

# Taliban fighters beat back offensive

## Pakistan asks Turkish PM to mediate between Afghan warring factions

### BRIEFLY

#### 50 feared drowned in Indian bus plunge

More than 50 people were feared drowned Wednesday when a bus transporting them plunged into a flooded water tank in southern India on Wednesday, a news agency report said. AP reports from New Delhi.

Eight passengers swam ashore and 60 were missing in Chitragurga district in Karnataka state. Press Trust of India news agency quoted S Madiyal, a state police officer, as saying, Madiyal said the accident was an unusual one. The bus was being pushed by some passengers after it failed to start on its own. The driver lost control and the bus fell into the tank after breaking through the parapet. The tank's depth was not known.

#### Shultz criticizes Clinton

Former Secretary of State George Shultz says the Clinton administration's efforts in Bosnia, have fallen short. AP reports from Dayton, Ohio.

Shultz, who held the post under President Reagan and who is now campaigning for presidential candidate Bob Dole, took part in a foreign policy forum Tuesday night at Sinclair Community College. Former Representative Stephen Solarz also spoke. Solarz listed trade agreements and nuclear weapons control, NATO expansion and Middle East peace talks, Haiti and Bosnia as some of the accomplishments of the Clinton administration. "I don't think you should put Bosnia on your list," Shultz said.

#### 119 Ugandans rescued from rebels

Soldiers and helicopters intercepted 200 insurgents in Uganda this week, rescuing 119 people kidnapped by rebel forces. AP reports from Gulu.

Ten of the abductees were killed in the Monday attack near Kitum, about 205 miles from Kampala, the army said Wednesday. The rebel group — the Lord's Resistance Army — is led by Joseph Kony, a former Roman Catholic lay worker. It has few volunteers and abducts young men and women for military training or for use as porters and cooks.

#### Malaysian plane makes forced landing

A light Cessna airplane flown by a German pilot and a German co-pilot made an emergency landing on an Expressway in northern Malaysia Wednesday, forcing the closing of one lane. Bernama news agency reported. Nobody was injured. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Police said the single-engine four-seater Cessna 172, belonging to the Penang Flying Club, landed near the edge of the four-lane North-South Expressway, but traffic was not disrupted. The 847-kilometres (522-mile) toll highway runs the length of the Malaysian Peninsula. The plane landed near Sungai town in Perak state, 150 kilometres (90 miles) from Kuala Lumpur.

#### Ukrainian navy commander resigns

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksandr Kuzmuk on Wednesday accepted the resignations of the navy commander, Vice Adm Vladimir Bezkorovainy, and his two deputies. AP reports from Kiev.

All three resigned for health reasons, said navy spokesman Mikola Savchenko. They will be assigned to other posts, he said. The navy's press service refused to connect the resignations to the situation surrounding the disputed Black Sea Fleet, claimed by both Russia and Ukraine after the 1991 Soviet collapse.

#### BJP protests Gowda's dinner for Miss World contestants

NEW DELHI, Oct 24: A dinner for Miss World contestants to be hosted by Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda sparked a protest march in the Indian capital, a newspaper said today. reports AP.

The youth wing of India's main Hindu political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) Brandished cardboard cut-outs of the prime minister alongside contestants during Wednesday's march. The Hindu Daily reported.

Beg Raj Khataha, the president of the group, said that by agreeing to host the dinner on November 4 Deve Gowda shows his insensitivity to Indian culture.

He added Deve Gowda should concentrate instead on solving India's unemployment, corruption, inflation and terrorism.

The competition, due to be held in Bangalore from November 12 to 23, has been dogged by protests, with some women's groups threatening to burn themselves to death if the event goes ahead.

JEBUL SIRAJ, Afghanistan, Oct 24: Former government soldiers unleashed a blistering hail of rockets Wednesday on Taliban positions north of Kabul, but witnesses said Taliban fighters beat back the offensive, reports AP.

