



WAR ON TERROR

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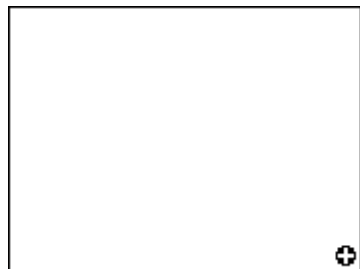
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Osama Capture Report Denied

TEHRAN, Iran, Feb. 28, 2004

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Hunt For Bin Laden



Osama bin Laden (Photo: AP)

QUOTE

"Osama bin Laden has been arrested a long time ago, but Bush is intending to use it for propaganda maneuvering in the presidential election"
Iran state radio quoting its reporter



(Photo: AP / CBS)

Peshawar. Hossein said Shahed told him Friday night that bin Laden was arrested "a long time ago."

But Shahed, who is The Nation's Peshawar bureau chief and not its editor, denied telling the Iranian radio station that bin Laden had been captured.

"I never said this," Shahed said in a telephone interview with the AP's Islamabad bureau. "But I have for the last year been saying that he is not far away. He is within their (the Americans') reach, and they can declare him arrested any time."

Shahed gave no evidence to back up that claim.

Hossein said he had a second source for his report that bin Laden had been

(CBS/AP) Iran's state radio, quoting an unnamed source, said Saturday that Osama bin Laden was captured in Pakistan "a long time ago." U.S. and Pakistani officials denied the report.

The report said Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's visit to the region this week was in connection with the arrest. In Washington, a U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, denied early Saturday that bin Laden was captured.

The report was carried by Iran radio's external Pushtun service. The director of Iran radio's Pushtun service, Asheq Hossein, said he had two sources for the report that bin Laden had been captured.

A Pakistani military operation has been under way in the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and a Pakistani official said previously that members of al Qaeda are being sought there, although bin Laden was not a specific target.

Pakistani Army spokesman Gen. Shaukat Sultan also told The Associated Press that the report was not true. "That information is wrong," he said.

Speaking to the AP in Tehran, Hossein identified one of the sources as "Shamim Shahed, editor" of the English-language Pakistani newspaper The Nation in

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captured, but he declined to identify him except to say he was "a man with close links to intelligence services and Afghan tribal leaders."

Iranian state radio quoted its reporter as saying the arrest happened a long time ago.

"Osama bin Laden has been arrested a long time ago, but Bush is intending to use it for propaganda maneuvering in the presidential election," he said.

Homayoun Jarir, son-in-law of Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, said he could not confirm the report.

Separately, Pakistani forces killed 11 people in an exchange of fire after a minibus failed to stop at a roadblock in the tribal region where anti-terrorism operations have been ongoing, an army spokesman told the AP.

The shooting occurred early Saturday, the morning after armed men and soldiers exchanged fire at a military compound in the region.

The minibus failed to stop at a roadblock in Zeri Noor, a village just outside of Wana, the main town in tribal South Waziristan, Sultan told AP. He said soldiers only shot at the bus after someone inside opened fire on them.

"It was a terrorist act," he said.

Allah Dad, a local resident, told AP that the bus was filled mostly with Afghan refugees on their way to the border. A taxi driving near the minibus was also hit, and the driver killed, Dad said.

He said as many as 12 people were killed, and seven more injured in the incident.

"They opened fire when the bus didn't stop," Dad said. "There is a lot of tension in the area and a lot of troops. The roads to Afghanistan have been sealed."

Two local officials who spoke to the AP earlier on condition of anonymity did not mention an exchange of fire, saying it was not clear exactly what prompted the shooting.

The deaths are sure to increase anger in the region. Tribal leaders deeply resent the presence of the army on their lands. Pakistani forces have been slowly increasing their presence under pressure from Washington to crack down on al Qaeda and Taliban suspects, who are believed sheltering in the region.

In an operation Tuesday in Wana, troops arrested 25 suspected terrorists, none of whom have been identified.

In Friday's raid, armed men tried to sneak into a military compound in Wana, sparking a shootout, Sultan said Saturday. There were no casualties and the spokesman said he had no details.

"I can only say that there was an exchange of fire but there were no casualties," Sultan told The Associated Press.

Wana is located about 190 miles west of the capital, Islamabad.

Pakistan has not revealed the identity of the suspects captured in the counterterrorism operation in Wana, the fourth by the army to track down suspects since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

Security officials caution they have no confirmed information on the whereabouts of bin Laden, but say the operations are geared toward locating him.

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They say Pakistani rapid reaction forces have been deployed to specific areas along the border with Afghanistan, a mountainous landscape that runs 2,000 miles from the Himalayas in Pakistan's northern territories to the desert of southwestern Baluchistan.

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