

Italy repatriating 12,000 Albanians

BARI (Italy), Aug 9: Italy launched a huge air and sea operation today to repatriate more than 12,000 Albanians who landed on its Adriatic coast on Thursday in the third mass refugee influx from Albania this year, reports AFP. A Hercules C-130 took off from Bari over night carrying around 60 Albanians. Four other military aircraft were due to follow. The air lift will back up efforts to repatriate the majority of the refugees by sea. During the morning, 600 Albanians were due to embark on the ferry Tiziano in Bari where 3,000 Albanians spent the night on the quayside. Another 7,000 refugees who forced their way ashore on Thursday were being held at a disused stadium in Bari. Incidents erupted during the night between security forces and the Albanians who pelted their guards with stones and plaster. About 200 Albanians were said to have broken out of the stadium through the fence. Several refugees were taken to hospital. In Rome, the government said it was requisitioning five ships to start a shuttle service across the Adriatic while military transport planes and requisitioned civilian aircraft were also to be used. The repatriation effort was expected to take several days. Interior Minister Enzo Scotti ordered local authorities to requisition as many boats as possible to ferry the refugees home. The government of the Mediterranean island of Malta, where 675 Albanians were reported to have arrived, also said it would refuse to allow them to stay.

Iran's militants want end to hostage affair

WASHINGTON, Aug 9: Most militant leaders in Iran want to wind up the entire hostage episode because hostages no longer has any great impact on events, the spiritual mentor of Islamic Jihad hostage-takers in Lebanon was quoted as saying, reports AP. In an interview in Beirut appearing in Friday editions of the Washington Post, Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah was quoted as saying the release of the British journalist John McCarthy was arranged in Istanbul, where the Organisation of Islamic Conference met this week. "On his last trip to Iran in May, the Sheikh said he met with many Iranian leaders. I heard from the most hard-line of oppositionists there that they desire an end to the whole problem. The hostage issue no longer has any great impact on events," Fadlallah told his interviewer. He said, "I imagine that the ploys of hostages-dealing have been exhausted and everyone is looking for a way out."

Iran has admitted influence over groups holding hostages, but not enough to dictate to those groups. He noted that Iran had not linked release of hostages with release of Iranian assets still frozen by the United States. "Iran does not want its assets in exchange for the hostages. This process has nothing to do with the hostages."

The spiritual leader of the Shiite group also appeared optimistic about signs that Israel seemed ready to free captured Lebanese prisoners in exchange for Western hostages. Following McCarthy's release, Israel reiterated it is willing to release more than 300 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners held by its militia ally, the South Lebanon Army, as well as Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid, kidnapped from Lebanon by Israeli troops as a bargaining chip in July 1989.



SRINAGAR (India): Muslim militants of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) march with weapons in full battle dress during a general strike called by the militants August 6 in the northern Indian state's summer capital.

Iraq condemned for persecuting Kuwaitis Only PLO can represent Palestinians: OIC

ISTANBUL, Aug 9: Foreign ministers from Islamic countries condemned Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait, saying it was "fully responsible" for human and material losses and demanding compensation, reports AP. The condemnation came in the final communique Thursday of the 20th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the first such meeting of the group since the Gulf War. Mohammed Saeed Al-Shaf, the Iraqi state minister for foreign affairs who failed to convince the conference to call for a lifting of UN sanctions against Iraq, walked out of the final session. Iraq was condemned in the communique for "persecuting, torturing and killing Kuwaiti citizens, plundering public and private property and setting fire to and sabotaging oil wells."

The foreign ministers said Iraq was "fully responsible for the human and material damages inflicted upon Kuwait and other countries and demanded compensation from Iraq."

They also demanded that Iraq adhere to all UN Security Council resolutions on the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. The communique also praised the Intifada, the Palestinian uprising in the Israeli-occupied territories, as "the just struggle of the valiant Palestinian people."

It called for urgent international protection of Palestinians under Israeli occupation and reaffirmed it



OSJEK (Yugoslavia): The wife and daughter of a Croatian soldier who was killed in the Serbian attack on the east Croatian town of Dalj last week are comforted by her brother during the funeral service Aug 7.

Belgrade to invite foreign observers

PRAGUE, Aug 9: Yugoslavia has agreed to invite a wide-ranging group of international observers to help monitor and stabilise an uneasy ceasefire between the country's warring factions, reports Reuters. The 35 nations of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), trying to revive diplomatic and peaceful solutions to the Yugoslav crisis, made a second appeal on Thursday for a "permanent, complete and effective ceasefire accepted and fully respected by all parties involved."

A meeting of senior CSCE officials said it was "greatly disturbed by the appalling loss of human lives" in fighting between Yugoslavia's warring factions since its first ceasefire appeal five weeks ago. The group, which comprises all European states — including Yugoslavia — plus the United States and Canada, unanimously welcomed European Community offers to continue efforts to monitor a ceasefire and to include other CSCE countries in the monitoring mission.

