Taliban impose strict Islamic law in newly conquered areas

MAZAR E SHARIF. Afghanistan, May 26: Thousands of turbaned Taliban soldiers brandishing their weapons began enforcing strict Islamic law in this newly conquered corner of Afghanistan Monday, warning foreign aid agencies to keep their workers indoors, reports AP.

Black-bearded Taliban soldiers roared through the streets in pickup trucks bristling with antiaircraft weapons and multiple rocket launchers.

In Kabul, five Afghan women employees of the aid agency CARE International were dragged off a bus on Saturday

and beaten with sticks, the agency said Monday.

CARE said it was suspending a programme to feed widows in the Afghan capital until it re-ceived a guarantee from the Taliban that its workers will be

protected. "These women work to monitor a feeding programme which caters to 10,000 widows in Kabul. They have a written authorisation from the Taliban to carry out a monitoring survey and work for the programme", said Paul Barker, the CARE di-

rector for Afghanistan, speak-ing from Peshawar, Pakistan. In Mazar-e-Sharif, an aid

Three men tear off a poster of warlord general Abdul Rashid Dostum, Saturday in Mazar-

i-Sharif, northern Afghanistan. Taliban fighters and soldiers of the Afghan faction leader

Abdul Malik took control of the city Saturday. Dostum fled to Turkey with his close aides

and guards, hours after pro-Taliban forces captured his former stronghold.

Plane crash claims 6 in US: A

skydiving plane crashed in a field of sugar beets Sunday, killing

a pilot and five skydivers. One skydiver jumped out before the

Daryl Martin, a pilot who was fishing nearby, looked up

when he heard what he thought was a plane with engine trouble

and saw an aircraft spiraling to the ground. "One person jumped

from the airplane before it went down," Martin told the MSNBC

television network. By the time he lost sight of the plane behind

a tree line, "she was still floating to the ground. The 43-year-old woman, whose name was not released, had been planning to jump from an altitude of 3,500 feet (1,070 metres), Metro-Dade

Road mishap claims 16 in India:

Three trucks collided on a highway in northwestern India on

Monday, killing at least 16 people and injuring another 22,

Press Trust of India news agency said. AP reports from New

police said. Those killed were local commuters. The collision

occurred near Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan state, 250 kilo-

Rains kill 14 in Philippines:

Pounding rains and strong winds killed at least 14 people in the

Philippines and forced the government, stock market and

schools to shut down, officials said Monday, AP reports from

news conference at which she was to announce her candidacy

for next year's presidential elections because of widespread

flooding in the capital. At least 14 people drowned or were elec-

trocuted in incidents related to a tropical depression centered

about 290 kilometres (180 miles) northwest of Manila, forecast-

Chopper crash kills 2 in India: Two

crew members were killed when an Indian helicopter plunged

into the sea while attempting to rescue an injured employee at

an oil drilling vessel off Bombay, authorities said yesterday,

India (PTI) quoted the state-run Pawan Hans Company as say-

ing. The company owns a string of helicopters. The cause of the

2 armymen, 2 rebels killed in Mexico:

Two Mexican army sergeants and two fighters from the Popular

Revolutionary Army rebel force were killed in a skirmish in the

southern state of Guerrero, an army spokesman said Sunday,

leftist rebels and a contingent of soldiers traveling towards a

military base in the state capital of Chilpancingo.

Three army doctors were wounded in the shootout between

The accident took place overnight Sunday, the Press Trust of

A leading senator, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, postponed a

Four of the injured were hospitalised in serious condition

fire Capt. Robert Suarez said.

Manila.

ers said.

metres (155 miles) south of New Delhi.

AFP reports from New Delhi.

AP reports from Mexico City.

accident was not immediately clear.

crash and safely floated to the ground, AP reports from Miami.

agency said one of its workers was driven off the streets and warned to stay indoors, in the first overt act here against the international groups since the Taliban seized control of this

northern city on Saturday. "We will go ahead as normal, but cautiously," said an aid director, speaking on condition of anonymity so as not to further jeopardise the work. "If we feel it is not safe for the employees to come in to work, we won't let

them come. Some 2,500 Taliban soldiers rolled into Mazar-e-Sharif Sunday night, a day after

northern warlord Rashid Dos-

- AFP/UNB photo

BANJARMASIN, Indonesia

May 26: Rescue teams resumed

the grisly search on Monday for

people burned to death when ar-

sonists set a shopping mall on

fire during a pre-election riot

namika Berita, reported that

146 people died in Friday

night's turmoil in Banjarmasin,

city/900 kilometres (560 miles)

