

Serbs poised to capture Srebrenica

TUZLA (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Apr 16: Serbs were tightening their noose Friday on Srebrenica, the largest of just three Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia. The town appeared on the verge of falling, reports AP.

Bosnian state radio said the town was under attack from three directions, and that it had intercepted a Serbian commander's radio order to: "Shoot to kill."

Artillery rounds were falling on the town at the rate of two or three an hour, said Commander Barry Frewer, a UN spokesman. His information came from local Muslim commanders and other sources, he said.

The town's fall would be a devastating blow to Bosnia's Muslim-led government.

At the United Nations, Bosnian Ambassador Muhammed Sacirbey told reporters he was seeking confirmation of Srebrenica's fall. He said telephone lines to the town had been cut.

For Srebrenica it looks like its all over. How do you expect defenders to protect the town without ammunition? Sacirbey said.

There was no independent confirmation of the reports.

The New York Times, quoting UN sources, reported Friday that Srebrenica's defenders were negotiating a surrender that would guarantee the safe evacuation of Muslim civilians and of troops at a garrison. The report said the town could be in Serb hands as early as Friday.

A Western ambassador on the UN Security Council, speaking on condition of anonymity, told the Associated Press that if Srebrenica falls, the council might scrap its agreement to delay tightening sanctions against Serbia.

Reuters adds: The United Nations said today it was preparing to evacuate up to 30,000 refugees from the besieged eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica if it falls to Serb forces.

Sylvana Foa, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said the UNHCR had 50 trucks ready to pick up refugees around the town if advancing Serb forces managed to capture it.

Rabin hopeful about resumption of ME talks Israeli shells halt Palestinian deportees' march

MARJ AL-Zohour (Lebanon), Apr 16: Palestinian deportees staging a "death march" toward Israeli army lines were briefly stopped twice Friday when shells were fired over their heads, reports AP.

Reporters on both ends of the march said they saw Israeli gunners and allied South Lebanon army militiamen firing 155 mm howitzers over the heads of the deportees and on the road in front of them.

In Israel, an army spokesman denied that any shells were fired in the direction of the deportees.

A four-shell salvo exploded harmlessly overhead just five minutes after the march had started from the deportees tent camp in southeast Lebanon. Twenty minutes later, the deportees resumed their march, brandishing copies of the Holy Quran.

"May God bestow martyrdom on us," they chanted.

About a half hour later, four more howitzer shells landed on the road leading from the camp to the Zommaraya gateway of Israel's self-styled "security zone."

The Israelis and their allies also fired two smoke bombs and intermittent machine-gun volleys on the road about 500 yards (meters) from the marchers.

The 396 deportees stopped again, held prayers and then resumed the march toward Zommaraya, which is 2 kilometers south of the camp.

Five Israeli tanks were seen taking up positions around the mined Zommaraya corridor.

In a similar march December 21, four deportees were wounded by the ricochet of bullets fired by both Israeli troops and the South Lebanon army.

The deportees expect the Palestinian delegation to Arab-Israeli peace talks to accept a US invitation and resume talks in Washington on Tuesday, and staged their march in protest.

"The Arabs have abandoned us," said the deportees' spokesman, Abdel-Aziz Rantisi.

The United Nations Security Council has abandoned us. Israel and the United States are against us. We have to rely on ourselves from now on to force our way back home."

AFP adds: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Thursday he was optimistic that the Middle East peace talks would resume as scheduled next week.

At a weekly meeting of his ruling Labour Party in Tel Aviv, he also announced that Israel would invest between 70 million and 90 million dollars in the occupied territories.

"I am optimistic that all the Arab delegations will take part in the negotiations. But I can say no more before the official announcement is made in Damascus," said Rabin, who on Wednesday met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The Palestinians, Jordan,

Lebanon and Syria meet on Friday and Saturday in Damascus to decide on whether to travel to Washington for the negotiations with Israel due to open Tuesday.

