

## Sharon, Barak sued by Palestinians in Belgium

**AFP, Brussels**

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his predecessor Ehud Barak are among 15 Israelis named in a new case brought in Belgium on Thursday by six Palestinian fathers of children killed during the Intifada.

According to the writ, the Palestinians are "the fathers of children who died of wounds caused by bullets fired by the Israeli army," said their lawyer, Marie-Christine Warlop.

They all belong to an association called Justice and Peace for the Palestinian People.

As well as Sharon and Barak, the writ also names Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer, army chief of staff General Shaul Mofaz and 11 soldiers, both officers and other ranks, from Tarmiet base, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

## 2 Pak nuclear scientists released after interrogation

**AP, Islamabad**

Two retired Pakistani nuclear scientists detained on suspicion of links with Osama bin Laden's terrorist network have been released, the chief government spokesman said Thursday.

Government spokesman Gen. Rashid Quereshi confirmed that Sultan Bashir-ud-Din Mehmood and Abdul Majid had been freed but would not say when.

Both worked for Pakistan's Atomic Energy Commission until 1999 and were detained last month for questioning. Both had made frequent trips to Afghanistan, government officials said.

## 40 killed as Colombian gold mine collapses

**AFP, Medellin**

Twenty-eight bodies had been rescued late Thursday from an illegal gold mine that collapsed earlier in the day, killing at least 40 people, Civil Defence authorities said.

"Twenty-eight miners' bodies have been rescued and 32 wounded people have been taken to nearby hospitals," a rescue worker told AFP.

Villagers and emergency crews used tractors and shovels in a desperate attempt to find survivors after the roof of the abandoned gold mine fell in at around 6:30 am (11:30 GMT), trapping people under tonnes of earth, authorities said.

The mine, located some 300 kilometers (186 miles) west of the capital, collapsed after some 100 nearby villagers trying to eke out a living went in to look for the precious metal, civil defence spokesman Eduardo Arevalo told AFP.



**PHOTO: AFP**  
A model presents a gown by Russian designer Valentin Yudashkin and fashion house Nijole during High Fashion Week in Moscow on Wednesday.

# Omar appoints successor

## Hundreds of Taliban surrender at Kunduz

**AFP, Quetta**

Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar has appointed a long-time confidant as his new deputy and eventual successor, a close ally of the Islamic militia's leadership said Friday.

Mullah Akhtar Mohammed Usmani has been handed the task of leading the Taliban should anything happen to Omar, according to Abu Abdul Rehman, a commander of the Pakistan-based Harakat ul-Mujahedin Islamic militant group.

"Mullah Mohammed Omar has selected Mullah Usmani as his successor," Rehman told AFP.

"Mullah Omar and Usmani were school fellows. They both fought against the Russians.

"They both started together at the Jamia Farooq Azam" madrassa (religious school) in southern Kandahar province. "When they completed their studies they started teaching together."

Rehman said Usmani, like Omar, detested publicity and had only ever given one interview more than four years ago. He was a man of simple tastes who only ever ate bread and fruit.

The Harakat ul-Mujahedin, which Washington lists as a terrorist organisation, is one of several Muslim militant groups fighting to end Indian rule in Kashmir.

But it is closely linked to the Taliban, and has sent its militants to fight and train alongside the militia in Afghanistan.

Rehman denied reports that Omar had left Kandahar, one of the last remaining Taliban strongholds in Afghanistan.

"He is in the same place and still monitoring his security," said Rehman. "It is not possible (for US forces) to reach him."

Meanwhile, up to 600 Taliban fighters have surrendered in the area around Kunduz, the Northern Alliance said Friday as it pressed its drive against the besieged northern bastion of the Islamic militia.

As the state of talks to end the impasse remained confused, a US B-52 again bombed Taliban positions and alliance commanders said they had dislodged the militia from the hills around the town of Khanabad, near Kunduz.

Younis Qanooni, the alliance's interior minister, said that "500 to 600 Taliban have surrendered" in the area since the Northern Alliance push started Thursday.

Kunduz is the last stronghold of the Taliban in northern Afghanistan and one of two remaining pockets of resistance in the country, along with the Islamic militia's southern citadel of Kandahar.

Sadredine, a Northern Alliance commander, told AFP that "we have chased the Taliban from the hills" dominating Khanabad, encircled by alliance forces about 20 kilometers (12 miles) east of Kunduz.

"We suspended our offensive Thursday evening to allow all our people (Afghan Taliban) who want to give up to do so and come fight with us against foreign Taliban," Sadredine said.



**PHOTO: AFP**  
Tanks of the Northern Alliance get ready to attack Taliban troops on Khanabad frontline on Thursday as a 24-hour ultimatum to surrender expired yesterday.



**PHOTO: AFP**  
British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw (L) shakes hands with his Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar during their meeting at the Pakistani Foreign Office in Islamabad on Friday. Straw arrived in Pakistan for talks with UN and Pakistani officials on the formation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan.

