

Masood's forces retake Salang tunnel from Islamic militias

Troops loyal to deposed govt pound Taliban positions north of Kabul



Princess Diana (L) is welcomed by Mrs. Dasi (bowing), wife of Italian Professor Gerardo Filiberto Dasi, upon her arrival at Rimini airport, Italy on Saturday. The Princess of Wales visits the Italian sea resort of Rimini to receive a special award for her work in favour of humanitarian organisations. — AFP/UNB photo

KABUL, Oct 13: Troops loyal to the deposed government pounded Taliban positions north of the capital on Sunday, reports AP.

Several aid workers and diplomats were reporting that the Taliban army had been driven from Jebul Siraj, the headquarters of former military chief Ahmed Shah Masood.

The thud of tank fire and the roar of heavy artillery could be heard in Kabul's northern suburb of Khair Khana as fighting drew closer to the capital.

In control of roughly two thirds of Afghanistan, the Taliban is facing stiff resistance, battered by hit-and-run attacks.

Hospital officials in Kabul say they are receiving about 30 wounded a day, many of them civilians caught in the cross-fire.

In recent days the former government soldiers have been

waging successful guerilla-style assaults on Taliban positions, cutting their defence lines and trapping their troops.

From their mountain hideouts, troops loyal to Masood have used the cover of darkness to ambush Taliban positions on the road north of Kabul.

The strategic road leads to Baghram military air base, still believed to be controlled by Taliban. The road also links up with the Salang Highway, the only road that connects Kabul to northern Afghanistan and Central Asia.

That highway is virtually under the control of northern warlord Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek who rules seven northern provinces in Afghanistan.

Dostum's army is the only other major fighting force left in Afghanistan. His soldiers, most of them former conscripts in the old communist regime, are well-armed and well-disciplined.

Dostum also has a respectable air force and several Russian-trained pilots.

Last week Dostum formed a military alliance with deposed President Burhanuddin Rabbani, Masood, a minority Shiite leader Karim Khalili and several smaller groups.

Meanwhile, there were reports in Kabul that the Taliban army was being attacked in Afghanistan's western Herat province and at Shindand, a military air base under Taliban control.

Earlier report says, civilian casualties filled hospitals in the capital as troops loyal to the ousted government pounded Taliban rebel positions on the only road leading north from the city.

Taliban soldiers maintained their blockade on traffic heading north Sunday after a day of successful raids by troops controlled by the former govern-

ment's military chief, Ahmed Shah Masood.

The Taliban army claims to have fended off the latest attack, but dozens of Taliban fighters were injured in battles 16 kilometers (10 miles) north of the capital. Exact numbers of casualties could not be determined because many people bury their dead immediately in accordance with Islamic tradition.

AFP adds: Thousands of Afghans marched in the southwest Afghan city of Kandahar Saturday to show their support for the imposition of strict Islamic law, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported.

Many of the chanting demonstrators were women, who marched covered head to foot in accordance with regulations enforced by the Taliban Islamic militia which controls large parts of the country. AIP said.

The United Nations has said it may suspend aid unless the Taliban drop dictates that deny women education and the right to work outside the home.

Another AFP report says, forces loyal to the ousted Afghan government have retaken the southern flank of the strategically crucial Salang tunnel north of Kabul from Taliban militia, travellers said today.

Troops under the command of the ex-government's top commander Ahmed Shah Masood pushed the Taliban back from the south end of the tunnel late Saturday, inflicting their second major blow of the day on the militia, they said.

Indian nurses threaten hunger strike

NEW DELHI, Oct 13: Indian nurses have revived a campaign to press for uniforms with ankle-length hemlines saying they will go on hunger strike and refuse to wear white skirts to work, reports AFP.

The All India Government Nurses Federation, representing 150,000 nurses in state-run hospitals, revived its drive at the weekend after New Delhi ordered salary cuts for nurses protesting against traditional uniform skirts.

"We are not going on a strike because the current dengue fever epidemic in New Delhi would spark medical chaos, but we are launching a hunger strike," said

Federation General Secretary GK Khurana.

She rekindled the agitation, frozen since September 28 after Health Minister Saleem Sherwani on Friday said he would not bow to the nurses pressing for camel-shaded uniforms reaching down to their ankles.

"Sherwani has said the government will not succumb to the demands of the nurses," said Mohini Giri, Chairwoman of the National Commission for Women.

Giri, a peace-maker between the nurses and New Delhi, said she would meet Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda to discuss the issue.

Hutu rebels kill 40 in Burundi

BUJUMBURA, Oct 13: About 40 villagers were killed by Hutu rebels in the southwestern province of Burundi, an army spokesman told AFP today.

