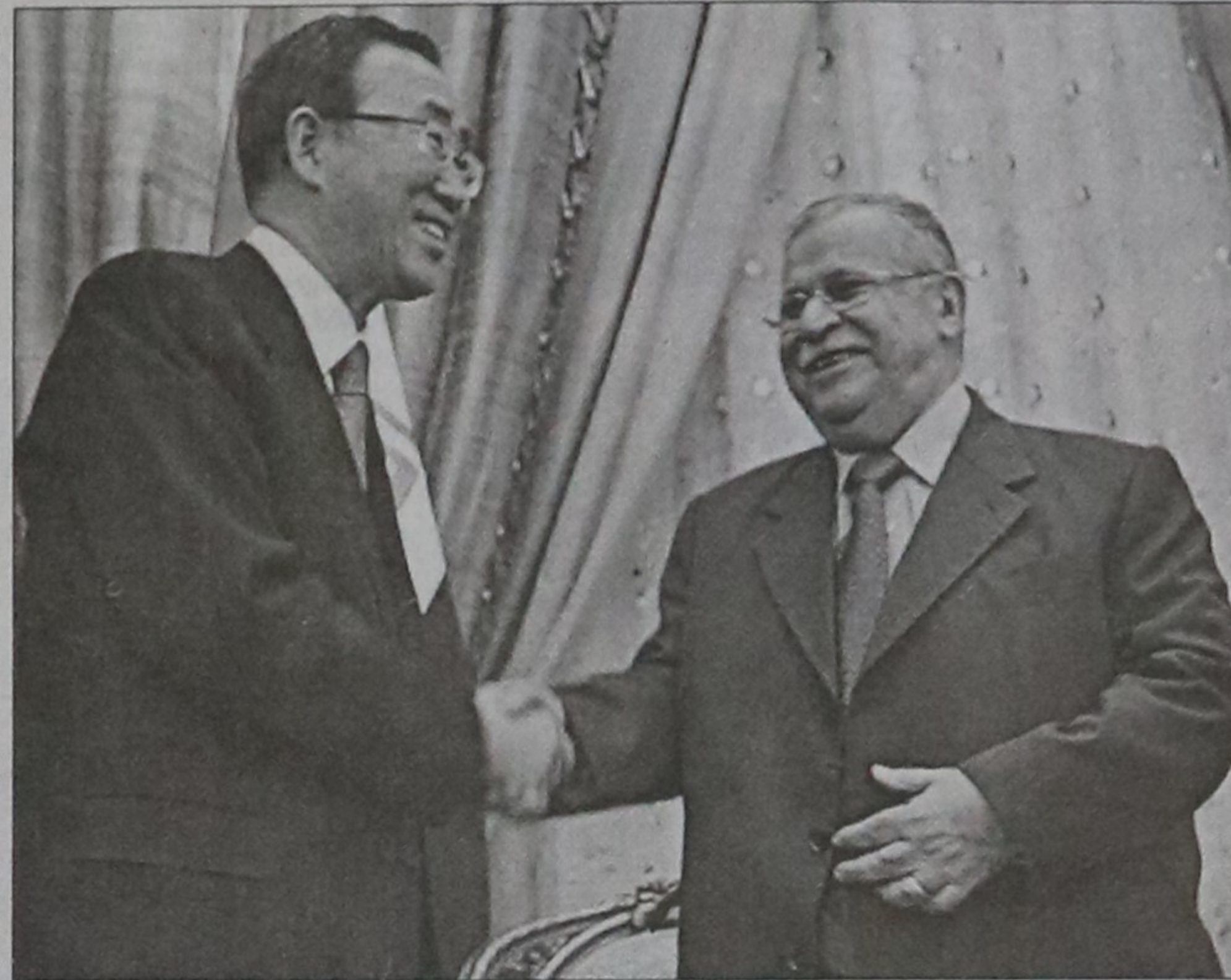


PHOTO: AFP

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (L) shakes hands with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani during their meeting in Baghdad yesterday. Ban paid a surprise visit to Baghdad for talks with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki one day after the Shia premier's bloc swept to victory in provincial elections which took place on January 31.

## N Korea may fire missiles across sea border

AFP, Seoul

North Korea may fire short-range missiles across its disputed sea border with South Korea to bolster its sabre-rattling campaign against the Seoul government, media reports said yesterday.