# Straw hears Pak concerns about Afghan bloodshed

**AFP, Islamabad**

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said Friday there was potential for a "humanitarian disaster" around the besieged northern Afghan town of Kunduz where Taliban forces are making a last stand.

Straw said concerns about bloody reprisals against the Taliban in the embattled enclave had been raised during talks here with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar.

He said Taliban troops who were willing to surrender should be accepted by the opposing Northern Alliance forces, but they could not be allowed to go free.

"We discussed what is a very difficult and potentially very serious situation ... We all understand the potential humanitarian disaster that could be possible in Kunduz," he told a joint press conference with Sattar.

Hundreds of Taliban troops have surrendered in the past 24 hours as alliance forces and US warplanes pound their positions with air strikes, artillery and rocket fire.

But thousands more Afghan Taliban and foreign militants believed to be linked to Osama bin Laden's alleged terrorist network are entrenched in the area, preferring to fight to the last.

Concerns about reprisal killings if the alliance forces crack the Taliban's defences have grown since the United Nations reported at least 100 young Taliban recruits were killed after the fall of the nearby city of Mazar-i-Sharif earlier this month.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said Thursday it had found 600 bodies in Mazar-i-Sharif in the wake of the battle, but could not say whether the victims had been executed or were killed in combat.

Straw said the situation in Kunduz was "sketchy" and the British government had "no troops on the ground" in the area to verify conflicting reports about Taliban defections.

"It's an area where information is limited but our position is very straightforward," he said.

"If people are ready to surrender, they are serious in their intentions, they have given up their arms and it is possible to accept their surrender, then their surrender should be accepted," he said.

Nine journalists were killed in Colombia so far this year, and 55 others received death threats, the armed forces said in a report published Thursday.

"In this country, because of the polarisation of the conflict, many journalists are caught in the crossfire," the report said.

The report said the "enemies of press freedom" were the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) as well as the right-wing paramilitary United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC).

Numerous journalists have fled the country after being named as "military targets" by the extremist groups, which are on the US list of terrorist organisations.

# Indo-EU summit talks tough against terrorism

**AFP, New Delhi**

Indian and European Union leaders Friday issued a joint declaration against terrorism and said they were in agreement that Afghanistan needed a broad-based multi-ethnic government.

"All states have a responsibility to refrain from providing moral, material or diplomatic support to acts of terrorism, and prevent the use of their territory for sponsoring terrorist acts against other states," the declaration said.

Decisive measures must be taken "against all states, individuals and entities which render support, harbour, finance, instigate or train terrorists or promote terrorism" it added.

The declaration also said India and the EU saw the United Nations as central to the efforts of the international community against terrorism.

"We agree that terrorism anywhere and everywhere and in any form must be routed out resolutely," Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said at a joint press conference with European Commission (EC) President Romano Prodi and Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt -- whose country holds the rotating EU presidency.

India was one of the first countries to back the US campaign against terrorism, but is sensitive to Washington's new alliance with its arch-rival, Pakistan.

New Delhi accuses Islamabad of supporting militants fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, which Pakistan denies.

"Terrorist activities still continue in Kashmir despite Pakistan becoming a member of the international coalition against terrorism," Vajpayee added.

Vajpayee said India and the EU agreed on the need for massive international assistance for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

# 9 members of a family killed in Saudi accident

**AFP, Riyadh**

Nine members of a Saudi family were killed when their car collided head-on with a jeep on the coastal road linking the holy city of Mecca with the southern city of Jizan, a newspaper reported Friday.

The family comprised the father, mother, their six children and the father's mother. Six passengers in the jeep were hospitalised for various injuries, Okaz newspaper reported.

The accident took place earlier this week near Qunfudah, 1,200 km (750 miles) southwest of the capital Riyadh on a road notorious for its deadly accidents. Hundreds of motorists die every year on this road.

# Afghan Jihad turns sour for Pakistani volunteers

**AFP, Chakdara**

They left Pakistan with their heads held high to fight a holy war with their Taliban "brothers" in Afghanistan, only to return without having fired a shot and with a deep sense of betrayal.

Thousands of Pakistani tribal volunteers, outraged by the US-led bombing campaign in Afghanistan, crossed the border in late October at the behest of their leader, Sufi Mohammad, head of the radical Islamic organisation, Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat Mohammad (TNSM).

Despite repeated Taliban assurances that they were not needed and should remain where they were, waves of ethnic Pashtun volunteers from the tribal zones of northwest Pakistan crossed the border to defend the hardline Islamic regime against the US-led "coalition of infidels."

According to sources here, a sizeable number of volunteers were killed, especially in fighting over the strategic northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, and around 2,000 have been listed as missing.

The remainder simply drifted back into Pakistan.

"I crossed the border with around 450 others," said Bakht Wali, a 50-year-old farmer, whose frail physique and quiet demeanor hardly mark him out as a guerrilla fighter.

Wali and his fellow jihadi (holy warriors) stayed a few days in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad before moving on to the capital Kabul.

"The Taliban split us up and despatched us to various front lines," said Wali, who ended up facing the advancing forces of the Northern Alliance just north of Kabul.

