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Pakistan Denies Bin Laden Visited for Dialysis

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Reuters

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (Reuters) - Pakistan said Tuesday a report that Saudi-born militant Osama bin Laden underwent secret kidney dialysis in one of its hospitals a day before the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States was absurd.

CBS News, quoting Pakistani intelligence sources, reported Monday that the accused mastermind of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington got the treatment at a military hospital in Rawalpindi, near the capital Islamabad.

"That is an absurd report," Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan told a news briefing.

Pakistan's top military spokesman, Major-General Rashid Qureshi, told the briefing he had checked with the two military hospitals with dialysis facilities in Rawalpindi and found there had been "no such thing."

"This smacks of a story that has been tailor-made," Qureshi said.

CBS quoted an unidentified nurse as saying the hospital's urology department was cleared of its usual staff and replaced with another team for bin Laden's treatment.

"It was a treatment for a very special person," the nurse was quoted as saying. "The special team was obviously up to no good."

But Qureshi derided the suggestion that there was any secret team of medical workers.

"How can we have secret urologists?" Qureshi asked. "I have tried to find out who they are. I have been working the whole day and last night on this."

The whereabouts of the Saudi-born militant, who is known to suffer from a kidney complaint, are not known.

In December, he appeared on a videotape sent to Qatar's al-Jazeera television. The tape was apparently recorded in early to mid-December.

He appeared gaunt, hollow-eyed and pale.

Since then there has been no word of the man.

Earlier this month, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said the United States had no way of knowing whether bin Laden had died of kidney problems but added that President Bush would not view that as "an unwelcome event."

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has said bin Laden may have died of a kidney ailment or may have been killed by U.S. bombing.

In November, the Saudi daily newspaper al-Watan said bin Laden had ordered his aides to kill him if he risked falling into the hands of U.S. forces.

Washington launched air strikes on Afghanistan in October to flush out bin Laden and punish his Taliban protectors after the September attacks that killed more than 3,000 people.

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