been found in the charred shell

of the four-story Mitra Plaza

shopping centre, most of them

looters. But they predicted more

remains would be discovered in

killed in separate violence

during the riot in Banjarmasin

violent, 27-day campaign for a

parliamentary election that

Another four people were

Friday marked the close of a

ISLAMABAD, May 26: The

Pakistani Foreign Minister,

Gohar Ayub Khan, has said

both the Clinton administra-

tion and UN Secretary General

Kofi Annan extended their full

support for the next round of

foreign secretaries level talks

in Islamabad beginning from

end of his six-day visit to the

United States, the foreign min-

ister said he returned "highly

satisfied" with his trip during

which he met key members of

istani Prime Minister Nawaz

Sharif for talks with India was

highly praised by the American

side as they "reiterated its will-

ingness to support this process

and recognised the necessity to

The initiative taken by Pak-

In a statement issued at the

June 19, reports PTI.

the US administration.

Police said 133 bodies have

northeast of Jakarta.

on Friday, police said.

the ashes.

A local newspaper, Di-

on Borneo island, reports AP.

Search for Indonesian

riot victims resumes

tum fled to Turkey and surren-dered his stronghold to mutineers who had defected to the

Pakistan, which became the first country to recognise the Taliban government on Sunday, was expected to send a representative to Mazar-e-Sharif soon and to reopen its embassy in Kabul later.

The fall of Dostum's northern provinces put all but two or three of Afghanistan's 29 provinces under the white flag of the Taliban.

In Turkey, Dostum said he will carry on the fight.

"I have fought for Afghanistan for the last 20 years. I will carry on with my struggle. The war continues," he told reporters in the lobby of his hotel in Ankara.

Abdul Razzak, the governor of Herat province who was named Taliban administrator of the north, held a meeting with General Malik Pahlawan, the architect of last week's revolt that overthrew Dostum.

No details were released from the meeting. As they met, the occasional thud of rocket fire could be heard in the distance but the cause was not known. The airport remained closed

Security in the city appeared to be in the hands of the Taliban soldiers, although Pahlawan's Uzbek warriors were posted outside most international aid organisations.

Pahlawan also recovered two vehicles belonging to the United Nations and Save the Children. Both were taken during the early chaotic hours after the takeover on Saturday.

AFP says earlier, Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani voiced concern Sunday over escalating fighting in war-torn Afghanistan and said the crisis in the neighbouring country could not be resolved militarily.

will be held on Thursday.

Party broke out.

arsonists set the fire.

and troops

parked cars.

'US, UN extend support for

next round of Indo-Pak talks'

burned remains.

The shopping centre was

closed and employees sent

home when the violence be-

tween the governing Golkar

party and the rival, Muslim-

dominated United Development

at the height of the riot several

gulfed in dense black smoke

and huge flames, and police set

many stayed inside the burning

building, apparently afraid

they would be arrested by police

130 houses, dozens of other

buildings, shopping centers and

nearby hospitals were trying

Monday to identify the badly

address all issues including

UN Secretary General Annan

on the outcome of the meeting

between Sharif and his, Indian

counterpart, IK Gujral at Male

and "the decision to hold the

next round of foreign secre-

taries level talks in Islamabad

The secretary general wel-

comed the progress made so far

in the talks with India and of-

fered the support of United Na-

that during his meeting with

Annan he expressed his concern

to the UN secretary general over

the reported move to abolish

United Nations Military

Observers Group in India and

Pakistan (UNMOGIP).

The foreign minister said

tions for the talks, Khan said.

from June 19 to 22."

Khan said he also briefed the

Kashmir," the statement said.

Forensic doctors at three

Some looters escaped, but

Rioters also set fire to about

hours later. It was soon en-

Mobs broke into the centre

KINSHASA, May 26: The new strongman in Kinshasa, Laurent Kabila met the ambassadors of the United States and Britain at the weekend, the state-run television announced Sunday, reports AFP.

Kabila meets

US, UK envoys

US Ambassador Daniel Simpson congratulated Kabila on his "total victory" and for having overturned the "32-year dictatorship" of former president Mobutu Sese Seko, the television of the Democratic Republic of the Congo-formerly Zaire'-said.

At Saturday's meeting, Simpson also praised the "soft-landing" of Kabila's forces when they entered Kinshasa, the report said.