Sources said they made their way on foot to the main road and caught a bus to Tatvan where they went to the police station. Five other Germans who managed to escape the kidnapping are being cared for in Tatvan. The 10 Germans—three children under 10, a 15-year-old teenager, four women and two men — seemed in good health but looked tired and dirty. On Thursday the Kurdistan National Liberation Front (ERNK) announced the forthcoming release of the 10 in Bonn. The ERNK is affiliated to the pro-Communist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has denied any involvement in the abduction. In Bonn, the Foreign Ministry confirmed the release of the 10 Germans.

British Labour Party leader in Kashmir

SRINAGAR (India), Aug 9: Gerald Kauffman, the British Labour Party's spokesman on foreign affairs, flew Friday to the Indian province of Kashmir where Muslim militants are fighting for independence, reports AP. Indian officials said the shadow foreign secretary was the highest ranking foreign dignitary they recalled visiting Kashmir since the insurrection escalated in January 1990. Minutes after his arrival at the airport in Srinagar, Kauffman was flown by helicopter to the official residence of Governor Girish Saxena. Scores of reporters thronged the gates of the airport but were kept away by armed policemen. A British High Commission spokesman in New Delhi said Kauffman will "observe the situation" in Kashmir and "talk to as many people as possible." Authorities tightened security in Srinagar, the summer capital of the northern Jammu-Kashmir state and the center of the Muslim movement to separate Kashmir from predominantly Hindu India. More than 2,650 people have been killed so far, including at least 963 this year. Urdu-language newspapers in Srinagar have expressed the hope that Kauffman would inquire into alleged human rights violations by federal troops in the Kashmir Valley. The government has denied allegations of systematic abuses. Kauffman will leave Srinagar Saturday for the city of Jammu, the state's winter capital, and return to Britain the same day.

Strike paralyses West Bank, Gaza

JERUSALEM, Aug 9: A general strike called by the unified leadership of the uprising in the occupied territories today paralyzed the West Bank and Gaza strip Arab and military sources said, reports AP. It marked the start of the 44th month of the intifada, or uprising, which began in December 1987. The Israeli army overnight Thursday destroyed the house in the Gaza strip town of Rafah of a Palestinian accused of membership in an intifada "shock group" responsible for the killing of several Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israeli authorities. The House of another member of the same group was also partially destroyed, military sources said.

Delhi-Moscow friendship treaty extended

NEW DELHI Aug 9: India announced a 20-year extension Thursday of a 1971 Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union calling in it an historic step towards strengthening the country's relations with the Kremlin, reports AP. The document commits India and the Soviet Union to helping each other in case of military threat. Moscow has been India's main arms supplier and its second largest trade partner after the United States. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh exchanged greetings with their Indian counterparts to mark the occasion.

Off the Record

Mostly Mozart

NEW YORK: What makes a musical performance sound "natural"? What does that sound like anyway? Is it always good? The Mostly Mozart festival concert Wednesday night raised those questions, reports AP.



Hans Graf, a conductor with solid Austrian credentials, led an all-Mozart program, consisting of the symphonies No. 19 and No. 25, Piano Concerto No. 15 with Anne-Marie McDermott as soloist, and the flute and harp concerto with flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal and harpist Marielle Nordmann. The Austrian-born Graf, making his festival debut this week, is principal conductor of the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg, Mozart's birthplace, and permanent guest conductor of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. It took the final work, the Symphony No. 25 in G minor, K. 183, to realize that this conductor, who resembles a cherubic boxer, was the musical heart of the evening. He opened with No. 19 in E-flat, K. 132, and was content to let the melodies unfold naturally in the first movement. He brought a natural lilt to the minuet movement natural because it was so dance-like. But generally, Graf rushed from one section to another, and the strings were not well focused.

January trial for Kennedy Smith

WEST PALM BEACH: William Kennedy Smith's judge on Wednesday set his rape case for Jan. 13, saying in court documents that he wanted to avoid conflicts with holidays while trying to seat a jury, reports AP.



Circuit Judge Mary Lupo tersely denied state motions for a speedy trial and change of venue. She also rejected bids by Smith's attorneys to exclude TV cameras from the courtroom, to seal further court filings and to impose sanctions on prosecutors for releasing allegations by three other women who said they had been attacked by Smith. Last month, attorneys for Smith, 30-year-old nephew of Sen Edward M Kennedy, gained a delay of his scheduled Aug 5 trial on charges he raped a Florida woman at his family's palm beach estate. They asked for three months to prepare his case and to allow a cooling off of the possibly prejudicial publicity, intensified by the prosecutors disclosure about the other women.

New home for stowaway bird

VANCOUVER: A pet pigeon from Japan that is believed to have crossed the Pacific Ocean by stowing away on a freighter has a new home, a new owner and a new name in Canada, reports Reuters. Welder Brian Kelm said on Thursday that the thirsty bird, now known as Sumo, turned up in May on the roof of his home in the British Columbia community of Pentictown, 256 kms (160 miles) east of Vancouver. He said the bird carried a tag identifying it as being owned by residents of the northern Japanese port city of Hokkaido.

