

## Pak attacks UN sanctions on Taliban

**Islamabad, Dec. 9:** Pakistan foreign minister Abdul Sattar has criticised plans to tighten economic and arms sanctions against Afghanistan.

"I have never come across sanctions from the UN Security Council which are so one-sided, which seem to be a prescription for fuelling the strife," BBC quoted Mr Sattar as saying.

The draft resolution would broaden sanctions imposed last year after the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden for trial on the alleged terrorist charges.

Mr Sattar said Pakistan favoured a total arms embargo against all parties in Afghanistan, and a peaceful resolution to the ongoing conflict between the Taliban and their opponents.

"Is that any way to promote peace, the supply of arms to a group that has very little territory under its control," Mr Sattar said.

He said the proposed sanctions would undermine efforts by UN envoy Francesco Vendrell to bring both parties in Afghanistan to the negotiating table. (*Dawn*)

THE ASIAN AGE

10 DEC 2000

# Taliban courts China to ward off UN sanctions

REUTERS  
KABUL, DEC 12

92-8 18/12  
**T**HE ruling Taliban invited a Chinese delegation to a rare meeting on Tuesday with its leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, in an effort to head off new UN sanctions, officials said.

Rising tension over the proposed sanctions was demonstrated by the departure of three UN officials for Pakistan on Tuesday, following five other UN relief workers on Sunday. An official said they left as part of a reduction in staff for security reasons.

The Chinese team led by Ambassador to Pakistan Lu Shulin, the highest ranking contact ever by China with the reclusive Omar, left Kabul on Tuesday for Kandahar, the Taleban heartland, officials said.

The Taliban are trying to head off new UN Security Council sanctions being proposed by Washington and Moscow. China, which could veto a Security Council resolution, has traditionally been sceptical of

sanctions and is also anxious to protect Pakistan — an ally of both the Taliban and China.

The meeting with Omar, unprecedented since the Taliban captured the capital four years ago, was the culmination of the Chinese trip to Afghanistan.

Shulin refused to discuss his talks with Taliban officials in Kabul or if there was any agreement on sanctions, which stem from the Taliban's refusal to hand over Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden to face US charges of terrorism.

Washington and Moscow want to impose an arms embargo on the Taliban, close their offices abroad and bar its officials from overseas travel. The US accuses bin Laden of masterminding the bombing of two US embassies in Africa in 1998.

Russia, which has expressed concern at Taliban-style Islamic movements spreading into Central Asia, backs the sanctions because it says bin Laden provides training and financial support to Chechen separatists.

INDIAN EXPRESS

U.N. MOVE ON TALIBAN / 'A SIGNAL TO PAK. TOO'

# Sanctions will hit Afghans hard

UNITED NATIONS, DEC. 20. Led by the United States and Russia, the Security Council on Tuesday imposed harsh new sanctions on the Taliban government of Afghanistan, leaving the United Nations profoundly split over the human and political damage the measures could inflict on one of the world's poorest nations.

The vote in the 15-member Council was 13 for the embargo, with China and Malaysia abstaining.

At a year-end news conference, the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, expressed his barely concealed displeasure at the move, which was also opposed by his Special Envoy trying to start peace negotiations between the Taliban and the remnants of an opposition army fighting in a corner of the country. The U.N. relief officials working in Afghanistan have been unusually public in their criticism. Private agencies also lobbied the Council

against taking this step. "It is not going to facilitate our peace efforts, nor is it going to facilitate our humanitarian work," Mr. Annan said of the Security Council action. "I think we had given adequate indications of that to the Council. But the decision belongs to the Council and of course, once they take the decision, we have to adapt and take the necessary measures that are required."

On Tuesday, the U.N. removed all its remaining relief workers from the country, fearing a backlash from the Taliban, who will be almost completely isolated diplomatically when the resolution takes effect in 30 days, and Taliban leaders will be barred from international travel. Air links will be cut and an arms and military training embargo will be imposed on only the Taliban and not their armed opposition, which is supplied by Russia, Iran and lately India. All assets belonging to Osama, the Saudi-born financier of Islamic militancy who

is thought to be living in Afghanistan, will be ordered frozen around the world.

The U.S. has been demanding Osama's expulsion from Afghanistan to stand trial for masterminding explosions at U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. The new sanctions are linked to the refusal of the Taliban to meet that demand, made in a first round of sanctions a year ago. For Russia, the Taliban is assumed to be behind an Islamic rebellion in Chechnya.

In Washington on Tuesday, a senior administration official said: "This sends an important signal not only to the Taliban, but also to Pakistan that pressure against the Taliban's continued safe haven for terrorists will only continue. The only way to turn the corner on our bilateral relations with the Taliban is for the terrorism issue to be resolved.

"If the Taliban and Islamabad believe that the next administration will look at this issue differently, they are delusional," the official said. "There is no issue in Washington that has stronger bipartisan support than combating terrorism."

Russian and U.S. pressure on Security Council members and some officials in the U.N. secretariat has been intense, diplomats said. Two weeks ago, as the sanctions resolution was circulating, the Russian representative complained to the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Louise Frechette, that the coordinator of relief work in Afghanistan, Mr. Erick de Mul, of the Netherlands, was undermining the anti-Taliban campaign by drawing attention to what he believed would be the adverse effects of the tightened embargo on ordinary Afghan citizens, already among the poorest people in the world.

The U.S. Ambassador, Ms. Nancy Soderberg, said the Security Council was taking "a strong stand against terrorism." She described Osama as "the world's most wanted terrorist."

Mr. Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Ambassador, said that the one-sided nature of the sanctions was fully justified. "It is the Taliban which has provided their territory for the use of terrorists and open support for the Chechen, Uzbek, Tajik, Uighur and other extremists." — *New York Times*

THE HINDU

21 DEC 2000

# Taliban protest to UN Security Council members

**Peshawar, Dec. 23:** The Taliban have protested to UN Security Council members who supported a recent US-Russian resolution for imposing tougher international sanctions against the militia. Afghan Islamic Press reported on Friday.

Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmed Motawwakil had sent letters to all Security Council members, except the sponsors of the resolution, the Pakistan-based news agency said. Mr Motawwakil asked the Security Council members, particularly Bangladesh and Tunisia: "What was your problem with Afghanistan that prompted you to vote against Afghan nation?"

He added: "Now it has become clear that you have supported this resolution because of US pressure."

The United Nations Security Council earlier this week slapped an arms embargo and tightened diplomatic and financial measures on the Taliban for failing to surrender Saudi fugitive Osama bin Laden, who is wanted by the United States on terrorism charges.

Mr Motawwakil thanked China and Malaysia for abstaining from voting. "China has not voted against Afghan people, though it has not used its veto power as expected," he added.

He said Russia was the "eternal enemy" of

Afghanistan while the United States also had shown its animosity towards the Afghan nation by sponsoring the hard-hitting curbs, adding: "That's why we have not sent letters to them." Sanctions against the Taliban have come at a "very bad time" for efforts to eradicate the country's massive opium crop, the UN's local drug control chief said on Friday.

The UN Drug Control Programme's representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Mr Bernard Frahi, said the sanctions had "complicated our dialogue with the Taliban" at a crucial time in the opium season.

They had also punished the Taliban despite the militia's sincere and apparently success-

ful efforts to ban opium cultivation, he added. Earlier this year, Taliban Supreme Leader Mulla Mohammad Omar had issued a decree banning opium cultivation, and Frahi said initial investigations found the authorities were genuine in efforts to eradicate the lucrative crop.

"According to our information, this decree is working in the province of Kandahar, but it's more difficult to estimate in the province of Helmand," he said.

"That's why the Taliban's cooperation is indispensable for us to be able to get on the ground in the spring to verify this significant data," he added. (AP)

THE ASIAN AGE

24 DEC 2000

# AFGHANISTAN IMBROGLIO

## India Must Adopt Pro-active Approach

By GURMEET KANWAL

ONE of the highlights of the strategic partnership agreement signed by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee with Russian President Vladimir Putin on 3 October 2000, was the convergence of views between India and Russia on jointly combating the threat of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan. In fact, the continuing civil strife in Islamist fundamentalist ruled Afghanistan poses perhaps the most serious threat to peace and stability in the Southern Asian region. Perhaps Samuel Huntington was right and Afghanistan is the first fault-line war that may eventually lead to a clash of civilisations.

While the Pakistan-supported and equipped Taliban militia has consolidated its hold over large parts of Afghan territory, Ahmed Shah Masood is still holding out in the Panjshir Valley. Abdul Rashid Dostum's Northern Alliance, propped up by tacit support from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the Central Asian Republics bordering Afghanistan, and by the physical presence of approximately 20,000 Russian troops north of Afghanistan's border, can still influence the final military outcome in Afghanistan. Iran had massed over 70,000 troops along its eastern border with Afghanistan in 1998-99 and a substantial number of these are still in their deployment areas. In view of the continuing bloodletting and Shia-baiting in Afghanistan, the likelihood of the present impasse breaking out into an armed conflict cannot be entirely ruled out. An Iran-Taliban war would inevitably snowball into a Shia-Sunni conflict, irretrievably destabilising the entire region.

### BATTLEGROUND

Meanwhile, in conjunction with Pakistan's ISI, the Afghani mullahs and terrorist outfits supported by them continue to spread their rabid brand of virulent Islamist fundamentalism in a wide swathe from India's Jammu and Kashmir in the east, through the CARs and the Caucasus, to the Balkans in the west. Though the United Nations Security Council deadline to hand over Osama bin Laden expired on 15 November 1999, the Taliban is still sheltering him in Afghanistan. Since bin Laden is again the prime suspect in the terror-bombing of the United States warship USS Cole in October last there is a strong possibility that the US may once again launch cruise missile attacks on his terrorist hideouts inside Afghanistan. This will further aggravate the already vitiated regional security environment.

For many centuries Afghanistan has been a battleground where several nations have struggled to gain influence. The first "Great Game" was played out during the 18th and 19th centuries between the Russian and British Empires in a period of imperialist expansion. The present Great Game concerns the rivalry between the US, Russia, China and Pakistan for access to the rich natural resources of the CARs. Since the independence of the CARs, Afghanistan's strategic importance has increased manifold as it is on the transit route between the landlocked CARs and the littoral states of the Arabian Sea. India too has a major interest in the region as the CARs are an emerging market for Indian exports and it would be cost effective for India to tap their large hydrocarbon reserves. On the other hand, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, two of the only three countries that have recognised the Taliban regime (the third is the United Arab Emirates), are seeking exclusive access to these markets as

well as defacto control over oil supplies from the CARs. However, it appears unbelievable that despite such high stakes, the international community is unwilling to get its act together to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan and continues to show a callous disregard for human rights violations and the oppression that the Afghani people are being subjected to.

The Soviet pull out from Afghanistan and the end of the Cold War saw the proud Afghans return to their quarrelsome ways. Since then, changes in fortune have been fast paced and precipitate. General Abdul Rashid Dostum, a former Communist Uzbek warlord and the head of the Jombesh-i-Milli Islami (National Islamic Movement), had toppled President Najibullah



in a mutiny in 1992. Dostum fought against Pakistani protege Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and later supported him against Burhanuddin Rabbani. A quintessential soldier-of-fortune, Dostum blames the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in 1996 on the failure of the Rabbani-Ahmed Shah Masood alliance to bring his Jombesh into the government. The Northern Alliance now includes the Jamiat-i-Islami of President Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masood and is Tajik dominated. Two Shia factions, the ethnic Hazara Hizb-i-Wahdat Islami (Islamic Unity Party) and the Harkat-i-Islami, are also part of the alliance. The ethnic Tajiks are Persian speaking and the Hazaras who inhabit the area west of Kabul are Shias.

It was during former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's tenure that the ISI had dropped Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and organised, armed, equipped and inducted the Taliban (literally meaning religious students) under Mullah Mohammed Omar into Afghanistan. Supported by the Pakistan military and flush with Saudi money, the Taliban captured province after province, usually by buying opposing commanders.

### HIGH STAKES

Where a fight did become necessary, Pakistan openly provided operational and logistics support. Despite vociferous Pakistani denials, between 1,500 to 2,000 Pakistani regular soldiers and airmen have been actively involved and have fought shoulder to shoulder with the Taliban. How else would a motley array of ill-trained students have manned and maintained T-54/55 tanks, multi-barrel artillery rocket launchers and long-range guns and flown MIG-21 fighters, AN-32 transport aircraft and Mi-17 helicopters? In fact, according to Anthony Davis of Jane's Defence Weekly, the Taliban campaigns during the summer months of 1998 and 1999 were "characterised by several relatively sophisticated manoeuvres across a fluid and fast-moving battlefield".

Pakistan is playing for high stakes in Afghanistan. Besides the obvious commercial windfall that it hopes to reap, Pakistan's interests include the gaining of strategic depth vis a vis India and making Afghanistan a surrogate state

that will allow it to play a larger role in the Southern Asian region. In the interest of short-term tactical gains, Pakistan is being extremely shortsighted in ignoring the dictum that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. The abiding lesson of history is that it has proved impossible for outside powers to rule Afghanistan. The British learnt it at great cost during the first two Afghan wars; so did the Soviets during the third. Pakistan is being naive in believing that it can rule Afghanistan by proxy through the Taliban. The Taliban militia is a motley array of petty minds, repressive and spiteful religious teachings, primitive ideology and an unbridled lust for power that has no base except among the Pushtuns. It is an amateurish medieval experiment in state making that is foredoomed to failure.

