The Paily Star

INTERNÄTIONAL

Afghans eye power-sharing deal

AFP, Kabul

Afghan factions met in Germany on Wednesday to continue hammering out a historic power-sharing deal, one day after US warplanes attacked a compound near Kandahar believing it held top Al-Qaida and Taliban leaders.

Representatives of the rival groups said Tuesday they were on track to strike a deal on the post-Taliban Afghan government in three to five days, as US Marines massed within striking distance of the ousted Taliban militia's last stronghold and cut off possible escape routes.

The compound southeast of Kandahar was the latest target in the US hunt for Osama bin Laden, the Saudi-born Islamic extremist, and his Al-Qaida network, accused of carrying out suicide attacks September 11 that killed some 4,000 in the United States.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who watched the attack live from the headquarters of the US Central Command in Florida, said he had no names of the leaders believed to be in the targeted facility, but said they were of "appreciable" importance.

"It clearly was a leadership area," he said. "All of the indicators demonstrated it was a non-trivial leadership activity."

In northern Afghanistan, Northern Alliance commanders said their troops, backed by US and British special forces, had put down a bloody rebellion by some 600 captured Taliban fighters at a prison fortress near Mazar-i-Sharif

The US-led military campaign has targeted the Taliban for supporting bin Laden

The United States has identified more than 40 sites where research on weapons of mass destruction may have been taking place, said General Tommy Franks, commander of US forces in Afghanistan

He also said US forces searching for Al-Qaida members were focusing on Jalalabad in the east and Kandahar in the south. US Attorney General John Ashcroft said the United States believes it already has members of the network in custody.

US officials say the military campaign not only serves the aim of tracking down terrorists, but also has freed Afghans from a repressive regime

Despite assurances to the contrary, there has been concern that the Northern Alliance -- a loose coalition made up of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and other minorities -- may be reluctant to share power with Pashtun tribes in the south, many of which formerly supported the Taliban.

But as the UN-backed conference opened Tuesday in a luxury chateau outside Bonn, all parties expressed optimism.

The delegates agreed on the agenda of the talks and planned to reach a deal on the transitional government within three to five days, a UN spokesman said Despite the confident mood, many disagreements remained, particularly

over a planned multinational security force. International officials and some Pashtun leaders have called for some

form of UN-endorsed peacekeeping force to oversee the formation of a government and guard major cities, particularly the capital Kabul, but the alliance opposes the idea.

Hard talking was also expected over the makeup of the interim government, in particular the naming of a "prime minister" as a deputy to exiled former king Mohammed Zahir Shah, widely seen as the likely symbolic head of a new administration.

Intense bargaining was also expected on the distribution of the key defence, finance and interior portfolios.

Burhanuddin Rabbani, the UN-recognised president of Afghanistan and nominal head of the Northern Alliance, again insisted the Bonn talks were "preliminary" and should be moved to Kabul.

As officials debated the country's political future in Germany, pressure mounted in Kandahar, where thousands of Taliban troops still loyal to their leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, remain.

More than 600 US Marines have flown in from ships in the Arabian Sea since Monday to secure an airstrip southwest of Kandahar and about 400 more were due to fly in over the next days, the Pentagon said

The Marines will help US and British special forces troops block Taliban and Al-Qaida fighters from escaping on the roads to Kabul and the borders with Pakistan and Iran

MNLF rebels free hostages

Arroyo relieved as Muslim rebellion ends

AFP, Zamboanga

Eighty-nine hostages walked free and their captors also got away Wednesday as the government agreed terms to end a deadly Muslim revolt in the southern Philippines.

The captives were found unharmed on the outskirts of Zamboanga as seven army trucks brought 217 heavily armed followers of Muslim leader Nur Misuari back to a Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) enclave near this southern port city.