Strictly for men

BUDAPEST: Hungary now shares at least one distinction with both the United States and Australia, according to hairdresser-entrepreneur Jozsef Gerendas. Makes in all three countries can pay to get their hair done by young women with bare breasts, reports AP. The so-called "topless" barber salon, Gerendas's third enterprise after a chimney-building firm and an auto market in a country town, opened this week in Budapest. Gerendas claims it is unique in Europe. "I've been inquiring and there's one in the United States and one in Australia," he said. Grabbing his radio telephone to take with him in his open-roof Volkswagen. "But there's nothing like this here. The institution is strictly for men, but the patrons Gerendas expects are not likely to come from the prefabricated flats around."

700-year-old cooking pots

SEDONA: An amateur US Archaeologist who led a 14 member team into a cave in the Coconino national forest here said on Thursday he had found three large, unbroken Singagua Indian cooking pots that were at least 700 years old, reports Reuters. Forest archaeologist Peter Pilles said the objects were among the largest intact pre-Columbian pots found in Arizona. The largest was three feet (90 cms) in diameter and the other two were two feet (60 cms) in diameter. The relics were taken to flagstaff, Arizona, to be placed on display. The orange and brown pottery relics were recovered by Andy Seagel of Phoenix, Arizona, who spotted them just inside the cave two weeks ago. Seagel said the location of the cave would not be disclosed to protect the site from vandals.

BRIEFLY

Former Dominican President jailed:

Former President of the Dominican Republic Salvador Jorge Blanco was sentenced Thursday to 20 years in prison and given a 13-million-dollar fine for corruption in office, officials said, reports AP from Santo Domingo.

Blanco, a social democrat who was President from 1982 to 1986, immediately appealed the decision to the judge hearing the case, Juan Maria Severino.

Retired General Manuel Antonio Cuervo Gomez, who served as Chief of the Armed Forces, was also given a 20-year jail term and a five-million-dollar fine. Cuervo also appealed his sentence.

The former President was found guilty of misusing more than 320 million dollars from a special Presidential account during his four years in power.

Japan to recognise Ethiopian govt:

Japan is to recognise the new government in Ethiopia led by President by Meles Zealawi, Foreign Ministry official said Friday, reports AP from Tokyo.

Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama was quoted by the officials as telling Friday's cabinet meeting that he had instructed Japanese Ambassador to Ethiopia Hisakazu Takase to inform the new Ethiopian leaders that Japan wants to cooperate in developing bilateral relations.

Former President Mengistu Haile Marime left the country for Zimbabwe in May and his government collapsed after military advances by rebel forces.

S Africa, Argentina restore ties:

South Africa and Argentina on Thursday resumed full diplomatic relations that were downgraded five years ago, the Foreign Affairs Ministry announced, reports AP from Johannesburg.

Argentina downgraded relations to the consular level in May 1986 at a time when many countries were breaking ties with South Africa to protest apartheid. South Africa's Parliament repealed apartheid legislation this year.

A ministry statement said the decision to resume diplomatic ties was made during a telephone conversation between South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha and his Argentine counterpart, Guido di Tella.

Thursday, Argentina named former rugby star Hugo Prota as its ambassador.

Tornado kills 14 in China:

A tornado struck China's largest city Shanghai and its environs, killing at least 14 people and injuring 161, according to media reports on Friday, reports Reuters from Beijing.

The tornado on Thursday dumped up to 231 mm (nine inches) of rain on the area over 10 hours, causing extensive flooding, the official people's daily said.

Some 3,000 houses were destroyed, it said.

Shanghai, China most populous city with nearly 13 million people, has already suffered its worst flooding in years when torrential rains hit the area in early May.

France may stop Mururoa tests:

New Zealand Disarmament Minister Doug Graham said today that France may soon stop its controversial nuclear tests in the south Pacific, reports Reuters from Wellington.

"Matters are moving quite quickly now and I believe that it may be possible that France will conclude that its present deterrent is sufficient and that there is no need now to continue testing to try and increase the strength of its weaponry," he told radio New Zealand.

Graham acknowledged he had no evidence the tests would halt.

Last month France finished this year's series of six underground nuclear blasts at Mururoa Atoll.

UNHCR to set up office in S Africa:

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is to set up a temporary office in South Africa and may help organise the return of political exiles, Foreign Minister Pik Botha said late Thursday, reports AP from Pretoria.

Botha said he had invited the UNHCR last week to continue discussions on a proposed agreement between the government and the UN body to facilitate the repatriation of political exiles.

Following a meeting here on Wednesday and Thursday between Botha, Justice Minister Kobie Coetsee, UNHCR Principal Legal Counsel Kalulu Kalumya and UNHCR Southern African desk head Nimi Akumoni, it was decided to maintain a temporary UNHCR office in South Africa.