

US ready to provide air, naval support in Sarajevo

WASHINGTON, July 1: The United States is ready to provide air and naval support to protect the international relief mission in Sarajevo but does not plan to deploy ground troops in Yugoslavia, the Pentagon said Tuesday, reports AFP.

If the ceasefire at the Sarajevo airport were not respected, the United States would provide, if asked, naval and air support for humanitarian aid deliveries, Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams said Tuesday.

"We would support other forces that would be involved on the ground," Williams quoted Defence Secretary Dick Cheney as saying.

Williams said the United Nations has not yet asked for

US participation in the operation at Sarajevo, where aid flights began arriving Tuesday after UN peacekeeping forces took control of the airport from Serbian forces on Monday.

"I just don't anticipate that we will put ground forces on the ground and I don't think we will be asked" by the United Nations, said Williams, responding to a question at a news conference.

But if asked, the United States plans to provide combat air patrol for an international truck convoy bringing humanitarian aid overland to Sarajevo from a port on the Yugoslav coast, such as Split, Williams said.

Meanwhile, six ships belonging to the US Sixth Fleet,

usually deployed in the Mediterranean, have been sent to the Adriatic Sea off Yugoslavia, Williams said.

"In light of the events, it makes sense to have it there," Williams said, calling the deployment "not unusual" and "not an exercise."

The ships — four amphibious vessels, a destroyer and a cruiser — comprise the Mediterranean Amphibious ready group and are carrying a contingent of 2,200 marines, he said.

If a ceasefire holds around Sarajevo, conforming to the provisions of UN Security Council resolutions, the United States will airlift food and medical supplies to the Sarajevo airport, Williams said.

Pakistan seeks common market of Islamic nations

ISLAMABAD, July 1: President Ghulam Ishaq Khan called for an Islamic free-trade bloc embracing the former Soviet Asian republics, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, the state-run news agency said Wednesday, reports AP.

"If the Muslim countries awaken in time... They can harness their tremendous potential to emerge as a strong self-reliant economic power," Ishaq Khan was quoted as saying at a banquet Tuesday welcoming Tajikistan's President Rahman Nabiyev.

Tajikistan last month became the fourth nation to join the Economic Cooperation Organization, established almost a decade ago by Iran, Turkey and Pakistan to develop economic relations.

Nabiyev, in Tehran before coming to Pakistan on Tuesday, signed several cooperation agreements with Iran.

Tajikistan, the only former Soviet republic that has linguistic ties with Iran, has been in the forefront of Tehran's efforts to boost its influence in the former Soviet Union's Muslim republics.

Iran is competing with Pakistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia for influence in the new republics.



ALGIERS: Algerian President Mohammed Boudiaf during his address in the House of Art and Culture in Annaba on Monday, a few minutes before he was assassinated by gunmen. —AFP/UNB photo.

Arafat urges UN to intervene in Palestine

DAKAR, July 1: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called for the Israeli-occupied territories to be placed under UN protection in an address to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit here Tuesday, reports AFP.

In his first major public appearance since his recent plane crash in Libya, Arafat, with a pistol on his hip and wearing his usual green battle-dress and Palestinian headscarf, thanked African leaders for supporting the Palestinian struggle.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leader urged the UN to intervene in Palestine as they had in Namibia.

"We propose that the

Palestinian territories be placed under international protection under the control of the United Nations during a transitional phase to prepare our people to exercise their right to self-determination and organise free and democratic elections," Arafat said.

Saying the Israeli Labour Party's recent election victory "demonstrated the Israeli people's wish to move towards peace," he expressed the hope that "that is reflected in the new government's policy so we can establish concretely a just and lasting peace in Palestine."

But Arafat said Israel had "authorised soldiers, settlers and armed militias to slaughter Palestinian civilians," practising a "policy of genocide."

UN to increase troops in Croatia

UNITED NATIONS, July 1: The UN Security Council decided Tuesday to strengthen by 180 troops the UN peacekeeping force in Croatia, and called on the Croatian government to abide fully by the UN peace plan, reports AFP.

