

Hundreds of refugees pour into Gorazde

SARAJEVO, Apr 6: Hundreds of refugees poured into Gorazde from neighbouring villages Tuesday as Serb forces pressed on with an offensive against the Muslim enclave in eastern Bosnia, the United Nations said, reports AFP.

Rose was going to the city after meetings Tuesday with Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic and General Rastim Delic, chief of staff of the mainly-Muslim Bosnian army. Delic told Rose that Serb forces were attacking the town from four directions and had taken nine villages, radio Sarajevo said.

The UN refugee agency said Tuesday that witnesses reported at least eight villages destroyed by Serb artillery in the southern part of the enclave, leaving some 1,500 people looking for shelter.

Major Rob Annink, a spokesman for the UN protection force in Sarajevo, said Serb forces had penetrated eight to 10 kilometres (five to six miles) into the southern part of the enclave and were continuing their attacks on the northeast and southeast sectors.

Clinton terms Whitewater issue as false

CHARLOTTE, NC, Apr 6: President Clinton said Tuesday he had been falsely accused in the Whitewater controversy and the American people should trust him and get "a little perspective" on the affair, reports Reuters.

Clinton gave a testy defence when two people questioned him during a televised town hall meeting about the tangle of financial and ethical dealings dogging his presidency.

"I have been the subject, sir, of false charges," he told one man from Bristol, Tennessee who listed what he said were Clinton's broken campaign promises on taxes and foreign policy and then asked him why people should believe in his credibility on the Whitewater saga.

"I think you ought to trust me," Clinton said. "You are free to disagree with me but disagreement is different from trust. We ought not to mix apples and oranges."

Earlier a soft-spoken young woman from Charlotte had also asked Clinton about Whitewater, telling him many Americans were "having a hard time with your credibility" because of the controversy and the reports that First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton turned a 1,000 dollar stake into a 100,000 dollar profit in the commodities markets 15 years ago.

"How can you earn back our trust?" The unidentified woman asked plaintively.

US prepares for showdown over N Korea's N-plan

WASHINGTON, Apr 6: A shipment of Patriot missiles left for the Korean peninsula as the United States prepared for a possible showdown over North Korea's nuclear programme, the Defence Department said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Spokeswoman Kathleen Delaski said one of the ships carrying the defensive missile systems was leaving from California Tuesday and that the second would soon follow.

Defence Secretary William Perry was also planning to head to South Korea next week to discuss the resumption of military exercises there.

The US announced last month it would discuss resuming suspended maneuvers with South Korea and deploy the Patriots after Pyongyang refused to open its nuclear sites for inspection.

preparing in case the diplomatic efforts fail," said Delaski. The spokeswoman said that US troops would not be flown in to South Korea for several weeks as the Patriots were expected to take some time arriving.

Earlier this week, Perry said the United States was pursuing the diplomatic path and was not currently considering a preemptive strike to neutralise North Korea's nuclear threat.

Delaski said that dates for Perry's trip were not yet definite but that the team spirit exercises -- which were suspended when North Korea initially agreed to inspections -- would be the focus of the talks in Seoul.

"We in the US believe that the exercise will take place but

we are still discussing it with South Korea," she said.

North Korea has objected to the exercises and considers them a preparation for war. Meanwhile, the Korean central news agency warned that war may break out any moment on the Korean peninsula as the United States increased pressure on Pyongyang.

"The US military has worked out an operational plan to hurl 600,000 troops, more than 200 warships and 1,600 aircraft and so on from the US mainland within 80 days in case of an emergency on the Korean peninsula," the agency said in a dispatch monitored in Tokyo.

"Facts tell that the situation on the Korean peninsula resembles that on the eve of the past Korean war," the report said.

Black Sea Fleet commander hurt with his own gun

SEVASTOPOL, Ukraine, Apr 6: The commander of the disputed Black Sea Fleet was in hospital after accidentally wounding himself with his own gun, the fleet press service said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Admiral Eduard Baltin, a Russian, was wounded in his right leg after a "malfunction of his pistol," but the wound was not serious and he was due to return to his post "very soon," the press service said.

