

Rabbani
Burhanuddin
1940
 Born in Faizabad. Educated Kabul and Al-Azhar university, Cairo
1971
 Becomes leader of Jamiat-Islami party, forced into exile in Pakistan by Afghan communists
1979
 Soviets invade Afghanistan, his party joins jihad (holy war) against them
1992
 Soviet-backed regime falls, Rabbani becomes president
1996
 Ousted by Taliban, but still recognised by UN as country's leader
2001
 Oct. 17: Returns to Kabul as titular head of Northern Alliance
 AFP



Tribals negotiate surrender of Taliban in Kandahar

Efforts on to form broad-based Afghan govt

AFP, Kabul

An uneasy calm descended Sunday on the Taliban's besieged southern stronghold of Kandahar as tribal leaders renewed efforts to negotiate a peaceful surrender by the Islamic militia.

"The atmosphere in the city is tense but there are no reports of fighting," said Hamid Karzai, who is one of three Pashtun tribal elders bidding to coax so-called moderate Taliban to defect to the opposition.

"We are continuing negotiations for a peaceful transfer of control in the city," Karzai told AFP by satellite phone from the neighbouring province of Uruzgan.

Earlier reports that the Taliban's supreme spiritual leader Mullah Mohammad Omar had agreed to surrender the city to the two other Pashtun chiefs, Mullah Naqibullah and Haji Bashir, were dismissed by the militia's spokesman as "Western propaganda".

The Pashtuns are Afghanistan's dominant ethnic group and make up the backbone of the Taliban, whose withdrawal from Kandahar would mark the final collapse of the hardline Islamic movement.

Except for a besieged pocket of territory in the far north, the regime would control no major cities and only a few provinces in the dustbowl south of the country.

Karzai, a former Afghan deputy foreign minister and close associate of the 87-year-old former king Mohammed Zahir Shah, is urging the Taliban to surrender not only Kandahar but also Saudi extremist Osama bin Laden, the

world's most wanted man.

Western intelligence forces cited in the British press Sunday claimed that US and British special forces had narrowed the search for bin Laden, wanted in connection with the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, to 70 square kilometres (30 square miles) of rugged terrain in southern Afghanistan.

"There are many in the Taliban who would like to see the back of Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaidaterrorist network," Karzai said.

Meanwhile, with ousted president Burhanuddin Rabbani back in Kabul, efforts intensified Sunday to form a broad-based government acceptable to Afghanistan's myriad ethnic groups, amid continued fighting to wrap up the remaining Taliban resistance.

Taliban fighters were still holed up in the Islamic militia's southern stronghold of Kandahar and around the northern city of Kunduz, where four US bombers pounded their positions on Sunday.

Several hundred soldiers of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance also took up positions at dawn on the Khanabad front line, some 20 kilometres (12 miles) east of the Kunduz, witnesses said.

The opposition is looking to eliminate the militia's last bastion in northern Afghanistan after the thousands of Taliban troops thought to be holding out around the city ignored an ultimatum to surrender or die.

If successful, it would culminate a monumental week for the anti-Taliban forces.



Northern Alliance soldiers watch the explosions after a US bomber dropped bombs on Taliban positions near the village of Khanabad, in Kunduz province, northern Afghanistan on Sunday. According to the Northern Alliance, nearly 30,000 Taliban troops are holed up in the Kunduz area.

Chechens begin direct peace talks with Moscow

AFP, Moscow

The first direct Chechnya peace talks between a representative of President Vladimir Putin and separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov opened Sunday in Moscow, ITAR-TASS reported.

The talks were attended by Viktor Kazantsev, Putin's representative for the north Caucasus region, and Maskhadov's chief negotiator Akhmed Zakayev, the news agency said.

The meeting began shortly after Zakayev's arrival in Moscow on Sunday from Istanbul. No other details were immediately available.

Rebel president Aslan Maskhadov's top negotiator told AFP that he would arrive in Moscow on Sunday to lead the first direct negotiations over a peace settlement in the 25-month war in Chechnya.

Stampede kills 13 in Indian temple

REUTERS, Bhopal

Thirteen people died in a stampede in a temple in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, triggered by fears of a fire which turned out to be a hoax, police and an eyewitness said yesterday.

