

Y'slav tanks pound Croatian village: 15 feared killed

ZAGREB, Aug 2: At least 15 Croatian policemen were feared killed when Yugoslav army tanks based in rival Serbia pounded a border village in Croatia on Thursday, a police spokesman said, report agencies.

A Yugoslav photographer at the scene said six people identified as Serbs were also killed in the village where Serbian guerrillas participated in the raid, according to official Croat sources.

The photographer said there were bodies in and around the police station and the overall death toll could be higher.

Police said they were not yet able to reenter Dalj to establish an exact casualty toll.

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External and internal conditions should be created for Yugoslav people to decide the

country's system in constitutional, peaceful and democrat means." Pavlov was quoted by Tass news agency as saying.

Markovic, who arrived in Moscow on Thursday for a two-day visit, briefed his Soviet counterpart on domestic situation and efforts made by the federal government in seeking peaceful solution to the current crisis in the Balkan state.

Both sides maintained that the international efforts for stabilizing the situation in Yugoslavia should not run counter to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs.

The two sides also discussed bilateral trade and expressed willingness to expand cooperation in various fields.

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Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jacques Poos Thursday indicated possibility of European military intervention to stop the partition of Yugoslavia.

Speaking on British television Channel Four, Poos said: "We might need to consider some military interposition forces."

"We have to try to stop it because partition is not a solution because if it starts in Croatia, it will continue. So all the internal and external bor-

Baker begins talks with Palestinians

JERUSALEM, Aug 2: US Secretary of State James Baker began talks today with Palestinian delegates from Israeli-occupied lands in a bid to settle the problem of who will represent the Palestinians at a Middle East Peace Conference, reports AFP.

Baker, who Thursday secured Israel's acceptance to attend the Conference pending a decision on Palestinian Representation, arrived first at the US Consulate in Jerusalem.

Israel is refusing to accept Palestinians from East Jerusalem because their presence at talks goes against the government's claim to the Holy City its undivided and eternal capital.

Israel's Palestinian delegates Faisal Husseini, Zakaria Al-Agha and Hanan Ashrawi arrived minutes later for the talks.

OIC to discuss ME issue

ISTANBUL, Aug 2: Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) will focus their discussions on Middle East regional disputes and ways of strengthening relations among the member countries when they meet on August 2-8 here, Turkish government sources said yesterday, reports Xinhua.

The Istanbul meeting will be a first gathering for the 45 members of the organization after the Gulf war.

The sources said that political, economic, social and cultural issues are expected to be discussed in the meeting.

War threat in Yugoslavia

Country known as Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formed under King of Serbia, Alexander I, partly from old Austro-Hungarian Empire.

- 1929 Serb-Croat dissension leads King to abrogate constitution, form own cabinet, rename country Yugoslavia.
- 1934 King assassinated. Son Peter, aged 11, succeeds. Uncle Prince Paul becomes regent.
- 1941 Paul signs pact with Germany. Peter sets up own government. Germany invades. Guerrillas fight Germans under rival leaders—Tito and Mihailovich.
- 1945 Tito is victor, forms full communist state. Mihailovich shot.
- 1948 Tito breaks with Stalin
- 1953 Tito becomes President
- 1980 Tito dies. Collective presidency takes over
- 1990 First multi-party elections
- June 1991. Slovenia and Croatia declare independence. Federal army intervenes.

Mass starvation in Iraq likely

Mass starvation is coming to Iraq unless food supplies are increased, spokesmen for humanitarian organisations told Congress on Thursday, reports AP from Washington.

But a State Department official said the United States will not now release Iraqi funds in the United States to buy food for Iraq, as Australia has done.

"US private and official claims against Iraq far exceed the total official Iraqi assets now held in US banks," said Melinda L Kimble, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organisations, in testimony before the House Select Committee on Hunger.

\$ 650m foreign help needed at Chernobyl

The Soviet Union needs 650 million dollars in foreign contributions to help erase the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, Soviet and United Nations officials estimated Thursday, reports AP from Vienna.

The figure includes spending for health, resettlement, economic rebuilding, social and psychological rehabilitation, food and agriculture, and environmental monitoring and clean-up, said a statement released at the United Nations' Vienna office.

Atlantis launching postponed

The US space agency on Thursday postponed the launch of the shuttle Atlantis for at least a day because of bad weather that moved in while engineers were resolving a cockpit pressure problem, reports Reuter from Florida.

The shuttle was to have taken off at 11:01 am (15:01 GMT) but launch director Robert Steck at the Kennedy Space Centre said lift off would be rescheduled for about the same time on Friday.

18 killed in Colombian bus mishap

An inter-city bus loaded with passengers tumbled into a river in northwestern Colombia Thursday, leaving at least 18 dead and injuring another 13 people, local police spokesman said, reports AFP.

Officials were still trying to determine why the bus plunged into the Sucho river in the Antioquia Department between Dabeiba and Mutata, 600 kilometres (370 miles) from Bogota, police added.