The alliance of troops loyal to deposed military chief Ahmad Shah Masood and northern warlord Gen. Rashid Dostum are the only forces capable of halting a complete Taliban takeover of the country.

The Taliban army of religious students, which swept into Kabul on September 27 and now controls two-thirds of Afghanistan, responded to Wednesday's assault with mortars, heavy artillery and tank fire.

Masood's troops were trying to take control of the Khair Khay Pass, 12 miles (20 kilometers) north of Kabul.

Witnesses returning from the front said Taliban troops put up fierce resistance, chasing retreating soldiers loyal to the government beyond Kot Safi, a small village north of the coveted pass.

Control of the pass would have put Masood's men in the hills overlooking Kabul's airport and made it difficult for the Taliban to advance northward.

Dostum, Masood and the ousted government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani are demanding the Taliban leave Kabul before agreeing to a ceasefire, but Taliban leaders have refused.

"We will defend Kabul until the last drop of our blood," Taliban Information Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi told reporters Wednesday. "We will fight until the last Taliban is killed."

Diplomats from the United Nations and Pakistan were trying to arrange a ceasefire, but it was not likely they would be successful anytime soon.

"We had close and very intensive discussion," UN envoy Norbert Hol said Wednesday after meeting with Dostum in his northern headquarters of Mazar-e-Sharif. "We discussed for several hours a ceasefire and the beginning of a political process as a second step."

Masood is commanding a combined force of several thousand soldiers, including troops loyal to Dostum.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Dostum's well-armed soldiers were participating in this offensive, but witnesses said Dostum had about 2,000 troops at the front line.

"Shouting 'God is great!' one Dostum commander who would not give his name added, 'We're going to Kabul to get rid of the Taliban and Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto."

Masood has repeatedly accused Pakistan of arming and training the Taliban army. Pakistan denies the charges.

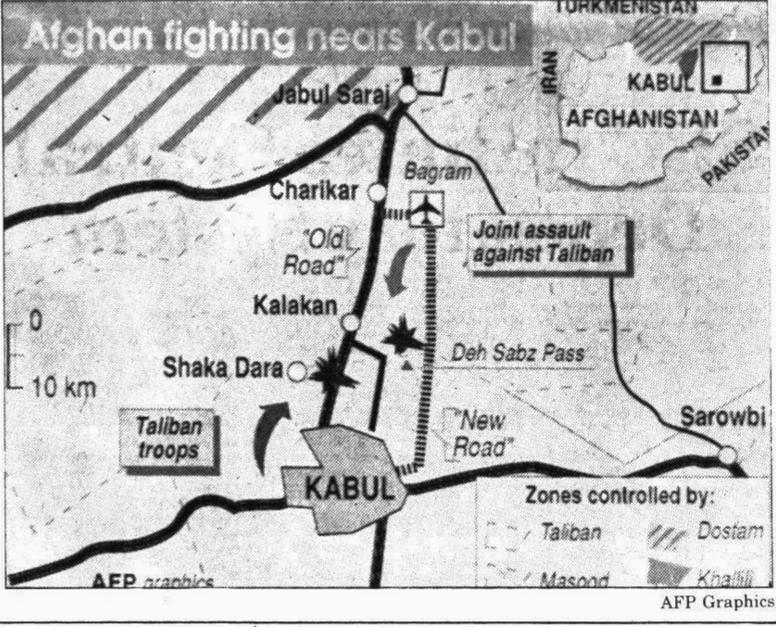
AFP adds from Ankara: Pakistan has asked Turkey's Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to mediate between Afghanistan's warring factions, a newspaper said in its Thursday edition.

"I brought a letter from Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to Erbakan which requests that Erbakan bring all rival groups in Afghanistan together," Pakistan's oil and natural resources minister told the English-language Turkish Daily News.

Prime Minister Erbakan has agreed to play a role, because it would be a historical role for Turkey," Anwar Saifullah Khan said, according to the newspaper. Khan was in Istanbul to attend an economy ministers meeting of eight Muslim countries.