Dozens of Hindu devotees raced down the narrow stairs of the temple on a hillock in Satna district fearing a fire in the temple on Saturday.

There were at least five women among those who died in the stampede, a local police officer said, adding that 25 people had been admitted to hospital.

14 children killed in India after Vitamin-A overdose

AFP, Guwahati

Four more children have died of an alleged vitamin A overdose in the northeastern Indian state of Assam under a UNICEF-backed anti-blindness drive, taking the death toll to 14, officials said Sunday.

The four deaths occurred overnight in the southern Assam districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi, a senior district health official said.

The children were aged between two and three.

Assam's health minister, Bhumidhar Barman said the government was "extremely worried" about the situation.

"We are expecting reports from a laboratory where we have sent vitamin samples for investigations," Barman said.

Kung Fu star Bruce Lee to make digital comeback

AFP, Hong Kong

A Korean film maker is planning to bring Hong Kong martial arts icon Bruce Lee back to the silver screen, nearly 30 years after his death, using digital technology, a report said Sunday.

ShinCine Films will use the latest in digital animation technology to bring the territory's greatest movie star back to life in a 390-million Hong Kong dollar (50.1 million US) film aptly entitled "Dragon Warrior", the South China Morning Post reported.

Lee's name in Chinese -- Siu Loong -- means small dragon.

Lee's voice will be remodelled using a computer and the use of digital technology will enable the star to interact with live-action actors.



Leader of the opposition Congress (I) Party, Sonia Gandhi, receives a garland from members of the lower castes in New Delhi on Sunday. Sonia met Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Saturday to discuss the proposed Prevention of Terrorism ordinance (POTO). She made it clear that her party was opposed to POTO on grounds that it would be misused by the police.

11 killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian security forces have shot dead 11 Muslim separatist militants in Indian-administered Kashmir, a police spokesman said Sunday.

Acting after a tip-off, Indian troops shot dead four heavily armed militants after a six-hour long gunbattle at Girja Chaprawan village in the southern Kashmir district of Rajouri late Saturday, the spokesman said.

"The gun-battle erupted when the militants opened fire at the troops who asked them to surrender after surrounding their hideout," he said.

Four assault rifles, 13 landmines and five rockets were among the arms and ammunition recovered from the scene of the encounter, he said.

In another incident Indian troops shot dead four militants in Nangla village, in Kashmir's southern Poonch district early Sunday, the spokesman said.

Indian troops also shot dead a militant identified as Rafeeq Ahmed, in Gandana village in Kashmir's

Doda district, 220 km south of Srinagar, the Kashmiri summer capital, the spokesman said.

"Ahmed was working as top commander of the HUIJ (Harkat-ul-Jihadi-Islami) militant group," the spokesman added.

Elsewhere in Kashmir, two more militants were killed by Indian security personnel, the spokesman said.

More than 35,000 people have died in Kashmir since the beginning of an armed separatist rebellion in 1989.

Reuters adds: Islamic militants are likely to try to make their way into the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir as they are routed in Afghanistan and then in turn pushed out of Pakistan, the Indian army chief in the tense border region said.

In a weekend interview with Reuters, Lieutenant General J R Mukherjee said the army was stepping up its efforts to stop guerrillas coming across the line of control which divides disputed Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Moderate Albanian party wins Kosovo polls

AFP, Pristina

Kosovo's largest ethnic Albanian party, led by moderate writer-turned-politician Ibrahim Rugova, has won the most votes in the province's general election, but failed to gain an outright majority, exit polls indicated Sunday.

Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) took 45 percent of the popular vote in Saturday's election for a 120-member parliament in the Yugoslav province, against 24 percent for its nearest rival, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), according to an exit poll by the non-governmental organisation Kosova Action for Civic Initiatives (KAIC).

"Preliminary results from the elections on November 17, according to the leadership of the LDK, show that the LDK is certain of a convincing win in the majority of towns in Kosovo," the party said on its official web site (www.kosova.com).

A senior aide to Rugova, Skender Hyseni, said the LDK leader would address a news conference at his home in Pristina later Sunday.

Rugova, 57, who led a campaign of passive resistance against the

regime of former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic, is the frontrunner to be elected president by the parliament.

The president is to nominate a prime minister, who in turn will form a government for Kosovo, a predominantly ethnic Albanian province in southern Serbia, the dominant Yugoslav republic.

