

Status of Black Sea Fleet Ukraine calls for urgent talks with Russia

KIEV, May 29: Ukraine Friday called for urgent talks with Russia on the status of the Black Sea Fleet and warned continuation of the apparent defections of fleet vessels to Russia could have unforeseeable consequences, reports AFP.

In a note sent by Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk to the Russian Ambassador in Kiev, Leonid Smolyakov, Ukraine said the growing number of vessels hoisting the St Andrew's flag of Russian violated existing accords.

"The torpedos eventual agreements on the division of the fleet and does not contribute to the creation of Ukrainian and Russian navies on the basis of this fleet," the note stated.

Ukraine called for talks to be organized as soon as possible between Ukrainian and Russian officials and for a meeting to be set up soon between Presidents Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine and Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

Under agreements signed last year, the fleet has been operating on a "mixed" basis with a joint Russian-Ukrainian command structure, joint crews and joint logistical support for the fleet.

The Ukrainian request came as 22 more vessels, including 11 research boats and 11 rescue boats, hoisted the St Andrew's flag Friday, Itar-Tass news agency reported.

The latest "defections" brought the total number of fleet support vessels that have raised the Russian flag since May 18 to 20.

So far no large warships have raised the Russian flag.

Fleet officers have said the flag-changing was organized as an act of protest by seamen against the uncertain status of the fleet, the unresolved problems of citizenship for seamen and low salaries for sailors and officers.

Serbs launch artillery attack on Sarajevo NATO to provide air cover for 'safe areas' in Bosnia

BRUSSELS, May 29: NATO members agreed on Friday that alliance warplanes could be used to defend Muslim havens in Bosnia and told their military planners to investigate the options, alliance sources said, reports Reuter.

Ambassadors from the 16 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) nations also agreed new measures to make a NATO-led naval adriatic blockade of the former Yugoslavia more effective.

A NATO spokesman said the envoys discussed a controversial new western policy, including how safe areas might be defended with troops and air power.

He said NATO would consider any request from the United Nations for further help in former Yugoslavia but that allies remained committed to finding a political settlement to the war along the lines of an international peace plan.

NATO defence ministers reached a similar agreement earlier this week, but France — a major player in Bosnia, with some 5,000 troops on the ground — was not present at that meeting, France was represented at Friday's meeting.

Diplomats said there was broad agreement that NATO could provide air cover for the safe areas, since allied fighters are already enforcing a United Nations no-fly zone over Bosnia.

AP from Sarajevo says: An agreement to demilitarize Sarajevo was stalled as rebel Serbs launched their heaviest attack in nearly three weeks and the Serb commander skipped talks on the pact.

Bosnian Serb Gen. Ratko Mladic apparently did not attend the talks because of a battle in Goradze, 28 miles (45 kilometers) southeast of the capital.

More than 1,000 shells hit government positions around Goradze within two hours, according to a report on Sarajevo radio. It could not be independently confirmed.

Artillery and sniper fire hit Sarajevo, the capital, on Friday.

The fighting in Sarajevo and towns north of the capital was some of the heaviest since a May 9 cease-fire was signed by ethnic Serb and Muslim-led government forces.

The Bosnian government commander, Gen. Sefer Halilovic, and the chief of Bosnian Croat forces, Gen. Milivoj Petkovic, signed an agreement at Sarajevo's airport on the withdrawal of heavy weapons around the city.

But the vast majority of such guns are controlled by Mladic, who has commanded the 13-month-old siege of Sarajevo. The accord has no chance of success without his consent.



A French UN soldier works Friday reinforcing barbed wire supposed to stop civilians trying to flee Sarajevo. About 100 people try to leave the besieged city through Sarajevo's airport every night crossing the front line. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Pilot allowed hostess to take controls of Boeing

WASHINGTON: A pilot who allowed a hostess to take the controls of a Boeing passenger plane while landing in Philadelphia has been fined and had his licence revoked, the Washington Post reported Saturday, says AFP.

USAir sacked Jon Swartzentruber for having allowed a hostess to touch and rest her hands on the control of the aircraft during the flight from Tampa, Florida, on March 4, the paper said.

The airline also fired the Boeing 737-400's co-pilot and the hostess concerned.

The Federal Aviation Authority removed Swartzentruber's licence as FAA rules state that pilots may not allow anybody to touch the controls.

The newspaper reported that the FAA launched an enquiry after receiving a tip-off.