Turkey has had traditionally good ties with Pakistan and has called on the warring Afghan groups to agree to a ceasefire.

On Wednesday troops loyal to a powerful Afghan warlord joined ex-government soldiers for the first time on Wednesday to attack a key pass near Kabul held by Taliban militia.



## Russia losing control over its N-Arms : CIA

LONDON, Oct 24: A CIA report expressing concern that Russia was losing control over its nuclear arms came as no surprise to international military experts, who said on Wednesday the real threat was from an accident not an unauthorised attacks, reports Reuter.

Given economic and military conditions in Russia, they said, it was not unreasonable to conclude that control was weakening.

"It (the report) doesn't entirely surprise me," Robert Hall, editor of Jane's Intelligence Review, an authoritative monthly on military matters, told Reuters.

"The Russians have been speaking at very high levels with the Americans about their safety procedures to try to reassure them all is well but because of the state of play within Russia itself... it is well within bounds that things aren't going right," he added.

"I think it will be an error rather than a deliberate act."

The Central Intelligence Agency report: "Prospects for unauthorised use of Russian nuclear weapons," which was published in the Washington Times on Tuesday, said the Russian nuclear control system was being subjected to stress which it was not designed to withstand.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), a London-based think-tank, says Russia had 754 intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM), 688 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM) and 89

bombers on January 1, 1996.

Under START II (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) signed by the US and Russia — but not yet ratified by the Russian Duma (parliament) — both countries must reduce their strategic warheads to between 3,000-3,500 by 2003. SLBMs will be limited to 1,750 for each side.

The Washington Times cited the CIA report as warning of "Conspiracies within nuclear-armed units" to commit blackmail.

Because of low morale and poor living conditions in the Russian military, even within the elite who man nuclear submarines and warheads, the CIA considers it a major threat.

Washington confirmed that the leaked information was correct but was quick to quash concerns that Russia was losing control over its nuclear weapons.

But Hall and Rose Gottemoeller, deputy director of the IISS, were not so sure.

"People who operate the nuclear facilities are receiving priority in payment and conditions but overall conditions in the former Soviet Union are pretty dire and therefore the system is being severely challenged in its ability to maintain the checks and balances it had before," said Hall.

"The danger of an accident happening through a nuclear reactor or even an old submarine which has not been commissioned... is perhaps greater than the sensational chance of a terrorist capturing a nuclear weapons from a nuclear storage site."

## Kurdish factions agree to ceasefire

WASHINGTON, Oct 24: Rival Kurdish factions in northern Iraq have agreed to a ceasefire and to hold talks next week in Ankara with US British and Turkish mediators, the State Department said Wednesday, reports AP.

Spokesman Nicholas Burns said the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) also agreed to "resist external intervention" and to eliminate terrorism.

The two factions have been courting Tehran and Baghdad for support in their fighting although they have periodically denied involvement from the two governments.

As fighting continued in northern Iraq following the announcement, Burns said the United States was "calling upon both groups to commit to actually implement the ceasefire to which they have agreed in principle."

Meanwhile, a large contingent of Iranian troops crossed into northern Iraq in support of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan on Wednesday, the PUK's Kurdish rivals said.

The Islamic regime of Iran has intervened directly to help the PUK of Jalal Talabani and has sent several thousand soldiers armed with heavy weapons who have crossed the border," said the Baghdad backed Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in a statement.

But while opening up more than a century after Darwin went public with his scientific theories, John Paul condemned "evolutionary theories which... consider that the spirit emerges from the forces of living matter."

"If the human body originates from living matter which existed before it came into being, the soul is immediately created by god," said the Pope.

Theologians at Darwin's time had rejected his theory as it undermined the church dogma of men's original sin.



Carol Bellamy (R), the executive director of UNICEF, called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday at her suite at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York. — AFP/UNB photo

## Chirac, King Hussein concerned about faltering ME peace

AMMAN, Oct 24: French President Jacques Chirac and Jordan's King Hussein say they are concerned about the faltering Middle East peace process, reports Reuter.