Seoul officials believe this is the likeliest form of provocation from the communist state, according to the Chosun Ilbo newspaper and Yonhap news agency.

The North, which is fiercely hostile to Seoul's conservative government, announced last week it has scrapped all peace agreements with the South including one covering the Yellow Sea borderline.

Its official media has repeatedly warned of a possible armed clash.



PHOTO: AFP

Former FARC hostage Sigifredo Lopez (C) smiles amidst relatives and friends upon his arrival at the Alfonso Bonilla Aragon airport, in Palmira, Valle del Cauca on Thursday. Lopez -- a former deputy abducted on April 11, 2002 -- is the last hostage to be released of a group of six, which includes former governor of the province of Meta, Alan Jara, and three police officers and a soldier, freed on February 3 and February 1st respectively.

## Rebel-held hostage flown to freedom in Colombia

AP, Bogota

The last known politician held hostage by Colombia's main leftist insurgency was airlifted to freedom Thursday after six years in captivity.

Provincial lawmaker Sigifredo Lopez was the sixth and latest hostage released this week by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in what the rebels said was a unilateral act aimed at starting talks on an exchange of hostages for imprisoned guerrillas.

At a news conference, Lopez firmly blamed the FARC for the deaths of all 11 colleagues who were abducted with him in April 2002. He said he survived because he had been separated from the other prisoners previously as punishment for arguing.

## Hunt underway for remains of Nazi 'Doctor Death'

AFP, Berlin

Police in Germany and Austria sought to confirm Thursday that Nazi war criminal Aribert Heim, alias "Doctor Death", died in Egypt in 1992, but veteran Nazi hunters were sceptical.

German police said they would hunt Heim's grave, while Austrian police also sought "verification" of his death, according to prosecutors.

## Israel deports activists from detained ship

AP, Jerusalem

Israel deported activists from an aid ship it intercepted in the Mediterranean en route from Lebanon to the Gaza Strip, but allowed blood donations that were on board to enter Gaza yesterday, the Israeli military said.

Meanwhile, Gaza militants launched two rockets into Israel, the Israeli military said, causing no injuries but punctuating the fragility of a Gaza cease-fire nearly three weeks after the end of Israel's offensive

against Hamas.

The aid ship remained docked at the Ashdod port, where it was towed Thursday after being stopped and boarded by Israeli troops. Israel and Lebanon are officially at war, and Israel said it was concerned about the ship's cargo and called the boat a "provocation." Israel, which is enforcing a naval blockade aimed at Gaza's Hamas rulers, has allowed several similar aid ships into Gaza and has turned several more back, but had never

before boarded or detained one.

Fifteen of the people on board, Lebanese and Syrian nationals, were deported overnight to Lebanon and Syria through Israel's borders with those two countries, the military said. Three others -- two Indians and a Briton -- remained in police custody pending deportation from Israel's international airport, police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said.

It was not immediately clear when the boat would be allowed to sail.

## South African president defends ANC record

AFP, Cape Town

South African President Kgalema Motlanthe on Friday defended the ruling ANC's record in a state of the nation address as the party heads into general elections after a period of political upheaval.

Motlanthe had the awkward task of delivering the annual state of the nation address after only five months in office, as his predecessor Thabo Mbeki was forced to resign by the African National Congress.

Flagging the government's achievements after 15 years of democracy, Motlanthe also highlighted challenges in the economy, crime, corruption and poverty while assuring that "our nation is in a good state."

He said the ANC-dominated government had overseen South Africa's longest-ever period of economic growth, reducing unemployment from 31 percent in 2003 to 23 percent in 2007. But he said the global financial crisis was hitting home.

## 'Afghanistan can be quagmire for Qaeda'

AFP, Washington

The US-led "war on terror" will end when moderate Muslims stand up to extremism in Afghanistan, US Senator Joseph Lieberman wrote yesterday in the Wall Street Journal.

