

European nations reject purported truce offer from Osama bin Laden

BY JILL LAWLESS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — Key European nations, including Iraq war opponents Germany and France, vigorously rejected a truce offer purportedly from Osama bin Laden Thursday, saying there could be no negotiating with his al-Qaida terrorist network.

Many saw the audio-taped offer as an attempt to drive a wedge between the United States and its European allies, and one analyst said it might contain a message to militants to hold back on attacks against Europe.

The tape was broadcast on Arab TV stations. "I am offering a truce to European countries," the speaker on the tape said. "Its core is our commitment to cease operations against any country which does not carry out an onslaught against Muslims or interfere in their af-

fairs."

In Italy, a nation shocked by the killing of an Italian civilian captured by militants in Iraq, Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said it was "unthinkable that we may open a negotiation with bin Laden, everybody understands this."

French President Jacques Chirac, one of the firmest opponents of the Iraq war, was equally blunt: "No dealings are possible with terrorists."

Secretary of State Colin Powell told Polish television that "this is a time for all of us to be ever more resolute and say to Osama bin Laden, 'No, we will not listen to any of these demands. You are the one who is wrong. You are the one who must be brought to justice.'"

The tape — broadcast on the pan-Arab television stations Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya — is the first attributed to bin Laden since

January.

The message said "the door to a truce is open for three months," but the time frame could be extended. "The truce will begin when the last soldier leaves our countries," the speaker said without elaborating.

The CIA said the tape was likely an authentic recording of bin Laden, who is believed to be hiding in the mountains along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Charles Heyman, an analyst at Jane's Defense Weekly, said the tape was "a not very subtle attempt to break whatever coalition there is and to destabilize the situation in Iraq."

Several European governments strongly opposed to the Iraq war quickly rejected the offer. Chirac, speaking in Algeria, said terrorism "is a barbarous act that attacks innocent people."

"One cannot lean on religion or

any other motivation to perpetrate terrorist acts," said Chirac, whose country has troops in Afghanistan but not in Iraq.

But Spain's incoming Socialist government — which promised to pull all 1,300 Spanish troops out of Iraq — also denounced the taped message.

"What we want is peace, democracy and freedom," said incoming Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos.

Analysts said the tape was an attempt to encourage Europeans to pressure their governments to stop supporting U.S. military operations in Muslim nations.

It also could be a message to al-Qaida sympathizers to stop European operations, to avoid galvanizing support for President Bush's war on terrorism, said Montasser el-Zayat, an Egyptian lawyer who defends Islamic radicals.

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McDonald's launches adult Happy Meals

BY DAVE CARPENTER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Coming soon to a McDonald's near you: Adult Happy Meals, featuring salad, bottled water, pedometer and a little bit of advice: walk more.

The hamburger giant outlined plans Thursday to introduce the "Go Active!" meals for grown-ups at all 13,500 of its U.S. restaurants May 6 along with other steps designed to make its fare more healthy.

A target of obesity lawsuits and a magnet for criticism that fast food is unhealthy, McDonald's Corp. also launched a marketing blitz to address health issues head-on and tout new diet-conscious options at its

outlets.

The company said that in June it will roll out healthier choices in its Happy Meals for children nationwide, such as the option to substitute apple slices and juice for fries and a soft drink.

It also will distribute brochures telling customers how to modify their McDonald's orders for lower fat, calories and carbohydrates, such as by skipping the cheese or bun. The promotion has been employed at its New York-region restaurants since January.

Also new will be low-fat salad dressing, a fourth variety of salad and nutrition information on Happy Meal packages starting in test markets. The company said the steps come in response to a call

by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services this year for the private sector to help fight obesity.

HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson lauded McDonald's for promoting balanced eating and exercise and committing to "taking a lead role by helping educate its customers on this seriously important health issue."

The announcement and a presentation by McDonald's executives at the National Press Club in Washington signaled the company's biggest public-relations push yet on the obesity and diet concerns that are forcing sweeping changes in the U.S. food and restaurant industries.

The fast food industry has been under pressure from consumer

groups and the government to give more nutritional information and promote healthier eating. McDonald's introduced entree salads in the United States about a year ago, as did competitors, and has been moving to add some healthier options to its restaurants worldwide.

Blaming McDonald's for Americans' rising obesity and physical inactivity is "not reflective of reality," Mike Roberts, president of the company's U.S. operations, said in an interview.

"But it's part of what we're dealing with as a country right now, and we've got to lead" by providing lots of choices and educating consumers about them, he said. "We're very concerned about our customers' well-being."

Governor asks for counsel to prevent gay union

BY JENNIFER PETER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — Gov. Mitt Romney said Thursday he will seek emergency legislation aimed at forestalling gay marriages, which are scheduled to become legal in Massachusetts on May 17.

The legislation would allow Romney to appoint a special counsel who would ask the state's highest court to delay its ruling on gay marriage. The governor said it would allow him "to protect the integrity of the constitutional process."

"Fundamentally, I believe this is a decision which is so important it should be made by the people," Romney said. "I would like the right to be able to represent the people and my own office before the courts in Massachusetts."

Last month Democratic Attorney General Thomas Reilly rejected the Republican governor's request to seek a stay from the Supreme Judicial Court until November 2006, when voters may have a chance to weigh in on a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage and legalizing civil unions.

The man Romney hopes to tap as special counsel is retired state Supreme Judicial Court Justice Joseph R. Nolan, who has called the court's November ruling legalizing gay marriage an "abomination."

The attorney general, as the state's chief legal officer, determines legal policy for the commonwealth.

"This would be an unprecedented intrusion on the attorney general's authority," said attorney Robert Sherman, who served as counsel to former Attorney General Scott Harshbarger.

Any legislation to stop gay marriage would likely face an uphill battle in the state Senate, where 22 of the 40 members last month voted against the constitutional amendment. It passed anyway because there were enough votes among House members.

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