Security Council resolution 762, adopted unanimously, called for an additional 60 military observers and 120 civilian police to be added to the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Croatia.

The Council also extended the Croatian peacekeepers' mandate to include Serbian-majority areas of the republic, dubbed "pink zones," not currently under UN control. That measure would bring the reestablishment of Croatian authority in the zones under UN overnight.

Rabin wants ME talks to resume

JERUSALEM: Israel's Prime Minister-elect Yitzhak Rabin has called for new efforts to get Middle East Peace Talks going and the United States immediately backed his efforts, reports Reuter.

But Palestinians in the occupied territories feared Rabin's rush to repair ties with Washington would encourage US pressure to wring concessions from them.

"We must move now to have a continuous negotiation. Let's sit down — not every four, five or six weeks," Rabin said in his first public speech since his general election victory over Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir a week ago.

"We were very pleased to see the statement by Rabin saying let's engage and let's stay engaged and let's get something done," Baker said in Washington.

Fundamentalists cheer Boudiaf's assassination

ALGIERS, July 1: Muslim fundamentalists on Tuesday cheered the assassination of Algerian leader Mohamed Boudiaf, and reports of a second gunman fuelled suspicions that the killing was a well-planned conspiracy, reports AP.

Boudiaf, 73, was killed Monday in a machine-gun and grenade attack while speaking to local officials at a culture center in Annaba, 600 kilometers (375 miles) east of Algiers.

Forty-one other people, including Interior Minister Abdennour Kerramane, were wounded by bullets or grenade shrapnel.

Algerian officials Monday blamed the killing on a gunman dressed in a riot police uniform. But on Tuesday, witnesses came forward saying a second gunman sprayed bystanders with bullets, lending support to earlier suggestions the killing was part of a well-planned conspiracy.

Boudiaf's son, Nacer, contended the assassination was "commanded and prepared in advance," and he called on authorities to "explain to the Algerian people why he was killed and who ordered it."

"The truth must be known," he said in a radio interview.

Muslim fundamentalists, targets of a six-month-old crackdown by the military-installed leadership, remained the popular suspects in speculation racing through Algiers.

But the son of Algeria's leading fundamentalists denied that his father's banned party was behind the killing.

BRIEFLY

Hand-written Qurans recovered: Egyptian police have recovered 13 hand-written holy Qurans worth an estimated 900,000 dollars which had been stolen from a government body, newspapers reported on Tuesday, says Reuter from Cairo.

The papers said the 300-year-old gold-painted copies of the Quran had been taken from the general book authority by an employee who intended to smuggle them abroad.

5 killed as typhoon hits Hanoi: Typhoon Chuck roared across Vietnam's northern provinces, killing five people and leaving nine missing, sinking boats and tearing 500 trees from their roots, official and local news reports said today, Reuter reports from Hanoi.

The typhoon, the first of the season, was the most violent to hit northern Vietnam in years, an official from the National Storm and Flood Control Committee told Reuters.

In Hanoi, Chuck tore down 38 telephone and electricity poles late on Monday night, knocked out power in a third of the capital, flooded large areas and uprooted more than 500 trees. Most of which were planted before French rule ended in 1954.

The typhoon, with winds up to 120 kph (75 mph), destroyed dozens of houses, tore up coastal dykes built to hold back the sea and sank dozens of freighters, coal barges and fishing boats in the coastal provinces of Quang Ninh and Thai Binh and the port city of Haiphong, official newspapers said.

Bush congratulates Mitterrand: President George Bush said on Tuesday he telephoned French President Francois Mitterrand and congratulated him on his weekend trip to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, which has been under siege by Serbian forces for three months, Reuter reports from Washington.

"I talked to President Mitterrand today, had a long talk with him on his trip there and other items as well," Bush told visiting German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel at the start of a meeting in the Oval office.

Asked by a reporter whether he approved of Mitterrand's dangerous visit to Sarajevo on Sunday, Bush said, "sure, absolutely. He did good work... I congratulated him on it."

"Supplies are going in there today and that's very good," Bush said.

