

International

Dostam's jet bombs Taliban frontline north of Kabul

KABUL, Oct 26: An unidentified jet, believed to belong to the airforce of ex-communist General Abdul Rashid Dostam, bombed the frontline of the Taliban religious militia north of Kabul, locals told AFP today.

A Dostam jet dropped two bombs both of which exploded on the side of a mountain, locals reported.

The mountain range marks the rear infantry lines of the Taliban on the so-called New Road, some 30-odd kilometres northeast of Kabul.

Locals believed the unidentified jet bomber, which made no pass only when it dropped the two bombs, was Dostam's because the Taliban would not make the mistake of bombing their own men.

Taliban on the New Road made no mention of this bombing, but stated they had infantry positions well forward of the mountain ridge which was bombed, which corroborates claims that the jet was from Dostam's rival Uzbek faction.

Earlier report says, an unidentified jet today bombed Kabul Airport, just a day after the Taliban militia which

seized the city a month ago, declared war on a powerful Afghan warlord, witnesses said.

A single aircraft dropped four bombs on the airport, which lies less than a kilometre (about a half mile) from the Afghan capital's northeastern residential suburbs at 7 am (0230 GMT), they said.

Two of the bombs failed to explode when they hit a largely deserted area of the airport's perimeter, they said. The damage caused by the other bombs was not immediately known, they said.

"I heard a jet overhead and saw two explosions at the eastern end of the airport runway but could not see what damage was caused, shopkeeper Farid Ahmad told AFP.

The jet was flying very high and dropped a total of four bombs before flying off, but two of the devices did not explode," he added.

Other residents and shopkeepers in the area also said they had heard an aircraft overhead and saw explosions inside the civil and military airport compound, but nervous Taliban fighters at the airport

denied the bombing raid had taken place.

The raid was the first on the city since the Taliban announced they had launched an attack on the territory of powerful northern Afghan warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostam, who has a large air force.

Taliban run radio said today the militia struck at Dostam's men in his western province of Badghis on Friday, seizing the area and part of neighbouring Faryab province.

Meanwhile, Kabul's new Taliban leadership has confirmed it has opened a new battle front in western Afghanistan against the country's powerful northern warlord, state-run radio said today.

Islamic Taliban forces struck at General Abdul Rashid Dostam's men in his western province of Badghis on Friday, seizing the key province and declaring open war on the northern chief, Radio Shariat said.

The militia also seized part of Dostam's Faryab province — which lies north of Badghis, from the south of which the Taliban launched their attack.



Prince Karim Aga Khan IV (L) is presented with the Hadrian Award by David Rockefeller (R) Friday, in honour of his achievements in the field of architectural conservation in the Muslim world. The award is presented by the World Monuments Fund and Rockefeller is among the previous recipients. — AFP/UNB photo



Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (C) offers prayer during a meeting organised to observe the "Chelum" a day that marks the 40th day of mourning after a death, of her brother Murtaza Bhutto in Rawalpindi Friday. Benazir said she would not bow down under pressure from conspirators and would not resign. Benazir is flanked by her husband Asif Ali Zardari (R), Investment Minister, and Hamid Nasir Chatta (L), Chief of the Pakistan Muslim League (J). — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Chirac's ME tour ends

French President Jacques Chirac flew home on Friday at the end of a week-long Middle East tour to promote Europe as a political partner in the peace process, Reuter reports from Cairo.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak saw Chirac off at Cairo Airport after the two leaders discussed the results of Chirac's five-nation tour. Chirac visited Israel, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Jordan and Syria and has used his trip to demand Israel recognise a Palestinian state and withdraw from occupied Arab lands.

Road mishap kills 16 in Jammu

Sixteen people including five women were killed and 25 others were injured in a truck accident near Chinaun in Rajouri district of Jammu Saturday night, official sources said yesterday. PTI reports from Jammu.

172 die of encephalitis in Nepal

A viral encephalitis epidemic has claimed 172 lives in lowland tropical regions of Nepal since April, the state-run news agency KSS reported yesterday, AFP says from Kathmandu.

Sacked minister held in ROK

South Korean prosecutors arrested sacked Defence Minister Lee Yang-ho yesterday shortly after a criminal court issued an arrest warrant in connection with an arms deal, Reuter reports from Seoul.