"It's over," Lieutenant General Roy Cimatu declared as the haggard-looking hostages streamed out of a residential compound in the village of Pasonanca to end their 24hour ordeal The group, many of them bare-

foot and wearing only their night clothes, clapped and embraced each other. A frail old man was taken out by soldiers on a stretcher. The government of President

Gloria Arrovo, who had previously taken a hard line against hostage takers, agreed to grant the renegade MNLF members safe passage



PHOTO: AFP Armed followers of suspended renegade Muslim Governor Nur Misuari depart from a forested area of Zamboanga City on Wednesday leaving behind the 89 people they had held captive.

to end a revolt that claimed 27 lives in two days of fighting.

Asked what her government planned to do to the rebels. Arrovo said the issue was a "tactical matter" that would be left to the armed forces.

But the military would make sure such an incident "won't happen again," she told reporters in Manila.

The rebels seized 113 residents at gunpoint Tuesday, shortly after the military launched air strikes to dislodge them from Cabatangan, a hilltop government complex that overlooks this city of 600,000 people

Muslim government leaders held talks overnight and won a pledge that the gunmen would free their hostages unharmed in exchange for safe passage out of the predominantly Christian city.

Meanwhile, President Gloria Arroyo on Wednesday said she was relieved fighting in the southern Philippine city of Zamboanga between government troops and armed followers of Muslim leader Nur Misuari had ended with the safe release of 89 hostages

Strike in Kashmir

A strike called to protest a new and

controversial anti-terrorism ordi

nance Wednesday closed down

shops and businesses in Indian-

administered Kashmir, residents

The Prevention of Terrorism

It has been opposed by the

Ordinance (POTO), introduced last

month by the Indian cabinet, is yet to

be promulgated by parliament.

to protest

AFP, Srinagar

said

anti-terror law

Madhuri

Dixit's appeal

AFP, Bombay

Indian film star Madhuri Dixit has appealed to the government to stop AP. London the "mass murder" of elephants in northeastern India, where 31 elephants have died in the past two weapons, a wide range of international analysts say he months has been trying to acquire them for years and may have

Dixit, 34, a hugely popular Bollywood star, has written a letter to the Minister of Forests G.C. Langthasa in the state of Assam, where the elephants have died, the People for the Ethical Treatment of

Animals (PETA) group said. She said she was saddened to hear that a number of elephants had been poisoned and that six were killed this month by a train while resting on a railway track passing

REUTERS, Guwahati

sovereignty

succeeded, or be close.

does and prepare for its possible use.

A rebel group fighting for an independent homeland in the northeastern state of Assam has called for peace talks with New Delhi, raising hopes of an end to two decades of insurgency in the tea- and oil -rich area.

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) has called for talks for the first time since New Delhi said in January it was willing to talk to the rebels in any country they wanted

and to discuss any issue, including

ULFA Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa said in a statement late on Tuesday. "A political dialogue is the only

ULFA calls for peace talks

way out for peace in Assam and to solve the burning problem of the state," he said. ULFA one of the biggest rebel

groups in India's volatile northeast, accuses New Delhi of exploiting the region's mineral resources while

neglecting the local economy. ULFA made its call for peace talks on the eve of the "black day" separatist are observing on Wednesday to mark the 10th anniversary of the first major military operation against them.

produced.

"ULFA is willing to have peace talks with New Delhi to solve the In the past, militants have marked problems of the people of Assam," the anniversary by bombing oil

pipelines, blasting railway bridges and killing several security men.

Police said earlier on Tuesday that security had been increased throughout the state to prevent militant attacks. Assam accounts for 54 per cent of the tea and up to 15 per cent of onshore crude oil produced in India.

Government officials were not available to comment on ULFA's call for talks.

In January, home (interior) ministry officials invited ULFA for talks without any pre-conditions and said they believed a constitutional solution could be found to the group's demands

AFP, Qala-E-Jangi

Northern Alliance forces Wednesday retook the prison fortress here, wiping out the last pockets of resistance of a rebellion that left hundreds of pro-Taliban captives dead.