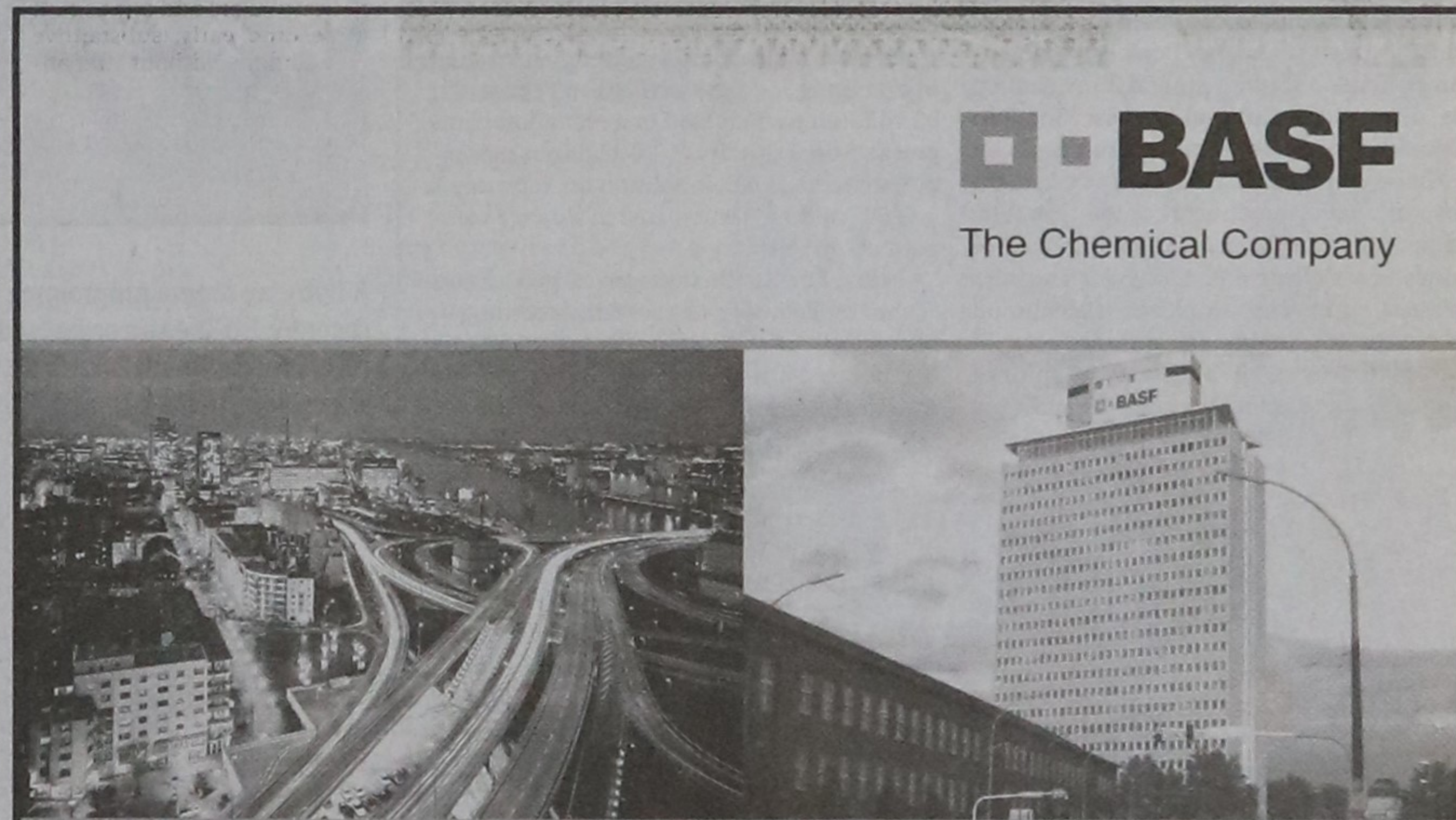
In an opinion article, the independent senator from Connecticut -- a supporter of Republican John McCain's failed 2008 presidential bid -- acknowledged militants in Afghanistan "have grown in strength, size and sophistication."

Foreign troops are waging an

uphill battle against Taliban militants -- who controlled Kabul from 1996 to 2001 -- and al-Qaeda.

"Afghans are not eager to return to the tyranny and poverty of the Taliban," Lieberman wrote. "That is why the insurgents have not won their support and must resort to self-defeating tactics of cruelty and coercion."

The "war on terror will end" when coalition forces "have empowered and expanded the mainstream Muslim majority to stand up and defeat the extremist minority."



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