Pakistan Thursday offered to buy heavy weapons at market price from tribesmen in a turbulent region on the Afghan border where troops are hunting for Al-Qaeda militants, an official said.

(04.03.2005)
The government wanted to purchase anti-aircraft guns, missiles, mortars, rocket launchers, landmines, hand-grenades, light machineguns and AK-47 Kalashnikov assault rifles, local administrator Khan Bukhsh said.

"This is a golden opportunity for the tribal people," he said at a meeting with members of the dominant Mahsud tribe at Tank city in the rugged South Waziristan.

"You can sell your weapons and the government will pay you at market price."

Khan gave the tribesmen one week to consider the government's offer. They said they would discuss it at an assembly on March 10.

US officials believe Al-Qaeda mastermind Osama bin Laden and other key militants have been sheltering somewhere along the mountainous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001.

Pakistani troops killed more than 300 Al-Qaeda-linked foreign and local militants and lost about 200 soldiers in battles in South Waziristan last year.

The tribal belt was flooded with thousands of heavy weapons worth millions of dollars during the 1979-89 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Von: 3 March 2005, Agence France-Presse

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