Alliance soldiers who since Sunday had traded fierce gunfire with the prisoners were in complete control of the sprawling fortress in northern Afghanistan, an AFP reporter said.

waves of US air strikes during the revolt, was littered Wednesday with bodies of the slain prisoners, burntout vehicles and shell casings.

those who were resisting this morning," said General Abdul Atif, one of the commanders who led the assault. "In total we killed 450. None wanted to surrender."

Prison revolt ends: N Alliance

machine guns and blasted them Those killed, he added, were Pakistanis, Chechens, Arabs and Uzbeks

The fighters had surrendered in the city of Kunduz to the east at the weekend and had been transferred to the ancient fortress at Qala-e-Jangi, 10 kilometres (six miles) west of the city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

On Sunday, they staged an uprising and took over the prison, seizing piles of weapons and ammunition from their Northern Alliance

with tanks, while US warplanes pounded them with bombs. Fighting to the death, they killed

some 45-50 alliance soldiers in the bitter battle, according to one comander. US and British military advisers had been on the scene during the

be members of alleged terrorist

Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaida net-

work, put up fierce resistance as

alliance forces shot at them with

rebellion, apparently guiding air strikes from the ground. Pentagon spokeswoman

opposition and rights groups across Victoria Clarke said five US military India who say it could lead to human personnel were injured Sunday in a rights abuses. US air strike at the prison.

Kashmiri leaders feel POTO will be used against them to suppress their 12-year-old separatist struggle. But Kashmir's chief minister Farooq Abdullah said he had already started using POTO "firmly against terrorism in Kashmir"

Ship of Columbus discovered?

AP, Panama City

Panamanian authorities on Tuesday announced the discovery of a second ship believed to possibly belong to the fleet Christopher Columbus used on his last voyage to America in the 16th century. US and Spanish experts planned to visit the site to investigate the discovery, which took place earlier this week off the Atlantic coast of Panama's Veraguas province, about 250-km east of the capital. The discovery comes on the heels of a similar find late last month near the port of Nombre de Dios, 120-km east of Panama City

The prisoners, some believed to Y'slavia of

UN war crimes prosecutor Carla Del Ponte accused the Yugoslav army on Tuesday of sheltering indicted Bosnian Serb war criminal Ratko Mladic, and said she knew he was living in Belgrade.

Army, General Mladic is said to enjoy military immunity and he is being shielded from both national

The clay facility, the target of "We have subdued the last of

'Laden may have nukes' UN accuses

sheltering war criminal AFP, United Nations

explosive to spread radioactive material over a wide area and make it uninhabitable. It could be made from easily acquired low-grade nuclear material, such as "The problems in finding materials for a dirty bomb practically do not exist," said Dmitry Kovchegin of the

"As an officer of the Yugoslav

iailers

through a jungle

"Due to the mass destruction of forests - encroachments on the homes of gentle animals who are supposedly protected by our laws -elephants are forced to go in search of food and are actually met with poison," she wrote in the letter released by PETA.

Gunmen abduct 9 civilians in Aceh province

AFP, Banda Aceh

A group of armed men has abducted nine people including a local radio reporter in Indonesia's rebellious Aceh province, rights activists said Wednesdav

The group forced the nine, including two women, to get off two buses in which they were travelling in the Sungai Raya area of East Aceh on Sunday and took them away, said Muhammad Yusuf Puteh, who heads the local branch of the Aceh Forum for Human Rights.

The public buses were travelling from the provincial capital Banda South Africa. Aceh to the East Aceh town of Langsa

Puteh said the bus company indicated that the victims were not from Aceh because they could not speak the local language

Zimbabwe dismisses **UN** report

AFP, Harare

The Zimbabwe government has dismissed as false a damning UN report implicating it in the looting of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the state-run Herald said Wednesday.

Foreign Minister Stan Mudenge was quoted in the paper as saying the report was a "pack of lies' invented by the British government. "We know that the report has

been created by the British government, who are keen to discredit Zimbabwe at all costs," he said.

The UN report, released last week, asserted that the plundering of the DRC's natural resources has continued unabated by all sides in the conflict.