Mandela demands interim govt

Nelson Mandela demanded the resignation of South Africa's white minority government Thursday and endorsed the immediate formation of an interim government in Pretoria, reports AP from Rio De Janeiro.

Mandela said his African National Congress would stop all future negotiations with President F W de Klerk's government on a new constitution that would give new voting rights to the 30-million black majority.

12 killed in Sydney fire

Twelve people were killed early Friday when a fire swept through a hostel for people with brain damage some 300 km (190 miles) north of Sydney, reports Reuter.

Police said seven residents of the former farm house at Dungog were being treated for minor injuries. Another 21 escaped without injury.

A police spokesman said the cause of the fire was not known but investigations were centred on two wood stoves. "There's nothing to suggest arson was involved," he said.

Heroin ring busted

Police arrested 30 members of a suspected Bronx-based heroin distribution ring Thursday and confiscated property valued at more than 40 million dollars, New York Police Commissioner Lee Brown said, reports AFP from New York.

Officers seized 225,000 dollars in cash, 20 fire arms and 2.5 kilograms (5.5 pounds) of heroin and took control of 12 businesses linked to money-laundering, as well as three houses, 127 cars and several bank accounts.

Bush's homage to Babi Yar dead

KIEV (Soviet Union), Aug 2: US President George Bush choked with emotion when delivering a harrowing account of the massacre of nearly 100,000 people by Nazi troops at Babi Yar in 1941, reports Reuter.

Bush, in the Ukraine on Thursday at the end of a four-day summit trip to the Soviet Union, laid a wreath at the site, now a powerful symbol of Nazi atrocities during World War II.

Standing before a huge cast-iron monument built on the edge of a ravine where the mass slaughter of Jews, Russians, Christians and Gypsies took place, Bush said:

"Here on September 29, 1941, soldiers forced men, women and children to undergo a ritual of humiliation and death.

"Victims stopped first to empty their pockets and placed their valuables in heaps on the ground. They moved forward to another place, where they had to remove their clothing which Nazis folded in neat piles — booty for the Fuhrer.

"Shivering, they moved to the edge of the ravine where marksmen murdered their prey, letting the bodies fall into a long deep pit.

"For 36 hours rifle reports and shrill human cries shattered the calm. The Nazis tried to drown out that horror by playing dance music over loudspeakers.

"Despite this macabre ritual, the screams made their way into the hearts of towns people and the pages of history.

"When the first round of shooting stopped, more than 33,000 bodies lay in the pit. Many more people had committed suicide rather than undergo the humiliating execution rite.

"Within 18 months nearly 100,000 people perished here..."

42,000 US troops still in Gulf: It exercises soon

WASHINGTON, Aug 2: One year after the Iraqi invasion, 42,000 US soldiers are still deployed in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams said Thursday, reports AFP.

Some 4,000 soldiers of an armored tank division are stationed in Kuwait where they will stay at least until September, Williams said. He added that the Pentagon had not yet made a decision on how long the deployment would last and that Kuwaiti authorities wanted the unit to remain there for the Gulf war.

Some 4,000 US soldiers also remain in Southern Turkey where they are part of the multinational force protecting Kurdish civilians from possible reprisals from Baghdad for their insurrection following the war.

The military situation in the Gulf has been fundamentally changed despite Saddam Hussein's continued grip on power in Iraq a year after he invaded Kuwait, US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney said on Thursday, report agencies.

The region is safer for American allies and extensive negotiations are under way with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states on repositioning US military equipment, joint exercises and visits by American forces, Cheney added.

US forces in the past year led the liberation of Kuwait, crushed Saddam's ability to threaten neighbouring states, demonstrated Washington's willingness to help friends and healed America's "open wound" over Vietnam, Cheney said.

"That's a long list of very significant developments that are absolutely unaffected by whether Saddam Hussein is still in Baghdad," he told re-

Special US privileges may go if Manila scraps Subic base

MANILA, Aug 2: The Philippines' close relationship with the United States will be endangered if the Philippine Senate rejects an agreement allowing the US Navy to keep Subic Bay naval base, a US official said Friday, reports AP.

"This is not a threat," embassy spokesman Stanley Schragger said in a radio interview. "This is reality. There is a political element in this thing."

On July 17, the United States and the Philippines announced an agreement under which the Americans would give up Clark Air Base in September 1992 but keep Subic for another 10 years for 203 million dollars annually.

Both bases were heavily damaged by eruptions of Mount Pinatubo in June. The volcano is 16 kilometers (10 miles) west of Clark.

But the agreement must be ratified by two-thirds of the 23-member Senate. Sixteen senators oppose the agreement, complaining that the compensation figure is too low and the 10-year extension too long.

The current agreement expires September 16, and presidential Executive Secretary Franklin Drilon says the Americans must leave both bases if the Senate does not approve the extension by then.

