

N Alliance promises to end sufferings of Afghans

AFP, Bonn

The head of the Northern Alliance delegation at the inter-Afghan talks in Germany promised Wednesday his movement was committed to ending the suffering of the Afghan people and striving for peace.

Forces of the Alliance, officially called the United Front, took control of Kabul November 13 after the flight of the Taliban in the face of US air strikes, and controls much of the rest of the country.

Yunus Qanooni, who will take up the interior affairs portfolio in the new Afghan interim administration under the power-sharing agreement signed in Bonn Wednesday, told AFP:

"Today we have ended a military process and have entered into a political process. Today we promise to our brothers and sisters that we will, Inshallah, put an end to their suffering."

India rules out foreign use of military bases

AFP, New Delhi

India on Wednesday ruled out the use of its military bases by any foreign country but said it would take part in joint defence exercises with other nations.

"India's military bases are not accessible to any foreign country and the country will not enter into any military alliance nor will the army serve under any flag except the UN," Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told parliament.

Singh's statement came a day after India and the United States pledged a new era of sweeping defence ties, including joint training of special forces and air and maritime programmes as part of an "overall strategic cooperation."

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 terror strikes in the United States and subsequent US military action in Afghanistan, there was speculation that New Delhi might allow US troops to use Indian bases.

Kashmir polls slated for Sept 2002: CM

AFP, Srinagar

Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah has scheduled state polls in Indian-administered Kashmir for September 2002 — exactly six years after the last elections held in the insurgency-torn region.

"I am interested in holding the polls to the state assembly in September," Abdullah said late Tuesday.

"I want the new government to take charge in October," he added.

The last assembly polls in Kashmir in September 1996 were won by Abdullah's National Conference (NC) party, amid allegations of vote-rigging and a total boycott by separatist political groups.

The Kashmir state legislature has a lifespan of six years, compared to five years in all other Indian states.

OIC urges UN to probe Afghan massacre

AFP, Riyadh

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on Wednesday called on the United Nations to investigate the killing of hundreds of prisoners at the Qala-e-Jangi prison in Afghanistan.

The call came in a letter sent by OIC Secretary General Abdelwahed Belkeziz to the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and released to the press on Wednesday.

"News has reached me about the massacre that took place recently inside the citadel of Jangi located on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan, and claimed the lives of hundreds of prisoners," the letter said.

US freezes assets of Hamas backers

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush on Tuesday froze the assets of a US-based foundation suspected of helping the radical Palestinian group Hamas recruit and train suicide bombers to strike at Israel.

The move broadened the financial front in Bush's war on terrorism beyond Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaida network which Washington blames for September 11 terror strikes on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

"The message is this: those who do business with terror will do no business with the United States — or anywhere else the United States can reach," Bush announced in the White House Rose Garden.

Ballot stuffing, Tamils' outcry mar polling in Sri Lanka

70 per cent turnout in polls, 6 killed in violence

AFP, Colombo

Ballot-rigging and military moves preventing up to 80,000 minority Tamils from casting their votes marred polling Wednesday in Sri Lanka's second general election in 14 months, which was expected to result in another hung parliament.

Voting in the snap elections called five years early was conducted under tight security following a blood-stained campaign.

At least six people were killed on the eve of the ballot, bringing to 47 the number of deaths from poll-related violence in the past five weeks.

Voting in Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections ended after nine hours of polling Wednesday amid sporadic violence and allegations of ballot rigging, officials said.

Police clashed with ruling party supporters near several polling stations in western, northwestern and central regions despite tight security provided by some 40,000 constables and heavily armed troops.

Election officials said initial reports suggested that about 70 per cent of the 12.43 million electorate turned out to vote.

However, some 80,000 members of the island's minority Tamil community were prevented from voting as the military closed a checkpoint used by civilians to get to polling stations in the northern and eastern regions.

Counting is expected to begin after all the ballot boxes from the 9,946 polling booths are received at provincial capitals. The first results are expected early Thursday.