Lieutenant Colonel Isale Nibiza said the rebels Friday attacked the village of Burambi, 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of the capital Bujumbura. It is one of the worst attacks reported by the government.

They (the rebels) killed people and burned houses, their victims were mainly those who could not flee, such as women children and old people," he added.

Reuter adds, African leaders told Burundi's military ruler Pierre Buyoya on Saturday to open unconditional talks with Hutu rebels within a month or face further sanctions.

NZ plunges into political uncertainty

WELLINGTON, Oct 12: New Zealand plunged into political uncertainty today with the clear coalition in sight after voters delivered a split verdict on six years of Conservative rule, reports Reuter.

Prime Minister Jim Bolger said he would try to form a new minority government, but opposition Labour leader Helen Clark sought coalition talks with Nationalist New Zealand first and the left-wing alliance.

"I know that many people have expressed the hope that I will break through that glass ceiling and be the first woman prime minister of New Zealand," Clark told cheering

supporters. "I will be endeavouring to negotiate to see that I can lead a change of government, and certainly leadership of this country is something that I would consider a great honour to accept."

But Bolger, who has a potential partner in radical free-market act New Zealand, was optimistic of holding onto power, he urged financial workers to keep calm.

We know that New Zealand will be able to form a sensible government, a forward-looking government, a government that you and I would be prepared to be part of as we move forward through the next three years."

Russia to train Iranian experts to run N-plant

TEHRAN, Oct 13: Russia is to train Iranian experts to run a controversial civilian nuclear plant in southern Iran, according to an official announcement published Saturday, reports AP.

Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation (IAEO) said in an advertisement in a newspaper that it would take a number of men and send them to Russia for training in various technical positions at Iran's first nuclear station in the Gulf port of Bushehr.

The applicants will have to undergo written tests and interviews and learn Russian in courses offered by the organisation, it added.

KDP confirms fall of N Iraqi city of Sulaimaniya to PUK

ARBIL, Iraq, Oct 13: A Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) official today confirmed the fall of the northern Iraqi city of Sulaimaniya and said it had been seized by Iranian revolutionary guards, reports AP.

We have withdrawn from the city of Sulaimaniya because of the heavy Iranian artillery and missile bombardments," Arbil Governor Franso Hariri, who is a member of the KDP leadership, told AFP.

UN officials said, however, that the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the KDP's main Kurdish rival, has seized Sulaimaniya.

KDP forces captured Sulaimaniya without a fight on September 9, in the culmination of an offensive which they took control of Arbil, capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, with Iraqi military support, said Saturday.

The PUK said several towns in northern Iraq from the KDP after mounting a campaign on Friday to eject KDP forces from a wide swathe of Sulaimaniya province.

Reuter adds: Anti-Baghdad Kurdish rebels of Jalal Talabani have recaptured the Kurdish stronghold of Sulaimaniya from the pro-Baghdad rebels of Massoud Barzani, the UN coordinator's office in Baghdad said today.

Early this morning the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) took over Sulaimaniya

from Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Massoud Barzani, a source at the coordinator's headquarters told Reuters.

AP adds from Nicosia: Kurdish rebels claimed that they had recaptured several towns in northern Iraq on Saturday, six weeks after they were defeated by a rival Kurdish faction backed by Saddam Hussein.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan said in a facsimile to the Associated Press that its fighters had recaptured the towns of Panjwin, Mawat and Chuwartah from its rival, the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

The towns form an arc about 30 miles (50 kilometres) northeast of the city of Sulaimaniya, 170 miles (275 kilometres) north of Baghdad.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Massoud Barzani confirmed the fighting in a statement, saying PUK fighters backed with Iranian troops and artillery crossed into northern Iraq from Iran on Friday.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party with help from the Iraqi army took control of the area in an offensive that began August 30.

It said the fighting continued Saturday morning and that the KDP had to evacuate Panjwin under heavy Iranian artillery and rocket shelling.

The Arabic-language statement, also sent by facsimile to the AP, made no mention of Mawat and Chuwartah, but said KDP forces had repulsed a PUK attack on the nearby locality of Qala Diza.

The Iraqi-backed Barzani militia were routed from the region after suffering more than 73 killed," the English-language statement said. The statement did not say if there were any PUK casualties.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party accused Iran of trying to destabilise the border areas after a period of calm.

It said the fighting continued Saturday morning and that the KDP had to evacuate Panjwin under heavy Iranian artillery and rocket shelling.

The Arabic-language statement, also sent by facsimile to the AP, made no mention of Mawat and Chuwartah, but said KDP forces had repulsed a PUK attack on the nearby locality of Qala Diza.

