

US plans int'l drive against terrorism

WASHINGTON, Jan 12: The US government is planning "a whole series of cooperative ventures" against crime and terrorism in the coming year, Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff said Wednesday, reports AP.

"These are matters of common interest that the United States has with many countries around the world," he told reporters. But he quickly added that "there is nothing Islam-specific about our overall concern and policy."

A trial began in New York Monday of 12 men including Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, an Islamic religious leader, on charges of planning a religious war of terrorism against the United States. Prosecutors say they planned to blow up tunnels under the Hudson River to New York City.

Tarnoff said international cooperation on crime and terrorism is increasing, and he hoped it would increase further.

The (Clinton) administration is contemplating... a whole series of cooperative ventures bilaterally and multilaterally around the world with respect to international terrorism but also international crime," he said.

Tarnoff did not give any details of the anti-crime efforts planned by the administration.

He said the administration respects Islam as one of the world's great religions.

"When Islam or any other religion or any other movement adopts a policy of violence and terrorism, we oppose it," he went on.

Tarnoff said the US government also opposes terrorism by Kurds in eastern Turkey, Kurds and Turks are both largely Muslim.

"At the same time, we hope that it will be possible for the government of Turkey to continue to explore ways to increase its dialogue with responsible members of the Kurdish community," he added.

"And we have had some concerns, as you know, with the imprisonment of Kurdish representatives in the Turkish parliament but we have very vigorously from the initiation of (Kurdish) terrorism taken a very strong stand against it," Tarnoff said.



Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev (sitting) is surrounded by bodyguards on Wednesday during a hastily arranged press conference held in a village some 10 km west of Grozny. — AFP photo

Yemeni team calls off visit to S Arabia

SANAA, Jan 12: A high-level Yemeni delegation called off a visit to Saudi Arabia scheduled for Wednesday after a clash on the border between the two countries, officials here said, reports AP.

The delegation was to have paved the way for a trip to the Saudi Kingdom by President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The officials said he was due to travel on Sunday, but that visit had now also been called off.

The president and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia discussed steps taken to contain the border incident during a telephonic conversation on Tuesday, according to Yemen's official news agency Saba.

Officials here said Saudi-armed Yemeni tribesmen occupied a border post in the northeast of the country and hoisted the Saudi flag. A clash broke out with Yemeni border police, who recovered the post and ripped down the flag.

There was no official Saudi comment on the incident.

Earlier, this month Yemen and Saudi Arabia agreed to halt military movements along their disputed border and pull their forces back from the area, following a series of clashes.

Yemen claims sovereignty over three Saudi provinces — Najran, Jizan and Assir — assigned to the kingdom under a treaty signed in 1934. Sanaa argues that the treaty expired in September 1992 and is opposed to renewing it.

Mubarak criticises Rabin for war threat

CAIRO, Jan 12: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Wednesday criticised Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for calling on his country to prepare for war in the long term, reports AP.

"It is a very serious thing to make threats of war. This is what worries us about the extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in April," Mubarak said at the opening of the Cairo International Book Fair.

In a comment published in the Israeli daily Haaretz on Sunday, Rabin said the Jewish state "should prepare itself for a war in the more or less long term."

Mubarak, quoted by the official news agency Mena, said such remarks "worry us and frighten the other countries which want to sign peace accords with Israel."

"If we seek peace, we must discuss all aspects of peace," Mubarak said he regretted such remarks, "especially as they come from Rabin at a time when we are seeking to establish peace in the region."

Egypt has threatened not to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty if Israel refuses to join up when it comes up for renewal in April.

"It is hard for me as an Egyptian citizen to agree to sign this treaty without Israel signing it, because public opinion will demand that I account for my actions," Mubarak said.

First US fuel shipment leaves for DPRK

YOCHON (South Korea), Jan 12: A tanker left Thursday carrying the first US shipment of fuel oil to North Korea promised under an agreement in which the North is to dismantle its nuclear reactors, reports AP.

The Chinese-flag Da Qing 94 left with 24,000 tons of heavy oil. A second, Liberian-flag tanker was to follow, but was delayed by engine trouble.

