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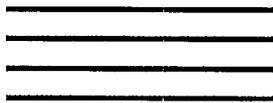
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**SOUTH ASIA**

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**Afghanistan: Key Taliban Base Falls**

Government forces yesterday captured the main Taliban base in the Kabul area, at Chahar Asiab, according to press reports. Loss of the base, about 15 km south of Kabul, puts the group out of rocket range of the capital, which was the main government objective, and gives President Rabbani control of the entire area for the first time since the civil war began in 1992. A spokesman confirmed on Saturday that Rabbani will not step down tomorrow as scheduled under a UN plan.

- Consistent setbacks in the Kabul area have not hampered Taliban forces in the west; [redacted] the group is poised to attack a major government airbase at Shindand in Herat Province.
- Opposition leader Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, who held the Chahar Asiab base until last month, is negotiating an alliance against the group with Rabbani ally Abdul Sayyaf [redacted] *but success against Taliban leaves the government less reason to join with its former rival.* [redacted]

**AMERICAS**

