

# Opposition forces seize district, close in on key city

By Associated Press  
INTERNATIONAL

JABAL SARAJ, Afghanistan — Aided by heavy U.S. bombing, opposition forces said they seized a district near Mazar-e-Sharif from Taliban forces today and were closing in on the key northern city.

U.S. officials said the northern opposition alliance was making advances in the area but that the situation was “very fluid” and information hard to come by. In some cases, they said, opposition forces were attacking on horseback against Taliban tanks.

Northern alliance spokesman Ashraf Nadeem said opposition troops took control of Shol Ghar district, about 30 miles from Mazar-e-Sharif, and some units were just eight miles south of the city.

The Taliban denied they lost Shol Ghar and said they would move 500 fresh fighters into the area by Thursday despite raids by U.S. warplanes.

A Taliban official said the opposition was lying and that its claims were baseless, the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press reported. It did not identify the official.

It said the official, speaking in the eastern city of Jalalabad, acknowledged opposition forces had earlier seized Zaray — one of three districts south of Mazar-e-Sharif.

RAMALLAH, West Bank — Israeli troops withdrew early today from Ramallah, the seat of Palestinian government and commerce, as Israel’s largest military operation in the West Bank in years was drawing to an end.

## ap news briefs

Israeli tanks, jeeps and armored personnel carriers rolled from the northern neighborhoods of the town toward the Israeli settlement of Beit El, as Palestinian security forces moved in.

In a statement, Israeli Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer said his forces would maintain their cordon around the town. He said Israel would hold Yasser Arafat’s Palestinian Authority responsible for preventing attacks against Israelis.

Israeli forces had moved into parts of six Palestinian towns after the Oct. 17 assassination of ultranationalist Tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi. With the completion of the Israeli pull-back from Ramallah, only areas of the Palestinian towns of Tulkarem and Jenin remained under Israeli control.

Israeli officials said this week that the incursions accomplished their mission. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israeli forces killed 42 armed militants in clashes and 15 in targeted operations.

### NATIONAL

FLORENCE, Mont. — The bodies of three women were found with their throats slashed Tuesday at a beauty salon in this western Montana community, Ravalli County Sheriff Perry Johnson said.

A customer arriving at The Hair Gallery in Florence found one of the victims lying in a pool of blood and called authorities, who discovered two more victims in an adjacent utility

room.

The woman found by the customer was identified as the owner of the salon. The other victims were a manicurist and a customer.

There was no immediate arrest, and Johnson did not provide information about a possible motive. Authorities said they were searching for a man seen in front of the salon by the woman who found the owner’s body.

PALO ALTO, Calif. — Casting doubt on what would be one of the biggest high-tech deals ever, the family of Hewlett-Packard Co. co-founder William Hewlett will vote their 5 percent stake in the company against the proposed \$21 billion acquisition of Compaq Computer Corp.

HP’s biggest shareholder, the Packard family foundation — which owns more than 10 percent of HP’s stock — has not decided whether to support the deal. The \$5 billion foundation has hired advisers to help determine its decision. “It has tremendous consequences for us,” said Robert Stephens, a son-in-law of co-founder David Packard and a member of the foundation board.

Walter Hewlett, Hewlett’s son and a member of the HP board, said the company can create better value for shareholders without adding Compaq. He said the deal would give the new HP too much exposure to the struggling personal computer industry and dilute its

profitable printer business.

Hewlett voted for the acquisition when the board originally allowed chief executive Carly Fiorina to pursue the deal. Wall Street has been sour on the Compaq deal since it was announced on Labor Day. A spokeswoman for Fiorina did not immediately return a call for comment.

### WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve’s latest attempt to prevent the country from sinking deeper into recession could be followed by another rate reduction next month.

Economists wonder, however, whether lower borrowing costs will induce consumers and businesses jolted by the Sept. 11 terror attacks to spend and invest.

With Tuesday’s half-point cut, Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan and his colleagues have pushed the target for the federal funds rate to 2 percent, the lowest level since September 1961 for the interest that banks charge each other on overnight loans.

It was the third reduction of a half-point since the attacks and the tenth time the Fed cut rates this year.

The board held the door open to a further rates cut in the future. “The risks are weighted mainly toward conditions that may generate economic weakness,” the Fed said in a statement.

Some economists said the Fed could very well cut rates by another half-point at its last meeting of the year, on Dec. 11. That would push the funds rate down to 1.5 percent, a level last seen in July 1961, when John F. Kennedy was president. Others thought the next

cut would be by a more conservative quarter-point.

