

# Arms ordered off Kabul streets as interim govt set to take over

AFP, Kabul

The Afghan authorities ordered unauthorised weapons off the streets Thursday and fighters back to barracks ahead of the historic inauguration this weekend of a six-month interim government.

Diplomats at the United Nations in New York said meanwhile that the last obstacles to the creation of a multinational security force for war-ravaged Afghanistan had been removed and a resolution authorising the force would be adopted by the 15-member UN Security Council by early Friday at the latest.

In other developments, US warplanes circled the skies over the Tora Bora cave complex in eastern Afghanistan, waiting to pounce on fleeing fighters from Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

The ban on gun-toting civilians in Kabul was part of security measures being implemented ahead of the inauguration on Saturday of the interim government led by Pashtun royalist Hamid Karzai.

"The security commission has approved an order that no armed persons can walk on the streets and that they should go back to barracks," defence ministry official Doctor Gulbuddin told AFP.

Only Mujahedin fighters from the Kabul garrison, police from the interior ministry and secret police from the intelligence services would be allowed to carry weapons, he said.

Fighters brandishing rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers and other weaponry have flooded the streets since the Taliban regime fled the capital on the night of November 12, often threatening passers-by.

Security has become a pressing concern here and war-weary residents

on Thursday cheered news of a breakthrough on the deployment of a British-led international security force.

The incoming interim government agreed to let a 3,000-strong security force into the country but only for six months, when the mandate of the interim administration expires. The British defence ministry subsequently said the number could be as high as 5,000.

The first 100 British Marines are expected here on Saturday and will help arrange security for the inauguration ceremony, which several foreign ministers are expected to attend including Abdul Sattar of Pakistan, formerly the chief support of the Taliban.

The Afghan cabinet which takes power Saturday will rule for six months. A Loya Jirga -- traditional grand assembly of elders -- will then set up a transitional authority to rule the country for up to two years to be followed by elections.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, in a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, described the chains of command for the multinational force.

"The United Kingdom, as lead nation, will exercise command of the International Security Assistance Force" for the first three months of its six-month existence, Straw wrote.

He said the US military could "have authority" over the force "to ensure that International Security Assistance Force activities do not interfere with the successful completion of Operation Enduring Freedom" -- the US-led campaign against bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

"The core mission of the force in the initial phase would be to assist in the maintenance of security," Straw said, adding that the force could study the possibility of intervening outside Kabul, in other parts of Afghanistan.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin (L) escorts Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf (C) as they review a guard-of-honour during the welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Thursday. Pakistan's president arrived in Beijing for a four-day visit to his country's closest ally as both nations anxiously watch developments in Afghanistan and tension mounting between Pakistan and arch-rival India. PHOTO: AFP

## Musharraf in China amid Indo-Pak tension

AFP, Beijing

President Pervez Musharraf arrived in China Thursday for a visit to Pakistan's closest ally, which comes as both nations anxiously watch developments in Afghanistan and tension mounts between Pakistan and arch-rival India.

Musharraf arrived at Nanjing Airport, northeast of Beijing, at 3:30 pm (0730 GMT) and was driven directly into the city for a welcoming ceremony.

He was then due to meet President Jiang Zemin at the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

Prior to leaving Pakistan, Musharraf said the visit was "very important" and stressed the historically strong relationship between the two countries.

"I will discuss with the Chinese leadership the events taking place in this region and bilateral relations," he told Pakistani television.

"It is very important visit and I am looking forward to discussing regional and bilateral issues with

the Chinese leadership."

The visit, which marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the countries, is expected to focus on talks on the situation in Afghanistan.

The war-torn country has been a major concern for both leaders following the September 11 attacks on the US and subsequent military action against the Taliban regime and al-Qaeda group of Osama bin Laden.

Analysts say Musharraf's visit, at a time when he is being wooed by Washington and other influential governments as a major player in Afghanistan, has powerful symbolic value, signalling to the outside world that China remains Pakistan's key ally.

The troubles in Afghanistan are a major concern for both Musharraf and Jiang.

While Pakistan is seeking to maintain its traditional influence in Afghan affairs after ending its support for the Taliban, China has

been concerned about radical Islamic groups exporting their ideas to its Muslim regions.