Mandela receives honorary doctorate

President Nelson Mandela received an honorary doctorate Friday from a university that was the training ground for apartheid's leaders, AP reports from Stellenbosch.

Bomb attack on train in Algeria: 8 killed

Eight people were killed and more than 30 wounded in a bomb attack on a passenger train south of Algiers, according to media reports yesterday, AFP says from Algiers.

'UN unable to achieve goal of gender parity by 2000'

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 26: While publicly espousing women's rights worldwide, the United Nations admits it cannot meet its own goal of boosting the ratio of women in UN professional ranks to 50 per cent by the end of the decade, reports AP.

"Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali set the goal in advance of last year's UN Women's Conference in Beijing, aimed at seeking solutions to women's problems and improving conditions in industrial and traditional societies.

But Assistant Secretary-General Rosario Green, one of the UN's highest-ranking women, admitted Thursday that obstacles to meeting the equality goal were "far greater than expected."

In a report to the General As-

Tigers attack navy gunboat, kill 12 crew members

COLOMBO, Oct 26: Tamil Tiger rebels staged a suicide attack on a Sri Lanka navy gunboat today killing the 12 crew members, as guerrilla attacks in the island's north-east escalate, officials said, reports AFP.

More than 65 rebels, security personnel and civilians have been killed in raids in the past week.

The Dvora gunboat was patrolling just outside the strategic Port of Trincomalee when the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) carried out a pre-dawn raid, officials said.

"The Tigers used suicide cadres to ram a boat packed with explosives against the gunboat P-457," a local official said, adding there was no sign of survivors.

It is believed the navy vessel had two officers and 10 sailors on board.

Officials were investigating whether the rebels' suicide craft was on a mission to attack the Port of Trincomalee, a key government base for action against the Tigers, when it was intercepted by the navy.

"They are making a tremendous attempt to infiltrate the harbour to cause more damage," a local official said.

The latest round of fighting known as Eelam war three started in Trincomalee when the LTTE called off six months of talks with the government and sank two gunboats in the port in April last year.

The guerrillas who are leading a protracted campaign for a homeland called Eelam in the island's north and east.

'Russia firm to keep 6,000 soldiers in Chechnya'

MOSCOW, Oct 26: Russia's decision to keep two brigades totalling some 6,000 soldiers in Chechnya is irreversible, a senior Russian government official said Friday, reports AFP.

The unnamed official, quoted by Interfax news agency, was speaking after Chechnya's new foreign minister had voiced concern that Moscow would not pull all of its troops out of the breakaway north Caucasus republic.

Former Russian Security Chief General Alexander Lebed, who was ousted last week, had promised that all Moscow's troops would withdraw from Chechnya, in line with the peace accord he signed with the separatist rebels on August 31.

But Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov has always insisted that the two brigades, totalling some 6,000 men, should stay.

For the Russian government, withdrawing all the forces would be tantamount to recognising Chechen independence.

Chechen Foreign Minister Ruslan Chmuyev said the Russian plan to keep a bridge of troops from the interior ministry and one from the defence ministry in Chechnya was not provided for in the peace accords.

He accused hardliners in the Russian government of trying to undermine the peace process.

Lebed's successor as the Russian official responsible for Chechnya, Ivan Rybkin, was due to meet Friday with Chechnya's Deputy Prime Minister B Ruslan Kutayev, Interfax said.

UN to airlift food to refugees in eastern Zaire

BUKAVU, Oct 26: The United Nations will airlift emergency food supplies this weekend to thousands of refugees in eastern Zaire who have fled fighting between Tutsi rebels and Zairean soldiers, reports Reuter.

The World Food Programme said a chartered C-130 transport plane would ferry supplies from Entebbe in Uganda to Bukavu and Goma in eastern Zaire.

The two towns are within range of the town of Uvira, near the border with Burundi, which Banyamulenge Tutsi rebels claim they have captured in recent battles.

European humanitarian aid commissioner Emma Bonino appealed for an end to the fighting and warned of further genocide in Central Africa's Great Lakes region.

Japan's ruling parties fail to reach accord on forming new govt

TOKYO, Oct 26: Japan's ruling parties failed to reach agreement in opening talks on the formation of a new government, with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) reluctant to stay in the coalition, reports today said, according to AFP.

Leaders of the three parties — the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the largest force in the coalition, the SDP and New Party Sakigake — held their first meeting Friday since last week's general elections.