Fanatical terrorists "might resort to this kind of mass destruction weapon and we have to take that seriously. he said

While there is no proof Osama bin Laden has nuclear

Even experts who think bin Laden's al-Qaida network

The scale and sophistication of the terror attacks on

"The Sept. 11 attacks certainly take us a lot closer to

does not have an atomic bomb say it's best to assume it

the World Trade Center and Pentagon, for which bin

Laden is the main suspect, mean nothing can ever again

a nuclear possibility," said Paul Wilkinson, an expert on

be ruled out, no matter how nightmarish, they say.

terrorism at StAndrews University in Scotland.

US Army Gen Tommy Franks, commander of US military operations against the Taliban and al-Qaida said Tuesday that US officials had identified more than 40 sites in Afghanistan where bin Laden's network may have been researching nuclear, chemical or biological

He said the sites were still being tested for evidence

"Inevitably, it will happen eventually," said Dr Frank Barnaby, a nuclear physicist who specializes in nuclear terrorism studies at the Oxford Research Group, a private think tank in Oxford, England.

Bin Laden has boasted of having weapons of mass

destruction. The US and other Western governments

say there is no evidence he has a nuclear weapon, but

that any weapon of mass destruction had actually been

could quickly construct one. Not capable of producing a

nuclear explosion, a dirty bomb would use conventional

isotopes for medicine and industry.

enter for Policy Studies in Moscow.

officials acknowledge it can't be ruled out.

Many experts fear bin Laden has a "dirty bomb" or

Analysts who doubt bin Laden has a nuclear bomb don't think al-Qaida has the skill to develop such weapons. Plans for an atomic bomb found in Kabul, reported recently by the British press, appear to have been an old spoof from a humor journal that al-Qaida may have mistaken for genuine diagrams.

mated Asia needs dlrs 70.2 billion a

year in investment to achieve envi-

quate, the gap resulting in part from

failure by the richer nations to honor

promises made at the 1992 Earth

Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The

Johannesburg meeting will assess

the state of the world's environment

PHOTO AFP

a decade after Rio.

But inflows have proved inade-

conmentally sound development.

and international justice," Del Ponte told a public meeting of the UN Security Council.

Planet with atmosphere outside solar system

AFP, Washington

A team of astronomers using the Hubble Space Telescope has, for the first time, directly detected the atmosphere of a planet outside our solar system and analysed its chemical makeup, NASA announced Tuesday.

The roughly Jupiter-sized planet which orbits around a star similar to our sun, labelled HD 209458 -- is located in the constellation Pegasus, some 150 light years from Earth

The discovery "opens up an exciting new phase of extra-solar planet exploration, where we can begin to compare and contrast the atmospheres of planets around other stars." an enthusiastic David Charbonneau, an astronomer at the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, announced at a press conference

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (L) shows Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra the way during an official welcoming ceremony at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi on Wednesday. Thaksin, in India for a fourday official visit, said his country and India were on the verge of signing new pacts for cooperation in economics, politics and information technology.

Nepal seeks arms from India to battle Maoists

AFP, New Delhi

Nepal's army chief General Prajwalla S.J.B. Rana visited India earlier this week to ask for speedy delivery of military supplies in the wake of Maoist insurgent violence in the Himalayan kingdom, reports said Wednesday.

Newspapers said Rana met his Indian counterpart S. Padmanabhan either Sunday or early Monday, just before the Nepalese government imposed a state of emergency in the kingdom. In declaring emergency, the government ordered the army to

series of attacks which left 200 rebels and around 80 soldiers and police dead

The Indian Express newspaper said Wednesday the meeting between the two army chiefs was kept a closely guarded secret and was to be described as a "courtesy

PHOTO: AFF

During talks, Rana cited the situation in Nepal to urge India to speed up the delivery of ammunition New Delhi has already agreed to supply for infantry, weapons, artillerv pieces and engineering equipment, media reports said.