Also, tensions between perennial rivals Pakistan and India have heightened dangerously since the December 13 attack on India's parliament by five armed gunmen, who New Delhi says were Pakistan-based militants backed by Pakistani military intelligence.

Hundreds of tanks and other army vehicles were seen moving towards India's western border with Pakistan from Tuesday evening.

China's foreign ministry on Thursday said it was "seriously concerned" at developments.

It urged both sides to "exercise restraint", said spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue.

She also told reporters that China and Pakistan had a "time-honoured traditional friendship" and that Musharraf's visit would "surely promote the further development of Sino-Pakistani relations in the new century."

## Cold snap claims 74 lives in N India

AFP, New Delhi

More than 74 people have died of hypothermia in northern India as a biting cold snap tightens its grip on the region, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported Thursday.

The highest toll was in Bihar state where 41 people were reported to have died in the past week, followed by 30 deaths in Uttar Pradesh.

PTI reported two deaths in the desert state of Rajasthan and one more in adjoining Punjab province.

Local authorities in Bihar have arranged for outdoor bonfires to be kept burning in some of the worst-hit districts, while primary-level government and private schools have been closed until December 31.

## Finnish ferry with 816 aboard runs aground in Baltic Sea

AFP, Helsinki

A passenger ferry en route from the Finnish town of Turku to Stockholm with 663 passengers and 153 crew aboard ran aground in the Finnish archipelago early Thursday, Finnish news agency FNB reported.

Rescue ships and helicopters were on stand-by at the scene in case of emergency but no evacuation was being prepared and there was no immediate danger to the passengers' safety, FNB said quoting officials from the Viking Lines group which owns the ferry.

The vessel, the Isabella, suffered minor damage to a fuel tank in the accident, and the ship's rudder and propellers were out of order.

The cause of the accident was not known, but rough seas and strong winds of up to 30 meters per second were reported in the area.

## Conference on children's sexual exploitation ends

AFP, Yokohama

An international conference to fight commercial sexual exploitation of children ended here Thursday with participants renewing their resolve to prevent abuse of minors.

But some delegates to the conference voiced disappointment that the four day event stopped short of producing concrete action plans for the international community to protect children from commercial sexual abuse.

"What we have to do now is to implement the fruits of this meeting," said former Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto in a closing speech at the second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

"There are still many issues to be tackled. There will be new problems to be dealt with," Hashimoto said.

## New computer virus on the loose

AFP, Hong Kong

A new computer virus called "Reezak" on the loose this festive season carries a distinctly festive punch when unleashed, anti-virus experts warned Thursday.

US-based Computer Associates International said the malicious worm would arrive as an e-mail calling itself "Happy New Year" in the subject line.

The message text says "Hi, I can't describe my feelings but all I can say is Happy New Year; bye" and comes with an attachment: "Christmas.exe."

When opened, the attachment has the ability to disable selected keys on the infected user's keyboard and delete all the files found in the Windows System directory, rendering the computer inoperable.

## Haiti's ruler defends attacks on opposition supporters

AFP, Port-au-Prince

The party of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide Wednesday defended attacks on opposition supporters as "self-defence" in the wake of a failed coup, while authorities in Ecuador said they would deport the suspected coup leader.

"The Haitian people, when they are in danger, have the right to defend themselves, to protect themselves when there are terrorists, putschists," Lavalas Family party spokesman Senator Yvon Neptune, told local radio.

Pro-government mobs attacked opposition supporters Monday after a band of 30 armed gunmen broke into the grounds of the National Palace here and exchanged fire with paramilitary police for more than six hours before being overpowered.

## Laden fighters abandon Aladdin's cave of terror

AFP, Tora Bora

US military planes returned Thursday to the skies over Osama bin Laden's former hideout in eastern Afghanistan as military investigators went through the Aladdin's cave of terrorism below.

Ammunition, guns, surface-to-air missiles and other weapons have been found in the caves hurriedly abandoned by the followers of the suspected planner of the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington.

At least one of the hundreds of caves was through a one metre (three feet) wide drainage channel. Inside were thousands of white metal boxes packed with munitions.