First deputy commander of the fleet Vitaly Laryonov is to fill the post of acting commander while Baltin is recovering, it said.

According to reports in the Ukrainian press, the accident happened in Baltin's home near Sevastopol when he was showing his gun to guests.

Russia and Ukraine have fought for control of the strategic Black Sea Fleet, based at the autonomous Ukrainian region of Crimea.

Off the Record



Zika the newborn baby chimpanzee is held up for the cameras just after his delivery at Belgrade Zoo on Monday. It is the third baby chimpanzee to be born here in three years, with the help of a team of Belgrade gynaecologists. — AFP photo

Central Asian states returning to Islamic world

WASHINGTON, Apr 6: The former foreign-affairs adviser to the chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Tajikistan says the former Soviet republics in Central Asia face a slow but inevitable return to the Islamic world, reports USIS.

"That means the old communist rule would be swept away," Sergei Gretskey told an April 4 seminar at the Wilson International Center for Scholars.

"The fundamentals of Islam are now being taught in schools in Turkmenistan. Criminal punishment is handed out for polygamy," Gretskey said.

But while Central Asian Muslims are "gradually proceeding to return to their Islamic roots," they have not attained political rights, he said.

Oil spill drifts to Omani, Iranian coasts

KUWAIT CITY, Apr 6: The oil spill floating in Gulf waters is approaching the Omani and Iranian coasts, especially in the vicinity of the Hormuz Strait, a Gulf environment organisation warned yesterday, reports Xinhua.

The Regional Organisation for the Protection of Marine Environment (ROPME) said in a statement quoted by Kuwait news agency Kuna that Oman set up a fully-equipped team to combat the oil leakage.

All Gulf states expressed readiness to take part in the efforts to contain the crude spill, it said.

The 15,000-ton light oil spill was caused by the March 30 collision between Panamanian and United Arab Emirates (UAE) oil tankers.

Heir of 11th Duke spends night in jail

LONDON: A London magistrate granted bail Wednesday to the Marquess of Blandford, famously troubled heir of the 11th Duke of Marlborough, reports AP.

Blandford, 38, who has had several highly publicised brushes with the law and has acknowledged he has a drug abuse problem, spent Tuesday night in jail after failing to appear in court on charges of stealing a checkbook and not paying a tax fee.

The Horseferry Road Magistrate Court freed Blandford on 5,000 pounds (dhs 7,500) bail. Magistrate Stuart Black fined Blandford 200 pounds (dhs 300) for missing Tuesday's court date and ordered him not to take any taxis.

Blandford was arrested February 16 outside Tramps, a well-known nightclub in London's West End. He was released on bail.

But when he failed to show up for a court appearance Tuesday, a warrant was issued and police arrested him just before midnight as he drove through west London.

Last month the trustees of the multi-million-pound Blenheim Palace estate Blandford will one day inherit began proceedings to limit his eventual control of its 11,500 acres and one of the great houses of Britain. The present Duke, his father, is 67.

Sky diving to cure fear of heights

SANTA FE, New Mexico: A 54-year-old woman who tried to cure her fear of heights by taking up sky diving, plunged to her death when her parachute failed during her first attempt, said friends and relatives Tuesday, reports AFP.

Polly Perry's instructor, who was attached her by a harness, also died in the 8,500 feet fall.

"I told her not to do it. Too many parachutes don't open. She said 'It won't be a problem. I'll be strapped to my instructor,'" said one of Perry's cousins.

Perry had taken the jump as part of a week-long seminar aimed at curing people of their fear of heights, said a friend.

... for wearing miniskirts

NIAMEY: Attackers believed to be Islamic militants assaulted young women wearing miniskirts and sporting fancy braided hair styles in the central Niger town of Maradi on Monday and Tuesday, state-run radio reported.

It said groups of zealots roamed streets and marketplaces smashing brothels and beating women they considered immodestly dressed but did not say how many women were hurt or the extent of their injuries.

Authorities in the town, 650 km (400 miles) east of Niamey, said they would find and severely punish the attackers.

Islam has enjoyed a revival since political reforms began in Niger in 1990. In the devoutly Muslim southern town of Zinder, religious activities in 1992 banned the miniskirt and beat offenders.