Nepal also reportedly expressed interest in buying light attack helicopters from India to bolster its antirebel operations

Former-Israeli minister jailed

AFP, Jerusalem

A Jerusalem appeal court said Wednesday it had confirmed a suspended jail sentence of 18 months passed on former transport minister Yitzhak Mordechai in April.

Mordechai, 57, who at one time was a candidate for prime minister, had been found guilty of sexual assault on two women, an army officer and a right-wing Likud party worker, when he was defence minister between 1996 and 1999.

Parliament waived his immunity from prosecution in March last year and he resigned from the former government of Ehud Barak the following May while police investigated the allegations, which he consistently denied

Indian film director Goutam Ghose speaks to spectators after he received the "Montgolfiere d'Argent" (the Silver Balloon) for his film "Dekha", in the "3 Continents" film festival in Nantes, western

US President George W. Bush (R) speaks during a ceremony honoring the 2001 US Nobel Laureates in the East Room at the White House on Tuesday in Washington DC. From left are: Dr. George Akerlof, economic sciences; Dr. Eric A. Cornell, physics; Dr. Wolfgang Ketterle, physics; Dr. Williams Knowles, chemistry; Dr. Michael Spence, economic sciences; Dr. Joseph E. Stiglitz, economic sciences; Dr. Carl E. Weiman, physics.

to improve environment delegates are also urging that Asia, and that the key to victory was AP, Phnom Penh alleviating mass poverty on the developed countries honor a com-Asian nations are suffering from an continent. mitment to reach a United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross annual shortfall of at least dlrs 30 "Our challenge today is poverty billion and need more funding reduction in a socially, environmennational product for official developtally and economically acceptable manner," said Kim Hak-Su, execupromised but not delivered -- from ment assistance developed nations to turn the tide of An Asian task force preparing for environmental degradation. the Johannesburg summit estitive secretary of the UN Economic

Asia needs billions of bucks

The issue of green financing was and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in a policy expected to feature Wednesday as governments formulate an Asian paper A Phnom Penh Regional agenda for next year's World Summit on Sustainable Platform, which will be submitted to

Development in Johannesburg, the 2002 summit, is expected to voice concern over an annual financing gap for the environment of The three-day conference opened Tuesday with a warning that about dlrs 30 billion and call for the global battle for sustainable innovative ways to tap funds. The ESCAP chief and other development would be won or lost in

clamp down on the Maoists after the querrillas broke a four-month ceasefire on Friday and launched a Indo-US talks on defence

cooperation begin

AFP, New Delhi

Admiral Dennis C. Blair, the defence minister George Fernandes after talks with senior Indian military officials, the governgiving details.

walked out of parliament in protest military helicopter near a high-İndia on Monday.

Indian aviation officials said

Tuesday that the reconnaissance minute meeting.

will visit the city of Jodhpur in the desert state of Rajasthan, to meet heads of army and airforce units stationed along India's borders with Pakistan.

months -- is one of many made by top US officials since the September 11 attacks in the US and the subsequent strikes in Afghanistan.

Rumsfeld also made the trip earlier this month

France on Tuesday.

India and the United States Wednesday began talks on longterm defence cooperation as well as the Afghanistan situation, a government spokesman said.

commander-in-chief of the US Pacific Command, met Indian ment spokesman said, without

His visit came as opposition MPs at an unauthorised flight by a US profile nuclear facility in southern

helicopter took off from the American warship USS John Young, which is taking part in the US military action in Afghanistan and had docked near the city of Madras to refuel.

The helicopter cruised around the state-owned Kalpakkam nuclear power station, 100 kilometres (62 miles) south of Madras for almost three hours before being spotted.

Opposition MPs said the US had violated Indian airspace and demanded an immediate explanation from Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Press Trust of India reported

The captain of USS John Young has already denied that there was any violation of airspace.

Media reports said that India

would raise the matter with the US, but it was not clear whether Fernandes brought up the issue with Admiral Blair during their 30-

During his three-day trip, Blair

His visit -- the second in two

Secretary of State Colin Powell visited New Delhi in October and Defence Secretary Donald