The entrance was dug through rock and earth, leading to a cavern about four metres (12 feet) wide and two metres (six feet) high.

Stacked from floor to ceiling along the walls were thousands of metal boxes inscribed with Chinese characters containing munitions, including tonnes of 12.7 millimetre ammunition, mortars and missiles.

have headed for the Pakistan border after the al-Qaeda bases became a target.

Local Mujahedin fighters, working with US Special Forces, are going through the tunnels, which have been sealed off since the victory over al-Qaeda.

Commanders said about 200 bodies have been found. But donkeys have also been seen coming back down the slopes carrying equipment and documents found in the bin Laden lair.

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## Pakistan Arresting al-Qaeda

The US plans to question several hundred Arab fighters in custody



## 3 shot as Palestinian police try to arrest Hamas leader

AFP, Gaza City

Palestinian police shot three people here early Thursday in clashes with hundreds of protesters who prevented them from arresting a senior leader of the radical Islamic Hamas group, witnesses said.

Police closed off the streets around the home of senior political leader Abdul Aziz al-Rantissi in Gaza City as 300-400 protesters, some armed, formed a barrier

between the officers and the house. A tense stand-off ensued overnight after the violence had subsided.

A senior Hamas official said Wednesday that the headline Palestinian Islamic movement was calling a halt to its devastating suicide bombings against Israel. This came after Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called for an end to the violence.

Meanwhile, head of the Israeli

Shin Beth security services Avi Dichter met Palestinian police chiefs to discuss an Israeli pullout from Palestinian-controlled land. According to Palestinians, the meeting was a failure.

Al-Rantissi told AFP by phone: "I am refusing to be arrested by order of the CIA and the Israeli (secret service) Mossad. There was a security meeting and then they came to arrest me."

## Argentina declares state of emergency

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina was under a state of emergency Thursday in the face of violent unrest over the country's crumbling economy, as labor unions announced a general strike and Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo and other cabinet members reportedly resign.

Seven people were killed, 138 were injured and some 551 had been arrested since the protests and looting incidents broke out across the country on Wednesday, police said.

"We're hungry, we need to eat," people shouted as they stole food.

The unrest came as the South American nation -- mired in 3-1/2 years of crippling recession -- battled to stave off economic collapse and avoid default on its 132-billion-dollar public debt.

Thousands of people banging pots and chanting slogans gathered outside the presidential palace early Thursday to protest the state of emergency decree and the government's handling of the crisis. Police dispersed them with tear gas.

Other groups of protesters gathered outside both houses of Congress and the homes of Cavallo and President Fernando de la Rúa.

De la Rúa accepted Cavallo's resignation, the official Telam news agency said Thursday quoting

government sources.

Cavallo, who as economy minister 10 years ago under former president Carlos Menem pegged the Argentine peso to the US dollar, was reappointed by de la Rúa only nine months ago to find a way out of the present economic mess.

De la Rúa and his cabinet were meeting early Thursday at his home in the residential Olivos district, as hundreds of protesters gathered peacefully outside asking that the president step down for failing to save the economy.

The president late Wednesday declared a 30-day state of emergency, assuming special powers and suspending constitutional guarantees. Defense Minister Horacio Jaunarena said, however, that the government would not resort to the military.

In a speech to the nation, de la Rúa called for a meeting of all political parties, provincial governors and lawmakers to try to find a resolution to the widening economic and political crisis.

Telam's government official also hinted at a possible cabinet reshuffle and said all of Argentina's 24 governors -- 14 belong to the opposition -- and leading congressmen had been called to a meeting Thursday to discuss Argentina's troubles.

## Afghans see an end to war

AFP, Kabul

Hamid Karzai, pushed to the forefront in the turbulence of the September 11 attacks on the United States, will take office in Afghanistan on Saturday with the monumental task of rebuilding and uniting a devastated country.

He will head a power-sharing government that has six months to take the first key steps to turning the page on 23 years of bloodletting and anarchy and holding democratic elections.

With the country awash with landmines and guns, in the grip of drought, riven by bitter ethnic divisions, its economy in tatters and with more than five million people displaced, Karzai and his 30-member team will do well just to stop the problems getting worse.

