

News briefs

Bin Laden tape urges Muslims to strike U.S.

WASHINGTON — Amid renewed U.S. warnings of an imminent terror attack, a new audiotape believed to be from Osama bin Laden on Tuesday urged Muslims around the world to join Iraq in a global holy war against the United States and its allies.

The tape's release Tuesday by the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television network, calls for "martyrdom operations" — code for suicide bombings — and urges Muslims to overthrow Islamic governments that side with the United States.

U.S. officials said the tape offers new evidence of a growing alliance between Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and the al-Qaida terrorist network. But the speaker on the tape seems to have nothing but contempt for Hussein, suggesting that Muslims should side with him only because his enemy is worse.

The tape's release came as the heads of the CIA and the FBI expressed fears that al-Qaida terrorists will strike again, perhaps as soon as the end of the week. In chilling testimony Tuesday before the Senate Intelligence Committee CIA Director George Tenet and FBI Director Robert Mueller warned of possible attacks using chemical, biological or radioactive materials against shopping malls, churches, schools or other so-called soft targets that are lightly protected.

The message aired five days after U.S. officials elevated the national terrorism alert to the second highest level, citing increased electronic "chatter" among suspected terrorists.

Though the speaker on the tape does not specifically call for attacks on U.S. soil, he urges Muslims to do whatever they can to defeat what the speaker calls "agents of the devil."

"Killing the infidels is a good thing that will get you to heaven," the taped voice says. "As God said, stick together and unite, because that's the only way to victory."

— Ron Hutcheson and Shannon McCaffrey, Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

Federal student aid programs in jeopardy

BALTIMORE — Federal funding to some student financial aid programs would be cut this year under proposals currently being debated by Congress and the Bush administration.

Conferees from the House of Representatives and Senate were scheduled to meet Monday night to begin negotiating a final appropriations bill that includes federal student aid programs. Much of the debate currently centers on the Pell Grant program, which helps low-income families pay college tuition.

The Bush administration announced last week it opposes a Senate bill to increase the maximum Pell Grant by \$100 to \$4,100. The White House has proposed maintaining the \$4,000 limit, while increasing total funding to the program by \$1.9 billion to cover its current deficit. Many university lobbyists are working to maintain increases called for in the Senate's bill, citing increased need brought about by increasing enrollment, tuition costs and the weak economy. An estimated 4.4 million students received Pell Grants in 2002.

"If there is a cutback in the federal student aid programs, the entity that

has to make up the difference is the college," said Mark Lindenmeyer, Loyola's director of financial aid and a member of the College Scholarship Service Assembly Council.

— Mike Memoli, The Greyhound, Loyola College-Maryland (U-WIRE)

Greenspan questions new stimulus package

WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan weighed in the debate over President Bush's proposed tax cut Tuesday, voicing concern about the rising federal budget deficit and questioning the need for a new economic stimulus package.

He also surprised some analysts with a cautiously upbeat assessment of the U.S. economy's prospects, though he said that fears of war with Iraq make it difficult to gauge the economy's underlying health.

Greenspan's testimony to the Senate Banking Committee is likely to bolster Democratic opposition to Bush's proposal to reduce taxes to boost economic growth. Bush shocked many lawmakers and analysts last week when he unveiled a tax cut and budget proposal that his administration estimates will push up the annual deficit to \$300 billion.

A budget deficit of \$100 billion to \$200 billion is manageable, Greenspan said, implying that anything larger risks a dangerous hike in the federal government's debt.

"A rise in the debt increases the amount of interest payments, which in turn increases the debt still further, and there is an accelerating pattern after you reach a certain point of no return," he said.

— Ken Moritsugu, Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

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