Pakistan is also, amazingly, paying no heed to the Talibanisation of its own society, particularly the northwest. The madrasa-narcotics-Kalashnikov culture has taken deep root and a well-entrenched local military commander-police-mullah warlord-narcotics mafia-smuggler-criminal nexus is ruling the roost. The Frankenstein monster that Pakistan has created will eventually boomerang on it and destroy it. If Afghanistan eventually breaks up on an ethnic and linguistic basis, the Pakhtoons in Afghanistan will surely turn to their Pakhtoon brothers in the North-West Frontier Province who are already clamouring for a homeland of their own which they call Pakhtoonkhwa.

India must work for an early solution to the Afghan crisis and must ensure that Afghanistan's unity and territorial integrity are maintained.

### INDIAN ROLE

Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan must be seriously countered and the Taliban experiment must not be allowed to succeed, or else the virulence of Islamist fundamentalism will soon spread all over the Southern Asian region, including the CARs. The installation of a truly representative, duly elected government in Kabul should be a national security priority. India and Russia must take the lead in finding a negotiated solution in consultation with the regional entities and all parties to the conflict. Because it lacks a contiguous border with Afghanistan, India is neither part of the UN six plus two initiative nor of the Shanghai Five working group. As a country that is directly affected by the terrorism emanating from the Taliban-Pakistan nexus, India must leverage its newfound strategic partnership with the US to gain representation in all negotiations to resolve the Afghanistan problem.

So far, India has provided only political and diplomatic support to the Northern Alliance and little else. Clearly, India needs to adopt a more pro-active strategy to ensure that the Taliban militia is disbanded under international supervision. India must push vigorously for a strong UN peace enforcement operation in Afghanistan and should be willing to contribute up to a brigade group (5,000 personnel) for a chapter seven intervention. Meanwhile, the humanitarian and medical assistance being provided to the Northern Alliance must be upgraded to the provision of military equipment and ammunition and logistics support. The campaign for a strong and stable Afghanistan under a truly representative government has to be fought on all fronts — political, diplomatic, moral and, if necessary, military. An aspiring regional power cannot shy away from investing in safeguarding its national security interests. Moreover, greater involvement in Afghanistan will also relieve pressure on the Kashmir front.

The author is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# Warring Afghans agree for peace talks

REUTERS  
UNITED NATIONS, NOV 4

AFGHANISTAN's warring parties have agreed to a new U.N. sponsored peace effort to end the protracted civil war in the central Asian nation, a U.N. official announced on Friday.

In separate letters to the United Nations, the ruling Taliban militia and the Opposition United Front consented to a "process of dialogue" aimed at "bringing about in the shortest possible time an end to the armed conflict in Afghanistan," said Francesco Vendrell, the Chief U.N. envoy for Afghanistan.

The agreement says the combatants would stay with the peace process until the agenda was exhausted.

Vendrell, a Spaniard and veteran U.N. official, said he expected to shuttle between

## Afghanistan militia demand UN seat

AFGHANISTAN's ruling Taliban militia urged the United Nations on Saturday to grant it recognition at a meeting in New York next week.

Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, told a news conference there was no truth in recent media reports that the world body had already decided to grant Afghanistan's UN seat to the ousted government of Burhanuddin Rabbani for another year.

"No decision has been taken," Zaeef said, ahead of a UN meeting on the issue on Monday. — Reuters

the two sides and then hoped for indirect talks in the same city between the two parties. Only if this went well would there be face-to-face negotiations.

Noting that "scepticism is warranted" because of the failure of previous peace talks, Vendrell said the "difference this time is there is a written agreement" as well as a commitment not to abandon the negotiations.

The last talks were in July 1999 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

and ethnicity, captured Kabul in September 1996. They control most of the country except for a swath in the north under the United Front led by Gen. Ahmad Shah Masood.

Asked about a ceasefire, Vendrell said it was probably too dangerous to begin talks on this crucial issue, as the negotiations would stop if one side or another began fighting.

"It is even less helpful if we agree on a ceasefire without verification and then in the middle of the talks one party breaks it," he said.

"I don't want to minimise the importance of a ceasefire but I don't think one should rush to a ceasefire if the parties are not ready."

Vendrell spoke shortly before a meeting of the so-called "six-plus-two group" of Afghanistan's six neighbours — China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and

Uzbekistan — plus the United States and Russia.

Pakistan's U.N. ambassador, Shamsah Ahmed, said after the meeting that the eight countries endorsed Vendrell. "Everybody realises the people of Afghanistan have suffered enough," he said.

"They have given almost everything by way of sacrifices in the cause of the free world. The free world owes it to them to restore peace in their country and help them in reconstruction."

At the same time, the US and Russia are working on a proposal to impose an arms embargo against the Taliban only, although it would be very difficult to enforce, Security Council diplomats reported. Despite denials, they said Pakistan was supplying weaponry to the Taliban while Russia and its allies did the same for the northern alliance.

# Ex-Afghan king gets EU support to go back with peace plan

Vijay Dutt  
London, November 20

HF-13  
2/11

THE FORMER King of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah, who lives in exile in Italy is wanting to return to his country, to head a supreme council of tribal leaders and through them try to restore peace in the country. The European Union is supportive of his plans.

Now 84, he had fled Afghanistan in 1973 following the military coup by his cousin, who declared a republic. According to the Sunday Telegraph, Shah lives in a villa near Rome. He is still revered by many Afghans. They recall the peace they enjoyed during his 40-year-long reign.

The Western powers are quite enthused with the idea. The US is already incensed with the Taliban for harbouring Osama bin Laden. In the UK too, Osama followers are posing threats to its national security. The move by Shah has come in midst of rumours that Russia and the US diplomats met recently to impose stricter sanctions against the Taliban regime.

A western diplomat has been quoted saying, "I would say that 95 per cent of Afghans support his

(Shah's) return, including many Taliban. Mullah Omar is increasingly isolated and now lives in a world of dreams and visions. If the Taliban fragments there will be an all-out war."

He agrees that Shah's plan for a supreme council is the only solu-

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'Ninety five per cent of Afghans support Shah's return, including many Taliban. Mullah Omar is increasingly isolated and now lives in a world of dreams and visions. If the Taliban fragments there will be an all-out war'

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tion. Shah, it is reported, has been quietly garnering support for his return. He convened a large gathering of Afghan tribals in Rome and sent emissaries to Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. His delegates have also visited Washington, Tokyo and Brussels.

The talks during the four-day

convention in Rome were very successful and Shah was shown a lot of affection. The Western diplomats are quite convinced that his word would be listened to by Afghans.

Pakistan and Iran however are opposed to the plan. Iran convened a meeting in Cyprus, according to the Sunday paper, to discuss a Teheran-backed supreme council (Loya Jirga). Pakistan sent an emissary into the country for gathering support for a peace initiative.

The Iranians fear a return of monarchy in their own country if Shah is welcomed in Kabul. Pakistan suspects that Shah will be favourable to India. Moreover a moderate regime in Kabul will conflict with the objectives of Islamabad hardliners.

Shah's men have also held meetings with commanders of the Afghani Opposition. They have been given guarded assurance of support. Shah has no problems in giving Mullah Omar too a key role in the council.

It is said that some Shah's men also met a few Taliban leaders. A Shah spokesman said that Afghanistan needs a moral leadership. The former king is eminently suited to provide it.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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# Pak to face heat of international pressure to dissociate from Taliban

Udayan Nambodiri  
New Delhi, November 21

PAKISTAN CAN probably see it coming: international pressure it has never known before. Any day now the UN Security Council may declare an arms embargo on the Taliban. That would be asking Pakistan to seal off the land routes through which the Taliban moves its military hardware.

The US, Russia, China and now, India, have agreed on the need for stiffer sanctions. Ahmad Shah Masood, the Northern Alliance commander, is fighting with his back to the wall. Though he hopes to retake the town of Taloqan before winter, the western powers have little illusion about his ability to stave off the Taliban blitz.

Fuelling the big powers' resolve are two factors: first, Russia, harassed by Islamic insurgency in Chechnya-Dagestan and fearing the spread of the Taliban into Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Krgystan, cannot openly back Masood committed as it is to a

## News Analysis

"peaceful resolution". Second, there appears to be panic in the anti-Taliban camp. Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan has turned wobbly in his support to Russia.

India, long denied the respect it demanded as a country hurt by Talibanism, is waiting as the stick is brought out for "Taliban and its supporters" (read Pakistan).

Months of diplomatic lobbying which saw India gradually gaining acceptance as a multilateral partner on Afghanistan, will probably result in hitting out at the base of Kashmir militancy.

The US-Russia diplomatic offensive against the Taliban progressed swiftly after Tom Pickering, the US deputy secretary of state, and V.I. Trubnikov, started their talks. Russia roped in Iran's support, while the US brought India on board. Simultaneously, a carrot and stick policy was tried on Pakistan but following the October bomb attack on USS Cole in Aden harbour, further appeasement became impossible. If Pakistan is sincere about disassociating itself from the Taliban, it must show proof to the UN.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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# Dealing with Afghanistan

By P. S. Suryanarayana

THE TALIBAN challenge to a coalescent post-Cold War international order is being increasingly recognised. The latest 'six-plus-two' conclave, held under the auspices of the United Nations, was attended for the first time by the highest ranking foreign policy mandarins from the United States and Iran — Ms. Madeleine Albright and Dr. Kamal Karazi, respectively. It is an irony that India, which faces a 'Talibanised' challenge in Jammu and Kashmir, is not a frontline state recognised by the U.N. for peace in Afghanistan. The U.S. and Russia constitute the component of 'two' within the U.N.-sponsored forum, the historical reason being their involvement in Afghanistan as the Cold War adversaries during the communist experiment in that South West Asian country that borders Pakistan. The six other trouble-shooters are Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and they share frontiers with Afghanistan.

After the updated meeting of the U.N. caucus, Ms. Albright expressed satisfaction over the 'similarity' of views among the participants in general and between Iran and the U.S. in particular. This has not of course led to any new formula at this moment to lessen the Taliban menace to the emerging new world order, given specifically the clash of strategic interests between Iran and Pakistan over Afghanistan.

China surely is not amused at the possibility of 'Talibanised' unrest, if not awakening, in its own backyard bordering Afghanistan. But Beijing will not be averse to allowing the Taliban to strew its own political juice of Islamic extremism inside Afghanistan, at least for some time, if there can be a strategic insurance against its export to China. Pakistan, as a conspicuous ally of the Taliban, can be expected to offer China such an assurance behind the scenes.

From the present standpoint of Pakistan, headed by an essentially 'secular' military ruler in Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the Taliban's fundamentalist energies can be stirred in ways detrimental to India in Jammu and Kashmir, which is very much seen by him to reflect the 'unfin-

ished agenda of the partition' of the Indian subcontinent. This phrase was first used long before Gen. Musharraf emerged on the Pakistan scene as a secularist influenced by Kemal Ataturk of Turkey.

Now, the Taliban's strategic-tactical utility to Pakistan was the key factor that prompted Gen. Musharraf to blame India for a recent bomb explosion at a vegetable market on the outskirts of Islamabad, despite reports that the device was found in a crate of fruits coming from Afghanistan. India and the Taliban, which controls the area in question, have always been poles apart.

Uzbekistan, among all the Central Asian republics with erstwhile Soviet connections, reckons that the Taliban deserves to be kept at arm's length. On a separate plane, Teheran's equation with Washington has not stabilised since the Shia-slanted Iranian political revolution. Yet, Iran and the U.S., the latter after some cool calculations, share at this moment a strategic interest in stemming the tide of the Taliban inside and outside Afghanistan.

Russia, successor to the Soviet Union which beat a military retreat from Afghanistan under Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* as extended to foreign policy, is now under a President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, who cannot afford to leave Afghanistan to its own devices — such as those that the Taliban might promote as the predominant warlord in a failed state. The remnants of the Taliban's opponents are still being commanded by Mr. Ahmad Shah Masood, the renowned anti-Soviet guerrilla and a latter-day India-friendly leader.

Now, although not directly threatened by either a present or a potential Taliban wave, except in Chechnya, Moscow will nonetheless find itself constrained in its interactions with its former provinces of Central Asia, should these states face a Taliban-inspired insurgency within their

own domains. Nor surprisingly, Mr. Putin is at present inclined to open a dialogue with Gen. Musharraf.

The latest India-U.S. union over their current 'concerns' regarding Afghanistan is a far cry from the time immediately before and after the rise of the Taliban as a political force in 1994-95. Then, suspicions were up in the air that the U.S. might have masterminded a Taliban-style alternative to the interminably squabbling Afghan 'mujahideen' groups which had earlier been aided by the U.S., with Pakistan playing a Man Friday, in the war

## ***It is an irony that India is not recognised as a frontline state by the U.N. in its efforts for peace in Afghanistan.***

against the Soviet 'stooges' in Kabul. The U.S. has consistently refuted all suggestions that it was the brain behind the rise of the Taliban as an Afghan outfit with direct genetical roots in Pakistan's Islamist religious schools in the Quetta and Peshawar belts. Washington, it was said in the mid-1990s, would not wish to create a Frankenstein's monster in Afghanistan.