WASHINGTON — Some lawmakers of both parties say they are not ready to succumb to President Bush’s threat to veto their efforts to boost the \$40 billion Congress has already approved for anti-terrorism programs.

At the same time, Senate Democrats are forging ahead with a \$67 billion economic stimulus proposal, guaranteeing a partisan confrontation because the package has little Republican support.

Bush issued his veto threat Tuesday at a White House meeting with congressional leaders. He urged them to live within budget and emergency spending limits that were agreed to shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. New needs should be revisited next year, he said.

But Democratic leaders, as well as top Democrats and Republicans on the House and Senate Appropriations committees, say the spending deals were brokered before the recent anthrax attacks and the need for broader anti-terror efforts became clear. They say more money is needed for the FBI, Coast Guard, public health, food safety programs, as well as for the costs of waging the war in Afghanistan.

WASHINGTON — Investigators are using subway computer records to trace every step a New York woman took before she died from inhaled anthrax, hoping to solve the mystery of how she could have run into the deadly germ.

Eight days after the last anthrax diagnosis, a top federal health official said the worst of the anthrax-by-mail episode may be over. “For this episode, we’re out of the woods,” said Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health.

The big fear had been that the New York woman was the first victim of an anthrax attack by some means other than mail, but “every day that goes by without seeing another unexplained inhalational case makes it less and less likely” that happened, said Fauci.

But another attack — either new mailed anthrax-tainted letters or by some other means — can’t be ruled out. Particularly until the death of Kathy Nguyen is solved, “vigilance is heightened around the country,” said Dr. James Hughes of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nguyen last week became the fourth person to die from inhaled anthrax in the outbreak that began with the September mailing of tainted letters to news media in Florida and New York, and to Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle.

WASHINGTON — Failing to settle its antitrust case with all sides, Microsoft Corp. is now in the precarious position of complying with already negotiated sanctions while risking additional future penalties the trial judge could impose as early as next year.

Some experts wonder whether Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates jumped this week from a frying pan of secret negotiations into a potential fire in federal court.

# Doctor agrees to return to coroner job termed ‘not the most popular thing in the world’

CORONER, from Page 1

doctor because the coroner must be on call 24 hours a day and the position doesn’t pay much. County officials found that out as they started looking for a replacement.

McCullough said Selby asked if he would take the job again, and he agreed because he thought no one else would. “It was more a matter of necessity,” he said. “It’s not the most popular thing

in the world.”

Selby said Hellerud will remain as assistant deputy coroner. She added she thinks McCullough will do a good job.

“He seems to be taking this very seriously,” she said.

Dr. McCullough said he first became deputy coroner in 1967, after moving to Goodland from Colorado because patients here didn’t have much of a selection.

“When I came here there was only

one active physician,” he said. “It was a matter of going where the need was.”

Right after he moved to town, he said, the county attorney was on the phone asking if he would be the deputy coroner. The doctor said he quit in 1996 because he wanted to devote more time to his private practice.

Rules vary from state to state, McCullough said, but Kansas law requires commissioners in the largest county in each judicial district to ap-

point a district coroner.

Thomas County commissioners recently appointed Dr. Victor Hildyard as district coroner in the seven-county 15th Judicial District, which includes Sherman County. Dr. Hildyard replaced Dr. Richard Ohmart of Oakley, who resigned for health reasons.

The Thomas County commissioners also appoint deputy coroners in each county, he said, noting that a few counties in the district don’t have a deputy

coroner and rely on those in neighboring counties.

McCullough said the coroner’s job is to investigate any unexplained or unusual deaths to find a cause. He said coroners examine most accidental deaths, suicides or deaths where no one else is present and decide when to perform autopsies.

He said it wasn’t always that way, however.

The King of England first created the

office of “crown,” McCullough said. The crown’s job was to be aware of all deaths because the king was legally entitled to a portion of every dead person’s property, he said, but the position and its title have evolved over the years.

McCullough, 76, said he plans to keep the job until he retires, which isn’t going to be soon.

“I’ve seen too many people deteriorate when they retire,” he said.

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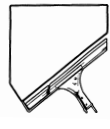
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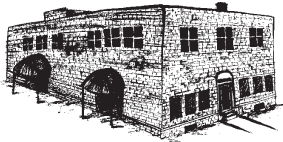
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