

Taliban launch three-pronged attack on Kabul

ISLAMABAD, Oct 11: The Islamic Taliban militia has launched a three-pronged attack on the Afghan capital Kabul. Taliban sources in Pakistan said today, reports Reuter.

UN Officials confirmed an attack on Kabul was underway but had no details.

Taliban sources in the Pakistani cities of Peshawar and Quetta said Taliban fighters had captured the key town of Charasyab just south of Kabul and were holding it despite shelling by forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

They said the Taliban had attacked on three fronts — from the west, south and southwest — on Tuesday night.

They penetrated government defence lines in Arghandeh, 15 km (nine miles) southwest of Kabul, and Paghman to the west, as well as in Charasyab.

There was no immediate word on casualties, but the sources said many government soldiers had been captured in Charasyab.

AP adds: Opposition Taliban troops marched to-

ward the shattered Afghan capital Wednesday capturing a strategic base south of the city and moving their rockets within range of Kabul, authorities said.

Thousands of Taliban soldiers have been amassing outside the capital for several weeks warning residents and foreign humanitarian workers to evacuate the city in preparation for a major assault on Kabul.

Government soldiers set up security rings around the city, deploying thousands of troops and dozens of tanks to the outskirts, officials said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties from the heavy rocket duel between government soldiers and Taliban troops that began late Tuesday and was continuing on Wednesday.

The government confirmed Wednesday that Taliban soldiers broke through their front lines and overran a base at Charasyab, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) southeast of Kabul. The loss of the base is more damaging psychologically than strategically.

Last March government troops took Charasyab from

Taliban soldiers pushing them out of rocket range of the city. Since then the capital has been relatively peaceful. Schools have opened and the administration had begun working.

But outside the city the Taliban have been preparing for their assault and demanding President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his military chief Ahmed Shah Masoud resign.

They have refused. Meanwhile, on Wednesday United Nations workers inside the capital reported hearing jet fighters overfly the city and the roar of dozens of outgoing rockets.

There were rockets that fell in the city," said Knut Ostby, a UN spokesman in the Pakistan capital of Islamabad.

Ostby received a report early Wednesday from the six UN international staff still in Kabul.

There were no immediate plans to evacuate the UN staff, "but we always have contingency plans, if the need arises," he said.

In recent weeks the UN special envoy Mahmood Mestiri had been shuttling

between the government and opposition Taliban fighters to try to broker a ceasefire.

Mestiri warned of massive bloodshed if the Taliban try to militarily capture Kabul, the scene of some of the heaviest fighting between rival Islamic factions seeking outright control in Afghanistan.

Since throwing out the communists from power in 1992 the 10 main Islamic factions have been fighting each other. More than 25,000 people, most of them civilians living in Kabul, have died in the bitter fratricidal fighting.

Taliban troops are newcomers to the fighting, entering the fray last year. Until last March when the Taliban launched its first assault on the capital, it had called the other leaders criminals for attacking civilian targets.

Made up of former Islamic religious students, the Taliban made sweeping gains in southern and western Afghanistan. In September they marched into the western city of Herat virtually uncontested taking control of that city from government-allied troops.



A Croatian doctor collects remains of Croat soldiers at a recently discovered mass grave near Kupres in central Bosnia on Tuesday. So far three bodies have been uncovered at the site. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

31 killed in Shimla bus plunge:

At least 31 people were killed when a bus fell into river Ravi near Bagga, 20 kms from Chamba last night, PTI reports from Shimla.

The bus was on its way from Chamba to Darwala. The lone survivor was a four-year-old girl.

Earthquake rocks N Japan:

An earthquake registering 4.4 on the Richter scale shook northern Japan Wednesday but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries the meteorological agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicentre of the quake which occurred at 5:48 am (2048 GMT Tuesday) was located some 50 kilometres (31 miles) beneath the seabed off the Pacific coast of Fukushima prefecture, the agency said.

Landslide kills 38 in China:

All 38 people in a long-distance bus were killed when it was buried by a landslide, according to an official newspaper report seen in Beijing on Wednesday. AP reports from Beijing.