Honecker may leave Chilean embassy: Chilean Foreign Minister Enrique Silva Cimma said Tuesday that former East German leader Erich Honecker may leave his refuge in the Chilean embassy in Moscow within the next 15 days, AFP reports from Santiago.

"There are no specific dates," Silva Cimma said, commenting on a news report in Santiago that said Honecker would leave the embassy between July 10 and July 15.

Silva Cimma acknowledged, however, that the story "may coincide in time, perhaps, with some solution that is moving ahead."

"The public will be informed once the matter has been decided," the foreign minister said. Silva Cimma has sought to keep Santiago's negotiations with Russia and Germany as low-profile as possible.

Cuban refugee rescued: A Cuban refugee said he spent nearly a week on an inner tube in the Atlantic Ocean and watched two friends die and two others disappear before he was rescued by pleasure boaters Tuesday, reports AP from Fla.

Carlos Quintin, 31, said he left his hometown of Santa Fe, Cuba, last Wednesday with four friends, all floating on inner tubes.

On the first night, two men were separated from Quintin and a married couple. Quintin said the husband slipped from his tube and drowned Sunday night, and the wife died Monday.

"They just loved each other so much," Quintin said through an interpreter from his bed at St Mary's Hospital. "She just went crazy."

Russian ferry catches fire: More than 700 passengers and crew were safely evacuated from a Russian ferry on Tuesday after it caught fire in the port of St Petersburg, Itar-Tass news agency said, reports Reuter.

Rabbani seeks UN aid

KABUL, July 1: Afghanistan's new interim president Burhanuddin Rabbani said his administration would work to ensure security and spread Islam in a speech late Tuesday, his first address to the nation since taking over two days earlier, reports AFP.

Rabbani also launched an appeal for aid from other countries and from the United Nations to help reconstruct his war-torn country.

A temporary constitution would be drafted with the help of Islamic scholars to provide for defense, propagate Islam, protect Afghanistan's independence and establish national unity, he said.

"The first mission of the Islamic government is to establish security, and it will make a serious effort to do that," he said in his nationally televised address.

Rabbani, who was installed as president Sunday, also criticized India for siding with Afghanistan's former communist government, but said he desired to improve relations with New Delhi as many Muslims lived in India.

Salman Rushdie Iranian MPs against lifting of death sentence

TEHRAN, July 1: Iran's parliament, despite the defeat of Islamic hardliners in recent elections, has reaffirmed that the death sentence against British author Salman Rushdie cannot be lifted, reports AFP.

"All Muslims and all Hezbollah (Party of God) forces in the world have the duty to apply the Fatwa" issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in February 1989, according to a petition signed by 170 MPs.

The late Ayatollah issued the religious edict calling for the execution of the Indian-born author for blasphemy against Islam in his novel *Satanstoeves*.

Reliable sources said the petition was still being circulated in the 270 member parliament and that all MPs were expected to sign.

Anti-state elements to be crushed: Sharif

KARACHI, July 1: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has said there would be no leniency shown in an army-led crime crackdown in the troubled Sind province, reports Reuter.

"All anti-state elements will be crushed with an iron hand," he told reporters on Tuesday after a brief visit to the provincial capital Karachi during which he met senior army officials conducting the month-old operation.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto asked Sharif's 20-month-old government to resign, blaming it for what it called an insurgency in the southern province bordering

India.

A resolution issued after a two-day meeting of the PPP central executive committee called for fresh elections under a neutral interim government.

"In case this demand is not met, the party reserves the right to resign from the (federal and provincial parliamentary) assemblies and launch a movement," it said.

But the central working committee of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party, which met in the capital, Islamabad, rejected the demand as a conspiracy against elected institutions.

The PPP regards Sharif's government as a product of massive election-rigging in

October 1990 after President Ghulam Ishaq Khan sacked Bhutto as prime minister on disputed charges of misuse.

Sharif arrived in Karachi two days after the Sind-based ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) party quit his government and asked its parliamentary deputies to resign their seats.