Chirac arrived in Jordan on Wednesday from the Palestinian territories where he received a hero's welcome after a tense two days in Israel, where his visit was marred by heavy security, diplomatic incidents, media hostility and public indifference.

After a first private session with the king, a spokesman quoted Chirac as saying, "I informed him of a certain worry which I have. We share the same feeling about the evolution of the region and the peace process. We share the same anxiety King Hussein struck a simi-

lar note of concern, warning in a dinner toast: "The only alternative to peace in our region is the end of all hope an accelerated slide towards the abyss."

Chirac reported to the Jordanian monarch on his talks with Syrian, Israeli and Palestinian leaders on a Middle East tour aimed at increasing French and European political influence on stalled Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.

At a joint news conference with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat earlier in the day in Ramallah, Chirac said the US-driven peace process appeared to have run out of steam which he said the Europeans could help inject a vital element of confidence.

Hours after he left the Gaza Strip, Israel imposed a total

closure of the Palestinian territories in what it said was a measure to prevent possible attacks on the anniversary of the assassination of Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader Fathi Saqqa in Maita by suspected Israeli agents.

King Hussein said the people of the Middle East looked for "an active and supportive European role" to help build peace on solid, sustainable foundations.

AP adds: Negotiating amid warnings of fresh violence, Israel and the Palestinians edged closer to agreement Wednesday on a Hebron troop withdrawal. President Clinton's Mideast envoy said.

However Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said the gaps between the two sides remained "very wide."

## Suu Kyi barred from leaving home

YANGON, Oct 24: Myanmar's military junta has stopped Aung San Suu Kyi from leaving her home and faced renewed international condemnation today for detaining one of the opposition leader's top aides, reports AP.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been prevented from leaving her home since early Wednesday. Tin Co. co-vice chairman of her National League for Democracy (NLD), told AFP, raising fears that she may be under de facto house arrest.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who was released from six years of house arrest in July 1995, has until now been free to

leave her compound in order to meet with NLD officials at other locations across Yangon.

Myanmar's ruling military junta was roundly condemned by international human rights groups and the United States after taking in the other NLD vice chairman, Kyi Maung for questioning on Wednesday.

US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns called Kyi Maung's detention "a very serious situation" and an "escalation" of repression in Myanmar.

The human rights watchdog Amnesty International called the move "part of a relentless attempt by the Myanmar (Burmese) authorities to crush any peaceful dissent by what ever means."

Military intelligence of official Kyaw Thein told AFP late Wednesday that Kyi Maung had not been arrested, but had been "merely picked up for questioning."

Another report from Beijing says Zhang Wannian, a vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission, met here Wednesday with Myanmar's Army Chief and armed forces deputy commander Maung Aye, official news reports said.

Zhang praised relations between the two neighbours and their armies.

## Italy opens diplomatic office in Iraq

ROME, Oct 24: As it seeks to play a bigger role in the Middle East, Italy has opened a diplomatic office in Iraq and is extending a hand to Libya, reports AP.

Both countries are under UN sanctions, but Rome has long had major economic ties with Libya, a former colony which is Italy's largest single oil supplier.

In response to news reports, "It is confirmed that Italy has opened an interests section at the Hungarian Embassy in Baghdad."