Yet, a fashionable theory right across the diplomatic spectrum in Islamabad during 1994-97, the period of the Taliban's ascendancy, was that Pakistan's intelligence output, Saudi Arabia's funds and the U.S.'s strategic resourcefulness were behind the initial momentum of that Sunni-Muslim fundamentalist outfit. The common interest of these countries was the establishment of some post-Soviet stability in Afghanistan in a reversal of its then rampant civil war phase which, to Islamabad's chagrin, was dominated by an India-friendly Mr. Masood.

Pakistan was at that time keen on the emergence of a friendly regime in Kabul, given that Islamabad would always regard Afghanistan as a realm of 'strategic depth' with reference to India. For Saudi Arabia, the bastion of the Sunni faith, an amenable Taliban would have been a useful counterpoise in Afghanistan in relation to its neighbouring Shia citadel of Iran — Riyadh's traditional rival in Islamic politics.

The U.S., on the other hand, was at that

time reckoned to be in search of a stabilising force in Afghanistan, irrespective of its internal dynamics, so that drug trafficking and other newly-identified international scourges of a post-Cold War orientation could be controlled. The Taliban, with its initial puritanical opposition to the narcotics menace as amplified by Mullah Omar as its leader, was seen to suit the U.S. agenda of the mid-1990s in that pocket of the world. But, not so after the arrival of a Saudi dissident — Osama bin Laden who later acquired notoriety as a terrorist on Washington's list of wanted criminals — in the Taliban-controlled Afghan territory in 1996. This could have easily turned both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia against the Taliban, if these two countries had blessed its rise in the first place.

If the Taliban had indeed chosen in 1996 to defy its alleged benefactors, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, that could be traced to the rugged sense of fierce independence which the Afghans were known to cherish. It was against that balanced sheet that the Taliban's demonstrated 'restraint' at the Kandahar airport, at the height of the Indian Airlines' plane hijack drama there last December, has not earned it any international acclaim as a responsible player, contrary to the view in Pakistan by observers of the Taliban phenomenon such as Kamal Matinuddin.

At another strategic level, despite Pakistan's constant efforts to woo the Afghans in its battle of wits with India, the leaders in Kabul have traditionally sought to play the so-called India card in order not to become subservient to Islamabad. That, in part, accounted for the move in the mid-1990s by Afghan Islamist leaders such as Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani and Mr. Masood to try and build bridges with India. Given this historical reality, India may continue to figure in the strategic calculations of the future leaders in Kabul, if Afghanistan can be put back on its feet as a state within recognised boundaries. India needs to be associated with the U.N. caucus on Afghanistan, at least as an associate member, even if the caucus does not turn into an international conference on a failed but not forgotten state.

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# India debating security implications

By Atul Aneja

**NEW DELHI, OCT. 11.** As a Sunni Islamic revolution threatens to sweep Afghanistan, the political establishment here has seriously begun debating its ramifications on Indian security.

Highly-placed Government sources say the possibility of a takeover of Afghanistan by the Pakistan-backed Taliban is not improbable. If the Taliban wraps up its control over Afghanistan, it will mark a second Islamic revolution in two decades. But unlike the Iranian revolution of 1979, which was essentially driven by the Shia clergy, the upsurge in Afghanistan is being overtly led by a section of arch conservative Sunnis, inspired by a radical brand of Wahabism.

With the winter descending on the Hindu-kush, the Taliban extremists have mounted a decisive assault on the forces of Commander Ahmed Shah Masood, close to the Afghan-Tajik border in the Badakshan region. It now remains to be seen whether Mr. Masood, the lynchpin of the anti-Taliban northern alliance, can weather this storm and live to fight another day.

Commander Masood's reverses, however, have not triggered any fundamental shift in the Indian disposition towards Afghanistan. Far from diluting support, the dominant view in the Government favours a firmer and more tangible backing for Mr. Masood. In this effort, a section here feels that India, along with the Central Asian Republics, should hang together as never before and render full support to Russia which is spearheading the counter-Taliban campaign. In fact, Mr. Masood's overseas friends have given him considered advice in

the recent past. Afghanistan's Tajik commander has been asked to keep his hold over Badakshan. If he succeeds, the recapture of the strategic Talequan province which he earlier lost to the Taliban should be his next target.

Mr. Masood has also been told to exercise control over the land supply route. His hold over a viable land corridor may be vital for his survival. His supporters simply do not have the wherewithal or the will to sustain an airlift for too long.

The next few days will be crucial in defining Afghanistan's future course. If the Commander holds on for a few weeks, he is likely to survive the Taliban onslaught at least till next summer. By braving the Taliban assault in the coming days, Mr. Masood can legitimately hope that the winter snows will block the lofty mountain passes and impair the Taliban's highly stretched communication lines.

But if he fails, it will be a major geo-political event which will have serious security implications for India and the region. Analysts here are currently debating the ramifications of Mr. Masood's possible military defeat on Indian security.

There are two schools of thought. One is of the view that a Taliban military sweep will be catastrophic and will seriously jeopardise India's national security. An Islamic revolution will see the emergence of Afghanistan as a springboard for spreading radical Islam in Central Asia and beyond.

With the Taliban consolidated along the Pakistan-Afghan arch, the pressure on Kashmir will be further heightened. Taliban's success will also mean a bonanza for Pakistan and will

help reduce its political and economic isolation. The second school of thought is less alarmist. The Taliban's success may not necessarily weaken India's hold over Kashmir. Kashmir, it says, is already saturated with foreign militants. The Taliban may, therefore, find little scope to push in many more battle-hardened insurgents. Besides, adequate deployment of the Indian armed forces along the heights may be sufficient to block large-scale foreign infiltration in the Valley.

The apprehension that the Taliban forces may sweep into Central Asia after wresting control over Afghanistan may also be equally simplistic. On the contrary, once the Taliban takes over, power may dampen its enthusiasm to export Wahabism. Analysts point out that the urge for national consolidation usually overrides the zeal to export revolution after political power is wrested. In the case of Russia, Trotsky's exhortations for a "permanent revolution," revolving around the armed export of socialism, had to give way to a policy of national consolidation.

The possibility of the Taliban favouring political entrenchment in Afghanistan to global pan-Islamic campaign may therefore not be surprising. The anticipation of economic rewards on account of the Trans-Asian oil pipeline may only reinforce this sentiment.

But two other factors are likely to determine whether the Taliban will remain within or push beyond its frontiers. The disposition of Saudi Arabia, which has been associated with the Taliban in the past and can exercise considerable clout in Afghanistan, will be crucial in determining Afghanistan's future course.

# The Taliban & Afghanistan

By Qamar Agha

**T**HE TALIBAN, in a last-ditch effort are trying to gain control of the Afghan territory occupied by the forces of the Northern Alliance, led by the Tajik warlord, Gen. Ahmad Shah Masood. They have already captured more than 95 per cent of Afghan territory. And, with the fall of the key northern town of Taleqan, Gen. Masood has been deprived of his main supply line from neighbouring Tajikistan and is now confined to the isolated mountainous areas of his native Panjsher valley.

The latest offensive has brought the Taliban face-to-face with Tajik and Russian forces deployed on Tajikistan's borders. According to a source, 1,500 Islamic militants had crossed from Afghanistan to Tajikistan and more than 200 insurgents had slipped into Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz President, Mr. Askar Akayev, blamed the Tajik Government for failing to prevent the rebels from penetrating its border regions. He said the terrorists wished to set up an Islamic state in the Farghana valley, which straddles the Central Asian Republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. However, the leaders of these countries and Russia have called on international organisations to resolve the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan to prevent the spread of Islamic extremism to their territories.

The Taliban are gaining because of the divisions within the Opposition led by Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani and the failure of the leadership of the newly-independent, oil-rich Central Asian Republics to deal with it. Both the Russia-China backed regional alliance (known as Shanghai Five) and the United Nations initiative (known as Six-Plus-Two, comprising the U.S., Russia and the six Afghan neighbours) have failed to contain the Taliban militia. Both initiatives even failed to install a national unity government, representing various ethnic and religious Afghan minorities, in place of the Pakistan-backed, Pashtoon-dominated Taliban regime.

The U.S. has imposed economic sanctions but has not taken any serious measures to dislodge the Taliban regime. It chooses to depend on Pakistan to moderate the Islamic regime led by Mullah Mo-

hammad Omar as it is worried about the possibility of a more extremist, anti-West group taking over. Therefore, it is demanding the arrest of Osama bin Laden and wants the Taliban to purge the anti-West organisations based in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan's military rulers have not been able to bring about any moderation. The U.S. is also dealing with India and both have agreed to set up an institutional framework to deal with the problem of terrorism in the region.

## **Mullah Omar may succeed in capturing the remaining territories still occupied by the Opposition forces but will find it difficult to establish peace in Afghanistan.**

The U.S. is, in principle, committed to the U.N. initiative which calls for the installation of a national unity government in Afghanistan. But the problem is that such a government will have more of an Iranian influence than that of the U.S. or Pakistan. The Taliban came to power not by removing a secular government but the Islamic coalition which had increasingly become pro-Iran. Ever since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, successive Afghan Governments (barring the Taliban) have had a very uneasy relationship with Islamabad. Therefore, any popular Government there is likely to align with India and Iran to neutralise the threat posed by Islamabad's hegemonistic designs in the region.

The U.S. would not prefer a pro-Iran Government in Kabul. The conservative Arab allies of the West in the Persian Gulf region, who are backing the Taliban, are also opposed to Iran gaining influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Ever since the pro-Pakistan and pro-Saudi Arabia regime of Mullah Omar came to power, the Taliban were involved in the containment of Iran and the Russian influence in Central Asia and the North Caucasus. The Taliban (or students), who received their basic education in the 'madrasas' (seminaries) run by the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam of Pakistan, subscribe to the conservative Deoband school of thought. These madrasas were specially opened for the benefit of children of the Afghan

refugees in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province and Baluchistan. Besides religious education, the students were also trained by Pakistani security forces to wage *jihad* not only against the "infidel" but also "Muslims who do not follow the strict interpretation of Islam as preached by the Deoband and the Jamaat-i-Islami". Both are opposed to the liberal traditions of the South Asian Muslims as practised by various Sufi sects. They are also opposed to the Barelvis, a Sunni

The U.S. had developed strategic ties

with India to deal with the terrorist threat in the region. Washington "fully shares and agrees with" India's concerns about the nature of the Taliban Government and its linkages with international terrorist organisations. By developing strategic ties with India, Washington is forcing both Pakistan and Afghanistan to get rid of their anti-West Islamic elements. The presence of the hostile Taliban regime amongst the Central Asian countries and the failure of their regional ally, Russia, to deal with the situation is forcing them to seek U.S. support.

The Pakistan-Taliban design is only weakening the Muslim countries of the Central Asian region. The ongoing civil war in Afghanistan has rendered millions of people refugees or displaced them internally. These refugees are not prepared to go back to their homeland because of the insecurity caused by the ongoing war between the rival militias. Innocent people are being killed in the name of religion and several towns and cities, including Kabul have almost been completely destroyed.

Mullah Omar may succeed in capturing the remaining territories still occupied by the Opposition forces but will find it difficult to establish peace and security. Various ethnic and religious minorities will not cooperate with his Government. The Islamic regime of the Deoband version will not be acceptable to a large majority of Afghans.

ments opposed to the West will be purged. This will help Mullah Omar get recognition from the West.

King Abd-al-Aziz had to dissolve the Ikhwan to please the Britishers, whose presence in the oil sector was opposed by them. The Britishers had supported King Abd-al-Aziz in consolidating his authority in Saudi Arabia but opposed the Ikhwan's interference in the neighbouring Arab countries. If Mullah Omar succeeds in establishing his rule over Afghanistan and also contains the anti-West elements, Western nations will not hesitate to recognise his regime. But if he fails, the West will impose more biting economic sanctions.

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# Taliban threaten to attack Russia

5/29/10

## Warrant against Benazir in graft case

STEPHEN FARRELL, IAN BRODIE &  
ZAHID HUSSAIN  
THE TIMES, LONDON

KABUL, Oct. 28. — Afghanistan's ruling Taliban, emboldened by victories that have brought it the closest yet to controlling the entire country, yesterday threatened to strike against Russia if Moscow continued to support the rebel commander, Ahmed Shah Masood.

The warning came after a meeting between General Masood and Russia's defence minister, Mr Igor Sergeev, in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. A senior Taliban spokesman, Abdul Hai Mutamin, asked Russia to stop interfering. "The consequences would be very dangerous if it continues to do so. We can create lots of problems for the Russians and inflict heavy losses on them," he said.

UNI quoted Russian defence ministry's head of international department General Leonid Ivashov as having said that if the Taliban captured the northern parts of Afghanistan, then they would turn them into bases for promoting Islamic fundamentalism. "We regard it

### PAKISTAN WARNING

KARACHI, Oct. 28. — Pakistan today said it would not allow the USA to cross its airspace to attack Afghanistan-based Osama Bin Laden, the Saudi militant accused of attacking US targets. Foreign minister Mr Abdul Sattar said Pakistan would make an international protest if the USA violates its airspace. — Reuters

as a threat," Gen. Ivashov, who was on the delegation which met Masood on Thursday, said. General Ivashov warned that if the militia attacked Russia, then his country would act accordingly which however would not exceed the limits of Russian federation.

Tajikistan, a former Soviet state in Central Asia alarmed at the Taliban's recent capture of the strategic town of Taloqan, is just one of Afghanistan's northern neighbours concerned at the prospect of Islamic militancy spilling across their borders.