The accident occurred Sunday in Lishui in the coastal province of Zhejiang when thousands of cubic meters (cubic feet) of stone and mud came tumbling down a mountainside, completely burying the bus and blocking other traffic, the Xinmin Evening News reported Tuesday.

Mangal Chakraborty dead:

Veteran Bengali film director, Mangal Chakraborty, who dominated the Bengali film industry during the 60s died in a city hospital yesterday following a cerebral attack. PTI reports from Calcutta.

He was 81 and is survived by his wife and a daughter. Chakraborty directed about 40 Bengali and Hindi films, of which 15 are all time hits. These include *Sonar Harin, Shikar, Aam-ti-Sa-Sakha* and *Tin Adhyay, Nujay Danda, Dhaner Aalo Ma-Matti-Manush* and *Haranath Pandit*.

10,898 prisoners freed in Kenya:

Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi has set free 10,898 prisoners, mostly petty offenders, with less than six months of their jail terms to serve, Reuter reports from Nairobi.

Moi, in power since 1978, ordered the release of the prisoners at a ceremony on Tuesday to mark his becoming president. Moi's gesture follows comments by a high court judge who said last week that Kenya's prisons were overcrowded and "jailing anyone is like sending them to a death chamber."

Gold sites found in Pakistan:

Australian experts have identified numerous sites with potential deposits of gold and other minerals in Pakistan's mountainous northern region, officials said Tuesday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

Some 70 sites have been located with feasible gold deposits, they said in a report compiled after a three-year survey of 80,000 square kilometres (32,000 square miles) between the Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges. The experts have also charted many sites with good possibilities for zinc, copper and lead reserves, the teams chief geologist, Jim Claverino, said.

7 Russian border guards killed:

Seven Russian border guards were killed and five wounded in Tajikistan when their truck was fired on, from across the Afghan border, officials said Wednesday. AP reports from Tajikistan Dushanbe.

The incident happened Tuesday while the guards were traveling from the border town of Khorog to a Russian guard post, said the Russian Border Guards commander, Gen Pavel Tara-senko. He flew from Dushanbe to the post to investigate. More than 25,000 Russian troops are in the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan to prop up the government and protect the border.

2 main Iraqi opposition groups reach agreement

TEHRAN, Oct 11: Two major Iraqi opposition groups have reached agreement on a fixed date for the parliament elections and reduction of armed forces from the two sides, according to a report here Tuesday, reports Xinhua.

Iran's official news agency IRNA reported last night that the latest agreement was concluded by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK) here Monday.

The PUK official pointed out that there will be no official observers from outside the Iraqi Kurdistan, however, the local and foreign journalists, present during the elections, could play the role as observers.

Rao now wants to be novelist

NEW DELHI, Oct 11: Prime Minister P V Narsimha Rao already has made a mark as a statesman and scholar. Now, he wants to be a novelist, reports AP.

Working after office hours on a laptop computer, Rao has nearly completed the manuscript of a political novel whose protagonist follows a career remarkably like his own, according to Outlook, a new magazine published Wednesday.

Judging by excerpts of "The Other Half," the book may give insight into Rao's private thoughts about politics, power and some of his predecessors. Neither does the 73-year-old prime minister shy away from the racy side of public life.

US to grant Castro visa

WASHINGTON, Oct 11: The Clinton administration appeared certain to grant Cuban President Fidel Castro a US visa as early as Wednesday to attend UN 50th anniversary events in New York, reports AFP.

The State Department confirmed that Castro had requested the visa, and a senior official, speaking privately Tuesday, said it would likely be granted "tomorrow or the next day."

"I don't expect him to meet with US officials' while in the United States, the official said."

Hamas wants to stabilise ties with PLO

DAMASCUS, Oct 11: The hardline Muslim fundamentalist group Hamas which is opposed to the Israeli PLO autonomy accords said Tuesday it wanted to establish stable relations with Yasser Arafat's Palestinian authority, reports AFP.

The desire for improved relations was voiced at meetings in Khartoum between the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and representatives from Gaza's Hamas statement distributed here said.

"Hamas reaffirmed its concern to establish stable relations with the Palestinian authority, with each side maintaining its political convictions, preserving the unity of the Palestinian people and recognising the right to resist the Israeli occupation, the statement said."