British High Commissioner Marcus Hope met Kabila after Simpson and delivered to him a message from Prime Minister Tony Blair, contents of which were not disclosed, the television said.

French Ambassador Michel Rougagnou officially requested an audience with Kabila last week but has not yet been given an appointment.

Generals summon Turkish president

ANKARA, Turkey, May 26: Top generals summoned Islamic Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan Monday to discuss ways of curbing radical Islam and expelling pro-Islamic officers from the army, reports AP.

Newspapers said Erbakan, who has angered the military with his Islamisation policies, was headed for another confrontation with the military. who have asked him to retract his Islam-oriented policies and take measures to protect secu-

The generals organised the emergency meeting.

Taiwan mobilises warships to monitor protests near disputed island

TAIPEI, May 26: Taiwan has mobilised warships and an early warning surveillance plane to monitor the protest by some 200 ethnic Chinese activists in waters near the disputed Diaoyu-Senkaku island group, sources said today, reports AFP.

Taiwan's coastal security units were also ready to extend assistance whenever needed, the sources said.

They said navy authorities had stationed three warships some 30 nautical miles off the disputed archipelago, known as the Diaoyu islands to Chinese and Senkaku to Japanese as the activists from Hong Kong, New York and Taiwan played a catand-mouse game with Japanese coast guard vessels.

An E-2T surveillance aircraft was also deployed, they added.

The islands are claim by Japan, China and Taiwan.

AP add, dozen's of Japanese coast guard vessels intercepted a flotilla of protesters from Hong Kong and Taiwan near a disputed island chain in the East China Sea on Monday and ordered them to turn back.

Iran slams Turkish Incursion in northern Iraq

TEHRAN, May 26: Iran on Sunday condemned the Turkish incursion in northern Iraq and called on Ankara to withdraw its troops immediately and unconditionally, reports AFP.

It is not only a violation of all international laws but the sovereign rights and territorial integrity of the Iraqi Muslim nation," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmud Mohammadi said, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Turkey has tripled its presence in northern Iraq to around 30,000 troops and killed nearly 1,450 rebels from the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) since launching its operation in May 14.

Iran and Iraq have yet to normalise relations following their 1980-1988 war.

peace in our motherland," Koroma said in his broadcast. without elaborating. He said the "military feared He accused Kabbah's government of "nurturing sec-

the disintegration of Sierra Leone into factional conflicts".

Annan criticises coup

the government of the SLPP

(Sierra Leone People's Party, led

by Ahmad Tejan Kabbah) be-

cause of its failure to consoli-

date the gains purported to have been achieved by the brokers of

in Sierra Leone tional and tribal conflict". "We also saw the inability of the executive to bring sanity to the situation reflected in the factional conflict," he added, without elaborating.

> The new leader also criticised what he called "the inability of army commanders to convey to the head of state the welfare problems and other administrative constraints within the armed forces."



Former Sierra-Leonean president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (L) and rebel leader Foday Sankoh hug each other in this file photo taken November 30, 1996 in Abidjan, after signing a long-awaited peace accord that ended more than five years of civil war in the West African nation. Kabbah was overthrown Sunday in a military coup d'etat, as Sankoh said he was "still studying the - AFP/UNB photo situation."

Chirac in danger of losing election gamble riding a wave of voter anger They also will try to swing

PARIS, May 26: President Jacques Chirac is in danger of losing his election gamble, but it's not over yet, reports AP.

UNITED NATIONS, May 26:

Secretary-General Kofi Annan

on Sunday criticised the coup in

the west African country Sierra

Leone, where the United Na-

tions had been trying to the

country recover from five years

control over Sierra Leone after

seizing the legislature and

burning the national treasury

The elected President Ahmed

Tejan Kabbah reportedly fled to

United Nations said Annan was

"distressed" to hear of the coup.

The statement said Annan was

especially concerned over re-

ports that UN offices in Free-

town had been looted and local

No further details on those

"The United Nations and the

international community

firmly uphold the principle that the will of the people shall be the basis for the authority of

government and that govern-

ments democratically elected

shall not be overthrown by

AFP adds from Freetown:

Sierra Leone's new strongman

identified himself as Major

Jolly Paul Koroma on national

radio Sunday, the day soldiers

here seized power, ousting the

elected regime of President

around 9:45 pm (2145 GMT) Ma-

jor Koroma, a common name in

Sierra Leone, was wholly un-

known to most in the country,

where a curfew was imposed

as head of state - the west

African country's fifth in as

many years - and chairman of

the Armed Forces Revolution-

ary Council (AFRC), the name

given to the group of soldiers

that seized power earlier Sun-

rity and defenders of the consti-

tution, we decided to overthrow

"As custodians of state secu-

Koroma announced himself

Until his announcement

force," the statement said.

Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.

earlier Sunday.

In a statement Sunday, the

Rebellious soldiers claimed

of civil war, reports AP.

neighbouring Guinea.

UN staffers detained.

incidents were available.

Despite his conservative coalition's setback in Sunday's first-round parliamentary elections, the second round next week is still a wide-open race.

When the French president announced early parliamentary elections last month, polls said his coalition would lose seats but comfortably maintain power. Chirac had feared that if he waited until scheduled elections next spring, austerity measures aimed at qualifying for a European currency would cost conservatives any chance

of staying in power. That feared loss of support already began during Sunday's first round of voting: The left won a majority of ballots by

over France's record 12.8 per cent jobless rate.

But the campaign is still hotly contested because few candidates won seats outright in the 577-seat National Assembly, which had been 80 per cent-controlled by Chirac's coalition. Many candidates face

a tough second round on June 1. The right looked stronger than the left in terms of seats most likely to be won in the second round. Official results have the right leading in more than 200 districts, compared to more than 170 for the left.

And since more than 30 per cent of the electorate didn't vote Sunday, the conservatives clearly will try to spur more supporters to the polls the second time around.

votes from supporters of the far-right National Front led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, although it's unclear what they might do to appease them. Chirac could risk turning off other voters if he makes a gesture to Le Pen's party, which won 15 per cent on Abdur Remark Deputy Lychaus

Another question mark is Prime Minister Alain Juppe. Chirac's loyal but unpopular lieutenant. Chirac could consider dumping him as a political liability in the coming

> Losing the election gamble would force Chirac into an uncomfortable partnership with a left-dominated parliament and a leftist prime minister, probably Socialist leader Lionel

N-power to desalinate sea water

R. Senthilnathan writes from Vienna

A growing shortage of fresh water for the world's increasing population has countries look power technology development keenly at the option of using section of the IAEA said. nuclear power to desalinate sea

An international meeting is to be held in Taejon in South Korea next week to discuss how best the problem of short supply of fresh water can be solved by using nuclear energy. The week-long meet, began

yesterday under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), brought together more than 300 experts from all over the world to discuss the present status of experiments in nuclear-powered desalination and how to proceed in future. The meeting is being con-

vened following requests from a number of countries which are

struggling to meet the increasing demand for fresh water, Toshio Konishi of the nuclear

India is among the core group of countries that have progressed quite far in producing portable water through nuclear energy and Indian scientists are expected to submit presentations at the deliberations about their experiences in the

The agency was studying the feasibility of using nuclear energy for sea water desalination in the sixties, but interest died out in subsequent years, only to be revived in 1989.

The world's largest desalinator is nature itself. Each year the solar system takes through evaporation about 400,000 cubic kilometres — about 100

times the global annual water consumption -- of sea water, purifies and then sends it back to earth in the form of rain, sleet or snow in different parts of the world, experts say.

But the fresh water coming down as rain is not equally distributed, leaving some nations battling the ravages of water and others completely parched.

The number of countries actually using nuclear energy to desalinate might be small, but the list wishing to use it is getting longer. Morocco is to undertake a joint study with China on a desalination plant and Indonesia has also showed an interest in such projects. South Korea is designing a 330 MW multi-purpose nuclear power plant which can be used for desalination.

- India Abroad News Service

Russian sensitiveness to Indian security may seal fate of Kiev-Islamabad arms deal

Arun Mohanty writes from Moscow

Russian sensitiveness to Indian security concerns may have sealed the fate of Ukraine's deal to supply sophisticated tanks to Pakistan, according to defence experts Moscow.

They say that even Islamabad is now threatening to review the \$650 million contract after discovering that the T-80Us it had received in the first lot were outdated weapon sys-

With the deadline for dispatching the second lot of tanks to Pakistan fast approaching, it looks more and more evident that Ukraine would find it tough to fulfil its obligation to supply the rest of the 320 tanks under the contract, causing tension in ties with Islamabad, reliable sources in the defence ministry here say.

In its desperation to save the deal. Kiev had also tried to clinch secret deals with the 50 cash-strapped Russian factories making the vital T-80U components. But the Russian govern-. ment's firm stand on the issue prevented these factories from concluding any secret deal with Kiev, sources said.