He survives 175-foot fall

PORTLAND: A man survived a leap from a 175-foot (52.5 metre) bridge Friday after rejecting pleas from police and a doctor to give life another chance, reports AP.

Travis Scott Batezel, 19, was pulled from the Willamette River after jumping from the downtown Fremont Bridge. He was uninjured, said Jan Cook, spokeswoman for Emanuel Hospital and Health Centre, where Batezel was admitted for observation and a psychiatric examination.

"That's a long way down and I haven't heard of too many people surviving that," said police Sgt Derrick Foxworth.

Batezel climbed over a railing on the lower deck of the bridge, which carries northbound traffic over the river, shortly after 7:30 am.

Rush-hour traffic backed up as police and a passing physician tried to get him to reconsider.

Ber floods German roads

KAMEN (Germany): Around 60,000 litres of foaming beer flooded a German motorway on Friday, blocking traffic between Kamen and Hanover for an hour, police said, reports Reuter.

A lorry carrying beer struck a barrier after suffering a tyre blow out and the boozey cargo split across the road.

Before the fire brigade could siphon away the beer, rain washed away the hazardous alcohol, letting the speedy German drivers resume their journey. Germany's autobahns are the last motorways in the western world without general speed limits.

Japan won't demand return of Kuriles in G-7 summit

TOKYO, May 29: Japan, under pressure to improve relations with Moscow, will not push its demands for the return of four Russian-held islands at this year's Group of Seven (G-7) summit meeting, news reports said today, says Reuter.

Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa told parliament on Friday he was content that the territorial dispute was raised at last year's Munich summit of leaders of seven leading industrial powers.

"Our country's stance was clearly presented in the political declaration at the summit last year in Munich, so it's not necessary to do it again," he quoted as saying by The Daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun and other papers.

Miyazawa's remark is the

latest signal that Japan, this year's host for the annual G-7 summit meeting, is easing its policy toward Russia and its President Boris Yeltsin.

For several years, Japanese leaders have used the summit as a venue to rally international support for their country's claims to the islands, which lie northeast of Japan's northernmost Hokkaido island.

US pressure is seen as a major factor for the policy shift. Earlier this week, President Bill Clinton wrote to Miyazawa urging Japan to donate 500 million dollars to a US proposed scheme to provide 4 billion dollars to help privatise Russia's state industries, Kyodo news agency said.

The United States would match Japan's pledge, while

Britain, France, Germany and Italy would be expected to provide a total 1 billion dollar, it said. The remaining 2 billion dollar would be raised through international funding institutions.

Under heavy pressure from Washington, Japan pledged 1.8 billion dollar in aid for Russia. It was Tokyo's biggest offer of aid to Moscow in years and appeared to mark a break with its policy of refusing large-scale aid until the territorial dispute is resolved.

Moscow seized the four islands — known in Russia as the Southern Kuriles and in Japan as the northern territories — after Stalin declared war on Japan in the closing days of World War Two in 1945.

Clinton liar, opportunist, says Iraqi newspaper

BAGHDAD, May 29: US President Bill Clinton is a liar, an opportunist and knows nothing about foreign affairs, an Iraqi newspaper said today in a stinging attack, reports Reuter.

"Four months after his entrance to the White House, Clinton's lies increased dramatically both at the internal and foreign levels," said Babel, published by President Saddam Hussein's son Uday.

It said Clinton was "stupid in foreign policy" and added that he had committed "a series of scandals in ministerial appointments and matters related to homosexuals and abortion."

Clinton's approval rating slides further

NEW YORK, May 29: The latest Newsweek poll shows that President Bill Clinton's approval rating has fallen to 36 per cent, the lowest point since he took office in January, the weekly said on Friday, reports Reuter.

His standing in a similar poll at the end of April was 46 per cent and, less than two weeks after his inauguration, stood at 51 per cent.

The latest poll was conducted May 26-27, just before Clinton's budget victory in the house. It found that 53 per cent of the 750 respondents did not think Congress should pass the economic package as proposed by the President.

In addition, only 31 per cent approved of the way Clinton was handling the economy.

Newsweek said 56 per cent of those questioned thought Clinton was losing touch with the concerns of average Americans and 49 per cent thought he lacked the ability to deal with the problems facing his administration.

The poll, which appears in the June 7 issue, had a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points.

UK people want cut in cost of monarchy

LONDON, May 29: A majority of British people want to see a cut in the public contribution to the cost of the monarchy, and most people think the Queen is "too glum,"



Queen Elizabeth

an ICM Poll for the Guardian newspaper showed today, reports AFP.