However, final results could be held up for over a week if elections commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake decides to order fresh polls in areas affected by violence and rigging.

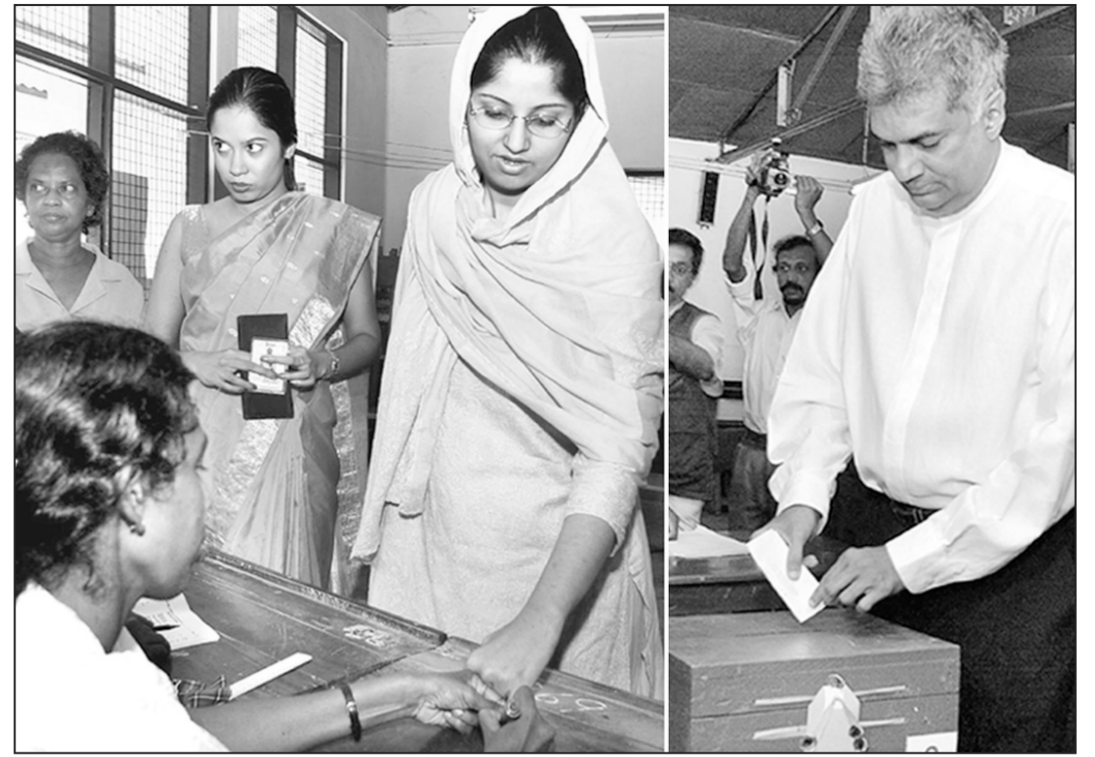
A repolling can take place only after December 12 according to new election laws which give more powers to the commissioner to prevent electoral malpractice.

The election campaign focused on the depressed state of the economy and the long-running war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the northeast.

An estimated 80,000 members of the minority Tamil community were effectively disenfranchised as the military closed three checkpoints, preventing them crossing from LTTE-held areas to polling stations in government-controlled towns.

The European Union (EU) Election Observer Mission expressed "serious concern" over the checkpoint closures.

"This would have a significant impact on the outcome of the election in these areas," the Northern Irish head of the EU mission, John Cushnahan, said.



Women queue at polling stations to cast their votes in Sri Lanka's general election on Wednesday while main opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe casts his ballot in the capital Colombo. Sri Lanka is holding its second parliamentary election in 14 months after the minority government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga collapsed in October.



Israeli investigation officers look at the remains of a suicide bomber, who detonated himself near the Hilton Hotel in west Jerusalem on Wednesday. The suicide bombing left three people slightly injured, a police spokesman said.