The Iraqi-backed Barzani militia were routed from the region after suffering more than 73 killed," the English-language statement said. The statement did not say if there were any PUK casualties.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party accused Iran of trying to destabilise the border areas after a period of calm.

The girls hanged themselves in their home on Thursday a night after apparently making a suicide pact they had no cash to fund their weddings.

Poverty and their inability to get married because of dowry is seen as the reason behind the suicide, the news agency quoted a police officer as saying in Agra.

Victims of dowry

NEW DELHI, Oct 13: Four sisters have hanged themselves in the Taj Mahal town of Agra because they were too poor to offer a dowry for their own weddings, the United News of India quoted police as saying Saturday, reports AP.

The sisters, aged between 12 and 24 years, were daughters of a deceased government worker and cared for their mentally-ill mother, a widow, in Agra's Rajaram Ki Bagli area near the Moghul-built Taj Mahal monument.

The girls hanged themselves in their home on Thursday a night after apparently making a suicide pact they had no cash to fund their weddings.

Poverty and their inability to get married because of dowry is seen as the reason behind the suicide, the news agency quoted a police officer as saying in Agra.

BRIEFLY

Greek PM wins confidence vote: Socialist Prime Minister Costas Simitis won a parliamentary vote of confidence early yesterday pledging to close the gap between Greece and its European Union partners through spending cuts and increased growth, Reuter reports from Athens.

Simitis was backed by 161 deputies in the 300 seat parliament while 134 voted against him and five were absent. His Pasko Party scored an easy victory in elections last month which gave him an absolute majority of 162 seats. The vote came at the end of a three-day debate during which Simitis and his ministers told parliament that Greeks must make sacrifices so that the country will be able to join the European Monetary Union (EMU) by the year 2000.

China plans to attend UN hearing: China plans to attend a UN hearing that will scrutinise Hong Kong's human rights record, the South China Morning Post reported yesterday, Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

Beijing had agreed to send observers to the hearing in Geneva on October 23, the newspaper quoted Francisco Aguilar Urbina, Chairman of the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC), as saying, China was also considering attending a UN committee hearing on economic, social and cultural rights on November 26, the paper said.

15 killed as raft capsizes in Angola: At least 15 people were killed when a raft capsized Friday on a river near the Angolan locality of Muxima north of the capital, the radio reported yesterday, AFP says from Luanda.

Most of the casualties were Roman Catholic devotees heading for ceremonies in Muxima in honour of the Angolan saint Mama Muxima a local official said. The Roman Catholic church made no statement on the accident.

Pilot killed in chopper crash in Russia: A pilot was killed when a small helicopter crashed on landing in Russia's Siberia region, a spokesman for the emergencies ministry said yesterday, Reuter reports from Moscow.

The helicopter, a Mi-2, was returning to its base in the city of Nefteyugansk after checking installations in the oil-rich Tyumen region. It had a crew of two. The second pilot escape unhurt.

Tower collapse in Dallas kills 3: A 1,500-foot (457-metre) transmission tower collapsed into a mass of twisted metal, killing three workers on the tower who earlier discussed cutting short their repairs because it was too windy, AP reports from Cedar Hill.

Dallas-Fort Worth television station KXAS — one of the stations that uses the tower — reported a gust of wind caught the machine used to hoist materials up to the workers. The device fell, breaking a guy wire and causing the tower to fall Saturday. "When people said 'The tower!' I turned and looked and just saw the motion of the last of the tower disappearing between the tree line," said police Lt. Jim Zerban.

Wang Xizhe arrives in HK: Chinese dissident Wang Xizhe, who wrote a letter in support of Tibetan self-determination, has arrived in Hong Kong and is seeking political asylum in the United States, government radio reported yesterday.

The co-author of the letter, Liu Xiaobo, was sentenced on Tuesday to three years in a labour camp. The radio quoted an unidentified source as saying Wang "started planning his departure" after Liu was sentenced.

10 killed in clash in Mogadishu: At least 10 people were killed and nine wounded in a string of attacks on clashes in the Somali capital on Friday and early today, witnesses said, Reuter reports from Mogadishu.

Israeli gunners shell Hezbollah posts

JERUSALEM, Oct 13: Israeli gunners shelled a South Lebanese village, wounding 10 civilians in an escalation of its conflict with pro-Iranian Hezbollah guerrillas, Lebanese security sources said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Israel said its artillery attack on Friday night was a direct reprisal for an attack by the Muslim guerrillas on its forces, although no one was hurt in the attack.

However, its action bypassed a monitoring mechanism set up last April under US and French auspices which is designed to avert escalation of the conflict in South Lebanon and bans attacks from or at civilian areas.

The Israeli army later said in a statement that its troops killed two Amal guerrillas and wounded one in a clash in the Jewish state's occupied zone in South Lebanon on Friday.