"What gives the Philippines the status to some degree in the United States is that we are partners in this security relationship and this relationship ensures US support for

Imelda to ship Marcos body home from Hawaii

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Marcos spokesman Roger Pejuan said in a telephone interview with radio station Darr here that the travel documents issued by the Philippine Consulate in New York to the former first lady are to expire on September 1.

"If we are to base the return of Mrs. Marcos on the expiration of the travel documents, she is supposed to return here before that happens," Pejuan said from New York.

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150 Tamils killed in Lanka

COLOMBO, Aug 2: Sri Lankan troops and Tamil rebels were locked in fierce combat today near a northern army camp that has been under rebel siege for more than three weeks, a military spokesman said, reports Reuter.

"We are trying to draw out as many terrorists as possible and kill them before going into the camp," he said.

About 150 rebels were killed and 24 soldiers wounded on Thursday in fighting for the base at Elephant Pass, the spokesman said.

More than 150 government soldiers and an estimated 1,925 rebels have died in the three-week battle, the military said.

Military reports on the fighting and casualties could not be verified by independent or rebel sources.

About 800 soldiers have been pinned down in the camp

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KIEV: US First Lady Barbara Bush (L) sits beside two Holocaust survivors while her husband US President George Bush speaks at the Babi Yar War Memorial Aug 1. The Babi Yar monument was built in memory of the nearly 100,000 Jews and other citizens of the Ukraine, massacred by the Nazis during World War II. — AFP/UNB photo

Death penalty for derogatory remark about Prophet

ISLAMABAD, Aug 2: Pakistan said Thursday it would impose the death penalty on anyone making a disrespectful or derogatory remark about the Prophet Muhammad (SM), reports AFP.

Chaudhury Amir Hussain, Minister of State for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, said the decision, made at a cabinet meeting Monday, was in line with a recent verdict by the Federal Court of the Sharia, one of Pakistan's religious institutions.

The Minister said the move was aimed at amending Article 295 (C) of the country's penal code which stipulated life imprisonment for offences against the Prophet.

Off the Record

START won't stop them

WASHINGTON: START won't stop them. Not the Earth Penetrating Weapon, not the Microwave Weapon, not the Nuclear Shotgun, reports AP.

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty signed by Presidents Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow this week relegates thousands of intercontinental missiles and warheads to the scrap heap.

But it allows the development of new kinds of long-range arms. And it doesn't stem a host of destructive weapons with exotic-sounding names on the drawing boards and test ranges of both countries.

The waning US-Soviet rivalry and growing budget constraints in both countries have not suppressed scientists' appetite for technological innovation.

"The enthusiasm on Capitol Hill and at the Defence Department for proceeding with these programmes is low, but the laboratories will always have an interest," said Edward Warner, a senior defence analyst at the Rand Corporation, a California-based think tank.

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No one-way ticket

MANILA: A daughter and son-in-law of deposed President Ferdinand Marcos will not return to the Philippines on one-way travel documents and instead are demanding regular passports, their lawyer said Friday, reports AP.

The lawyer, Manuel Lazaro, also said the Marcos family was insisting on coming home with the body of the former President, who died in exile in Hawaii in 1989.

On Wednesday, the Philippine government announced that it was lifting the 5 1/2-year entry ban on Marcos' widow, Imelda, and her three children so they can return and face tax fraud charges.

They were to be issued temporary travel documents instead of passports, which were cancelled when Marcos was ousted in 1986.

But the lawyer for Irena Marcos-Araneta and her husband, Gregorio Araneta, said his clients were demanding passports instead.

Space garden

CAPE CANAVERAL: Deep inside a laboratory stripped of soil and shielded from the sun, NASA is growing potatoes to see if they might thrive in a faraway, topsy-turvy garden — one in outer space, reports AP.

It is the field of the future, this sealed, two-story plant chamber that uses liquid nutrients in lieu of dirt, transports condensation into water, and recycles water, oxygen and, ultimately, even inedible plant parts.

"For any kind of extensive manned exploration or habitation in space, you're going to have to be able to make certain you have enough oxygen, water, food, as well as all the technological niceties that have been so elaborately described in all the sci-fi books and movies," said Paul Buchanan, head of biomedical operations and research at Kennedy Space Centre.

Needle exchange

NEW HAVEN: A programme that lets drug addicts swap used needles for clean ones is reducing the spread of AIDS by about a third among participants, according to preliminary data collected by Yale University researchers, reports AP.

The results, released Wednesday, represent the first reliable data showing needle exchanges work, said Edward H Kaplan, a Yale public policy analyst.

More than 10,000 marked syringes have been given to addicts since the New Haven needle exchange was launched in November. About 5,200 of the syringes had been turned in by the end of June, along with about 4,200 not from the programme.

Tests on both sets of needles led researchers to project nearly 33 per cent fewer new AIDS cases over the course of a year for addicts using the programme's needles.

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