Migrants riot in Malaysia, set detention centre afire

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

More than 2,000 illegal immigrants, mostly Indonesians, rioted and set fire to a detention centre in Malaysia's southern Johor state, police said Wednesday.

The detainees gathered in an open area of the detention centre late Tuesday and set four buildings ablaze, said Abu Bakar Said, Johor's deputy police chief.

They threw stones and bottles as police moved in and about 10 to 15 of the illegal immigrants were injured, but there were no serious casualties, he said.

"Because this is a riot, we have to be tough in subduing the situation. Those throwing stones and bottles also injured some of their fellow immigrants."

Abu Bakar said it took two hours for police to get the situation under control.

"We had to take some time first to persuade some of the illegals to move aside and then we acted to subdue the remaining problem makers," Abu Bakar said, adding that all four blocks were razed to the ground.

The cause of the riot in the centre, which houses some 2,300 inmates of whom 1,560 are Indonesians, was still under investigation.

Last week, Malaysia announced plans to send about 10,000 Indonesian illegal immigrants home each month, saying there were about 450,000 in the country.

The government said Monday that 1,700 illegals would be deported this weekend to reduce congestion at detention centres, bringing the total number of Indonesian repatriations in recent months to 11,325.

The detainees involved in the riot have been sent to detention centres in neighbouring states, and authorities are making arrangements to immediately deport about 1,500 Indonesians.

The government has said that illegal immigrants have contributed to a growth in crime and other social problems here and also to the spread of diseases and squatter colonies.

Economic problems have also led to job losses in Malaysia.

US forces to remain in Afghan soil for some time more: Bush

AFP, Washington

US forces will remain in Afghanistan as long as it takes and may also intervene elsewhere as the war on terrorism continues, US President George W. Bush said Tuesday.

In an interview on ABC television's "20/20" program Tuesday, Bush said the job in Afghanistan may take some time, but vowed to complete it, which may involve sending troops elsewhere.

"Strikes will be incredibly important," he said in a pre-recorded interview to be broadcast later Tuesday. "And there may be need to

use military troops elsewhere ... I just want the American people to know that we're keeping all options on the table."

On October 7, Bush launched the campaign against Afghanistan to topple the Taliban militia and destroy Al-Qaida, the network of terrorist suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden.

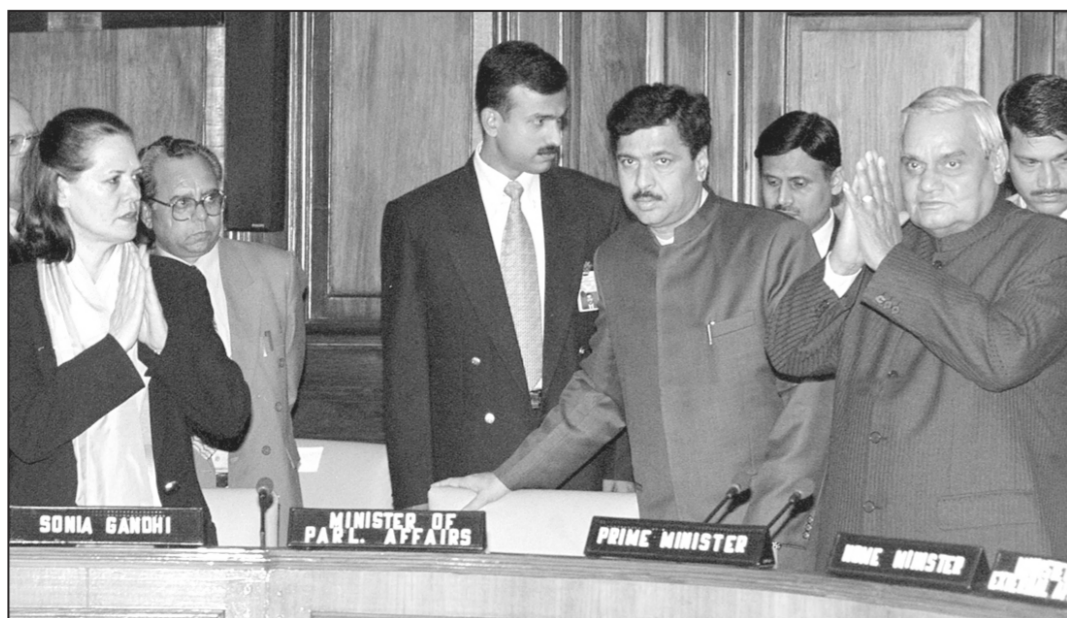
Bush reiterated that US forces were "tightening the noose" around bin Laden, reportedly seeking refuge in systems of caves and underground tunnels.