Chechens suspending talks, military pact with Moscow

GROZNY, Oct 11: Chechen rebels said Wednesday they are suspending peace talks and a military agreement with Moscow because of attacks on civilians, and are demanding that UN forces secure the peace, reports AP.

A statement by rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev, cited by Russian news agencies, accuses Russia of "missile strikes, bombings and artillery shelling of populated areas, numerous civilian victims, constant provocations by Russian troops and gross violations of obligations by the Russian side."

Tensions have risen in Chechnya since a bomb at-

tack critically wounded a top Russian general on Friday. An already tenuous military pact signed July 31 has grown increasingly wobbly.

Russia has threatened to impose harsher measures on the breakaway southern republic, while the Chechens say Russian planes have bombed and shelled villages. Moscow denies shelling civilians.

The ITAR-Tass news agency said Khozh-Akhmed Yarikhonov, the lead Chechen delegate at peace talks, told reporters in Grozny that Dudayev was breaking off talks "until the arrival in Chechnya of international observers and security forces

from the UN to guarantee compliance with international norms and obligations."

Russia considers the conflict an internal matter, and previous Chechen calls for international intervention have met little response. Russia did allow the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe to set up a mission in Grozny and sponsor the peace talks.

Despite the military agreement and truce, nightly clashes continue to claim victims. Casualty figures are notoriously unreliable.

Russian military authorities said Wednesday that one soldier was killed

Violence claims 18 in twenty four hours MQM calls strike in Karachi today

KARACHI, Oct 11: An immigrant-based opposition group has called a general strike for tomorrow in Sindh province, home of this Pakistani business capital where at least 18 people have been killed in political violence in the past 24 hours, police and hospital sources said, reports AFP.

The Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), the main political party of Karachi, said it called the strike throughout the southern province to protest the killing in cold

blood Tuesday of six of its members by police. But police have denied this and said the six died during an armed confrontation.

Overnight, prolonged shooting was heard in the city centre, witnesses said. Most shops and markets were closed well ahead of ighfall and the resumption of violence following the deaths of six MQM members.

Two people were slain early today, in the traditionally volatile Korangi and Malir areas east of Karachi, the po-

lice said. The MQM represents Muslim immigrants who came from predominantly Hindu, India following its 1947 partitioning and the birth of Pakistan. The immigrants speak Urdu, the main language of Pakistan.

More than 1,500 people have died in the political violence in Karachi since the beginning of the year, which is the result of the MQM's growing opposition to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government.



Released Palestinian prisoners kiss ground after they were freed from Israeli jails at the Nahal Oz crossing Tuesday. Israel freed some 300 prisoners and more than 600 releases were to follow Tuesday, police said, as families waited to celebrate the first concrete results of the West Bank deal. — AFP/UNB photo

Black males in America feel feared, mistrusted

WASHINGTON, Oct 11: The state of America's black men is measured with sweeping statistics — too few in the classrooms and corporate board rooms, too many on the streets, behind prison walls and in early graves, reports AP.

For individuals, there is a more personal accounting: the cabs that drive past researcher Richard Majors when he tries to flag them down on a busy Washington corner; the way some whites avert their eyes when bookstore clerk Albert Pollard steps into an elevator; the frequency with which police stop college student Shawn Barney for what he sees as no reason.

No matter how they succeed, many black men feel feared and mistrusted. They

say it's problem black women don't share, because women aren't perceived as threatening.

The men's frustration and anger is shared across economic lines, and it's part of the pull of the Million Man March, a giant rally for black males planned in Washington next Monday.

"I've done everything society asked me to do — worked hard, gone to the good schools, I dress well and I cannot get a taxi during the day," said Majors, who has a doctorate in psychology and won a Harvard Medical School fellowship.

"What does that say about the black man who has no power, who has no education, who has no skills?" he asked, adding: "We don't like black males very much in this soci-

ety." Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, originator of the Million Man March, says one of its goals is "showing the world a vastly different picture of the black male."

The midday event organizers describe it as more of a convergence than a march will underscore the majority of black men who stay in school, work hard and care for their families.