Violent crime in every 18 seconds in US

WASHINGTON, Oct 13: A violent crime is committed every 18 seconds, a rape every five minutes and a murder every one minute in the United States, a FBI report said today, reports Reuter.

The good news is that violent crime, and the homicide rate in particular, is falling.



A Palestinian schoolgirl stands by a poster of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, as crowds gathered to welcome Arafat in the West Bank town of Nablus on Saturday, where he is meeting with top Palestinian leaders to discuss the seven-month-overdue Israeli redeployment from Hebron. Arafat then lunched with US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, who has been mediating the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations since October 6. — AFP/UNB photo

Cases of Rao: Justice and politics questioned

NEW DELHI, Oct 13: Five years ago, the question was whether PV Narasimha Rao could lead India. Now, it's whether the former prime minister will go to jail, reports AP.

He has fallen from revered statesman to what some would say symbolises all that is rotten in Indian politics.

Rao became prime minister in 1991 and his policies to open the economy soon brought prosperity. He was praised for everything from controlling inflation to putting Coke and other trendy foreign goods on shop shelves.

But his Congress Party became wracked by scandal and in May elections — after ruling India for all but four of the last 49 years — it fell from power.

Now, Rao's achievements largely have been obscured by three corruption cases he faces:

— A businessman admits that in 1983 he paid a \$100,000 bribe to a Hindu priest claiming to be an associate of Rao, then foreign minister. He accuses Rao of knowing about the deal.

— In 1989, Rao allegedly used his position as foreign minister to pressure India's New York consulate to authenticate fake documents tracing an illegal foreign bank account to the son of a political rival.

— In 1993, Rao allegedly bribed parliament members to support him during a confidence vote. The case, however, was thrown into limbo when a key witness recanted testimony.

The 74-year-old Rao so far has managed to avoid jail or even a court appearance for any of the cases, arguing ill health or poor courtroom security. For the past few weeks, Indians have been opening their morn-

ing newspapers or watching evening news broadcasts to learn of his latest legal manoeuvre.



— at the house immediately posted \$175 bail — keeping Rao out of custody.

I think the public feels that the way the system works, those who have power and those who have influence can escape the clutches of the law," said E. Sridharan, a political scientist at India's premier think tank, the Centre for Policy Research.

"That itself is damaging — the cynicism about the criminal justice system," Sridharan said. The scandal also has done untold damage to an already weakened Congress Party — the party of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi.

After the 1991 assassination of Indira Gandhi's son, Rajiv, Rao became head of the party because other leaders had been tainted by allegations over kickbacks from a Swedish

arms maker.

Few thought Rao would be any more than a transitional figure. But his success in freeing the economy from strangling effects of protectionism and socialism won him support.

By the time he lost power, scores of politicians and bureaucrats were caught up in a \$1.23 billion bribes-for-favours scandal.

Rao at first still appeared personally above corruption. Then the charges against him began to seep out.

Off the Record

Van Halen's unpleasant trip to past

NEW YORK: Eddie Van Halen says that teaming up with David Lee Roth again was like an unpleasant trip to the past, reports AP.

Van Halen, said a backstage blow up at the MTV Video Music Awards last month put an end to the band's brief reconciliation with Roth.

"The old Dave reared his ugly head backstage," Van Halen tells Entertainment Weekly in its October 18 issue. "On a personal level I found out he hadn't changed."

In the TV press tent at the awards ceremony, Van Halen told a reporter that his upcoming hip-replacement operation, scheduled for Dec 16, was the only definite item on the band's agenda. Roth "went ballistic" and told Van Halen he shouldn't have mentioned the operation, according to his brother, Alex Van Halen.

"Uh yeah, that was the last straw," Eddie Van Halen says. Roth, the band's original lead singer, returned in June after 11 years on his own.

Clint Eastwood — unusual film director

LOS ANGELES: Clint Eastwood is not the kind of director who barks out "Action!" Instead, he opens a scene with a casual "OK," reports AP.

"I learned that years ago on 'Rawhide.' When you say 'Action!' it sends adrenaline through the actors," he said in Saturday's editions of the Los Angeles Times.

Even horses get very hip to the world 'Action.' They know something's about to happen. Up in the saddle, the actor squeezes the horse, the horse jumps out of the shot. Then you start over."

Eastwood is famous for his efficiency as a director. His latest project, "Absolute Power," was shot 17 days ahead of schedule.

In the film, due out in February, Eastwood plays a burglar who happens to witness a murderous romantic tryst involving the President of the United States.

Lifting his eyebrows, Eastwood said: "Of course, we know presidents don't do those things. But they, you have to take a little license. It's just a movie."