Along with the leaders of the two other main ethnic Albanian parties - the PDK and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) - Rugova, a French-educated professor of Albanian literature, has campaigned for "independence for Kosovo as soon as possible."

However, officials of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which will remain the ultimate authority in the province, have emphasised that the new Albanian-dominated parliament will never be allowed to declare independence for Kosovo from Yugoslavia, a fear of many minority Serbs.

The election was the result of a UN Security Council resolution in June 1999 that authorized "substantial autonomy" for Kosovo, and the deployment of a NATO-led peace-keeping force, KFOR.

Secret CIA units play key role in US air raids

REUTERS, Washington

Secret CIA paramilitary units have been operating inside Afghanistan since late September and have helped provide vital intelligence for US airstrikes targeting the leaders of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaida network, the Washington Post reported Sunday.

The Post, quoting unnamed well-placed sources, said one of the these CIA units, whose members do not wear military uniforms, on Sept. 27 became the first American force to enter Afghanistan during the current war to topple the ruling Taliban militia and crush Al-Qaida.

The Post said this first incursion, which preceded the October 7 start of the US bombing campaign in Afghanistan, helped pave the way for the later entrance of traditional US special forces into that country.

The CIA units also have provided the rebel Northern Alliance with information about Taliban and Al-

Qaida troop concentrations, the newspaper reported.

The paramilitary units are part of the CIA's highly secret Special Activities Division, the Post reported. The division's arsenal includes helicopters, airplanes, Hellfire anti-tank missiles and unmanned Predator aircraft spy drones equipped with powerful cameras, the newspaper said.

The division consists of about 150 fighters, pilots and specialists, mainly veterans of the US military, the Post said.

The United States has accused bin Laden and Al-Qaida of masterminding the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington, and the Taliban of harboring them in Afghanistan.

The Post said a CIA-operated Predator last week provided information that paved the way for three days of air strikes that killed key Al-Qaida leaders.

Northern Alliance talks tough against foreign troops

AFP, Kabul

The Anti-Taliban Northern Alliance said Sunday it saw no need for additional foreign troops in Afghanistan, as tensions simmered over Britain's deployment of 100 Royal Marines north of Kabul.

"We do not expect any more foreign troops. We see no need for that," the alliance's acting interior minister Yunis Qanooni told AFP.

Around 100 Royal Marine commandos flew into the Bagram air base on Thursday to pave the way for several thousand more troops to be sent to Afghanistan to help safeguard aid supplies.

Their arrival was viewed with intense mistrust by the Northern Alliance, whose defence minister, General Mohammad Quassim Fahim, said they were operating without the anti-Taliban coalition's agreement.

"The British forces perhaps have an agreement with the UN but not with us," Fahim told AFP.

However, Qanooni struck a more neutral note on Sunday, saying it

had been confirmed that the existing batch of commandos would be restricted to humanitarian work, demining operations and providing security for the British embassy which will reopen soon.

However, he reiterated that additional foreign troop deployments would not be welcomed.

A British Defence Ministry spokesman in London denied Saturday any major rift with the alliance, although he added that there may be "some difficulties" that would have to be negotiated.

The spokesman specifically rejected reports that the Royal Marine detachment already in Bagram had been told to leave.

"We can confirm that we have not had any such approach from the Northern Alliance leadership and that none of our troops will be returning home," he said.

Ousted Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani, who returned to Kabul on Saturday after five years in exile, said his administration had no objection to foreign troops conducting humanitarian

operations. But he sidestepped specific questions about the arrival of the British contingent.

"Some forces are here for security reasons, humanitarian reasons and demining reasons. As for humanitarian help, we have no objection," he told a press conference.

Northern Alliance foreign affairs spokesman Abdullah Abdullah also said the deployment of "thousands" of British soldiers would have to be discussed through the United Nations.

"If we are talking about the presence of thousands of troops it's another question which needs to be discussed. We are open to further consultation on this with the United Nations," he said.

The initial Northern Alliance concerns appear to have been prompted by speculation that the British troops could take an active role in ground operations to hunt down suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden and the leaders of his Al-Qaidanetwork.

EU pushes for ME peace

AFP, Jerusalem

A high-powered EU delegation meets Israeli leaders Sunday in an effort to jump-start the ailing peace process just hours after the encouraging news of an Israeli army pullout from a Palestinian town.