It also is described as a call for black men to come together to end the inner-city spiral of crime, drugs and unemployment, the conditions that feed media images of black men.

"Remember, many of these young black men deserved to be in jail. Many of them deserve to be under the jail. They are murderers and

thieves. They are giving the others a bad name," said black radio host Armstrong Williams, who supports the goals of the march but opposes the controversial Farrakhan as its leader.

Organisers have been criticised for excluding women from the event, one of several reasons the national body of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People refused to endorse the rally. But many black women support its goals, agreeing that black manhood is in crisis.

At predominantly black Howard University, Jania Richardson often finds herself in a class of five males and 25 females.

"Our black men are scarce," said Richardson,

president of the school's NAACP chapter.

Sure, black women must cope with racism and sexism, she said. But black men have a tougher time in school and in the work place, because "society feels threatened by them if they do succeed or if they don't succeed."

The statistics are numbing. Black men are eight times more likely to be murdered than white men, and five times more likely to be murdered than black women, according to US Census Bureau figures.

Thousands more black men are serving time in prison or jail than studying in college. In contrast, white men are nine times more likely to be in class than behind bars, according to researchers at The Sentencing

Off the Record

Fined for quack! quack!

CANBERRA: An Australian man has been fined a 2,000 Australian dollar (US dollar 1,500) for quacking like a duck on his radio transmitter, a court official in the Tasmanian town of Launceston said Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Don Desmond Davey, 57, was convicted on Tuesday for broadcasting something that was not speech, the official said.

Davey pleaded guilty to 16 charges over the operation and possession of unlicensed radio communications equipment and was also ordered to hand over his radio.

Hillary wants to keep it a secret

WASHINGTON: When President Clinton and his wife Hillary celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary Wednesday, the first lady has a romantic surprise in store for her husband, reports AP:

"You might be able to guess what it is," she said in her weekly newspaper column. "But sorry, I'm not telling."

Mrs Clinton hinted broadly at her plans when discussing ways to keep a marriage fresh.

"How do you ever get any privacy as a couple? How can romance thrive when you live above the office with a 'round-the-clock staff?'"

"Well," she answered, "you improvise." And she gave this example: "One night last summer when it was extremely hot and humid, we thought it would be nice to go for a dip in the White House swimming pool."

"It was very late. Chelsea was away at camp. So we grabbed our towels, left the mansion, tiptoed through the Oval Office and snuck through some bushes in the pitch black. Without anybody around, we went for a swim."

And her plans for Wednesday? "It will be a little too cold to celebrate our 20th anniversary with a dip in the pool," she wrote. "But I think I've come up with an equally romantic way to mark the day."

Too much is harmful, few minutes — helpful

ATLANTA: Too much sun can increase the risk of skin cancer, but a few minutes of sun a day can produce enough Vitamin D to help fight other types of cancer, researchers said on Tuesday, reports Atlanta.

"The exposure of only a small area of our body, such as face, arms or legs, to sunlight is sufficient to raise the blood levels of Vitamin D," reported a team of researchers from the Boston University Medical Centre.

Boston University's Dr Michael Holick called for "intelligent use of sunlight" to help people produce Vitamin D needed for a healthy skeleton and to fight disease.

Researchers, meeting for a symposium on the biological effects of light, disagreed however on exactly when radiation from the sun can be helpful or harmful.

Dr Cedric Garland, a professor at the University of California, San Diego, who studied deaths worldwide from various types of cancer, reported that death rates from breast cancer, for example, decrease upon migration to sunnier areas.

But cases of malignant melanoma are doubling every 10 years, said Dr Frederick Urbach of the Temple University School of Medicine.

Gorbachev blasts policy failure in Russia, US

WASHINGTON, Oct 11: Mikhail S Gorbachev, the Russian leader who guided his country away from the Cold War, said he was worried about "a tendency toward isolation" in the United States and political mistakes in Washington and Moscow, reports AP.

"I think America has not yet sorted out what role it wants to play," Gorbachev said Tuesday before a speech at the Kennedy Center on economic ties between the two countries.

In Moscow, where he was ousted in 1991 by President Boris Yeltsin, the former Soviet leader said "the situation is more complicated."