Ukraine had also failed to secure the key parts from

possess the Soviet technology for producing them, they added. sible to defend India's security

interests and see that collapse of the defence deal between Kiev and Islamabad becomes inevitable," the chairman of the Duma defence committee, General Lev Rokhlin told India Abroad News Service. Ukraine would not succeed

in blackmailing Moscow into supplying key components of the T-80U's without which the contract cannot be fulfilled, he

Ukraine was reported to have threatened to stop shipments of key space-docking sys-tems to Moscow if it blocked Kiev's defence deal with Islamabad.

But Ukrainian pressure tactics backfired, triggering a serious outburst in Moscow. Russia's Foreign Ministry virtually imposed a ban on further shipments of components necessary for assembling T-80U tanks in Ukraine.

"We will not succumb to Ukraine's blackmail tactics but block its defence deal with Pakistan," said an official of Rosvooruzheniye, Russia's chief

Poland and Slovakia, which arms exporter. "As a state company, we ought to defend our national interest," said the offi-"We will do everything pos- cial. These interests could not be adequately protected if hundreds of T-80U tanks arrive in Pakistan, which has troubled borders and tense relations with India, "our strategic partner and major importer of our weapons," he pointed out.

According to information available here, the Pakistani government was seriously considering reviewing its financial obligations under the deal as Ukraine had apparently failed to fulfil the terms of the agree-

The first batch of tanks which arrived in Pakistan in March were found to have been assembled during the Soviet era and might actually have been second hand equipment.

The tank's diesel engine, described by Ukrainian specialists as a definite advantage, was found to get heated so soon that officers found it difficult to run them in Pakistan's hot climate. Moreover, it was not capable of the kind of manoeuvres needed in actual battle conditions. The tank was also found to be a slow mover and fit only for ceremonial military parades.

Experts said the problem was Ukraine's failure to tie up for the supply of the more efficient gas turbine engines designed by Soviet defence factories before the break up of the Soviet Union. As a result they were saddled with the outdated diesel engines which were fitted in the tanks supplied to Pak-

Key officials here say that experts had questioned the implementation of the deal even when it was signed because 60 per cent of the tank's components came from Russia. Kiev had kept Moscow altogether out of the negotiations with Islam-

While Ukraine did not count on Russian opposition to the deal, Islamabad did not heed warnings about Kiev's technological dependence on Moscow, hoping that Moscow would not object to its implementation. Analysts here say this was

an unrealistic expectation as Moscow could not have risked its multi-million dollar arms deal with India, which was then under negotiation, by ignoring the latter's security interests. - India Abroad News Ser-

A woman in Kinshasa exchanges Zairean money, mainly for dollars, Sunday in a street called Wall Street. The exchange rate is fixed in the street. The new government has to put up with money carrying the effigy of ousted president Mobutu Sese Seko until they print - AFP/UNB photo their own money.

Australian PM apologises to aborigines MELBOURNE, May 26: Aus-

tralian Prime Minister John Howard made an unexpected personal apology today to tens of thousands of aborigines forcibly removed from their parents under a past government policy of assimilation, reports Reuter.

"Personally, I feel deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations towards indigenous people," Howard told a major conference on aboriginal reconciliation.

I am sorry for the hurt, the trauma, many here today may continue to feel as a consequence of those practices," he Howard received loud ap-

plause for his apology, but jeers when he said Australian history since white settlement in 1788 was not a history of "imperialism and exploitation and racism"

Many of the 1,500 aboriginal and political leaders turned their back on Howard as he continued his speech.

Before his speech, Howard was abused by an angry aboriginal woman who jumped on stage and harangued both Howard and populist politi-

cians Pauline Hanson. Delegates were told by conference leader Pat Dodson that black and white Australia were at a crossroads. "We meet at a moment of

son, chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. "Reconciliation stands at a crossroad as the nation debates two extremely important issues — native title and the "stolen

truth for this nation," said Dod-

generation", Dodson said. Australia is currently embroiled in a bitter row over aboriginal native title on farming land and past forced assimilation of children, a practice labelled genocidal by a human rights report to be released this

Tens of thousands of aboriginal children were taken from their parents from the 1880s to the 1960s to be brought up in children's homes or by white parents.

Australia's Human Rights

Commission and aboriginal

week.

leaders have called the assimilation policy genocidal and called for the government to formally apologise to aborigines. In a poignant opening cere-

mony, Howard and other political leaders presented smouldering grass and twigs piled on pieces of bark to aboriginal elders at the conference.