However the highest-ranking EU mission to visit the region since the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation nearly 14 months ago was promised a cool reception in Israel, the latest stop on a whirlwind tour.

The group, which visited the volatile West Bank on Saturday, is led by Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt.

"During the last 12 days, there has certainly been less violence... There is now a need to relaunch the peace process," said Verhofstadt, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency.

Among tentative signs of detente, the Israeli army pulled out of the Palestinian self-rule town of Tulkarem Saturday night.

The army said it had completed its withdrawal from the northern West Bank town, after partially reoccupying it nearly one month ago.

Israel's gesture bodes well for the EU visit, aimed at salvaging a US-brokered peace deal from the jaws of the bloody 14-month Palestinian uprising or intifada which has claimed almost 980 lives, the vast majority of

them Palestinian.

After visiting Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat Saturday, the EU diplomatic mission called for Israel and the Palestinians to seize the moment during this lull in the fighting.

For his part, Arafat said the Palestinians "will make all the efforts to sustain and maintain the ceasefire" and called for Europe's "support in ending the siege around our people".

Before their meeting with Arafat in Ramallah, the EU leaders, who included EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, European Commission head Romano Prodi and Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel, expressed optimism at the start of their tour Saturday morning in Egypt.

"I do have the impression that the situation may be better," Solana said in Cairo, adding that the peace process did not need a new initiative but "a political will".

After their talks with Arafat, the members of the EU delegation travelled to Jerusalem, where they were set to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Peres on Sunday, before heading to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

However an Israeli official in Sharon's office told AFP that little would come of the EU delegation's diplomatic sprint through the region.

Afghan refugees hesitate returning home

AFP, Peshawar

Leaving Afghanistan was easy during the 20 years that bombs fell and the sound of machineguns rattled through the streets of major cities. Going back is a difficult proposition.

Doctor Al-Umera, a 28-year-old who lives in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, had a determined look when she said: "InshaAllah, it's time to go home."

But she knows that it will be difficult for young Afghans who have spent all their life in a foreign land to go back to a country devastated by war and a society that remains one of the most conservative in the world.

The Pakistan government estimates that three million Afghans have crossed the border since the 1979-89 Soviet occupation and ensuing civil war.

More than 135,000 have crossed since the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington which sparked US air raids on Afghanistan. UN officials admit it will be a long process to get all the refugees to go back.

"My friends tell me: 'Don't go there, you are Pakistani now and they will kill you,'" Al-Umera said with a laugh.

The doctor moved from the

eastern province of Afghanistan to the Pakistani border city at the age of five.

She last went to her homeland in 1992, before the Taliban. Now she is happy that the rule of the hardline Islamic militia, dominated by the majority Pashtun community, is

over.

"I am a Pashtun myself and these people tarnish our image," she said. "Today the future is bright. I will tell you something, whoever comes to power in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance or group X or Z, nothing will be the same again."

So she is determined but also warns that Afghan exiles born and raised in the liberal West, "have to be patient and modest" when they go back.

"Afghanistan is and will remain an Islamic country. Women in particular must not expect a rapid change

in mentalities," commented the doctor before a friend added: "If she was at her home in Nangahar she would not even be allowed to sit in the same room as the men."

The treatment of women was a symbol of the ultra-conservative Taliban, but many observers highlight that even without them Afghan society remains very traditional.

"I am Afghan, my roots are Afghan, and I will probably die in this country," said another woman in her thirties, who has lived in the United States for a long time.

"But I know more than ever that I could never marry an Afghan, I am too free and independent," she added. "People like me brought up western-style will have difficulties getting back into this society."

Atta-ur-Rahman is 23, was born in Peshawar and was educated in a Pakistani school. Today he is studying in a "madrasa" religious school. His father was once governor of the Afghan province of Kunar and he saw his native country for the first time in 1988, when the Soviet army was leaving the province.

"It was fascinating. It is an incredible feeling to get to know your country," Atta-ur-Rahman insists it will not be a cultural shock to return because Peshawar is so close to Afghanistan.



An Afghan mother walks after her son along with others while entering into Afghanistan from Pakistan at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in Chaman on Sunday. Many Afghan refugees, who left their motherland in the wake of US-led bombing, are going back to their own country.