Russian and Central Asian leaders have met in Dushanbe

to urge joint efforts to fight the spread of fundamentalism. Russia, which fears links between the Taliban and rebel Muslim fighters in Chechnya, has stationed border guards on Tajikistan's 1,000-mile frontier with Afghanistan.

Mr Sergeev was in Tajikistan to take part in a meeting of defence ministers from 12 former Soviet states. He said: "Central Asia is slowly becoming the capital of international terrorism, with Islamic extremists trying to redraw the map of the region."

In June, the UN special envoy for Afghanistan, accused the Taliban of starting the latest round of fighting. Iran and China are also concerned about the destabilising effect of the advances.

The heightening of tensions comes amid speculation about whether the USA will launch retaliatory strikes on Osama bin Laden's bases in Afghanistan over the bomb attack on the USS Cole in Yemen.

According to one report, US Intelligence claims to have hard evidence linking Bin Laden to the attack on the destroyer.

### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ISLAMABAD, Oct. 26. — A court in Rawalpindi issued an arrest warrant yesterday against former Pakistani Prime Minister, Mrs Benazir Bhutto for failing to appear before it to answer corruption charges, court officials said today.

The court ordered that Mrs Bhutto, currently living in self-exile abroad, be arrested and brought before it on 10 November.

She has been charged with misusing powers to acquire illegal wealth and owning undeclared assets worth around \$1.5 billion in foreign countries, the officials said.

Mrs Bhutto and her jailed spouse, Mr Asif Ali Zardari, were sentenced to five years in another graft case in April 1999 for receiving kickbacks from a Swiss firm on a pre-shipment cargo inspection contract. Mr Zardari, who also faces other criminal charges, has been in jail since 1996 while Mrs Bhutto left Pakistan before the verdict in the kickbacks case and has been living aboard.

# 'Truly Indian' free-to-air Urdu channels by 2001

Poonam Saxena  
New Delhi, October 29

BY THE first quarter of 2001, two free-to-air Urdu channels are expected to come on board the satellite television platform: A news and current affairs channel called Al-Hind, and an entertainment channel, Falak.

The brainchild of C.M. Ibrahim, who was Minister of Information and Broadcasting during the Deve Gowda government, the two channels will have a total investment to the tune of Rs 132 crore with foreign equity pegged at 20 per cent. "They will be truly Indian channels, unlike networks like Star," says Ibrahim.

The major foreign promoter is Sayed Khalil, who owns *Khaleej Times*. Other promoters include Khan Lateef Khan, the Chicago-based owner of the Hyderabad Urdu daily, *Munsif*; Fakhruddin Khuraqiwalla, owner of the Akbarally's department store chain, Siraj Qureshi, owner of Hind Exports, economist Manzoor

Alam, who has also worked as economic advisor to the government of Saudi Arabia; and of course C.M. Ibrahim.

"Falak and Al-Hind will be the first Urdu channels in India," says former journalist Santosh Bhartiya (ex-Ananda Bazar Group), who will be heading both channels. "When we say Urdu, we don't mean Persian. We're talking of street Urdu, or Hindustani."

While the primary target is South Asia and the Middle East, Thaicom 3 will allow Falak and Al-Hind to beam to 133 countries. "We are looking at a global reach," says Bhartiya, "and we have an MoU with TWA Anthem to look after our marketing interests, worldwide."

But what will be the USP of the channels, considering there are already well-established news and entertainment channels in India? "Our news will be news without any censoring," says Ibrahim. "It will give a voice to the voiceless. And our entertainment channel will have no sex, violence or vul-

garity. Only those programmes which promote our *tehzeeb* and *sanskriti* will be shown. We will have shows that talk about our composite culture, promote communal harmony and keep the family unit intact. Today, TV is destroying our culture, we want to arrest that. It pains me to see the kind of things they show on TV today. Tell me, 'Liril' soap is being sold both in Pakistan and in India. But why is it sold in India by a half-naked girl?"

Ibrahim is quite confident of the financial success of the channel. "I am certain that within two years of launch, we will be No.1," he says. Adds Bhartiya: "Arthur Andersen has prepared a business plan for us which envisages that we will break even in three years. The Indian advertising market is Rs 3,000 crore, we want just 10 per cent of it."

The channel promoters are talking to major cable players for distribution of their channels and also exploring the possibility of giving decoders to cable operators.

## More sanctions on Taliban expected

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, October 29

THE UNITED Nations Security Council is expected to come out with a second set of sanctions on Afghanistan by the end of November. These include imposing a land blockade on the Taliban-controlled parts of the country — a measure that could hit its ally, Pakistan, equally.

Pakistan, the only UN member state to recognise the Taliban, would naturally come under international pressure to honour the new resolution and end its border trade with the Taliban. This measure is expected to effectively squeeze the Taliban's sources of military supplies at a time when it has been seen making rapid gains in the civil war.

Crafted mostly at the United States' urging, the Security Council's stand at the close of a year of sanctions on Afghanistan is undoubtedly influenced by the October 12 terrorist attack on the American warship, USS Cole, at Aden harbour which left 17 dead and 38 wounded. The Saudi millionaire, Osama bin-Laden, already wanted in connection with the August 1998 bombing of the US Embassy in Kenya, is one of the key suspects behind the attack on the warship.

However, the Security Council was considering sanctions even before the attack on USS Cole. Sources said, an evaluation of the impact of the sanctions clamped under resolution 1267 on October 15 last year made it clear that they did not have the desired impact in

terms of squeezing the Taliban either politically or economically.

The ongoing sanctions have two main provisions. First, they require that all states ban arrivals or departures by aircraft owned, leased or operated by or on behalf of the Taliban. The only exceptions are flights intended for delivering humanitarian assistance and performing religious obligations. Second, all countries must freeze funds and other financial resources owned or controlled by the Taliban, directly or indirectly.

These, however, did not have the desired effect. The Ariana Afghan Airlines flights continue to ply within the country. A skeletal mail service run by the Taliban continues to operate. As for the Taliban's funds abroad, not much was found in terms of bank deposits.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

OCT 29 2001

# Focus on Afghanistan

By C. Raja Mohan

*The time has come for New Delhi to adopt a more imaginative policy which will increase the costs of Pakistan's military and ideological adventurism in Afghanistan. India must also more directly involve itself in the international diplomacy on Afghanistan.*

110-12 rmb.

**D**ESPITE ITS current preoccupation with the conflict in Sri Lanka, New Delhi cannot afford to ignore the importance of the developments in and around Afghanistan. Nor should the surprising absence of serious fighting among the Afghan factions this summer lull India into diplomatic complacency. The political evolution in Afghanistan will continue to transform the geopolitics of the region and have a considerable bearing on India's foreign policy and national security for a long time to come. Further, the fusion of the new religious extremism in Afghanistan with international terrorism being spawned by Pakistan remains the biggest single security threat to India.

In the last couple of years, Indian diplomacy has drawn international attention to the forces of destabilisation radiating out of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan and international terrorism have become an important template to recolonise India's relations with the United States and key Islamic countries including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Central Asian Republics.

Although the Indian Government has brought Afghanistan and international terrorism to the top of its foreign policy agenda, it is a long way from shedding its traditional passive approach to the country and unveiling an activist policy to shape developments there.

While fighting in Afghanistan, stricken this summer by an unprecedented drought, has not reached the usual levels of the past, there has been an intensification of international diplomatic activity on the country.

One, the United Nations Security Council is debating the imposition of additional sanctions on the Taliban. Late last year, it put in place restrictions on air transportation links with Afghanistan. But as the sanctions regime has been too weak, the present debate is about plugging some of the loopholes.

Even as the U.N. considers more effective sanctions, there is concern in the international community over their impact on people's lives in Afghanistan already ground to dust by two decades of civil war and the current famine conditions. Finding an effective means to target the Taliban leadership, while sparing the people, is at

war would necessarily imply a readiness to bite the bullet and confront the forces of religious fundamentalism and extremism that have begun to dominate the political life of Pakistan.

Given the tight political linkages that exist between the Taliban and the variety of new militant outfits in Pakistan, the external orientation towards Afghanistan is the most accurate barometer of the internal relationship between the Pakistani establishment and Islamic extremism. These two may now have become inseparable.

Islamabad's reluctance or inability to cooperate with the world in constraining the Taliban would signal the triumph of a dangerous radicalism in Pakistan that is bent on promoting international terrorism and is committed unflinchingly to a jihad.

In refusing to engage the regime of Gen. Pervez Musharraf, India repeatedly pointed out that the problem was not about the dispute over Kashmir — which could indeed be settled peacefully — but the nature of the regime in Pakistan which had become ideologically committed to terrorism and expansionism in the name of jihad.

In that sense, the evolution of Afghanistan might hold the key to the future of Indo-Pakistan relations. The prospects of a return to normal Indo-Pakistan relations hinge not just on the seasonal variations in the level of cross-border terrorism sponsored by Islamabad but on the more significant political contest inside Pakistan for the soul of the nation.

India must seek to influence the outcome of this contest in its own national interest. One way of doing this is to engage Pakistan. Another way is to refuse to deal with it. But neither of these will be effective without a more aggressive Indian policy on Afghanistan.

Till now, India has adopted a low-key and passive approach to the unfolding developments in Afghanistan. The time has come for New Delhi to adopt a more imaginative policy which will increase the costs of Pakistan's military and ideological adventurism in Afghanistan. India must also more directly involve itself in the international diplomacy on Afghanistan and expand the pressure on Islamabad to choose whether it wants to be a moderate and modern Islamic nation or an outlaw state that is committed to international terrorism in the name of jihad.

its tar baby, Taliban, have emerged as the biggest threat to the Islamic world.

The concerns of the major powers and key regional actors have begun to put pressure on Pakistan to modify its Afghan policy and rein in the Taliban. Two decades ago, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan opened up enormous geopolitical opportunities for the military rulers in Islamabad. Pakistan reaped rich political dividends, becoming the frontline state in the efforts by the U.S., China and the Islamic world to oust the Soviet troops. Today, its support for the Taliban and religious extremism have begun to isolate Pakistan. More fundamentally, Islamabad's Afghan policy has begun to transform domestic politics in favour of Islamic radicalism in a manner few could have predicted 20 years ago.

The U.S. is stepping up the pressure on Islamabad to change its approach towards Afghanistan, reduce support to the Taliban and crack down on schools of religious militancy and international terrorism that have mushroomed inside Pakistan. But the signals from Pakistan are mixed, and the military rulers have not demonstrated that they have the self-confidence or political gumption to take head-on the rising forces of Islamic radicalism inside their society.

As the international community pays greater diplomatic attention to the situation in Afghanistan, the outcomes in Kabul are likely to indicate the political course the military regime in Pakistan has chosen to adopt. The success of international efforts to find a lasting solution to the unending war in Afghanistan will in essence depend upon a moderation of the Taliban regime as well as its political and ideological mentors in Pakistan. In other words, the developments in Afghanistan in the coming months will define the future correlation of political forces inside Pakistan.

Islamabad's cooperation with the international community and its neighbours to find a viable solution to the Afghan civil

## WORLD VIEW

new epicentre of international terrorism.

Moscow, angered by the Taliban support to Chechen separatists in Russia, has returned to a more assertive policy in Central Asia and the Caucasus by reactivating security links with the region. This week Russia is hosting a summit of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) leaders, whose focus is expected to be on managing the Taliban threat.

Three, within the region, the fragile Central Asian Republics are extremely concerned at the support the Taliban is extending to various dissident and terrorist groups out to undermine the ruling regimes. To the West, two leading Islamic nations, Iran and Saudi Arabia, are both deeply anxious about the direction Afghanistan is headed for. Shia Iran sees its ideological, economic and political interests threatened by the Sunni extremism being nurtured in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Saudis, despite being guardians of the Sunni faith, are essentially conservative and are troubled by the expansive radicalism of the Taliban and its support to Osama, who has committed himself to overthrow the House of Saud. Pakistan and

22 JUN 2002

# JIHADI WHIRLPOOL

Taliban struggles with isolation

THE stalemate in Afghanistan continues to fester. The United Nations, which had withdrawn from the country early in 1998, only to come back later after signing an agreement with the Taliban in May that year, is pulling out again after its offices were raided by the militia. Taliban's relations with the world body reflect the difficulties of its international status, which is a pariah seeking recognition. Earlier, it asked a UN envoy to recognise it as the dominant force in the region and showed itself to be sensitive to Secretary General Kofi Annan's accusation that it had bombarded civilians in the Panjshir Valley. It is, it must be remembered, virtually cut off from the rest of the world: its assets abroad are frozen and Ariana virtually grounded. The only trade possible is through Iran, with which the organisation signed a border trade agreement and through Pakistan. Going by the desperation with which passengers of an Ariana flight hijacked to London tried to seek asylum in the UK, the economic situation must be telling on the lives of ordinary citizens in that country. No wonder the Taliban was overjoyed when these people returned to the country: proof that it was liveable. A commentator points out that the Afghani currency is almost worthless and most of the trade in the country is conducted in Pakistani rupees. In fact, the principal economic activity in that country might be the training and arming radical Islamic militants for action all over the world. Going by the reports coming out of Jalalabad, where Osama bin Laden is said to be stationed at the moment, the *ihadis* are well-fed and well-provisioned.