Wali brought his own gun and insists he received no payment for his decision to fight alongside the Taliban -- a claim backed up by fellow volunteer Fazel Mohammad.

"We weren't mercenaries. We weren't paid. We just went to do our duty," Mohammad said.

# 4 killed in Indo-Pak firing along Kashmir border

**AFP, Srinagar**

Four people were killed, including three children, when Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged artillery and mortar fire over their disputed border in Kashmir, police said Friday.

The shelling took place overnight in two areas -- the Karna sector of the northern Kashmir district of Kupwara, which borders Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and the Uri sector of Baramulla district.

"Pakistani shells landed in Jabdi village in the Karna sector killing two girls and a boy," a police spokesman said. The girls were aged five and six, while the boy was nine-years-old, he said.

Three others, including two women, were also injured.

Earlier three civilians, including a brother and sister, were injured in cross-border shelling in the same area.

In the other shelling incident a man was killed, while another civilian was injured, in the village of Hattinga in Uri, again overnight, the spokesman said.

Indian and Pakistani troops have been exchanging heavy artillery, mortar and rocket fire over the Line of Control (LoC) -- the defacto border that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan -- for the past two days.

# Muslim rebellion Philippines seeks help from Indonesia, Malaysia

**AFP, Manila**

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo Friday said she has sought help from Indonesian and Malaysian leaders to end a fresh Filipino Muslim revolt that left more than 100 people dead this week.

Arroyo did not elaborate on what help she had specifically asked from Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

The alleged leader of the revolt, Nur Misuari, was on Thursday reported to have fled to Malaysia while unconfirmed reports on Friday said he could have even used the vast sea south of the Philippines to enter Indonesia.

Arroyo said the rebellion would end with the arrest of Misuari, who was suspended as governor of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) following attacks by his men on military and other security posts in southern Jolo island.

Arroyo's support for a rival faction in former guerilla Misuari's Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in Monday's ARMM elections apparently sparked the bloody revolt.

A Philippine court had already issued an arrest warrant for Misuari.



**PHOTO: AFP**  
Palestinian mourners carry the bodies of five schoolboys during their funeral in Khan Yunes on Friday in the Gaza Strip. The children, aged between six and 14, were killed on Thursday when one of them kicked an unexploded Israeli tank shell that had been fired in recent days, according to Palestinian security officials. The boys found the shell in scrub land close to the Jewish settlement of Nezer Hazani in the central Gaza Strip, as they were making their way to school in Khan Yunes.

# Aid agencies seek multi-nat'l force

**AFP, Washington**

A group of relief agencies is calling for the immediate deployment of an international stabilisation force to Afghanistan to secure the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The appeal comes amid the growing disintegration of the security situation as the Taliban continues to retreat, leaving power vacuums and lawlessness throughout the country.

"We believe there's a dangerous lack of security in parts of Afghanistan that is making it difficult to distribute aid adequately," said Ken Bacon of Refugees International, which, along with four other groups, on Wednesday urged urgent action to restore order.

"There's a cruel momentum to disorder and misrule and ... it feeds on itself more and more and the time to stop it is at the earliest possible minute, not to wait and wait and diddle around and come in months later," Bacon said.

"A multi-national presence ... is required now to bring the security that we need to get relief flowing in all areas of the country," he said.

Officials from Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and Mercy Corps International joined in the call.

"Time is of the essence in this crisis in order to save as many lives as possible," said Mark Bartolini of the International Rescue Committee.

"In the present environment, where the military goals have far outpaced the political imperative, we believe an external stabilisation force is the best hope for ensuring that we're able to operate unimpeded," he said.

The rapid retreat of the Taliban in the face of Northern Alliance advances backed by US bombing and military advice should have

made the distribution of aid easier, but the relief workers said that it had become more difficult because of the lack of law and order.

"The Taliban's dramatic territorial losses over the last 10 days would seem to open the door for humanitarian agencies like ours to access the most vulnerable populations," Bartolini said.

"Unfortunately ... we've been forced to cut back on our operations inside Afghanistan."

The United Nations said Wednesday that all its offices and those of various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had been looted in two of Afghanistan's largest cities, Mazar-i-Sharif in the north and Jalalabad in the east.

"The situation on the ground is changing rapidly," said Michelle Maynard of Save the Children. "Efforts must be made to bring about and maintain peace and stability and to do so quickly."

Shortly after they spoke, US

Secretary of State Colin Powell said he shared the concerns but noted that the situation looked to be gradually improving and that there were already plans to send French and Jordanian troops to secure Mazar-i-Sharif.

"We are as anxious as these aid organizations to establish security in the area and get food and medicines and other humanitarian supplies in," Powell said in an interview with National Public Radio.

But he maintained that bulk shipments of food into Afghanistan, notably from Uzbekistan, were increasing.

"The difficulty ... is clearing the roads, making sure the mines are out of the way and making sure that the food can be distributed on a retail basis down to the individual villages where the food is needed," Powell said, specifically pointing to areas on the Uzbek border and around Mazar-i-Sharif.