The talks have been blocked for four months because of Israel's expulsion of 400 Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip in mid-December.

Rabin, quoted by Israeli radio, also said Israel would invest between 70 million and 90 million dollars in the territories for infrastructure projects to create jobs for the Palestinians.

The territories have been closed for more than two weeks after a wave of violence in which 15 Israelis were killed in March. Since the closure, the number of attacks has fallen sharply, the Prime Minister said.

Before the territories were sealed off, 116,000 Palestinians travelled to work in Israel.

Soviet coup trial suspended

MOSCOW, Apr 16: The trial of the alleged masterminds of the August 1991 coup was suspended indefinitely Friday because of the illness of one of the 12 defendants, reports AP.

The presiding judge, Maj. Gen. Anatoly Ukolov, said the court would decide when to resume the trial after it received a medical report on Alexander Tizyakov, 67, who was rushed from the courtroom with heart trouble shortly after the trial began on Wednesday.

Tizyakov is at a military hospital in Moscow. His co-defendants have argued that the trial cannot proceed without him. The medical report will determine whether he is truly too ill to defend himself.

A doctor who was in the courtroom gave an unofficial opinion that Tizyakov could be ill for 15 to 20 days.

Before failed the coup, Tizyakov headed an association of state factories in the former Soviet Union. He was a member of the self-proclaimed "State Committee for the State of Emergency" that seized power from Mikhail Gorbachev for three days in 1991.

The other defendants include some of the most powerful men of the old regime: former KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, Defence Minister Dmitry Yazov, Soviet parliament leader Anatoly Lukyanov, and Vice President Gennady Yanayev.

19 killed in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Apr 16: Indian army troops attacked by Muslim militants retaliated with gunfire in two Kashmir towns, killing at least six civilians as an upsurge of violence left 13 others dead elsewhere in the troubled valley, reports AP.

Three civilians were killed and nine injured late Thursday in shooting by troops targeted for grenade attacks by militants in Badgam, central Kashmir, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported Friday.

The injured included an eight-month-old baby and a policeman who was hospitalized in serious condition, PTI said.

BRRIEFLY

15 miners die in Myanmar: Fifteen jade miners died and 11 others were injured when they were swept off the roof of an over-crowded mall train in northern Myanmar, the Mirror Daily reported Friday. AFP reports from Yangon.

The jade miners, travelling on the roof of the train on April 11 on their return from the jade mines in Hpakan region in Kachin state, northern Myanmar, were hit by the iron beams of a bridge it was crossing in the dark between Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin, and Mandalay city, 450 miles (700 kilometres), the paper said.

Trains have been especially crowded this week as predominantly Buddhist Myanmar ushers in the Myanmar new year 1355 with a five-day water festival which brought crowds on to the streets in all the big cities.

Air drops in Bosnia: German and French military planes dropped food and medical supplies overnight above Eastern Bosnia, a German air force spokesman said Friday, AFP reports from Frankfurt.

A German transall C-160 dropped 6,720 packets of humanitarian aid over Srebrenica, the Muslim town on the brink of capture by Serb forces.

A French transall also completed a mission, the spokesman said.

French and German planes have been participating in the airdrops since the end of March.

6.6 lakh at risk of AIDS in HK: At least 220,000 Hong Kong people — and possibly as many as 660,000 — are at high risk of developing AIDS, local newspaper The Standard reported Friday. Xinhua reports from Hong Kong.

AIDS experts warned, following the territory's first comprehensive survey, that most people did not believe they were in personal danger of being infected with the HIV virus that led to AIDS despite high awareness of the disease.

The 528,000 Hong Kong dollar (\$67,692 US dollar) survey, commissioned by the Hong Kong AIDS Foundation, finds 7.8 per cent of men and 2.3 per cent of women admitting practising high risk behaviour in the past 12 months, such as casual sex, sex with prostitutes, or sharing needles to inject drugs.