The MQM, representing Urdu-speaking Mohajir immigrants from India, accused the army of trying to crush it on the pretext of the crime crackdown.

But Sharif rejected the charge as baseless and said "anyone arrested during the crackdown would, if found guilty, be dealt with accordingly."



NETHERLANDS: American pop star Michael Jackson holds a young patient on his arm, during his visit to the Sophia children's hospital at Rotterdam on Monday last. — AFP/UNB photo

NATO facing financial crisis

BRUSSELS, July 1: NATO is facing a financial crisis as member states are less willing to contribute to the new command structure, said Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, general Sir Brian Kenny, who added that the organization's military cooperation agreement with France needed reviewing, reports AFP.

In the long term, he said, the net reduction of NATO forces following the end of the cold war would save money. But meanwhile the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was having trouble financing its new command structure.

"There is a financial crisis. Nations are less willing to

make (financial) contributions. The new command structure doesn't come without a price tag," he said.

NATO's military cooperation agreement with France, known as the Lemaitre-Alilleret accord (named after its two signatories) outlines the way in which French forces would back NATO in time of war. They were signed in 1968.

A year after France withdrew from the integrated military structure of NATO.

"That is certainly something that should need to be looked at," Kenny told reporters. "Maybe we'll come up with some other sort of format or framework for operations of the French with NATO."

He also said the new joint Franco-German army corps "could well bring France closer into NATO and it gives an entry back into the integrated military structure if there was a crisis situation."

Backing Kenny's comments on NATO's financial problems, another high ranking military official said "further costs" would be created by setting up multinational units or the new rapid intervention force which are both pillars of new NATO strategy.

In addition, some countries have refused to abandon the prestige of hosting allied headquarters which are "non viable solutions from a military viewpoint" or to suppress jobs

attributed to their senior officers.

"It is politically impossible to reduce in southern regions" on NATO (Italy, Greece and Turkey)," he said.

"If nations are not willing to compromise, it could create a major problem for the existing military machine of NATO. Money is the most serious threat more than the WARSAW pact," he added.

NATO military officials are trying to introduce a 25 per cent cut in staff costs at the allied general headquarters in Europe but because of the resistance encountered, SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) was keeping 30 of its 34 generals.

Off the Record

Choose between 'pizza' and 'smoke'?

SYDNEY: Pizza Hut said Wednesday it will ban smoking at all of its Australian restaurants effective July 12, citing concerns about passive smoking, reports AP.

Pizza Hut spokesman David Chapman said the company has a special responsibility to provide a safe and smoke-free environment to its staff and customers. The international fast-food chain has more than 180 restaurants in Australia.

"With a growing body of evidence pointing to the link between passive smoking, respiratory disorders and lung cancer, Pizza Hut has decided to make all its restaurants totally and permanently smoke-free," Chapman said.

"Our research shows that the average length of time a customer spends in a Pizza Hut restaurant is 45 minutes. For those who would prefer to smoke, this isn't a long time to go without a cigarette."

Peter Staples, federal minister for the aged, family and health services, said other restaurants should follow Pizza Hut's example.

In May, a woman won nearly \$50,000 from her employer in a landmark case claiming that 12 years of breathing cigarette smoke at work worsened her asthma and contributed to emphysema.

At the time, anti-smoking activists said the decision could open the door to large claims and force employers to ban smoking in the workplace.

Doctors involved in torture

LONDON: Physicians are involved in torture and in covering up torture in some countries, the British Medical Association says in a new report, reports AP.

"The problem of medical participation, tolerance or cover-up of torture is persistent in some countries and an occasional problem in others," said the report, released this week by a committee formed in 1990.

"The number of doctors involved is impossible to estimate due to the secret and illegal nature of the abuse."

The committee cited reports since 1989 of doctors being involved in torture in El Salvador, Turkey, Chile, Kuwait and Yugoslavia. The doctors were not directly involved in abusing the victim, but examined them and treated them during torture.

"We found that doctors had actively participated in the process of torture by certifying the prisoner's fitness for torture, reviving the prisoner after collapse, monitoring the prisoner's state during torture and giving false or inadequate medical care to the tortured person," the report said.