## US cargo jet crash kills 36

MANTA, Ecuador, Oct 24: A US cargo jet exploded in mid air shortly after take off here raining down flaming wreckage on this Pacific fishing port and killing at least 36 people officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

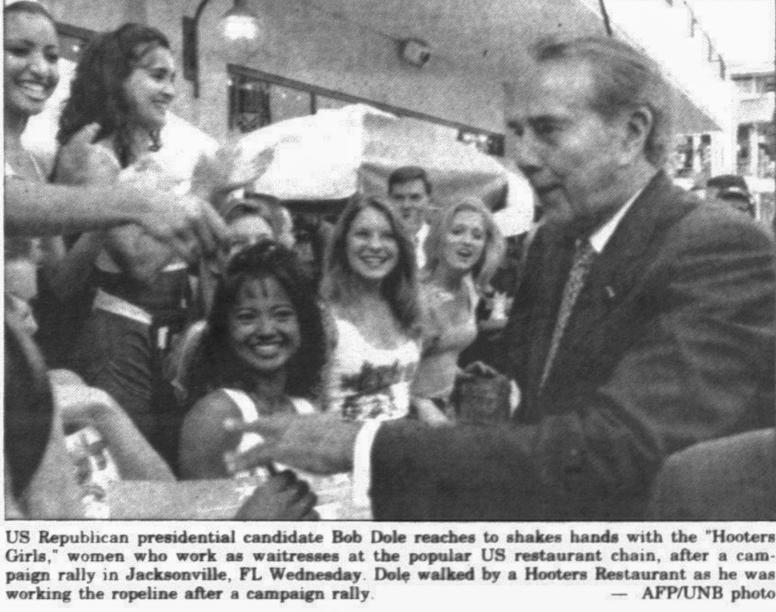
The explosion of a Million air Boeing 707 late Tuesday killed 36 people, including the plane's three crew members and injured at least 50 according to the latest civil defense toll. President Abdala Bucaram rushed to Manta, announce a day of mourning and urgently appealed for international aid.

## UN considering sanctions against Liberian factions

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 24: Frustrated over continued violence in Liberia, some members of the Security Council have suggested the time may have come to consider economic sanctions against some of the warring factions, a UN official said Wednesday, reports AP.

But Anthony Nvaki, special UN representative to Liberia, said the idea of imposing sanctions was not universally accepted among the 15 council members. He refused to say which countries were suggesting sanctions.

## Dole urges Perot to quit race, endorse Republican ticket



US Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole reaches to shakes hands with the "Hooters Girls," women who work as waitresses at the popular US restaurant chain, after a campaign rally in Jacksonville, FL Wednesday. Dole walked by a Hooters Restaurant as he was working the ropeline after a campaign rally. — AFP/UNB photo

WASHINGTON, Oct 24: In a dramatic bid to revive his White House campaign, Bob Dole dispatched his top aide to urge Ross Perot to quit the presidential race and endorse the Republican ticket, Republican and Reform Party sources said, reports AP.

Dole campaign manager Scott Reed made the urgent entreaty on Wednesday at a meeting with Perot in Dallas, according to several sources who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Neither Dole nor Perot had immediate comment. Shortly before the meeting, a Reform Party source said it was highly unlikely Perot would agree to abort his candidacy. Separately, Perot spokeswoman Sharon Holman said she was not aware of any Perot-Reed meeting but said emphatically, "Mr. Perot has no intention of quitting the race no intention whatsoever."

Clinton aides cast Reed's mission as proof of Dole's desperation, and Clinton campaign spokesman Joe Lockhart said: "We believe that on the issues that are most important to Mr Perot — the deficit, campaign finance reform — we have a stronger record."

The entreaty was evidence of the deep frustration within the Dole camp as the 1996 cam-

paign entered the final 12 days with Clinton comfortably ahead in national polls and enjoying a similarly lopsided advantage in state-by-state electoral vote counts. A new NBC-Wall Street Journal poll, for example, had Clinton at 52 per cent, Dole at 35 per cent and Perot at 6 per cent.

In the view of some Dole advisers, a Perot endorsement could swing several states in Dole's favour, especially in the Mountain West, Texas and Florida are also two traditionally Republican states where Clinton and Dole are running neck-and-neck with Perot garnering roughly 6 per cent in the polls.

More significantly, the Republican sources, including a ranking Dole campaign official in Washington, suggested such a dramatic development would throw what has been a stable race into sudden turmoil, perhaps giving Dole one last chance to overtake Clinton.