More women were at indirect risk through their partners as almost half of men with high risk behaviour were married.

11 killed in Bogota blast: A car bomb exploded Thursday at a crowded shopping mall, killing 11 people, injuring more than 100 and heavily damaging about 30 businesses, AP reports from Bogota.

President Cesar Gaviria, citing intelligence reports, blamed fugitive druglord Pablo Escobar for the bombing of the Centro 93 shopping center, five miles north of downtown Bogota.

He called an emergency National Security Council meeting Thursday night to discuss the bombing.

There was no claim of responsibility. Police have blamed Escobar's Medellin cocaine cartel for recently setting off 10 bombs in Bogota and other Colombian cities, killing 50 people and wounding more than 600.

Richest US science prize winner dies: Denis Burkitt, the cancer researcher who last year received the \$373,000 Bower Science Award, America's richest prize in science, has died. The Lancet medical journal reported. He was 82, AP reports from London.

Dr. Burkitt was also one of the first researchers to identify the importance of fibre in the human diet. Hundreds of thousands of copies of his 1975 book "Don't Forget the Fiber in Your Diet" have been sold worldwide.

Dr. Burkitt, who lived at Bisleigh 95 miles (150 km) west of London, died on March 23. The Lancet said in its current weekly issues.

He died a week after suffering a stroke, the British Medical Journal, another weekly, reported.

The Franklin Institute of Philadelphia last October named him as the 1992 recipient of the Bower Science Award. The award is presented annually for outstanding work in the life or physical sciences.

US may restore funding for spy satellites

WASHINGTON, Apr 16: The Clinton administration is seeking to restore funding cut last year by Congress for spy satellites, congressional officials and independent experts said Thursday, reports AP.

The biggest increase appears to be a 550 million dollar addition to the Central Intelligence Agency's satellite operations, said John Pike of the Federation of American Scientists.

While the intelligence budget is classified, it is widely thought to be about 28.5 billion dollars for fiscal 1993.

An administration official said some programmes have been cut in the 1994 request, including 200 million cut in the research and development budget of the National Security Agency which monitors communications worldwide.

Major against lifting of arms embargo for Bosnian Muslims

LONDON, Apr 16: British Prime Minister John Major on Thursday rejected a US suggestion to lift an arms embargo for Bosnian Muslims and said the flow of weapons to all sides should be cut off rather than increased, reports Reuters.

Major asked in a parliamentary question session whether he agreed that arms to the region should be choked off rather than increased replied. "I share the view... expressed about the need to damp down and not increase the supply of arms."

But in meetings with senior British officials US envoy Reginald Bartholomew repeated on Thursday that Washington would consider new moves against Bosnian Serbs, including air strikes and lifting an arms embargo, if they fail to sign a peace plan.

Giving detail of Bartholomew's talks with Foreign Office Minister Douglas Hogg, a British official said the US envoy stressed that the current US priority was, like Britain, to pass resolution rightening UN sanctions.

Bartholomew said that if that doesn't work then the US would consider asking the Security Council to lift the arms embargo, the official said.

He said Bartholomew, who went directly into talks with defence secretary Malcolm Rifkind after meeting Hogg, stressed that it was not on the agenda now. But if sanctions do not work then among a range of possibilities he listed lifting the embargo and also air strikes, the official said.

US President Bill Clinton's administration has said ending the arms ban was under consideration as part of pressure on Bosnian Serbs to sign a peace plan drawn up by international mediators Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance. Bartholomew, who met peace envoy Lord Owen, earlier on Thursday, briefed Hogg on his talks this week, with all parties to the Bosnian conflict and Yugoslav and Serbian leaders.

He told Hogg that the Bosnian Muslims and Croats had confirmed they were still behind the Vance-Owen process. But his overall assessment was that there is still a lot of work to be done before the Bosnian Serbs will sign.