The survey, published ahead of next Wednesday's 40th anniversary of the coronation, showed that 50 per cent of those questioned wanted to

cut the cost of royal palaces and services.

An additional 14 percent believed the royal family should not receive any public money. The monarchy currently receives 50 million pounds (75 million dollars) a year.

People aged between 18 and 34 were specially keen to see a slimline Scandinavian-style monarchy.

An overwhelming 81 per cent said Queen Elizabeth II did a good job, but 64 per cent thought she often looked too glum.

As many as 79 per cent believed newspapers were wrong to publish transcripts of conversations allegedly involving members of the royal family. Only 17 per cent approved.

Even so, 39 per cent admitted they read the transcripts, including 36 per cent of those who thought the papers were wrong to publish them.

The survey showed 57 per cent said the royal family should set a moral example by not having relationships outside marriage.

UN asks Cambodian warring leaders to abide by poll results

PHNOM PENH, May 29: The Chief UN peacekeeper in Cambodia declared today that the country's first multi-party election in decades was free and fair and told warring leaders to abide by the results, reports Reuter.

"I have no hesitation in declaring that the conduct of the election was free and fair," Yasushi Akashi told a meeting of the all-faction Supreme National Council (SNC).

The Royalist Party, the leading opposition group, pledged itself to honour the results of the vote, but Phnom Penh Prime Minister Hun Sen said he wanted to see if the counting of the ballots went as smoothly as the vote itself.

"We are awaiting the election results with the hope that the counting of votes would proceed in strict conditions which would allow all concerned parties to satisfactorily accept the vote," he told the SNC.

His Cambodian People's Party and the Royalist Party FUNCINPEC are expected to take the lion's share of votes.

Fears of serious violence during six days of voting proved unfounded but worries continued that war might break out again when elected leaders try to form a government.

The Khmer Rouge had threatened to use violence to disrupt the vote, saying the election was being used to fulfill Vietnam's colonial ambitions over Cambodia. However, in the end the radical group sent followers to polling stations in what diplomats called a desper-

ate bid to take some credit should the royalists defeat the Phnom Penh governments party.

"We must applaud your historic achievement," Head of State Prince Norodom Sihanouk told Akashi as the SNC meeting began.

Sihanouk endorsed a proposal by Akashi that the winning party or parties immediately form an interim consultative cabinet to represent the people's will and help a peaceful transition to democracy.

"We have to take into account the decision, irreversible of our people," the Prince said.

"I don't say the period following the election and the proclamation of the result of the election will be absolutely calm and quiet," he said. We might face

difficulties even in the military field.

Four ethnic Vietnamese were killed and 10 injured when unknown attackers threw a hand grenade at people playing cards in Kompot province in the south. Shelling continued in Siem Rea province in the north, the United Nations said.

Akashi's declaration was a necessary step in making the vote binding under the terms of a peace treaty the four Cambodian factions signed in 1991, formally ending 13 years of civil war.

The determination of the election as free and fair does place a strict obligation on all parties to abide by the people's choice whatever it may be, Akashi said.

Nearly 90 per cent of regis-

tered voters, 4.2 million people, participated in the UN run elections. First results were expected to be announced later today.

Some officials of the 22,000-strong UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) strongly objected to the publication of preliminary results and said the tally should be announced only after all ballots are counted.

"People are acting as if peace has returned and everybody loves each other," one said. "But it still a volatile situation. There could be bloodletting."

Akashi said Cambodians were able to go to the polls free from the violence and intimidation that has brutalised Cambodian political life for a quarter century and continued

South Korea proposes talks with North June 5

SEOUL, May 29: South Korea accepted North Korea's proposal Saturday for an exchange of presidential envoys to discuss nuclear and other issues and proposed that working level talks be held on June 5, reports AP.

The proposed South-North contact would be the first since the eighth round of inter-Korea prime ministers' talks in Pyongyang last September.

Seoul officials have indicated, however, that if North Korea does not reverse its decision to drop out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by June 12, inter-Korean talks will be meaningless.

"We cannot delay the problem of solving nuclear issues considering its importance," said Song Young-dae, one of the delegates to the working level talks, on Saturday.

"We will first solve nuclear problems, and then will talk with the North regarding other issues," he said.