Under a wide-ranging October 21 agreement aimed at ending worries over North Korea's suspected development of nuclear weapons, Washington pledged to ship 50,000 tons of heavy oil to the energy-deficient North within three months.

"We hope that the agreement can be fulfilled overall, not only in the area of supplying substitute energy, so that peace will come to the divided Korean Peninsula," National Unification Board spokesman Kim Kyung-Woong said in Seoul.

Kim said supplying oil to the isolated North would encourage it to open up further to the outside world.

In the nuclear agreement, the United States also pledged to improve economic and diplomatic relations with the North and provide it with two modern nuclear reactors worth 4 billion dollars.

In exchange, Communist North Korea agreed to freeze and then dismantle its present nuclear programme.

On Monday, US Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord praised North Korea for "meticulous" fulfillment of the terms of the agreement. Some members of the new Republican-dominated US Congress, however, have criticised the pact, and hearings to review it are scheduled next week.

The new reactors, which produce less weapons-grade plutonium, will be financed by an international consortium including the United States, Japan and South Korea.

Working-level officials from the three countries were meeting in Washington this week to work out an agreement setting up the consortium, called the Korea Energy Development Organisation.

In addition to the first shipment of 50,000 tons, the US-North Korean deal calls for Washington to supply 150,000 tons of heavy oil in 1995 and 500,000 tons annually thereafter to fuel conventional power plants in the North until the new nuclear reactors are completed in 2003.

The United States bought the oil for the first shipment from Honam Oil Refinery Co., a US-South Korean joint venture that includes America's Caltex, for 4.5 million dollars.

The shipment was delayed by a standoff over the North's downing of a US Army helicopter that strayed into its airspace in December.

Death rate from breast cancer drops almost 5 per cent in US

WASHINGTON, Jan 12: The death rate from breast cancer in American women fell almost 5 per cent between 1989 and 1992, the largest short-term decline in four decades, federal health officials said Wednesday. But the rate for black women rose, reports AP.

The biggest decline was among white women in their 30s, 40s and 50s, whose death rates fell 8 per cent to 9 per cent.

While the overall death rate was falling, 5.5 per cent among white women, it rose 2.6 per cent for black women.

There are 31 breast cancer deaths per 100,000 black women compared with 26 per 100,000 among white women each year.

Dr Samuel Broder, director of the National Cancer Institute, said, "Breast cancer is another example of a disease against which there is a differential course of progress in our society."

Minority death rates are also higher for prostate cancer, cervical cancer, diabetes, hypertension, asthma, fetal distress syndrome and other diseases he noted.

Despite the good news, we are far from satisfied. We need to make more progress against breast cancer in all women," said Broder.

Donna E. Shalala, the US secretary of health and human services, said, "These findings overall are encouraging."

But she added, "It's important to remember how far we still have to go in confronting breast cancer. We do not know if this trend will hold for the long term."

Fran Visco, president of the National Breast Cancer Coalition and a breast cancer survivor, said, "I hope it's true."

But it should not overshadow the fact we don't know how to prevent the disease or how to cure it yet," Visco said.

"Breast cancer without question is the disease women fear most," said Visco. "It has genetic components. You really don't know if your diagnosis means your daughters and granddaughters are at increased risk."

Breast cancer strikes 182,000 women in the United States each year and kills 46,000.

The statistics pointing to a downturn in the death rate came from the National Cancer Institute and the National Centre for Health Statistics.

The 4.7 per cent drop in the breast cancer death rate between 1989 and 1992 was the biggest short-term decline since 1950.

Broder told the National Cancer Advisory Board on Tuesday that improved breast cancer therapy and screening. A controversy is raging over whether women under 50 need regular mammograms.

In 1993, the National Cancer Institute stopped recommending that women in their 40s get regular mammograms, saying there's no evidence the X-rays save lives in that age group. Two studies published Wednesday in the Journal of the American Medical Association supported that advice.

But the American Cancer Society and the American Medical Association still strongly recommend that women get a mammogram every 12 or 24 months starting at age 40.