During the Tokyo meeting, the SDP offered tough policy proposals as a condition for its continued alliance with the LDP, including an immediate ban on political donations from companies, Kyodo News said.

The SDP also proposed setting up a committee to review a planned consumption tax rise and withdrawing US Marine corps from Okinawa, where anti-US sentiment is running high following last year's rape of schoolgirl by US servicemen.

The LDP agreed to setting up a consumption tax committee, but refrained from replying to other proposals, Jiji Press said.

Secretary General Koichi Kato expressed opposition to a ban on corporate donations, Jiji said, adding the LDP was unlikely to accept all the proposals the SDP offered.

The three parties are scheduled to hold their second meeting on Monday, SDP party officials said.

100 Muslim homes demolished

NEW YORK, Oct 26: At least 5,000 American troops would remain in Bosnia through 1997 under a plan being prepared by US and NATO military leaders, The New York Times reported Saturday, reports AP.

Citing Clinton administration officials, NATO leaders and European diplomats, the Times said US troops would be part of a peacekeeping force of 15,000 to 30,000 troops who would remain in Bosnia to enforce peace accords signed last fall in Dayton, Ohio.

The Times said American officials say President Clinton must give formal approval for the continued participation of US troops, and presidential aides said Clinton would not make a final decision until the United States and NATO agree on the scope of the mission, which won't be until after the US presidential election.

Nearly 60,000 troops, including 15,000 Americans, have patrolled Bosnia for the last year, enforcing the Dayton accords which ended a four-year civil war.

According to the Times, NATO officials said US officials signaled their intention to keep troops in Bosnia at a meeting in Brussels, Belgium, last week and in recent visits by Defense Secretary William Perry and deputy national security adviser Samuel Berger to NATO's Brussels headquarters.

Officials have said for months that it was likely some US troops, perhaps as many as 5,000, would have to remain in Bosnia after the end of this year as part of a larger NATO force. But they said officials were reluctant to make a formal decision until after the presidential election.

"You know full well that there has to be a military presence," a senior European diplomat in the Balkans told the Times. "There will be," he said, adding that American troops would be part of the force "without a shadow of a doubt."

Meanwhile, nearly three years have passed since Bosnia's Muslim-Croat federation was formed, but the enemies turned reluctant partners reached agreement only Friday on a flag, coat of arms and

power-sharing in the Bosnian capital.

Muslim and Bosnian Croat leaders also agreed on how to merge their police forces.

The agreements were signed by Alija Izetbegovic, Muslim leader and chairman of the newly elected three-member Bosnian presidency, and Kresimir Zubak, the Bosnian Croat co-president.

Michael Steiner, a German diplomat who negotiated the agreements called them "a new push" for the Muslim-Croat federation.

"It is a very important step," he said.

129 sign CTBT

India, Pakistan, DPRK abstain

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 26: A total of 129 countries have signed the treaty to ban nuclear test explosions, including all but three of states which must sign and ratify the pact before it becomes law, a UN spokesman announced Friday, reports AP.

The three are North Korea, India and Pakistan, spokesman Sylvana Foa told reporters.

Last month, the UN General Assembly overcame opposition by India and overwhelmingly approved the treaty, drafted in nearly three years of talks in Geneva, Switzerland.

The treaty stipulates that 44 states known to have nuclear reactors and research programmes must sign and ratify the agreement before it becomes international law.

India says it will never sign the agreement because it allows the world's five declared nuclear powers — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China — to keep their weapons.

Pakistan says it will not sign until India signs. The North Koreans have said nothing about their plans.

President Clinton and representatives of the other nuclear states signed the treaty September 24.

Hashimoto, who is also president of the LDP, has called on the SDP and Sakigake to remain in his coalition.

But policy coordination among the three parties appears to be difficult, because the SDP's proposals are unacceptable to the LDP, Kyodo said.

The Asahi Shimbun and Jiji Press said leaders of the LDP may have to form a minority government without forming a coalition because many SDP members are opposed to remaining in the conservative-dominated coalition.

The LDP outdistanced other parties in last week's elections for the House of Representatives but failed to secure a majority in the 500 seat lower chamber.

The protest came a day after Ram led an attack on photographers and journalists while they were staking out his residence in central Delhi.

A New Delhi police spokesman today said a case had been registered against Ram, his supporters and some of his security guards for "rioting and voluntarily causing hurt."