South Korea is demanding North Korea abide by an agreed-upon pact calling for

inter-Korean nuclear inspections in addition to international inspections.

North Korea's decision to drop out of nuclear controls reinforced suspicion that the hard-line Communist state is developing nuclear weapons, despite its denials.

Prime Minister Hwang In-sung said in a letter to his northern counterpart, Kang Song San, that southern delegates will meet those from the north at the border village of Panmunjom on June 5.

Arson attack leaves 4 dead in Berlin

BERLIN, May 29: A fire intentionally set in a residential building's entrance Saturday killed four Turks — two women and two children, all relatives — and injured two children, including a 7-month-old baby, police said, reports AP.

The fire was set in a Turkish-owned building in which only Turks lived, police said.

BRRIEFLY

Mikhail Gorbachev in Paris : Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev arrived in Paris on Friday on a five-day visit during which he will accompany President Francois Mitterrand on the French leader's annual pilgrimage to his wartime resistance hideout, reports Reuter from Paris.

Mitterrand and Gorbachev had lunch together Saturday. Today, they will visit the mediaeval abbey of Cluny and climb a hill at Solutre, in Burgundy, where Mitterrand sought refuge during World War Two.

Mitterrand climbs the hill every year, inviting only close friends to join in the excursion.

Gorbachev, the guest of an advertising firm, was welcomed at Paris airport by the Foreign Ministry's head of protocol. He was accompanied by his wife Raisa.

He is to appear on several television shows.

Floods claim 4 in Lanka : At least four people were drowned in floods caused by rains that damaged dozens of houses and left thousands of people homeless or marooned in southern Sri Lanka, officials said Saturday, AFP reports from Colombo.

With the onset of the southwest monsoon, heavy rains flooded villages in southern Galle, Matara, Ratnapura and Kalutara where navy boats Friday rescued some 8,000 families from their homes, officials said.

Most roads were impassable making it difficult for relief workers to transport food to those marooned in their homes and even to flood victims at some relief centres, an official from the Social Services Department said.

9 Kashmiri rebels killed : Nine Muslim guerrillas were killed in continuing violence in Kashmir, where a shutdown called to protest "atrocities" by security forces paralyzed the city of Srinagar Friday, police said, reports AFP from Srinagar.

Army troops shot dead three of the militants during an operation in central Badgam district overnight Thursday, Kashmir Police Chief Balwinder Singh Bedi said in the state's summer capital.

Bedi told reporters that three other guerrillas died in internal fighting, while three more died elsewhere in the troubled northern state late Thursday.

Meanwhile, police camped an indefinite curfew in parts of Srinagar to foil a planned demonstration by the outlawed Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) to protest the continued detention of its Chief Mohammed Yasin Malik.

Malaysia may buy US fighters : The US Defence Department notified Congress on Friday that Malaysia is considering buying 18 F/A-18D fighter planes with missiles and ammunition for 1.6 billion dollars, report Reuter from Washington.

This potential agreement would contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a friendly country," it said.

It said the planes would not affect the basic military balance in Southeast Asia.

Tigers kill 5 Lankan troops: Sri Lankan Tamil rebels killed five soldiers guarding a village in the eastern Batticaloa district early Saturday morning, a military spokesman said, Reuter reports from Colombo. He said about 20 soldiers were protecting the village, near jungles where rebels operate, when they were attacked. The rebels, fighting for a homeland in the north and east, did not enter the village, he said. One guerrilla was confirmed killed in the attack.

China executes 28 highway robbers

BEIJING, May 29: The authorities in the east-central Chinese province of Henan have executed 28 highway robbers who terrorized travellers and raped and killed motorists, an official newspaper reported, says AFP.

The Zhengzhou intermediate people's court sentenced 23 criminals to death in trials held May 13 to 18, the Henan legal news said in its Monday edition, received here today.

Another seven robbers were awarded suspended death sentences and nine given life sentences. The criminals, some of them armed with knives, looted drivers and passengers of money and valuables

Srebrenica to run out of water soon

BRUSSELS, May 29: The besieged Muslim enclave of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia will run out of water in a few days, putting the 25,000 inhabitants of the town at risk of an epidemic, an international medical charity said today, reports Reuter.

"The few sources which exist in the town will run dry in a few days," said the Brussels-based Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), which has helped provide water supplies to the town from surrounding areas.

"Besides the risks of an epidemic, this shortage simply aggravates the desperate conditions for the 25,000 inhabitants of the town," MSF said in a statement.