"Equally importantly, we found that many doctors who know that torture or other abuses are happening do nothing to challenge it."

The report added that one common form of collaboration in human rights abuses was the preparation of false or inadequate medical certificates for victims.

Non-smoker mothers, healthier infants

LONDON: More than 4,000 miscarriages of healthy fetuses occur each year in Britain because their mothers smoked during pregnancy, according to a report published by the Royal College of Physicians Wednesday, reports AP.

The risk of miscarriage was one-third higher among smoking mothers than non-smokers, premature labour was twice as common, and babies born to smokers were eight ounces lighter than those of non-smokers, the report said.

Babies whose fathers smoked although their mothers did not, were also lighter, the report found, either because of passive smoking by the mother or damage to the father's sperm.

Children under the age of five inhaling smoke from parents or carers resulted in up to 17,000 a year being admitted to hospital, according to the research by doctors, who studied international medical reports dating back 20 years, and compared these with British figures.

Their research found that maternal smoking during pregnancy and infancy was "the most important avoidable risk factor for infant death."

It's an attack on basic fundamental rights

WASHINGTON: The Democrat-controlled Congress is moving ahead on legislation to write abortion rights into federal law, setting up a veto showdown with the Republican administration, reports AP.

The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee Wednesday was considering a bill to protect the right to abortion. Sponsors hope the full House and Senate will pass it before the Republican National Convention in August.

The new push on the Freedom of Choice Act follows the Supreme Court's decision Monday that upheld the right to abortion but gave states new authority to impose restrictions.

The ruling "was a subtle, insidious attack on this most basic fundamental right," said Rep. Jack Brooks, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, whose panel passed the abortion-rights bill on a 20-13 vote Tuesday.

Instead of simply overruling the 1973 Roe vs. Wade opinion that legalized abortion, the Texas Democrat said, the court "pummeled it with a thousand small cuts."

"Four justices said, 'This (Roe vs. Wade) is a bad decision and we're going to overturn it as soon as we get a fifth,'" said Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass.

The Senate bill, unlike the House version, specifies that it is not intended to establish rights beyond those set out in Roe vs. Wade.

Moldovan govt steps down

MOLDOVA, July 1: The government of Moldova formally stepped down on Tuesday, acknowledging it was unable to cope with acute economic problems deepened by civil conflict, reports Reuter.

Deputies voted to accept the resignation submitted on June 9 by Valery Muravskiy and his cabinet. A new prime minister, expected to be chief Agriculture Minister Andrei Sangela, is due to be appointed today.

"Our main mistake was that we were not persistent enough in trying to solve problems facing us," Muravskiy told parliament.

The government's departure seemed unlikely to weaken the position of Moldovan President Mircea Snegur, who abandoned Tuesday's session to deal with conflict in the Dnestr region — a largely Russian-speaking territory fighting to break the rule of Kishinyov.

The separatists said Moldovan government forces had again shelled the Dnestr town of Bendery, scene of fierce fighting earlier this month.

Bendery's Deputy Mayor Vladimir Kharchenko said the bombardment had lasted for just under four hours.

"The Moldovans started shooting and did it with no reason. Of course we were forced to fire back," he said.

"What we have today is another attempt to continue the barbarous destruction of Bendery. We can't do anything. There are numerous fires in the city," he said by telephone.

"We have no means to extinguish fires. We are really helpless here."

Kharchenko denied a report on Romanian radio which said Moldovan forces had attacked the city's police headquarters.

Snegur accuses the Russian 14th army, still based in the republic, of supporting the rebels against the ethnically Romanian majority in Moldova. Moscow denies involvement.

United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said on Tuesday that Snipers had fired at members of a UN fact-finding mission near Bendery on Monday.

"The safety of UN personnel is a matter of grave preoccupation," he said.

He said, "this is the case for personnel discharging a mission of peace."

The war, on top of economic problems faced by all former Soviet republics, has had a devastating effect on Moldova's economy.