In an initial security move Kabul authorities on Thursday imposed an arms ban on the streets of Kabul

before the inauguration of the new government.

In the new administration's favour is that the attacks on New York and Washington have forced the international community, which all but forgot Afghanistan during the 1990s, to band together to help rebuild the country of desert, dust and rubble.

US air raids, which started on October 7 seeking to find accused terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, crippled the Taliban regime, allowing the North Alliance to deliver the knockout blow on the ground and take Kabul.

The United Nations, in the form of special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, played a key role in helping shape the new administration during marathon talks between rival factions in Bonn.

An accord on the interim administration was reached in Bonn on December 5. Two days later the Taliban were driven out of their bastion in the southern city of Kandahar and their cruel five year rule was finished.

## All parties back tough response to attack on Indian parliament

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

There is a growing consensus in the Indian political set-up on both sides of the divide that India should formulate a tough response in the wake of December 13 terrorist attack on Parliament here.

As the outrage over the attack deepens and evidences pile up showing the involvement of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and Pakistan-based militant outfits Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, there is a realisation among ruling BJP and the opposition parties that India has to come up with a hard option to deal with terrorism even if it means dismantling terrorist training camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Main opposition Congress, Samajwadi Party and even former Prime Minister V P Singh have veered round to the suggestion of smashing terrorist camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. This certainly marked a decisive shift in

the opposition camp which till the other day had dismissed the idea of "hot pursuit" of terrorists across the border as "irresponsible".

Observers here note that the growing demand for a new strong approach represents a qualitative change in India's political class in the face of escalating terrorism sponsored from across the border.

However, the Left parties still

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remain wary of "hot pursuit" theory saying this could lead to a full-scale war.

Despite the aggressive mood, India is unlikely to exercise hard option right now to tackle terrorism and would like to exhaust diplomatic options, officials here say. This was indicated by key government functionaries Home Minister L K Advani and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh.

Both Advani and Singh have counselled patience for deciding

India's response to the attack on Parliament and pointed out that the United States waited for a month before launching military operations against Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan.

That diplomacy has not yet run its full course was conveyed by Jaswant Singh at a meeting of high-level cabinet committee on security here a few days ago. It is part of this diplomatic offensive that India handed over a demarche to Pakistani High Commissioner Qazi Ashraf Jehangir here soon after the attack on Parliament and handed him over the "credible evidence" pointing to involvement of Pakistan-based militant groups and asked Islamabad to take action against them.

The demarche served on Pakistan is based on United Nations Security Council resolution number 1373 which makes it mandatory for Pakistan to act against terrorist groups. Non-compliance of the resolution may attract international sanctions against Pakistan.



Activists of the women organisation SAATHI burn an effigy of Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf during a protest against the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

## 'World, Iraq will live better without Saddam in power'

AFP, Cairo

US national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said "the world and Iraq will live better without (Iraqi President) Saddam Hussein in power," in an interview published Thursday with the Al-Hayat Arab daily.

"The United States and many (countries) in the region are aware that Saddam Hussein is not someone who cooperates," Rice told the London-based newspaper.

"Each time he is strengthened, somebody else is hurt. Therefore, the world and Iraq will live better without Saddam Hussein in power," she said, "no doubt about it."

When asked whether Washington intended to get rid of Hussein's regime even if he cooperated with the United Nations, she said: "We think it is most likely Saddam Hussein will not cooperate in a way that will make the region safer."

"We think Iraq was a problem

before September 11 and still is today," she added.

"It is a regime which threatens the region, our interests and the interests of our friends, he also threatens his own people. He is trying to acquire mass destruction weapons," Rice said in response to a question on possible military strikes against Hussein's regime.

"US President (George W. Bush) has not yet decided," she said, adding: "We have several means of dealing with Iraq, including that of encouraging Security Council members to modify the nature of the sanctions imposed on this country in order to target the Iraqi regime more specifically."

The UN Security Council reached a rare unanimous decision in November when it adopted a resolution paving the way for modified sanctions against Iraq in six months and for a possible return of UN arms inspectors to the country.