Speaking in Zagreb on Thursday before heading to London, Bartholomew renewed a call to the Bosnian Serbs to sign up to the deal without delay. The US envoy was to fly to Paris later on Thursday and return to Washington on Saturday.

Major again rejecting international military intervention in Bosnia said the British government and its allies were seeking to widen and deepen UN sanctions against the rump Yugoslav state comprise of Serbia and Montenegro. He regretted that the new sanctions resolution had been delayed at the United Nations in New York.

Russia, one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, on Monday secured a two-week postponement of the resolution saying it gave the warring sides particularly the Serbs.

Asia's food shortage threatening world's living standards

CANBERRA, Apr 16: Asia's food shortage is a time-bomb threatening the world's living standards, an international rice industry organisation said today, reports Reuters.

Klaus Lampe, Director-General of the International Rice Research Institute, said that by 2025 the world would need 765 million tonnes of rice a year, up about 70 per cent on present consumption.

"Asia is adding 51 million people to the world's population annually," Lampe told a food seminar. That's an extra 51 million people who depend on rice as a staple food.

And the institute, a non-profit research centre based in Manila, saw no hope in boosting rice production, Lampe said.

Rice-growing areas had rapidly declined due to housing and industrial expansion while salinization and degrading irrigation systems were also reducing land quality and area, he said.

New methods were needed to achieve Asian food security and sustainable development and research was poor, said Lampe.

Australian development cooperation minister Gordon Bilney told the seminar China, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines were near food self-sufficiency, but depletion of all resources by growing population was still a problem.

"Environmental gradation is taking its toll on agricultural output with farmers forced to use even more marginal lands as population pressure increases," he said.



Former US president George Bush receives his honorary degree from the Kuwaiti Minister of Education Dr. Ahmed Al-Robei Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

DPRK won't bow to global pressure

HONG KONG, Apr 16: North Korean President Kim Il Sung vowed Thursday that his hard-line communist state would never yield to global pressure to open suspected nuclear sites to international inspections, a report said, says AFP.

North Korea also separately denied US reports that Pyongyang planned to sell missiles to Iran.

China's official Xinhua news agency, monitored in Hong Kong, said in dispatches from the North Korean capital Pyongyang that Kim made his comments at a banquet in honour of Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk, who was attending Kim's birthday.

The North announced on a March 12 that it would quit the treaty rather than allow inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency of two sites suspected of being used to develop a nuclear arms programme.

Kim was reported as again denying that North Korea sought to develop nuclear weapons.

Shihanouk has long been a friend of Kim's and has a residence in North Korea, China, the North's last communist protector following the Soviet Union's collapse, did not send a top official to Kim's birthday, one of the highest holidays in the North's calendar. It sent President Yang Shangkun last year.

Pak army chief postpones US visit

ISLAMABAD, April 16: Pakistani army chief General Abdul Waheed today postponed a visit to the United States after earlier putting off a trip to France amid a domestic political crisis, reports AP.

The general's visit to the US has been postponed, said Major General Nasrullah, head of the military's public relations wing, without giving any reason.

Waheed was to begin on Monday, his official visit to the United States, seen as crucial to Islamabad's efforts to mend bilateral ties with its traditional ally. He postponed a visit to France Wednesday.

Pakistan to help Egypt handing over militants

CAIRO, Apr 16: Pakistan is ready to cooperate with Egypt on handing over Muslim militants suspected of masterminding anti-government violence, a Pakistani diplomat said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Pakistan, under growing US pressure for sponsoring terrorism, has in the last week rounded up about 200 Arabs in a sweep to track down suspected guerrillas accused of plotting action against their respective governments.

Security sources said 74 of those arrested have been ordered to leave Pakistan while scores of others including Egyptian suspects accused of plotting attacks on tourists in Egypt, were still under interrogation.

"There is no extradition treaty between Egypt and Pakistan but, if Egypt asked for the handover of activists, we will certainly cooperate. We would be very happy to cooperate," the Cairo-based diplomat told Reuters.