They also sacked brothels, bars and the local offices of the country's leading feminist organisation.

Beijing, Berlin are sisters

HONG KONG: Beijing and Berlin have more in common than the letter "B" — they're sisters, reports AFP.

Berlin became Beijing's 19th sister city Tuesday, and the two agreed to increase their cooperation in matters ranging from the financial and the scientific to the cultural and the educational, said Xinhua, monitored here.



Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supporters defy State of Emergency regulations by carrying traditional weapons as thousands took to the streets of Empangeni in Durban on Tuesday to call for a delay to the April elections. — AFP photo

Death toll soars to over 100 despite emergency in Natal

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 6: The death toll in Natal Province soared to more than 100 Wednesday despite a 6-day-old state of emergency, but political leaders rejected the idea of delaying voting in the region, reports AP.

concluded Tuesday it was not possible to hold fair elections in Natal when the rest of the country goes to polls.

The province, which includes the Zulu homeland of KwaZulu, has been under a state of emergency since Thursday to quell political violence between pro- and anti-election forces. Violence has increased in the run-up to the national election — the first to include South Africa's black majority — as Zulu nationalists demanding sovereignty try to block voting in their strongholds.

There has been speculation political leaders will delay the

vote in Natal while allowing the country's three other provinces to vote April 26-28.

But Judge Johann Kriegler, the head of the IEC, said Wednesday the political climate, not the election date, needed changing. African National Congress President Nelson Mandela and Constitutional Development minister Roelf Meyer agreed.

"As far as I'm concerned, that would not be a viable option," Meyer said of a possible delay in Natal voting.

Earlier, Mandela told the radio the state of emergency must be given more time to take effect before a delay is considered.



Hanan Al Dick, 22, daughter of Palestinian leader Abu Jihad who was assassinated in 1988 by Israeli soldiers in Tunisia, makes a V sign as she returns on Tuesday to Jericho in the West Bank with 26 other Palestinian deportees. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Bulgarians demand early polls: Tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Sofia on Tuesday in the first step of an organised campaign for early elections in Bulgaria, AFP reports from Sofia.

The Union of Democratic Forces, the main anti-Communist alliance which called the demonstration, said it would do everything legally possible both inside and outside parliament to topple the government of Prime Minister Luben Berov.

Iran denies Israeli's presence: An informed source from the Iranian Foreign Ministry denied on Tuesday the presence of an Israeli pilot in the country, Xinhua reports from Tehran.

It was reported that an Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister said in a meeting with Indian officials that an Israeli pilot has been held in Iran.

The source said that Israel's aim of maintaining such "absurd" claims is to divert world's attention from its holding of five Iranian diplomats in captivity since 1987.

Pak FM meets Saudi counterpart: Pakistani Foreign Minister Sardar Asf Ali met his Saudi counterpart Prince Saud Al-Faisal in Riyadh Tuesday to discuss bilateral issues, the official news agency SPA said, AFP reports from Riyadh.

The agency gave no further details of the talks or of the Pakistan minister's visit.

10 sailors honoured posthumously: Ten sailors killed in an explosion aboard a nuclear-powered submarine were honoured Tuesday at a ceremony attended by President Francois Mitterrand, AFP reports from Toulon, France.

With 3,000 people looking on in chilly spring weather, the 10 coffins were draped with the red, white and blue French flag on the quai of the naval base where the submarine Emeraude is based.

UAE to pull out troops: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced Tuesday it was withdrawing its forces from Somalia after taking part in a multinational force to restore peace to the war ravaged African nation, AFP reports from Abu Dhabi.

The armed forces said the decision to pull out the nearly 800 troops was taken in coordination with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the two other Gulf states which joined the US-led operation "restore hope."

Quakes shake Japan: Two moderate earthquakes shook the northern Kanto area of Japan yesterday afternoon, the meteorological agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

No immediate reports of any injuries or damages were reported, police said.

The first quake, measuring 5.3 on the open-ended Richter scale, was felt at 1:21 pm (0421 GMT) and the second one measuring 5.2 at 2:20 pm (0500 GMT).