There is little that the Taliban can do to negotiate its way out of the situation. After its recognition of Chechnya, its strategic worth for the gas pipeline project is nil. Moscow is now determined to prop up the northern alliance to create a buffer between the Taliban and the CIS states. The presence of bin Laden and *ihadis* of universal Islam on its soil makes its relations with a good portion of the Islamic world difficult, if not impossible. The Taliban has become an appendage of Pakistan, unable to define its foreign policy independently, except in terms of rejection. The humanitarian presence of the UN in Kabul was a sort of a token contact with the world and Taliban had begun to show willingness to make concessions like reopening girls' schools and allowing normal health facilities for women. The problem is that there are no takers for its basic philosophy, too extreme to be sustainable within any regional context. Pakistan uses Afghanistan and is promptly caught in its Kashmir logic. But a common *jihadi* whirlpool may drag both countries down, as many in Pakistan warn.

THE STATESMAN

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# Taliban clashes with Oppn, seizes town

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 2

FIGHTING erupted on several fronts in Afghanistan on Wednesday, with the ruling Taliban militia claiming it had seized a town on the Tajikistan border, cutting off a key Opposition supply route.

Sher Khan Bandar on the Amu river border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan was taken after day-long fighting, a Taliban spokesman told the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP). The Taliban militia and Opposition troops also clashed on the frontlines north of the capital Kabul and in the district of Imam Saheb in northern Kunduz province, an Opposition spokesman said. AIP, quoting unidentified sources, said the Taliban had captured Imam Saheb after an eight-hour battle, but the report could not be independently confirmed. A Taliban spokesman said the fall of Sher Khan Bandar would deal a severe blow to the Opposition alliance.

"The town is under our control and we have thus cut off an important supply route of the Opposition," the unidentified spokesman told AIP from the Taliban headquarters in southern Afghanistan. Each side accused the other of starting the fighting at the frontlines on the Shamali plains, 50 kilometers north of Kabul.

Abdullah, an Opposition spokesman said: "At the beginning the Taliban forces had some advance then they were pushed back. There is an exchange of artillery fire but the frontline is stable now," he said. AIP said Taliban artillery, tanks and jets were involved in the fighting, and Taliban officials in Kabul blamed former government forces, led by ex-defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood, for the clash. The Taliban breached the frontlines in their "counter-offensive," it said quoting an unnamed Taliban official. At least four Taliban soldiers died and three were injured in the fighting, it said.

Taliban sources said the bodies of Opposition troops were lying in the area, but gave no details.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 3 MAR 2000



# THE DEMON HAS A SAD FACE

As Afghanistan bleeds, the time has come to give it a second look

**K**arachi: The two sharply contrasting images of Afghanistan are sufficient to confuse even the most seasoned observers of the 21-year-long conflict, searching for ways to assess that country's prospects in the immediate as well as long-term contexts.

At one extreme lies a country whose future which looks depressingly uncertain as a bitter interecine conflict drags on. The other extreme, however, shows increasing signs of the Taliban regime consolidating its position to become a force to be reckoned with, rather than another interim phase in a transitional situation.

The Taliban's consolidation of control over Afghanistan, almost three years after taking charge of Kabul, poses many pointed questions to some of their most ardent critics. In Pakistan, the fears over the so-called prospective "Talibanisation" of the country, leads some to demand a fundamental reassessment of foreign policy, with a view to seeking a broadening of options for Islamabad. Such a "broadening" fundamentally calls for a distancing from the Taliban, instead seeking closer ties with other players on the Afghan scene such as members of the Northern alliance.

Whatever course Pakistan chooses in the weeks and months to come would be decisive in Islamabad's foreign policy orientation. The outlook for Afghanistan has become an especially relevant question for Pakistan at a time when General Pervez Musharraf is expected to travel across the Durand line any time soon, for his maiden meeting with Mullah Omar, the "Emir" or leader of the Taliban. Exactly what Pakistan wants to achieve from General Musharraf's visit, other than an attempt to establish a closer rapport with the Afghan regime, depends on Islamabad's assessment of present day Afghanistan.

BY FARHAN BOKHARI

In the coming weeks, the outcome of indirect negotiations between the Taliban and members of the Northern Alliance, sponsored by the Jeddah-based OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) may be crucial in setting the pace for a new ruling order. The OIC and members of the six-plus-two (the six countries surrounding Afghanistan along with the US and Russia) have recently appeared to have warmed up toward pushing for a political settlement.

However much the view on Afghan is driven by grand political and strategic considerations, the situation on the ground remains crucial to the future outlook. One part of that ground situation is the abject poverty afflicting the country, particularly in the wake of the long drawn-out war.

On the streets of Kabul, the cries of "bakhshesh" resonating from anyone of the Afghan capital's estimated 40,000 homeless children is one part of the humanitarian breakdown. "Widows of the war," as many of the women beggars are known, who have no choice but to beg, especially since being forced off work by the Taliban, is yet another of the many manifestations of Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis.

Later this month when spring arrives in Afghanistan, there would hardly be reason for joy in a sharp break from past tradition during the time of rulers such as Zahir Shah, Sardar Daud and the subsequent Moscow-backed communist factions. Unlike the celebrations which marked the festival of Nauruz, the official arrival of spring, more than two decades ago, Afghanistan's contemporary spring is more about rivals positioning themselves to seek the maximum advantage ahead of

the fighting season during the summer.

In sharp contrast to the days when Kabul's well known landmarks such as Bagh-i-Babur (the last resting place of Babur, the great Mughal emperor) attracted some of the city's more fashionable elite to celebrate Nauroz, there's only an uneasy calm spread across the city. Even Bagh-i-Babur, built in the memory of the prince of love, shows few signs of its past decor. While the UN has become involved in the rehabilitation of the grave site, the surrounding lawns show few indications of the rows of rose patches which once studded the sprawling grassy lawns.

Despite the many reasons for pessimism, however, the Taliban have begun to bring relative peace to an otherwise devastated country. While known as a radical Islamic lot to much of the outside world, the Taliban have brought about a remarkable change in the country's law and order environment, though society

remains subjected to an ideological straight jacket. In Pakistan, just next door, dewatering could well turn out to be a pipe dream in the end, but Afghanistan has shown some remarkably impressive results in taking away guns and clamping down on the scores of private militias which once dominated the main roads.

Despite the visible order, however, Afghanistan remains far from an internal political settlement and therefore exposed to periodic blood-bath. Besides, socially

regressive policies such as women being barred from work or men seeking career progressions, partially through demonstrating an obligation to sport beards, are hardly the first step towards eventual economic prosperity. With prospect for trouble still rife below the surface despite a visible consolidation of power by the Taliban, it is no surprise then that Kabul has witnessed at least four bomb blasts in the past few weeks. While the human casualties have been negligible, the Taliban have been quick

**Many women in today's Afghanistan resent the Taliban's prohibitions, especially barring them from work**

to claim that the Northern Alliance, a coalition of mainly non-Pushto-speaking factions, were responsible.

The opposing sides warming up to yet another round of battle is hardly surprising. The crucial issue for Pakistan, however, is that of charring a course that's best suited to its own national interests. For recent travellers to Afghanistan, there are at least three important lessons to

learn. First, while the humanitarian crisis has reached extreme proportions in parts of Afghanistan, the Afghans remain a war-hardened and tough people. Poverty-driven old men and women leaving their homes across cities such as Kabul, before sunset, in the biting chill of the Central Asian cold, is a powerful reminder of how the day begins. Kids without schools, patients without access to medicare and women without the means to earn a living,

especially when left to cater for themselves, may not be a strange sight in a country like Pakistan, but a nation in utter distress like Afghanistan is something that Pakistanis have not experienced for years.

Left to themselves without a major effort to step up the pace of reconstruction in the country, the Afghans are most likely to continue to be the victims of internal strife and the ruthlessness of the global narcotics game — two reasons for Afghanistan's notoriety in recent times. But with a strong push on humanitarian assistance, there is little reason to doubt that a population as resilient as the Afghans would not feel impelled to stand on their own two feet, and lead the way to sustaining a slow but steady course of economic and social reconstruction. And while the war continues in pockets of Afghanistan, the Taliban's success in restoring order in large parts of the country could well be the first step towards a fresh reconstruction effort.

Second, while a broad-based government may be the vital starting point for Afghanistan's normalisation and long-term stability, nevertheless, many Afghans have tried living a life under their previous rulers and still recall many unpleasant experiences. The main roads from one major city to another include strips lined with empty trailers which once functioned as the infamous check-posts where representatives of one Afghan commander or another would extort travellers of their money and other precious belongings.

**M**any women in today's Afghanistan resent the Taliban's prohibitions, especially barring them from work, but there is a widespread consensus on the view that their lives have never been as secure as today. To many in the West, such punishments as amputation of limbs or stoning to death or death by gunfire, depending on the nature of the crime involved, may sound too harsh and completely uncivilised, many victims of past atrocities in Afghanistan find themselves as peace with such powerful means of deterrence.

On the road to a new political order or a coalition, there are tough questions for many Afghans, especially ones such as why they should revert to rule by some of the country's most discredited rulers. In the end, rather than being pushed to accept such rulers, the Afghans are more likely to prefer settling for new faces who are thrown up in an evolutionary process.

Finally, the Afghans have been demonised for too long by much of the outside world. A country of 25 million with more than two decades of devastating war and sufferings conditioning them, has been closely associated with the image of Osama bin Laden, the Saudi militant in exile in Afghanistan. But demonisation of nations is often counter-productive.

For Islamabad, the best policy option remains that of continuing on a steady course with Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, encouraging change through quiet persuasion rather than being tempted towards a hardening of the stance. The best result from General Musharraf's visit could be the opportunity to take another step towards constructive engagement with the Taliban on issues of immediate concern such as a broad-based government in Kabul, a more effective check on drug smuggling, gun-running and extra-territorial militancy in the name of religion and a more liberal approach to human rights, including those of women.

*By arrangement with Dawn*

# Taliban seeks proof against Osama

By Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 1. The Taliban head of Government, Mullah Mohammad Rabbani, said today that Pakistan had made a "request" regarding the Saudi rebel, Osama bin Laden, but Afghanistan was a "free" Islamic State. He did not give details of the Pakistani "request" on Osama.

Mullah Rabbani, who is the chairman of the Taliban Council of Ministers, reiterated that Osama was a "guest" of the Islamic Emirate, adding that the militia did not believe that he was involved in the August 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa.

Mr. Rabbani, who had meetings with the Pakistani Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and the President, Mr. Rafiq Tarar, today stated that the Taliban was not aware of Osama's involvement in any terrorist activities.

He claimed that "all activities" of the Saudi "jihad financier" had been banned in Afghanistan and the Taliban had presented proposals to resolve the Osama issue. It was up to the international community to accept these proposals or not, Mr. Rabbani maintained.

Mr. Rabbani repeated that if any country had any "evidence" against Osama, it should be presented to the Taliban Supreme



The Chairman of the Taliban Council of Ministers, Mullah Mohammad Rabbani (right), is received by the Pakistani Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, in Islamabad on Tuesday. Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Mr. Samshad Ahmed, is also seen. — AP

Court, a proposal which has repeatedly been made by the Taliban leadership.

He said the purpose of his visit to Pakistan was to further strengthen bilateral relations. During his discussions, it was agreed that all Taliban consignments stuck at Karachi airport would be released. Also, Pakistan had agreed that there should be no restrictions on transit trade to Afghan-

istan, Mr. Rabbani maintained.

The issue of terrorism, he said also came up for discussion. The Taliban, Mullah Rabbani maintained, was opposed to all forms of terrorism — both inside Afghanistan and from Afghanistan. He said that nobody would be permitted to commit any illegal act from Afghan soil. "Terrorism is an act against Islam," he maintained.

THE HINDU  
= 2 FEB 2000

## 'Terrorist camps in Afghanistan to be closed down'

By Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 4. Assuming a posture that Pakistan was willing to address international concerns on terrorism, the Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, said tonight that the Taliban number two, Mullah Rabbani, had assured him during a recent meeting that terrorist camps in Afghanistan would be closed down. This "signal" comes at a time when the possibility of a stopover by the United States President, Mr. Bill Clinton, in Pakistan, remains an open question.

Gen. Musharraf told the State-run Pakistan Television that he would also be going to Afghanistan to discuss this issue further. He gave a 'clean chit' to Mujahideen groups operating in Kashmir, saying these were engaged in "jihad" and not terrorism. However, some "splinter groups" were engaged in terrorist activity and need to be controlled.

There would be a high-level meeting next week where action against terrorism would be considered. The General maintained that "they said" even inciting people to violence was consid-

ered terrorism. On India, Gen. Musharraf said New Delhi was trying to destabilise Pakistan militarily, diplomatically, economically and through its media. There was only "one dispute" with India, that of Kashmir and other issues were mere irritants.

He was ready to talk to India, but there could be progress only if there were "efforts" from the "other" (Indian) side. However, the desire to talk did not indicate that Pakistan was "scared" of India.

### 'Pak. will not be intimidated'

Raising his anti-India rhetoric to a new pitch, the Pakistani Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, said today that Pakistan would continue to support the "legitimate struggle" of the Kashmiri people and "not allow India to intimidate us".

In a statement on the occasion of 'Kashmir solidarity day' tomorrow, a national holiday here, Gen. Musharraf, who wants to project himself as the "ultimate supporter" of the Kashmiri cause in con-

trast to civilian Governments, said: "We will persevere in upholding the right of the Kashmiri people. We will never swerve from the path of law and justice."