"We want to cooperate to stem terrorism," the diplomat said. "Pakistan has no sympathy and will not allow any member of any nationality to use its soil to commit acts of terrorism or extremism against any other country."

Research guidelines for gene therapy

TOKYO, Apr 16: Japan has set guidelines for the first time on clinical research into gene therapy as a way of fighting AIDS and cancer, a Health Ministry official said today, reports Reuters.

Since 1990 when the United States first tried gene therapy on lethal genes, there has been increasing work on gene therapy, an advisory panel to the Health and Welfare Minister said in the guidelines.

As gene therapy could become an epoch-making technology in the 21st century, we have worked out guidelines to promote appropriate research on the therapy.

Off the Record

Dracula syndrome

JAKARTA: At least 50 families in a west Java village are living in fear of a Dracula-like visitation after finding blood stained marks on their doors, Indonesia's daily Jayakarta newspaper reported Friday, says Reuters.

No fangs have yet sunk into anyone's neck in the village of Cimone and police say the blood comes from chickens.

The police are looking for three men but suspect them of being pranksters rather than visitors from the other side of the grave.

Surrender after 21 years

ARLINGTON: A man who turned himself in after 21 years as a fugitive, 16 of them in Cuba, appeared in court Thursday and was ordered to stand trial for murder and attempted robbery, reports AP.

William White Graham, 38, also faces federal hijacking and kidnapping charges in Texas, prosecutors said.

Graham, who had been living in the San Francisco Bay area for the past five years, surrendered to law officers at Washington National Airport on Wednesday.

Prosecutors said Graham was one of four self-styled revolutionaries who killed two people during a bungled bank robbery in Arlington in October 1972. The group then fled to Houston where they hijacked a jetliner to Cuba, gunning down an airline ticket agent.

Graham, who did not enter a plea, was ordered to stand trial July 12 in Arlington County Circuit Court. He faces a possible life sentence if convicted.

Defence attorney Plato Cacheris said he was unsure why Graham decided to give himself up. "I assume he just got tired of it all," he said.

Graham had been working in the computer field in California, using the alias John Morgan Richardson, investigators said. He is married to a woman who lives in Miami, whom investigators would not identify.

Parents to pay \$84,700 for beating up teacher

NEWCASTLE, Northern Ireland: A teacher beaten up in front of her class by the mother of one of her six-year-old charges has been awarded 55,000 pounds (dlsr 84,700) compensation in an out-of-court settlement, reports AP.

The case was reported Thursday by the Ulster Teachers' Union in a debate about growing violence in schools at the union's annual conference at the seaside town of Newcastle 25 miles (40 km) south of Belfast.

Primary school teacher Shelagh McQuiston, 37, from Coleraine 50 miles (80 km) north of Belfast, was knocked to the ground, grabbed by her hair and kicked and punched in the attack three years ago, the union said in a statement.

It said she still suffers headaches as a result of injuries to her face, chest and stomach and has not worked since.

The compensation award for the physical and psychological harm she suffered was ordered by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, a government-funded body. The money will be paid to Mrs. McQuiston by the government's northern Ireland office.

The union, which represents 5,500 teachers in Northern Ireland, said the settlement is one of the highest involving a teacher.

The case was taken to the board on Ms. McQuiston's behalf by the union after her attacker was charged and given a conditional discharge. That court ruling meant no further action would be taken against Mrs. McQuiston's attacker provided she stayed out of further trouble for a year.

The attack was unconnected with northern Ireland's sectarian and political violence. The union said it resulted from Mrs. McQuiston reporting to the headmaster the child's unauthorized absence from school one day. "A promising teaching career of a woman in her early 30s has been brought to an end," the union's general secretary, David Allen, told the conference.



Hannah Blackford, 20, has her hands full at the London Zoo on April 12 when she was crowned 'Miss Beautiful Eyes 1993'. Hannah is pictured with Tyto, the barn owl. — AFP/UNB photo