US condemns Iraq for killings of foreigners

WASHINGTON, Apr 6: The United States accused Iraqi President Saddam Hussein Tuesday of offering bounties for the murders of foreign journalists, UN and international relief workers, reports AFP.

The United States strongly condemns recent attacks against United Nations personnel and journalists in northern Iraq over the past several weeks, the State Department said in a statement issued by spokesman Michael McCurry.

Among those killed in northern Iraq recently were AFP correspondent Lissy Schmidt, a German citizen, who was killed along with her Kurdish bodyguard in an ambush on Sunday. Four UN guards were wounded by gunfire last month.

Mexican revolutionaries bent on giving women their rights back

SAN CRISTOBAL DELAS CASAS, Mexico, Apr 6: Before Spaniards set foot on South America, women in the region's Mayan Kingdom had enjoyed equal — if not superior — status with menfolk, reports IPS.

But Spain's conquest of the continent changed all that, and generations of indigenous women thereafter were forced to suppress any ambitions they may have for themselves and spend their entire lives serving their husbands and their children.

Now the revolutionaries who staged the recent uprising in Mexico's southern state of Chiapas are bent on giving women their rights back.

A few hours after initiating their January 1 revolt for indigenous rights, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) declared the "revolutionary law of Zapatista

women." This decree subsequently became an essential part of the rebels' demands as they began negotiations here with the government in early March.

"The subject of women is a special issue," said the EZLN's principal spokesman who is known only as subcommander Marcos.

"It's the topic that has received the most attention," Aadre Aubry, a French historian who runs a Mayan cultural studies institute in Chiapas, adds: "For the last 1,000 years, Chiapan women have been respected for their strong conscience and the powerful way they've shaped their history."

The Zapatista women have resurrected an age-old struggle that has been taking place since the conquest of Palenque, during the ancient Mayan empire in 650 AD.

when the sovereign Chol Queen Zack-Kuk was able to maintain the social harmony and cosmic order," he says.

During the talks, the rebels insisted on equal access for women to high community posts, a guarantee of women's right to work, equal salaries for men and women, and he right for women to decide how many children they want to have.

The list of demand also included and assurance of women's right to health care, to nourishment, to education and to chose her own spouse.

The rebel group also demanded more severe punishments for "family members or strangers" who commit physical or sexual assault.

Subcommander Marcos credits a powerful unit of indigenous female soldiers for the high regard given to

women within the EZLN. He said the unit was the key to the groups' first important military operation in May 1993, thus determining the future of indigenous women's role in the ranks of the rebels.

The rebel group, which says women make up a third of its force during combat, claims it does not discriminate against its female members. Indeed, three of those who made up the rebel negotiating team that held discussions with Mexico's special peace commissioner Anuel Camacho were women.

"The EZLN treats women like human beings, and in the units where women are in control, men have no problems obeying," said commander Ramona, one of the negotiators in a recent press conference.

"We obey orders and our orders are obeyed."

This was not the case in ordinary male-dominated

Plot to kill Honduran president

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, Apr 6: Authorities broke up a plot by drug traffickers to assassinate Honduran President Carlos Roberto Reina, the government said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The plot was exposed by a Nicaraguan, Roger Arguello, who told Interior Ministry agents about it after he and two others were arrested, Honduran presidential chief of staff Lucio Izaguirre said.

The three had been hired by a car-theft and drug-trafficking ring, and had entered Honduras to burn down a paint factory in the outskirts of Tegucigalpa to collect three million dollars in insurance, said Izaguirre.

The three would have been paid 80,000 dollars, he said.

Albania wants to join NATO

ANKARA, Apr 6: Albania wants to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Albanian President Sali Berisha said Tuesday, adding that he backed the principle of the partnership for peace initiative, reports AFP.

"We support the principle of the NATO partnership for peace," he said, adding: "we want to join this organisation."

Berisha made the comment at a press conference on the second day of an official visit to meet Turkish leaders, stressing that Ankara had expressed its "total political support" for Albanian membership.

The partnership, already joined by a large number of central and eastern European countries, allows for closer cooperation with the Atlantic alliance, and is seen as a first step to full NATO membership.