Ironically, it was Perot's decision to quit the 1992 race just before the Democratic convention that helped boost Clinton from third place to first. Perot later rejoined the race, and ran third with 19 per cent.

Dole decided to go forward with the entreaty despite Perot's unpredictability and recent bad

blood between the Dole and Perot camps. It was Dole's campaign that insisted Perot be excluded from the presidential debates, drawing sharp criticism from Perot and Reform Party running mate Pat Choate.

Just what the Dole camp had to offer Perot was unclear: one Dole adviser noted the Republican candidate recently proposed a commission to draft a sweeping rewrite of campaign finance laws, and said perhaps Perot could be offered a leading role.

Several Republicans suggested Reed would not have travelled to Dallas unless he had reason to believe Perot was open to his proposal. But Holman said flatly, "Ross Perot is in the race to stay."

Indeed, as Dole campaigned in Jacksonville, Fla. Wednesday, a small plane buzzed overhead trailing an American flag and the message: "Don't Export Jobs — Vote Perot."

One Dole adviser said Perot might be open to the idea because he is facing the embarrassing prospect of getting less than 10 per cent of the vote four years after he was a major campaign force.

Perot has mounted an unconventional campaign, making only rare public appearances,

### Off the Record

#### Romantic chopper ride

SYRACUSE, New York: It was all in the name of love, but that may not help two county helicopter pilots who flew a police officer friend to a park so that he could propose to his girlfriend, reports AP.

Sheriff's Deputies Robert Bowles and Richard Van Orden used the department helicopter without authorisation to fly Aaron Phillips to the park in August.

Phillips, an officer in the town of Marcellus, popped the question, and his girlfriend, state Trooper Christine Tucker, accepted.

"It's a very romantic and touching kind of story. It's just a shame it is in direct violation of department policy, and for that we will take whatever action is deemed necessary," said Sheriff Kevin Walsh, who learned of the incident last week.

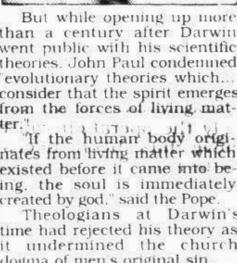
The punishment will probably not result in the pilots' suspension, he said.

Tucker was on the duty at the time. She had been dispatched to the park by the county emergency police center without being told what was about to happen.

#### Pope's confession

VATICAN CITY: Pope John Paul II in a cautious change of church policy on Wednesday acknowledged that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was "more than a hypothesis," reports AP.

In a message read to members of the Vatican's Academy of Sciences the Pope recalled that his predecessor Pius XII, in his encyclical "Humani Genes", considered Darwin's theory "worthy of investigation and in-depth thought, just like the opposite hypothesis."



#### Critical choices between love and lottery

ASUNCION, Paraguay: The young couple was engaged to be married in December — until they won the lottery, reports AP.

Gabriela Correa and Jose Martinez bought a ticket October 16th, won 75,000 dollars on the 17th, and by the 18th were fighting over who owned it.

Correa, 25, has the ticket, but Martinez, 28, told a judge it was his.

"I bought the ticket and she put it in her pocket. I said nothing because she was my fiancee," Martinez told Judge Pedro Benitez. "Now she says the ticket is hers."

The judge ordered the lottery agency to withhold the funds pending his ruling.

The engagement has been called off.

#### Communists' battle against Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck

BEIJING: In the battle for the hearts and minds of China's children, Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse are out, home-grown cartoons with Communist overtones are in, reports AP.

A new campaign promotes cartoons with Chinese characters and themes. Among them: tales of Confucius, the life of a revered poet, and the fable of a sports hero who soars through obedience and teamwork.

In today's market-driven China, it also makes business sense to go after what a state-run newspaper called "the unchecked spread of foreign comics."

Parents enriched by economic reforms are lavishing more money on their children, often indulging the every whim of "little emperors" born of the government's one-child family policy.