"The spirit of freedom gains strength by the day. The 20th century witnessed the collapse of powerful empires. The 21st century will not tolerate vestiges of alien domination. Sacrifices in the liberation struggle ennoble the cause of freedom. Savagery of occupation forces demeans and discredits the anachronistic design of alien rulers," the General said.

Interestingly, there was no reference in his statement to the "extension of moral, political and diplomatic support" — a normal Pakistani formulation till date. However, the General and the new dispensation are not bound by civilian fetters and want to show themselves to be the "true champions" of the Kashmiri cause.

"The terrible toll in Kashmir should appall decent people in India itself. They did not suffer as savage a repression by their colonial rulers over two centuries as

their country has perpetrated during the past 53 years. The memory will haunt the Indian generations to come," the General added.

Separately, the General was quoted as telling *The Washington Post* that Pakistan had not "scuttled" talks with India.

### Musharraf to visit Afghanistan

The Pakistani Chief Executive, General Pervez Musharraf, has accepted an invitation to visit Afghanistan, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, said today. Dates for the visit would be worked out, he said.

Mr. Sattar told reporters here that Gen. Musharraf was invited to Afghanistan by the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Kandahar-based Amir-ul-Momineen. The invitation was delivered by the head of the Taliban Government, Mullah Rabbani, during his recent visit to Islamabad. "General Musharraf accepted the invitation immediately," the Foreign Minister stated.

THE HINDU  
5 FEB 2000

13 PASSENGERS RELEASED

# Hijacked Afghan plane headed for Moscow?

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 6. A hijacked Afghan Ariana airliner with over 170 people on board continued its odyssey across Central Asia today, landing in Kazakhstan after being first taken from Kabul to Tashkent. The plane later took off from Kazakhstan and is probably headed for Moscow, the Afghan Islamic Press news agency said here.

Earlier, the Interfax news agency said the plane had landed at Aktyubinsk airport in western Kazakhstan. The city is close to the border with Russia.

## 'Taliban unaware of hijackers' demands'

KABUL, FEB. 6. The Taliban Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Mr. Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor, said that his Government had made no contact with the hijackers and his priority was the safety of the passengers.

"We want the safety of the passengers, that's our top priority," Mr. Mansoor said from Kandahar. He said he had no clue about the identity of the hijackers. Nor was he aware of reports that the hijackers were demanding the release of Ismail Khan, an opposition figurehead, held in a Kandahar jail. The Taliban was in contact with officials from the Uzbek and Kazhak embassies in Islamabad.

Mr. Mansoor said the Taliban wanted the country where the aircraft landed, to ensure the safety of passengers and return the plane.

A Kazakh official said the hijacked plane left the Kazakh city of Aktyubinsk today, but its destination was not clear. — Reuters.

Here, the hijackers released three passengers, including a woman who had suffered a heart attack on board. Earlier, they had released 10 passengers at Tashkent, the previous stop.

Troops of the elite "Speznaz" unit surrounded the aircraft at the Aktyubinsk airport. (An AP report from Almaty, Kazhakastan quoting members of the

country's Emergency Situations Committee said there were 20 hijackers on the plane.)

The hijackers reportedly demanded the release of the former Governor of the western Afghan province of Herat, Mr. Ismail Khan, a member of the ousted President, Mr. Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat-e-Islami party, who was arrested by the ruling Taliban militia in 1997.

The Boeing 727 which was on a routine 40-minute flight from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan lost contact with air traffic controllers soon after take-off from Kabul. An hour later the plane landed in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where the hijackers threatened to blow up the aircraft unless it was refuelled.

Itar-Tass news agency said 24 tonnes of fuel were provided before the jet took off again and landed at the Aktyubinsk airport in northwestern Kazakhstan and parked at the end of the runway as elite units took up positions around it, Interfax said.

The news agency said ten passengers, including four women and two children, were let off the airliner in Tashkent. The exact number of those left on board is unclear.

A spokesman for the Afghan commander, Gen. Ahmad Shah Masood, who leads an anti-Taliban alliance based in northern Afghanistan, said the alliance had no hand in the hijacking. He said internal strife among the Taliban ranks may be behind the incident which comes six weeks after the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane that ended at Kandahar airport in southern Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia condemned the hijacking. The spokesman for the Taliban Foreign Ministry, Mr. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, did not identify the hijackers. The Afghan Opposition spokesman identified one hijacker as Gul Agha, a former Governor of Kandahar.

"According to the information available the person who talked to the control tower in Tashkent was called Gul Agha," the spokesman said.

Agha belonged to the Mahaz-i-Milli party which was allied to Afghanistan's former King, Zahir Shah.

There were 178 people on board, including 12 children and 15 crew. No officials from the Taliban militia, which controls most of Afghanistan, were on the plane, he said. — DPA, AFP, Reuters

THE HINDU

: 7 FEB 2000

# Afghan plane hijacked

- Former Governor of Kandahar among hijackers
- An inhuman and anti-Afghan act, say Taliban

Kabul, February 6

**A**RMED HIJACKERS believed to be a dozen in number, seized an Afghan commercial aircraft with 178 people on board shortly after it took off from Kabul airport today. The pilot was forced to fly to Kazakhstan.

The Afghan Ariana Boeing 727 left Kabul in bright skies at 10 am (11 am IST) but minutes later, as the plane crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range, it lost contact with air traffic controllers.

What should have been a 40-minute flight to Mazar-i-Sharif, in northern Afghanistan, quickly turned into a terrifying ordeal for the hostages on board, among them 12 children.

After an hour the plane landed in Tashkent (the capital of Uzbekistan), where the hijackers threatened to blow up the aircraft unless it was refuelled.

An Uzbek official said 10 passengers — "sick people, women and children" — were released in Tashkent in exchange

## The man they want

THE HIJACKERS are demanding the release of a former Afghan governor, Ismail Khan, who is being held by the country's ruling Taliban militia, the Afghan Islamic Press news agency said. A key resistance fighter during the 1979-89 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Khan was governor of the western Afghan province of Herat. Taliban arrested him in 1997. Since then he has been in the militia's custody in Kandahar.

for 24 tonnes of fuel.

The plane then flew on to Aktyubinsk airport in northwestern Kazakhstan. The hijackers said they wanted to fly on to Moscow, St Petersburg or Kiev.

"We should say with regret that for the first time ever an Afghan plane has been hijacked," Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel said in Kabul. "This is

an inhuman and anti-Afghan act."

An Afghan Opposition spokesman, Abdullah, identified one hijacker as Gul Agha, a Governor of Kandahar before the Taliban swept to power in 1996.

Agha belonged to the Mahaz-i-Milli party which was allied to Afghanistan's former king, Zahir Shah.

This is the second hijacking to hit Afghanistan in just three months. An Indian Airlines jet was hijacked in December as it left Kathmandu airport in Nepal.

The hijackers flew to Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, where they held the jet for eight days before releasing their 160 hostages.

The Taliban operate a small and aging fleet of jets at Ariana Airlines which are prone to accidents. Ariana has only three Boeing 727s and a handful of Russian Antonov aircraft. United Nations Security Council sanctions imposed last November forbid the airline from making international flights. (AFP)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 7 FEB 2000

## Taliban blame world for silence

AFP, REUTERS and DPA

ISLAMABAD, Feb. 8. — As an asthmatic hostage was released on the third day of the hijack and a stomach illness broke out among the rest, Taliban still refused to talk to the hijackers and accused the world of being unsympathetic.

Supreme Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar deplored the "discriminatory silence" of the world, saying there would have been a chorus of condemnation if a plane from another country were hijacked.

A Taliban spokesman said a senior official — perhaps deputy foreign minister Abdul Rahman Zahid, who is visiting Germany — might travel to London to meet the released passengers. "It'll only be to receive our nationals; we won't negotiate with the hijackers."

Omar defended his decision in December to negotiate with the hijackers of IC-814. "Whatever we did was in accordance with wishes of the Indian government, which didn't refuse to negotiate but only delayed talks."

The Taliban has been told UK's negotiations with the hijackers are "progressing positively", AIP said in Pakistan.

**Masood denial:** The brother of Ahmed Shah Masood today denied the Taliban allegation that the Afghan Opposition leader is behind the hijack.

THE STATESMAN

- 9 FEB 2000

# Hijackers release ailing hostage 9/12

London, February 8 9/1

HIJACKERS OF an Afghan aircraft tonight released one more hostage as negotiations failed to make any headway to secure the freedom for 156 passengers and crew who spent a gruelling third day in captivity on board the aircraft at the Stansted Airport north of London.



Ismail: The man the hijackers want freed

The hijackers of the Ariana aircraft, freed a man for medical attention, police said. Armed police and army special forces kept watch on the jet. Contacts with the hijackers had remained intact.

British Home Secretary Jack Straw is understood to have chaired a meeting of 'cobra' -- the anti-terrorism committee comprising government officials, police and armed services and agreed that the talks must continue, thus putting on hold a rescue mission by the elite SAS commandos.

Supreme Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar today deplored what he called the discriminatory world "silence" over the hijacking of an Afghan commercial airliner.

"The world is silent," the Afghan Islamic press quoted him as saying, ....There would have been a chorus of condemnation if a plane from another country were hijacked", he said, speaking to the Pakistan-based private agency from Kandahar, the Taliban's headquarters in southern Afghanistan.

"If we hold any negotiation with the hijackers or give in to their demands, this will amount to encouraging terrorism," the Taliban leader said.

He justified his decision in December to negotiate with hijackers of an Indian Airlines jet parked at Kandahar Airport, saying "whatever we did then was in accordance with the wishes of the Indian Government, which did not refuse to negotiate but only delayed talks with the hijackers."

(Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 9 FEB 2000



## BRITISH AUTHORITIES OPEN TALKS WITH HIJACKERS

# Eight more hostages freed

By Thomas Abraham

LONDON, FEB. 7. Eight hostages were released from the hijacked Afghan airliner, which landed at London's Stansted airport early on Monday morning, after negotiations between the hijackers and British authorities, leaving another 157 passengers and crew still on board.

The Ariana Airlines Boeing-727 landed at Stansted airport from Moscow shortly after 2 a.m. on Monday at the end of a 22-hour-long journey that began in Kabul. The aircraft, which was on an internal flight to Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan, was first flown to Tashkent, where 10 passengers were released, and then to the Kazakh town of Aktyubinsk,

### India deplores hijack

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 7. India today deplored the hijacking of the Afghan Airline jet saying "We deplore terrorism in all its forms, including hijacking of aircraft". The Foreign Office spokesman said India remained concerned about the safety and welfare of innocent civilians on board the aircraft.

where three more passengers were freed and a leaking engine was repaired. The aircraft then flew to Moscow, where the hijackers let nine more passengers go. It then headed for western Europe and eventually landed at Stansted.

Two men, a woman and two children were freed around noon on Monday, while two women and a man were released a couple of hours later. Sixteen women and 19 children are still said to be



The hijacked Afghan Boeing 727 airliner on the tarmac at London's Stansted airport soon after its arrival on Monday. (Inset: Ismail Khan, whose release has been sought by the hijackers.) — Reuters

among those on board. All the passengers are believed to be Afghan nationals.

Stansted, about 30 km outside London, is the airport designated for such emergencies, and has staff trained to cope with hijacking. The airplane was guided to an isolated corner of the airport several kilometres from the main terminal, after which trained police negotiators opened talks with the hijackers. The hijackers are reported to have demanded the release of Ismail Khan, a former Mujahideen commander who has now been jailed by the Taliban.

In marked contrast to its policy during the hijack of the Indian Airlines aircraft in Kandahar, the Taliban has refused to negotiate with the hijackers, and has hinted that the British Government should storm the aircraft to resolve the problem. A Taliban representative in Europe, Mr. Rahmatullah Safi, was quoted by

the British Press Association news agency as saying that "We are confident that the British authorities understand the meaning of terrorism, and how to deal with hijackers." He added "we are not going to have any negotiations by any means or under any circumstances with the hijackers."

According to Mr. Safi, the hijacking had been planned by Mr. Ahmad Shah Masood, the anti-Taliban leader who controls a small pocket of territory in Afghanistan.

Though specially trained SAS commandos are believed to be on hand to storm the aircraft if necessary, the focus of the British efforts so far has been to ensure the release of passengers, and to ensure the safety and comfort of those still in the aircraft.

"Our principal concern remains the welfare of those on board, and to this end, we are discussing the delivery of food and

medication to those on board," Mr. John Broughton, a senior police officer, said. On the hijackers request, the aircraft had been supplied with a generator, as well as supplies of food and drink. After the release of the five hostages, Mr. Broughton said negotiations with the hijackers were "at a very critical stage".

The aircraft had entered British airspace at around 1 a.m., and had asked permission to land, which was immediately granted. "It was pretty much a formality given our international obligations and our concern for the passengers, given the shortage of fuel." Britain, in keeping with international practice, allows hijacked aircraft to land, but does not normally allow them to leave with hostages on board. With the Taliban unbending, the hijackers have little option but to surrender, or face armed action.

THE HINDU

- 8 FEB 2000

# Hijack ends, all passengers released

London, February 10 *AP*

A FOUR-DAY hijacking ordeal ended peacefully here on Thursday as 151 passengers and pirates walked off an Afghan plane unharmed, and 60 people immediately requested asylum.

Police arrested 19 people after everyone aboard walked across the runway at Stansted airport near London in the early hours of the morning, ending the longest hijacking on British soil.