Govt-rebel ceasefire in Mexico reach first anniversary

LA TRINITARIA, Mexico, Jan 12: Across a length of yellow tape outside the village's colonnaded town hall, opposing groups of peasants stared and waited for hours in a standoff that reached neither climax nor resolution, reports AP.

The confrontation on Wednesday, the eve of the first anniversary of the government's ceasefire with peasant-backed rebels, is one of half a dozen in recent days that illustrate how the conflict in the state of Chiapas hovers between war and peace.

The new government of President Ernesto Zedillo and the Zapatista National Liberation Army rebels have made overtures, but show no immediate signs of entering talks.

Many Mexicans fear violence could erupt at any moment as long as neither side is down at the bargaining table to establish a permanent truce.

In the recent incidents, some peasants emboldened by the guerilla revolt have tried to seize control of local governments while other peasants have rallied to defend the authorities.

"We will declare this a town in rebellion," said Rosendo Gutierrez Juarez, a leader of about 300 poor peasants who failed early Wednesday to seize La Trinitaria's town hall, 32 miles (50 kilometres) south of the southern Chiapas city of Comitán.

A roughly equal number of supporters of Mexico's ruling party blocked that bid, lining up around the building with just 10 feet (3 metres) and the yellow string separating the two sides.

Neither group budged in the course of the day, cooking rice and chicken as the hours wore on.

Octavio, a supporter of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, was among the town hall's defenders. "I don't understand what they want," he said, fanning himself with a straw hat and motioning toward his opponents.

Among other demands, this week's demonstrations have been in support of Amado Avendano, the opposition politician who claimed he was cheated of victory in the Chiapas gubernatorial election last August.

Avendano has proclaimed himself head of a "Transition Government in Rebellion" that has the open backing of the Zapatistas.

One attempted town hall takeover turned deadly.

About 300 peasants stormed the town hall of Chicomuselo on Tuesday, touching off violence that killed the police chief, his deputy, two peasant activists and three other people.

Peasants held that building for about 13 hours before police drove them out with tear gas and bullets.

Drug found to reduce risk of heart failure

BOSTON, Jan 12: Administering the drug Zofenopril within 24 hours of a heart attack and continuing it for six weeks can reduce the risk of heart failure or death, according to a new study, reports Reuters.

Zofenopril, made by Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. is a type of drug known as an Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme (ACE) inhibitor, which opens constricted blood vessels making it easier for blood to flow through them.

In tests on 1,556 volunteers a team of Italian researchers, led by Dr Ettore Ambrosioni of the University of Bologna, found that six weeks of drug treatment reduced the risk of congestive heart failure by 46 per cent compared with placebos who receive a placebo.

The risk of death was reduced by 25 per cent.