But Bush declined to say whether Washington was contem-

plating action against Iraq, the Gulf War foe the United States accuses of links to terrorism and developing weapons of mass destruction.

"Well, what people need to know is we're going to do our job in Afghanistan first," said Bush, complaining of "an impatience here in Washington" about the pursuit of the war.

"But I can tell you this, I'm the kind of president and this is the kind of administration that makes sure that the task we're doing is accomplished," he said.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) greets opposition leader Sonia Gandhi (L) as they arrived for an all-party meet to discuss the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) in New Delhi on Tuesday. The opposition Congress Party has opposed POTO in its present form, claiming the ordinance was too stringent, handing sweeping powers to the government.

Israel continuing its 'crimes': Arafat

AFP, Tehran

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat accused Israel of using every means it has to continue its "crimes", in a conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi, the Iranian news agency reported.

He asked Iran to use its influence to bring about a summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference following massive Israeli air strikes on the Palestinian territories, IRNA said.

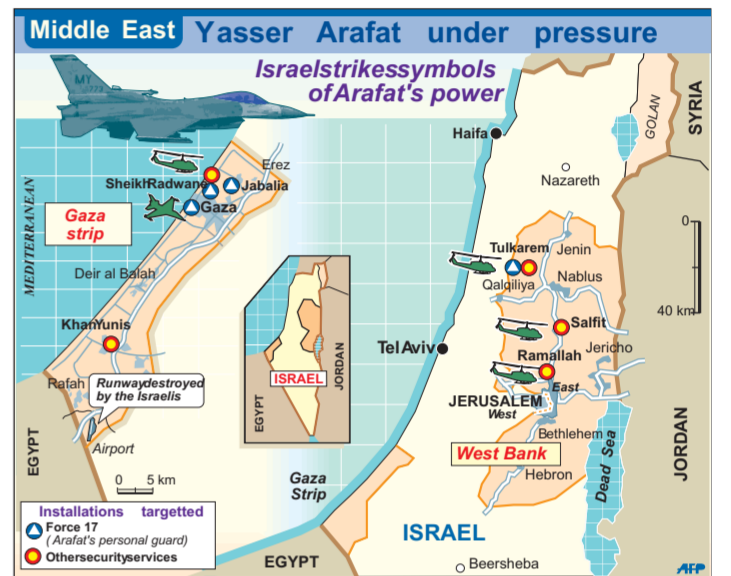
The Jewish state "is using every means at its disposal to continue its crimes, attacking children and homes," Arafat was quoted as telling Karazi late Tuesday.

"The Palestinian people have always considered Iran to be at their side," he added, thanking Iran for its sympathy.

Kharazi expressed Iran's support "for the legitimate resistance of the Palestinian people," adding, "We consider as accomplices (in its crimes) all those who support the Zionist regime."

The air strikes, which left two Palestinians dead and more than 120 injured, 60 of them schoolboys, were Israel's answer to Arafat for failing to prevent three suicide bombers creeping into Jerusalem and Haifa at the weekend, killing 25 people and injuring more than 200.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Israeli foreign ministry said after another suicide bombing in Jerusalem Wednesday that the Jewish state "will not allow killers to walk its streets freely."