Home Secretary Jack Straw said 60 people had requested asylum in Britain for themselves and 14 dependents, and he would personally determine their applications.

Those arrested were people taken of the airliner at the airport and "they are suspected of having committed criminal offences" Essex Police chief constable David Stevens told reporters.

He said police recovered four hand-guns, five knives, one set of brass knuckles, two detonators and two grenades which did not appear to have fuses.

"It is difficult to be absolutely certain of how many people were

involved in the hijacking," he said and did not rule out the possibility of more arrests.

Stevens made it clear that no guarantee was given to the hijackers. "There were no political demands made. They made no request for guarantee on asylum and no guarantees were given," he said.

However, he said 60 freed passengers had sought asylum in the United Kingdom. Stevens said police still did not know the motive for the hijacking, but added, "it became clear in the last hour of the negotiations that they (hijackers) were expressing concern about the political situation in Afghanistan."

All the passengers are still being medically checked and debriefed, he said. Essex county assistant chief constable John Broughton said, "we are now into a very com-

plex and involved criminal investigation."

After all on board disembarked, officials carried out a check of the Ariana Airlines Boeing 727 to confirm no one was left in the aircraft and that it was safe for investigators to enter.

In Kabul, Taliban chief Mullah Mohammad Omar welcomed the end of the hijack and thanked the British government.

In Kabul, the leader of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban welcomed the end of the Ariana Airlines hijacking ordeal and thanked the British government.

"We are grateful to the British government for bringing the hijacking to a peaceful end without any bloodshed and saving the lives of the passengers," Mullah Mohammad Omar said in a statement. The statement demanded that the Boeing 727, the passengers and crew be returned to Afghanistan. Omar's Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel said the Taliban would not be asking for the extradition of the hijackers and wanted Britain to handle the issue.

(Agencies)



A hostage, released from the hijacked Afghan plane, waves as he is transported in a minibus to a debriefing area at Stansted Airport, 25 miles north of London, on Thursday. Photo: AP

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# The Taliban has to choose quickly

By T. Sreedhar

THE HIJACKING of a plane of the Afghan airline, Ariana, during its flight from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif, presumably by a section of anti-Taliban forces, may have come to a tame end. But the questions the episode has raised for the Taliban cannot be easily brushed aside. The hijacking raises three basic issues. First, the Taliban, since it came to power in September 1996, has been openly defying established norms of behaviour in the international system. It along with its mentor, Pakistan, has been trying hard for the last three years to make terrorism and military instruments of foreign policy. The sheltering of anti-state forces such as the Al-Dawa of Osama bin Laden in the name of Islam and Afghan hospitality created a peculiar situation in the entire south and south west Asia. Its terror tactics are now being used by the Taliban's opponents in the Afghan polity. The Taliban leader, Mullah Umar's February 7 statement condemning terrorism did not evoke much sympathy. The new situation it is confronting requires international cooperation. Until and unless the Taliban mends its ways quickly, it cannot expect the needed cooperation.

Second, the Taliban made a major tactical mistake at the time of the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight no. 814 to Kandahar on December 24-25, 1999. It refused to arrest the hijackers and subject them to the law of the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan. By announcing publicly that the hijackers along with the terrorists released from Indian prisons were set free on the Pak-Afghan border near Quetta, Baluchistan, the Taliban might have exacerbated itself from a difficult situation. It may justify its actions by saying the Taliban is not a signatory to various international conventions as the world is yet to recognise it. Technically, it may be right. At the same time, not arresting them demonstrated to others that in Afghanistan, hijacking is not a big crime.

Another tactical mistake was the Taliban's Foreign Minister, Mr. Ahmed Muttawakil, during his visit to Islamabad on January 23-25 announcing that Mahmood Azhar, ideologue of the Harkat-ul-Mujaheedeen released from an Indian

prison, can enter his country without a visa. The crafty Mr. Muttawakil knows fully well that the Harkat-ul-Mujaheedeen is a terrorist organisation being nurtured by Islamabad for a specific purpose. If the Taliban considers that the leader of such an organisation can stay in Afghanistan, to escape the long arm of the law, again it is confirming to the world that it is not a bunch of responsible people. Its mentors are able to wash their

some hard choices quickly if it is to be acknowledged as the legitimate authority in Afghanistan by the international community. The Taliban's mentors may have enabled it to consolidate its position — since the capture of Kabul in September 1996, Pakistan managed to get the Taliban diplomatically recognised by two fellow Islamic countries, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. But both these two countries are not too comfortable about having heed-

## *The Taliban has to make some hard choices quickly if it is to be acknowledged as the legitimate authority in Afghanistan by the international community.*

hands off by saying the hijackers and the leaders of known terrorist outfits operate from Afghanistan and not Pakistan. That makes the Taliban scapegoats. If the Taliban chooses to remain in this situation for sometime to come, the pressure is going to be high from the international community.

Already the Taliban has paid a heavy price — once in 1998 and again in 1999 — for being a surrogate state of Islamabad. In August 1998, the Taliban captured Mazar-e-Sharif with the help of Pakistan, soldiers in disguise. The Pakistani soldiers then killed eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist in the local Iranian consulate — perhaps to convey a message to Teheran. The sharp Iranian reaction made the Taliban climb down and promise that such things will not be repeated. For no fault of its, because of Pakistan's actions, the Taliban received considerable flak from Iran.

Similarly, in the Kargil operations, Afghan mercenaries of the Taliban variety did participate along with the Northern Light Infantry and the Special Service Group of the Pakistani armed forces. In the process they paid a very high price in terms of men and materials. This disillusioned the Taliban and its mercenary force.

For an outside observer, all this clearly indicates that the Taliban has to make

ta and elected representatives. The military junta is not able to come out with any credible evidence against its political opponents. The deposed Prime Minister, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, howsoever desperate it may sound, is already talking in terms of a war looming large, with the territorial integrity of Pakistan being at stake.

Therefore, the Taliban has to come out of its peculiar relationship with Pakistan: first to get out of being bracketed as a terrorist state, and then to quickly get itself rehabilitated in the international order. Only then can it get the much-needed liberal international support for the reconstruction of the war-torn Afghan economy.

Many would argue that Pakistan will not allow its 20-year investment in Afghanistan to go waste. Any Taliban overtures independently to any of the neighbours will be frowned upon by Islamabad. This is a fact. The Taliban's November 1999 border trade agreement with Iran is being talked about in Pakistan as more than an exception. A variety of consumer goods from Dubai through Iran are finding their way into Herat, Kabul and Kandahar. Some reports even say the Pakistan too is being flooded with these goods, especially the two adjoining provinces, North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan.

Reports coming from Kabul also indicate that a low-profile political dialogue is on between the Taliban and the authorities in Teheran. This quiet diplomacy indicates that Iran is engaging the Taliban to help it come out of the terrorist syndrome. But Iran has its own limitations because of the peculiar nature of Persian Gulf politics.

The only other alternative for the Taliban is India. The Taliban's behaviour during the closing phases of the IC-814 hijack drama has further hardened New Delhi's stand. If the Taliban wants to resolve its dilemma, it has to make its first move quickly to revive the traditional Indo-Afghan friendship.

*(The writer is Senior Research Associate, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi).*

## Hijack ends, 60 seek asylum in Britain

REUTERS

STANSTED, Feb. 10. — The four-day hijack of an Afghan jetliner ended peacefully today with the hostages and hijackers climbing out just before dawn.

Nineteen people were arrested and about 60 of the 150-odd people on board have reportedly asked for asylum in Britain. The Taliban have alleged the hijack was a plot by the hijackers and some of the passengers to gain asylum in Britain.

Its supreme leader Mullah Omar has thanked Britain for ending the hijack and asked it to return the Boeing 727, crew and passengers to Afghanistan. Britain has chartered an airliner to fly back to Afghanistan passengers who wish to go, the Prime Minister's spokesman said.

Omar suggested Britain should try the hijackers. Essex police couldn't say what crimes those arrested might be charged with. Officers were still questioning the passengers amid hints that further arrests might be made.

Police have seized four handguns, five knives, a knuckleduster, two detonators and two grenades.

The first sign that the hijack's end was near came in the night when two hijackers left the plane for talks with British officials.

Soon, around 3 a.m. (8.30 a.m. IST), the plane's rear steps were lowered and all the 20 women and 20 children on board and 45 men climbed down. Three hours later, the rest came out.

■ Another report on page 11

THE STATESMAN

11 FEB 2000

# 22 arrested in Afghan plane hijacking case

London, February 11

**A** TWENTY-SECOND person has been arrested in connection with the four-day hijacking at London's Stansted airport, police said here, adding that they now believed they had detained everyone involved.

All the suspects are men, Kim White, a spokeswoman for Essex police, which is leading the investigations said.

"We think we have identified those who were part of the incident," she said.

The hijacking of the Afghan jet, with 165 Afghans on board, ended peacefully early yesterday. Police made 19 arrests immediately after the hijackers and passengers walked across the tarmac, and two more later.

The number of arrests appeared to suggest that some of the passengers had relatives or friends among the hijackers, whom police have estimated at between six and 10. White said checks were still being made to establish their number.

The president of Ariana, Mullah Hamidullah, on Tuesday quoted an air steward, who was released during a stopover in Tashkent at the beginning of the hijacking, as saying he suspected that around 40 passengers were involved.

His suspicions were reinforced by the flood of applications for political asylum - 74 - received by British authorities after the bloodless end to the hijacking.

The police spokeswoman said that the theory being touted in the British press that the hijacking had been planned by Afghans seeking asylum was not far-fetched. "We can't rule out this possibility."

Essex police were still to question 10 to 20 of the freed passengers today morning.

**UK in refugee quandary:** Britain has faced requests for asylum from 74 hostages freed from a hijacked Afghan airliner - setting off a

debate about whether its refugee policies were too soft, adds Reuters from Stansted.

Elation that the four-day hijack had ended peacefully was tempered by a quandary about how to handle the requests to avoid a rush of copycat plane seizures.

Police arrested 21 people from the plane and recovered four hand guns, five knives, two detonators and two grenades after the drama ended yesterday.

Afghan authorities have alleged the hijacking was a plot to gain asylum for the hijackers and some of the passengers.

Home Secretary (Interior Minister) Jack Straw told Parliament that of the 150 people on board at the end of the hijack, 60 adults and 14 dependants, believed to be children, had applied for political asylum.

**The number of arrests appeared to suggest that some of the passengers had relatives or friends among the hijackers, whom the police have estimated at between six and 10.**

"Let me make it clear that, in the talks which led to a peaceful ending of this hijacking, no undertakings of any kind concerning asylum were given by representatives of the British government," he said.

"Subject to compliance with all legal requirements, I would

wish to see removed from this country all those on the plane as soon as reasonably practicable...."

Authoritative sources said Mr Straw was unlikely to grant any asylum requests since the flight had started as a domestic one, indicating that the passengers were not fleeing in terror. His decision was likely to take several days.

While their fate was decided, the hostages enjoyed a different kind of captivity from their cramped existence on the plane - the luxury of a four-star Hilton hotel. In Afghanistan, the ruling Taliban authorities told Britain to try the hijackers and said they hoped the British government would return the commandeered Ariana Airlines Boeing 727. The hijackers would almost certainly face severe Islamic punishment or even death if tried in Afghanistan. (Agencies)

# Taliban cautions UK over passengers' asylum plea

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
KANDAHAR, FEB 13

98-9 14/2  
AFGHANISTAN'S Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel on Sunday cautioned Britain against granting political asylum to passengers freed from a hijacked Afghan plane in London.

He said if those seeking asylum for economic benefits get positive responses to their requests more Afghan people would be encouraged to

leave the war-torn country. "There should be a difference between political and economic asylum seekers. If countries are ready to grant political asylum, people will go to many countries," he told reporters. He said the ruling Taliban militia had clamped no ban on travel abroad by Afghans. Afghan borders were open to anybody who wanted to leave the country, Mutawakel said. However, he said if more ex-hostages return home it would discourage terrorists. The plane, a Boeing 727 of Afghan Ariana Airlines, was hi-

*Afghanistan*  
jacked soon after it left Kabul for northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif on February 6. It flew to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Russia before landing at Stansted airport in Britain the next morning.

The hijackers surrendered at London's Stansted airport after four days of negotiations on Thursday but at least 74 of the 164 on board the aircraft have requested asylum in Britain. So far 37 people have indicated willingness to return to their homeland.

INDIAN EXPRESS

14 FEB 2000

# 13 Afghans charged with hijacking

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA AND ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANDAHAR, Feb. 14. — British police today charged 13 Afghans with hijacking of the Afghan airliner to Stansted Airport, while 73 of the 142 released passengers flew back to Afghanistan as the authorities here drew up a plan to disperse asylum-seekers to countries with significant Afghan refugee populations.

Eight days after the hijacking, the 73 passengers returned home to heroes' welcome today. Showered with rose petals as they stepped off a chartered plane in Kandahar, they were welcomed by Taliban Foreign Minister Mr Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil with an embrace, chocolate and new salwar kameez, the traditional Afghan dress.

Mr Muttawakil presented some of the men with a turban. In keeping with the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islam, there was no contact with the women.

Juma Khan stepped off the plane and kissed the ground.

"This is my home. I love it," Abdul Farid wept. "Why wouldn't I come home? This is my country, this is where my family is, my heart," he said, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. "Afghanistan is my love".