Biggest black hole found

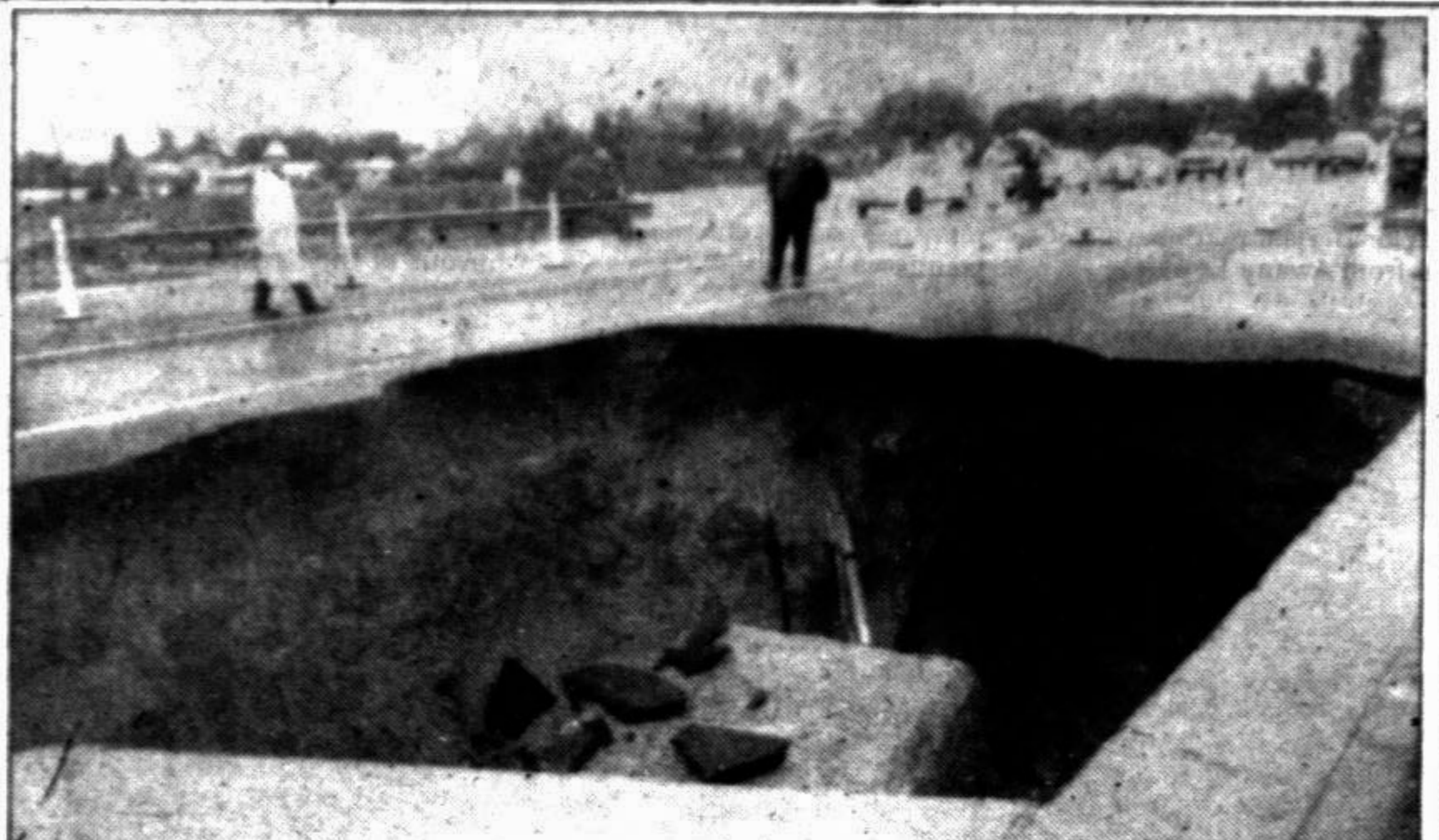
TUCSON, Arizona, Jan 12: American and Japanese astronomers have found evidence of the biggest black hole ever, a massive object the size of about forty million of our suns spinning 21 million light years from earth, reports AP.

The discovery was made with telescopes lined up about a third of the way around the earth called a very long base array radio telescope financed by the National Science Foundation.

"We think this is the best evidence yet for a massive black hole," said James Moran, a scientist with the Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics who is working on the project.

"The density inside is greater by a factor of 50 than any that have been found before," he said.

The 85 million dollar super telescope of 10 dishes strung from the virgin islands to Hawaii found what was believed to be a black hole at the centre.



Workmen stand outside a 30 foot deep sinkhole that appeared in a busy street in Industry, a suburb east of downtown Los Angeles early Wednesday. A motorist drove into the hole but was rescued with minor injuries by a resident of the area. — AFP photo

India reopens mission in Kabul soon

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: India is reopening its embassy in Afghanistan, one year after it was closed because of heavy fighting and the shelling on many diplomatic missions, a senior foreign ministry official said Thursday, reports AP.

But no date has been fixed for sending diplomats to Kabul because it was still not clear whether the city was safe enough, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The decision to reopen the Kabul mission comes at a time when Pakistan is sending its ambassador back to Kabul this week.

While India has remained neutral in the struggle between the nine Islamic factions for control of Kabul, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, chief of the biggest rebel faction, has often accused New Delhi of backing the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

India's arch-enemy, Pakistan backed Hekmatyar for years but now says its neutral in Afghanistan.

Since a civil war erupted after the fall of President Najibullah's communist government in 1992, at least 17,000 people have been killed in Kabul and much of the city has been reduced to rubble.