Labour Party mulls quitting Israeli govt

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli Labour party meets Wednesday to consider quitting Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's coalition government, with dovish party leader Shimon Peres opposed to the escalation of military raids on Palestinian targets.

Sharon launched a second day of massive air raids on the symbols of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's power Tuesday, killing two people

but endangering his own government in the process.

The United States and Britain voiced their "sympathy" for Israel, while asking both sides to do everything possible to rein in the violence, which reached a new peak at the weekend as suicide bombers carried out devastating attacks in Israel.

President George W. Bush demanded that Arafat hunt down those responsible for the suicide

bombings, which left at least 25 Israeli dead, and bring them to justice.

"It is incumbent upon Mr Arafat now to respond forcefully, to root out those who killed," Bush said during a town hall-style meeting in Florida.

Israel has said the military strikes are a signal to Arafat to crack down on Islamic militant groups.

But France, Turkey and Italy joined the Arab world in condemning the attacks, which French Foreign

Minister Hubert Vedrine said were aimed at "eliminating" Arafat.

Following up on the "signal" to Arafat sent Monday by air strikes on his helicopters and offices in Gaza City and the West Bank, Sharon branded Arafat a sponsor of terrorism and sent in warplanes and helicopter gunships in the largest wave of air raids on Palestinian security structures yet.

Pakistan moves to contain religious extremism

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan is moving to regulate thousands of religious schools and seminaries in a move aimed at curbing the spread of religious militancy, officials said.

The government is giving final touches to a draft law for the purpose, which will mark another major step to control religious extremism since President Pervez Musharraf banned two militant groups in August, they said.

Musharraf and religious parties have been at loggerheads since Pakistan joined the US-led international coalition against terrorism in September.

As a wave of street protests by radical parties tapered off after the Taliban rout in Afghanistan, Musharraf last week vowed to rein in what he called the "extremist minority."

Under the proposed regulatory regime, madrassas, or religious schools, will be registered and their accounts periodically audited, sources said.

Registration will be subject to prior clearance by security agencies and authorities will be empowered

to close any unapproved school or seminary, they said.

Registered schools will be required to introduce teaching of modern subjects side by side with religious education in order to bring them into the mainstream of the national educational system, an interior ministry official has said.

Religious parties and groups operate around 7,000 schools countrywide with the help of financial contributions from sympathisers at home and abroad.

More than half a million children and adults live and study in religious schools, thousands of them Afghans and hundreds from Arab countries.

Pakistani volunteers from various seminaries have fought in Afghanistan alongside the hardline Taliban militia.

The majority of the Taliban leadership also studied in Pakistani madrassas in southwestern Baluchistan province and North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar studied for four years in Darul-loom Haqqania at Akora Khatak in NWFP besides Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Mutawakel.

Nepal doesn't need foreign troops: PM

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has ruled out the use of foreign troops to help put down a growing Maoist rebellion, while favouring the swift import of fresh weapons to strengthen the military, press reports said Wednesday.

"There will be no foreign troops here at all," Deuba was quoted as saying by the English-language Kathmandu Post.

"We don't need them because our army is capable of dealing with the situation," Deuba said, while adding that his government would be looking to boost military strength through fresh arms imports.

"The only criteria is that such weapons be available quickly and cheaply and in this context, we could import arms and ammunitions from India," he said.

The Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) was deployed for the first time

against the Maoist rebels after they broke a four-month ceasefire on November 24 by launching a string of attacks on the army and police.

Officials have said more than 430 people, most of them rebels, have since been killed.

"The RNA has been given the mandate to disarm and defeat the terrorists," Deuba said, adding that talks with the Maoist leaders were out of the question.

"How can there be negotiations with those who deceive you? No, there will not be any peace negotiations now. I am clear about this. They must first lay down their arms and surrender, then we can think of other things," he added.

Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khada said late last month Nepal had asked India to supply helicopters and arms to help put down the rebellion.