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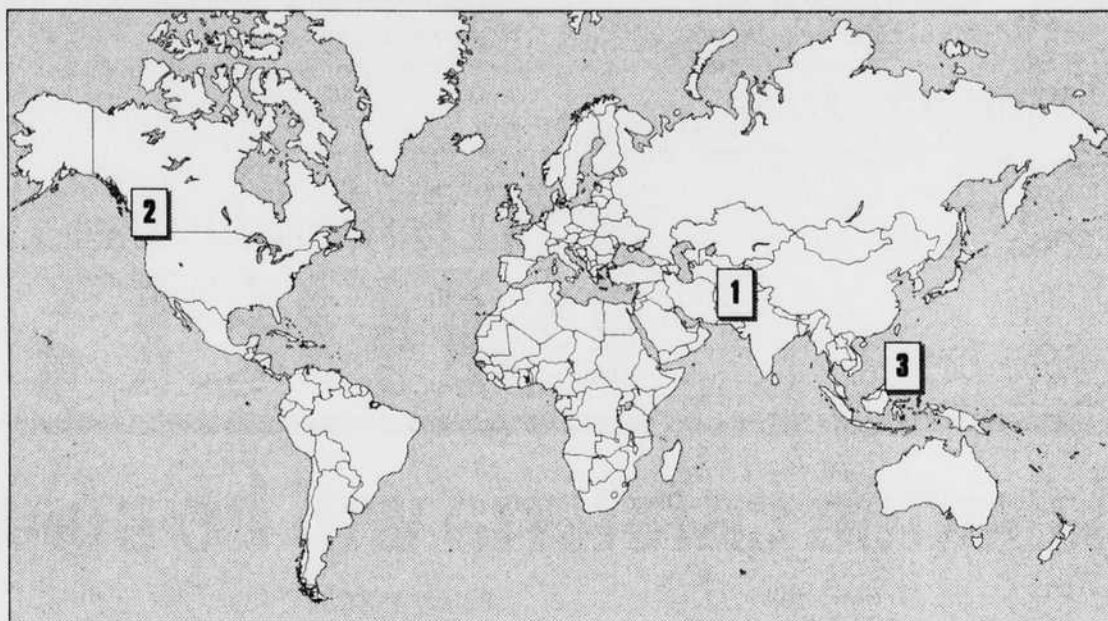
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# WORLD BRIEFS



## Factions struggle for control of stronghold

**1** KABUL, Afghanistan — Opposition forces said they gained ground Wednesday in eastern Afghanistan, a claim the ruling Taliban religious militia denied. The two front lines outside the northern opposition stronghold of Mazar-e-Sharif were reported calm.

Abdullah, a spokesman for anti-Taliban alliance leader Ahmed Shah Masood, said Masood's troops captured 25 Taliban bunkers in an offensive east of Kunduz province, 120 miles east of Mazar-e-Sharif. Taliban spokesman Abdul Hay Muttayn said his forces repelled the attack.

The alliance is backed into a small corner of northern Afghanistan. With Mazar-e-Sharif in its sights, the Taliban appear poised to capture the remainder of the country.

Meanwhile, the U.N. Security Council called Wednesday for peace talks between the two warring factions.

"The Security Council is deeply concerned at the dangerous escalation of the armed conflict, and it stresses the need to end the bloodshed," the president of the Security Council, Slovenian Ambassador Danilo Turk, said after the council was briefed privately on the latest fighting.

Turk said council members had expressed "grave concern" about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and deplored the Taliban's expulsion of several international aid agencies from the capital, Kabul.

Taliban leaders have imposed a strict version of Islamic law in the vast majority of the country that they control.

Abdullah said 50 Taliban soldiers were killed and 112 captured in Wednesday's fighting. He made no mention of alliance casualties. Abdullah spoke by telephone from London and said he had been in touch with Masood in northern Afghanistan.

Earlier, Taliban officials reported no fighting around Mazar-e-Sharif. Taliban fighters are reportedly closing in on the city from two sides, with the front lines about 12 miles to the west and 25 miles to the east.

## Canada signs treaty with western tribe

**2** NEW AIYANSH, British Columbia — Canada has signed a historic treaty granting land rights and self-government to the western Nisga'a Indians, a deal that could clear the way for similar pacts with dozens of other Indian communities.

To the rhythm of drums and ancient songs, Nisga'a chiefs neared the end of a century-old quest on Tuesday by signing the treaty, which gives them \$126 million in cash and title to 745 square miles of land in their rugged mountain homeland.

Hundreds of Nisga'a in traditional robes and headdresses burst into cheers when the treaty was signed at a community hall. Their chiefs stood in triumph on the podium, along with top officials of the federal and British Columbia governments, which had negotiated the treaty over the past 25 years.

The treaty must be approved within 90 days by a vote among the Nisga'a, then ratified by the federal parliament and the British Columbia legislature. The majority parties at both the federal and provincial level strongly support the treaty.

The Nisga'a chief negotiator, Joe Gosnell, told the crowd at the signing ceremony how Nisga'a leaders paddled by canoe to the provincial capital, Victoria, in 1887 to request a treaty. They were rebuffed, and the Nisga'a then endured "100 years of darkness," Gosnell said.

"Today, that has changed forever," he said. "Today we make history as we correct the mistakes of the past and send a signal of hope around the world."

It was a historic day not only for the 5,500 Nisga'a, but for all Indians in British Columbia.

None of the other 50 Indian communities has obtained a treaty this century, and the Nisga'a settlement is expected to serve as a loose model for other deals.

However, many British Columbians don't share their joy. Critics contend decisions of this magnitude should be made only with voters' consent.

## Military exercise held near disputed land

**3** MANILA, Philippines — U.S. and Philippine warships and aircraft staged live-fire military exercises today near a disputed South China Sea shoal, which could trigger protests from China.

The 18-hour exercise was held outside Philippine waters because the country has no agreement with the United States governing exercises on Philippine territory, said navy spokesman Salvador Cuba.

At least five ships and four aircraft joined the maneuvers, which involved simulated air and naval attacks using cannon fire to hit floating targets, Cuba said.

China was not notified of the military exercise because it was held in international waters, Cuba said, adding it was not meant to intimidate any country.

A Filipino navy official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the exercise at one point came very near Scarborough Shoal, which is claimed by both the Philippines and China.

Chinese Embassy spokesman Hao Yinbiao said the embassy was consulting with the Chinese Foreign Ministry about the exercise, which he said would raise concerns if it was in the shoal's vicinity.

Philippine officials say Scarborough, which lies 130 miles west of the province of Zambales, is within the country's economic zone that extends 200 miles off its shores. Chinese officials say the shoal has belonged to China since ancient times.

The exercise was held outside the Philippines because the Philippine Senate has not approved an agreement that would provide American troops with legal protections while on duty here, Cuba said. The accord was signed early this year by U.S. and Philippine officials.

The United States halted all joint exercises in the Philippines and visits by U.S. military ships in December 1996, when the Manila government closed a legal loophole that had shielded U.S. military personnel from prosecution by the Philippines for crimes committed here.