On the tarmac was Tine Staermose, representative of the Geneva-based International Organisation for Migration, which chartered the flight from Britain. "All of them are coming back voluntarily to Afghanistan. Now we have to get them home," she said.

On board were 60 adults and 13 children, including 10 crew members of the hijacked aircraft.

For the passengers, arrival at Kandahar ended an odyssey that began last Sunday when their Ariana Airlines plane was hijacked on a flight from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif. It made a series of stops on a journey through Central Asia and Russia, ending in Britain last Monday.

British police negotiated an end to the drama on Thursday, and everyone on board was



**HOMeward BOUND: Afghans from the Ariana airlines plane which was hijacked last week, leave by coach from their location at Moreton-in-Marsh, central England, on Sunday — AP/PTI**

allowed to leave the aircraft. Nineteen men are in custody in Britain for the hijacking; 13 of them appeared in court today.

Another 74 passengers have sought asylum and have refused to return home, despite assurances from Mr Muttawakil that they would be welcome. Today, the minister urged Britain to reject requests for refugees, not political ones. He also promised that they would

not be punished if they returned home to Afghanistan, a country ravaged by 20 years of war, and ruled by the ultra-orthodox Sunni militia of the Taliban who have enforced a brutal form of medieval Islam upon the 90 per cent of the country they control.

The Taliban, however, want the hijackers prosecuted and punished. But they have not yet demanded their return to Afghanistan — nor is it clear what punishment awaits them if they do. Mr Muttawakil has earlier said the death penalty was unlikely, because the hijackers killed no one aboard the hijacked plane.

The Taliban want Britain to return their Boeing 727, one of only four Boeing aircraft in Ariana's emaciated fleet. The aircraft is needed to take Afghans to Mecca and Medina for Haj.

It is not known if Britain will return the aircraft to Afghanistan which is under lifted UN sanctions since November to prise out the Saudi terrorist mastermind, Osama bin Laden.

# Afghan asylum seekers start legal moves in UK

REUTERS  
LONDON, FEB 15

DOZENS of freed Afghan hijack hostages on Tuesday began the long and delicate process of trying to persuade Britain to allow them to stay rather than send them back to their war-scarred homeland.

The refugee legal centre, a small London-based support group, said it was providing legal advice and representation to former hostages seeking asylum in Britain.

Lawyers for the group planned to interview 69 applicants on Tues-

day at a holding centre in western England, which is also home to the four flight crew waiting to fly the seized Ariana airlines plane back to Afghanistan.

The four-day hijacking ended peacefully last Thursday at a London airport with all of the passengers released unharmed.

But questions have swirled about the motivation of those aboard after 13 were charged with hijacking offences, 73 were flown home to Afghanistan and the rest began the process of seeking asylum in Britain. The reaction of the British government — caught in the bind of having to consider the

applicants while not being seen to encourage similar asylum bids — has also come under scrutiny.

An interpreter involved with freed hostages accused Britain of having effectively bullied many to return to Afghanistan.

"It was clear to me from the start that the immigration officers wanted as many out of Britain as fast as they could," David Fazel, an industrial engineer used by the government as an interpreter, told the *Times* newspaper.

The home office rejected the allegations by the translator and similar charges last week by Amnesty International that

Britain was contravening its obligations under UN Refugee Conventions by not giving each case adequate consideration.

"Seventy-three people left this country voluntarily and before they did each person was interviewed by the International Organisation for Migration, who would not have helped us if we were forcibly repatriating people," a spokesman told *Reuters*.

"They signed the document in their own language to the effect that they knew they were leaving voluntarily. If we railroaded so many out, how come so many stayed behind?"



# Saudi-Taliban relations in 'deep freeze'

Apratim Mukarji  
New Delhi, February 26

SAUDI ARABIA, one of the three countries to have recognised the fundamentalist Taliban regime of Afghanistan three years ago, has now turned its face away from the jealous exporters of religious extremism.

While it had a 'very strong' relationship with Pakistan's ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, it is manifestly unhappy with his usurper successor, Gen. Pervez Musharraf. It is also perturbed over the Pakistan-Taliban nexus, which it perceives to be threatening the stability and development of the region.

Reflecting the changed perceptions, the Saudi media were "extraordinarily" critical of the hijackers of the Indian Airlines flight IC-814 and of the Taliban's role, describing the hijacking as un-Islamic.

It was mainly at Pakistan's instigation that Riyadh extended its

recognition to the Taliban in 1997 even though it had suffered two major extremist attacks in November 1995 and June 1996. It was as the deep involvement of the Taliban in exporting religious extremism unfolded over the years, to the extent that promoter of international terrorism Osama bin-Laden was allowed to become a major player in Afghanistan ignoring Riyadh's demand for his repatriation to face trial, that Saudi Arabia realised the dangers of supporting the Kabul regime. "It has not broken the diplomatic ties," say Indian diplomats. "But Saudi-Taliban relations seem to be in deep freeze." Its ambassador was recalled and only a Second Secretary now heads the Afghan Embassy in Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia's concerns about extremism are now being reflected regularly and prominently in the public speeches of its leaders, the diplomats point out. The country, with a tremendous clout in the

Muslim world with its religious pre-eminence and wealth, is now quite consciously and deliberately focusing on the virtues of religious moderation, co-existence, tolerance and cross-civilisational dialogue, far away from the stark fundamentalism of the Taliban.

Equally significantly, Riyadh has reached out to Teheran during the last two years, further establishing the bona fides of its reconsidered approach to Islam and regional cooperation. "It is in the context of these significant changes in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy that the development of its relations with India should be seen," diplomats say.

India is, however, not quite sure how the changing perceptions in Riyadh should affect its stand on the Kashmir issue. While it played a major role in moderating the Pakistan-sponsored Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) resolution on the issue, its position is necessarily linked with that of

Pakistan calling for the implementation of the United Nations resolutions and for the self-determination of the Kashmiri people.

"But there is no real consistency by Saudi Arabia on the issue, which doesn't give satisfaction to Pakistan either," the diplomats point out. In fact, New Delhi is obviously curious to find out if Riyadh has worked out any deviation from its known position on Kashmir in the light of its realisation of the dangerous situation created by the Pakistan-Taliban nexus in exporting religious extremism. India-Saudi Arabia relations, never warm and intimate, are in the process of a welcome rejuvenation with the visit of Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nizar Obaid Madani, beginning tomorrow.

The visit is in the framework of the interest of both countries, the diplomats point out, to enhance the bilateral relations in the political and economic fields.

# Taliban tired of Pak intervention in Afghanistan

**Apratim Mukarji**  
New Delhi, January 2

SOME SECTIONS of the Taliban are getting tired of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and wish to reduce it. As Islamabad's hand in the IC 814 hijack gets exposed (as the Indian government clearly hopes), these dissenters may be encouraged to push their line of thinking very hard now.

After over three years of ruling the major part of Afghanistan, the Taliban find themselves still unacceptable to the international community. The perception is growing that acceptance would come only after the militia has emerged out of the shadows of Pakistan.

"The Taliban do not constitute a composite body," says analyst Tara Kartha of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Among the various tiers of diverse people that make up the fundamentalist militia, there are the Ghilzais Pashtuns of Kandahar and the Durrani, the two dominant tribes.

The latter however perceive themselves to be superior to the Kandaharis and this traditional source of discord has been playing its part in retaining the non-homogeneity of the organisation.

The influence of the Kandaharis, representing the most backward and fundamentalist region of the country, is however supreme among the Taliban, with the clergy, the highest echelon, coming from them. A hotch-potch of warlords make up another tier in the Taliban, while drug traffickers, operationally linked to Pakistan, have strong ties with the militia. The role of Mullah Rockety (the name is a derivative of his profession, arms dealing) is notable in this connection.

According to Dr Sreedhar of the

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IDSA, the Taliban were born in the rugged mountains of the Pak-Afghan border "inside the Pakistani territory sometime in August 1994." The generally accepted perception is that the militia was born because Pakistan's Afghanistan policy makers were disillusioned with the failure of their agencies like the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to restore normalcy in Kabul.

While they were looking for an alternative, Interior Minister in the second Benazir Bhutto government Maj Gen (retd.) Naseerullah Babar suggested the creation of a students' militia along with veterans from the Afghan Mujahideen who had fought the Soviet army and were since living in Pakistan. The search for a leader of such an outfit came to an end with Mohammed Umer Mujahid, later Mullah Omar, close to ISI and qualified with battle experience.

It is however the heterogeneous composition of the Taliban which now appears to be widening the strategic and tactical differences within the organisation. Over and above every other factor is of course the inherently independent spirit of the Afghan which is beginning to rebel against Pakistan's domination.

A subtle Indian role in facilitating the process of the Taliban proclaiming its independence of Pakistan may not be an exercise in fantasy, analysts say, provided its timing is appropriate. The urge to get out of Islamabad's clutches is already pronounced and may grow strong enough to impact on the Taliban's relationship with the eastern neighbour.

While the Taliban have been ruling nearly 90 per cent of the country, Afghanistan under their rule remains for all practical purposes a non-state.

# 12-10 Afghanistan a haven for Islamic militants?

By Kesava Menon

**MANAMA (BAHRAIN) JAN. 22.** As Arab Governments turn decisively against Islamic militants, one remarkable feature is the ubiquitousness of the "Afghani" phenomenon. Whether it is the long-standing militant movement in Algeria or the more nascent one in Lebanon, those Arab nationalists who took part in and got radicalised in the Afghan war are seen to have emerged as central figures. The concerned governments cannot take up the matter directly with the Taliban since none of them recognises the regime in Kabul and they have also not made public whether they have taken up the matter with Islamabad which too has a major contributory role.

In Algeria, the security forces are reported to have ringed the bases of the remaining radical groups to liquidate them. One of the major militant movements — the Islamic Salvation Army and a smaller faction the Islamic League for Preaching and Jihad — have dissolved themselves and their cadres are to assist the Algerian army in the crack-down. This combination of soldiers and reformed militants is waiting for the green signal to launch attacks on the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Salafist

Group for Preaching and Combat.

If optimistic projections bear out and the security forces succeed in their operation, they would wipe out the hard-core which has taken terrorism to new depths over the last eight years. The security forces are holding back because the Government has extended by a few days the period during which militants not guilty of serious crimes can seek amnesty. Throughout the Algerian crisis, the role of the "Afghanis" has been known to be a crucial one. With their combat experience and ideological training, those Algerians who had taken part in the Afghan war against the Soviets are believed to have provided the frame-work for the militant groups.

In fact, after the Algerians began to get the upper hand from a few years ago, it was believed that the leader of the GIA, Anton Zoubari (a known "Afghani"), had taken refuge in Afghanistan. But he was recently said to have been spotted ruing an encounter and it is unclear whether the earlier reports of him having fled to Afghanistan were accurate or whether he had chosen to return at a time when the GIA could emerge as the sole militant movement.

If Islamic militancy in Algeria seems to be entering its terminal stage, the militancy

in Lebanon appears to be entering into a new and dangerous phase. Through much of the 1970s and 80s, Lebanon was wracked by warfare between its ethnic militias — Shiite Amal and Hizbollah, Druze, Phalangist and Sunni — but they had begun to observe a tentative truce if not complete peace since the Taif Agreement of 1989. However, recently there has risen the new phenomenon of a radical Sunni group which has decided to take on the Lebanese army. Earlier this month, this group which has been training near the Syrian border ambushed a unit of the Lebanese army and 11 soldiers and 30 militants were killed in the fighting.

Not many details are known about this new Sunni group but Lebanese newspapers report that it is believed to be part of a loose network of militant groups which have "Afghanis" at their core and draw at least a part of their funding from the al-Qaeda of Saudi dissident, Osama bin Laden. The leader of the Lebanese group who was reportedly killed in the encounter — Bassam Kanj — was said to be an "Afghani". The emergence of this Sunni group spells bad news for a Lebanon which is still delicately held together. But it could also pose a long term threat to Syria where the

Alawites, a Shia off-shoot, dominate a society which has a Sunni majority.

Developments in Sudan are at a shaky stage. But from the manner in which the President, Lt. Gen. Omar al Bashir, has been courting regional States for assistance in arriving at an agreement with opposition groups, it would appear that the Government is readying itself for a show-down with the Islamists.

It is early days yet but if the Sudanese Government decides to go against the Islamists, if for no other reason than to please the U.S., it would mean that yet another Arab country has turned against the Islamists.

The current head of the Islamic radical group which assassinated Anwar Sadat, former Egyptian President, is believed to be yet another militant who has taken refuge in Afghanistan. These are the underlying causes which have restrained these Arab countries from recognising the Taliban.

Unofficially, all these Governments also state that they have been taking up the matter with Pakistan but it is probably the necessity of retaining the semblance of Islamic solidarity which prevents them from talking about it more openly.

## We won't expel Osama: Taliban

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 24. Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Government today said it would not bow to mounting U.S.-led international pressure to expel the Saudi-born terrorism suspect, Osama bin Laden. "We will never ask him to go," the Taliban Foreign Minister, Mr. Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, told a news conference after a two-day visit to Pakistan, which followed renewed U.S. pressure on Islamabad to persuade the Taliban to hand over Osama for trial.

Mr. Mutawakil said that while the Taliban Government, which is also under U.S.-sponsored U.N. aviation and financial sanctions over the affair, would not expel Osama, it could provide "technical assistance" if the dissident himself wanted to leave. He said Pakistan had no influence in the matter. — Reuters

**THE HINDU**

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