Ram's action came shortly after a television team spotted him with a senior leader of the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), fuelling speculation that the arch-foes were joining hands to take

400 newsmen clash with police in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Oct 26: About 400 journalists clashed with police here today during a protest against the founder of an Indian party of Hindu "untouchables" who attacked and injured several of their colleagues at his New Delhi home, reports AFP.

Witnesses said journalists and photographers from prominent dailies, magazines and news agencies denounced Kanahi Ram, founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), before scuffling with police.

The police unsuccessfully tried to stop the protesters with water cannons. The journalists broke several barricades and marched on the federal parliament before staging a sit-in outside Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's office.

"This is the first time that journalists have clashed with police on such a scale in New Delhi," a participant said.

"The journalists were shouting slogans against Ram and demanding his arrest," said the marcher, a photographer with an international news agency. "Several people on both sides were injured but there were no arrests."

A recent Cabinet meeting stressed the need to place all mosques under the control of the ministry of Waqfs (religious affairs)... to avoid letting the houses of God become centres for the propagation of extremist ideas," he said.

The government on Wednesday set up a special committee comprising seven Cabinet ministers to examine legislative means to face up to the spread of Shiite Muslim ideology in this Sunni Muslim-dominated country.

The religious leaders would be chosen from Al Azhar, the highest authority for Sunni Islam in Egypt.

power in Uttar Pradesh, a politically sensitive Indian state.

Anil Sharma, a photographer with the pioneer newspaper, who was one of several people roughed up, said the trouble started when Ram emerged from his house to find journalists waiting for his protegee Mayawati.

Egypt to place 30,000 mosques under govt's control to prevent extremist ideas

CAIRO, Oct 26: Egypt has decided to place 30,000 mosques under the government's control to prevent the propagation of "extremist" ideas, Religious Affairs Minister Hamdi Al-Zaqzuq said in statement published today, reports AFP.

"The ministry has drawn up a plan to take over 30,000 mosques by the year 2000 at the rate of 6,000 mosque each year," the government daily Al-Ahram quoted Zaqzuq as saying.

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Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (L) welcomes his French counterpart Jacques Chirac who arrived in Cairo Friday for talks on the last leg of his Middle East tour. — AFP/UNB photo

Russian military presses for money, warns of further decline

MOSCOW, Oct 26: In a frank admission of the military's shortcomings, Defence Minister Igor Rodionov said Friday that combat readiness was in decline and a lack of money pointed to further problems next year, reports AP.

Rodionov was pressing for more money as parliament prepared to discuss the revised 1997 budget draft, which puts more emphasis on social programs.

With Russia's defence spending falling sharply in recent years, such pressure from the military is normal when parliament considers the proposed budget. Still, Rodionov's comments painted a grave picture of the state of the military.

The armed forces are on the edge, beyond which extremely

undesirable and even uncontrollable events might take place," Rodionov told Russian soldiers who have served in trouble spots of the former Soviet Union.

"The 1997 defence budget does not give grounds for optimism," he said. "If the 1997 defence budget is not corrected, Russia might lose its armed forces as an integral and capable state structure."

Spending on the military has fallen 45 per cent since 1992, according to Western estimates.

The Russian army's prestige also has fallen since the end of the Cold War. It took a big hit in Chechnya, where troops were humiliated by separatist fighters. The war demonstrated the ineffectiveness of Russian

forces, while further draining the budget.

The proposed budget puts annual military spending at about 100 billion rubles (dollar 18.5 billion), and sets aside an additional 6.5 billion rubles (dollar 1.2 billion) for military reform.

Lawmakers in the State Duma, parliament's lower house, say that military spending projected for 1997 is actually slightly higher than this year, Rodionov can only hope to preserve the figure already in the draft, they say.

But Rodionov said the proposed budget covers only one-third of the military's needs.

career servicemen. Many soldiers and officers have not been paid for months.

Despite the many problems, most analysts do not foresee an outright rebellion by the Russian military, which has a long history of following civilian orders.

President Boris Yeltsin appointed Rodionov in July to carry out reforms. The president has promised to end unpopular conscription and create a smaller, professional military by the year 2000. The number of men under arms has declined from 2.7 million in 1992 to 1.5 million, a figure still considered too high.

Rodionov wants to trim 300,000 servicemen and slash the number of combat divisions from 78 to 12.