Almost every country closed down their missions in Kabul last year when the heavy fighting broke out in January. But since then, some Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia and Iran, who support one or the other group in Afghanistan have sent their diplomats back.

Alcohol and Pork Show Up the Claims of Jihad

Sarajevo: Everyday at noon the bells of the Catholic Cathedral toll, followed by those of the Orthodox Church around the corner. A few minutes later, the muezzin from the minaret of the Bascarsija mosque calls the faithful to prayer.

In contrast to elsewhere in war-ravaged Bosnia, the spirit of tolerance that defined cosmopolitan Sarajevo before the war persists among the Muslims, Serbs and Croats who still live here.

Were one to take the Serbian press at its word, Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, is the headquarters for the Muslims' Jihad, the "holy war" that Bosnian mujahedin (freedom fighters) are allegedly waging against Christianity. In Serb propaganda, echoed by the European press in milder forms, Bosnian Muslims are building an Islamic state, a strategic outpost from which Middle Eastern fundamentalists can penetrate western Europe.

Although the two-and-a-half year war has altered Sarajevo's ethnic composition, flooding it with Muslim refugees while triggering an exodus of Serbs and Croats, the different peoples of this besieged city still cling almost dogmatically to the ideal of a multi-religious, multi-cultural society.

The Muslim-led government has written multinationalism on its flag, holding out against international pressure to accept a truncated Muslim state. But with Bosnian army forces floundering on the battlefield and the government increasingly isolated, a religiously-oriented ethnic nationalism is slowly emerging as an alternative to secular democ-

ocracy.

In Bosnia the fall of communism followed by war opened the way for a religious renaissance within the Muslim community, just as it did for the other religious denominations throughout former Yugoslavia. Yet the role that religion has played in the political process has varied greatly from country to country.

In Serbia, the Eastern Orthodox Church backed nationalists' plans for a greater Serbia from the beginning. Orthodox priests and bishops travel regularly to the front to bless Bosnian Serb soldiers before battle. On television, Patriarch Pavle, the Church's highest cleric, urges the internationally-isolated Bosnian Serbs to press on in their "defence of God and Fatherland."

The Catholic Church in overwhelmingly Catholic Croatia maintains close relations with the conservative nationalist government of President Franjo Tudjman. In Bosnia, where about 800,000 Croats lived before the war, the Catholic hierarchy is split between liberal and nationalist wings; the latter openly backed the 1993-94 war of Bosnian Croat extremists against the Muslims.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Muslims make up almost half the population, Islam does not have the status of a national religion nor are many people in favour of giving it such status.

On Sarajevo's streets, evidence of Islamic orthodoxy is hard to find. High heels and colourful miniskirts are the fashion, alcohol flows freely and pork is available in the shops.

"Do we look like muja-

hedn?" laughs 27-year-old Muslim lawyer Aida Alibabic, whose Croatian finance serves in the Bosnian government army. "Some Ayatollah from Iran was here a few weeks ago. He left terribly disappointed because he really believed he was visiting an Islamic state."

In contrast to the aggressive fundamentalist Islam in the Middle East, Bosnian Islam is temperate and Western-oriented. This tradition is a legacy of the Ottoman Empire, under whose comparatively lenient rule part of the region's Slavic population, now the Bosnian Muslims, converted to Islam.

Tolerance and the experience of centuries-long coexistence with other peoples in committee. "If a ban on alcohol were proposed, I could veto it. But there's no-one suggesting that anyhow."

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Tolerance and the experience of centuries-long coexistence with other peoples in today part of the Bosnian identity. Most Bosnian Muslims are secular, non-practising Muslims and proudly refer to themselves simply as Bosnian.

"I grew up in a building with Serbs, Croats, Muslims and even Jews," explains Zlatan Nerevoic, a journalist from the Sarajevo weekly Dani. "We were all so alike that I didn't even really know what I meant to be a Muslim until I was older."

But today, with nationalism at fever pitch across the Balkans, the Bosnian Muslims feel increasingly forced to define themselves in national and religious terms. Many have begun to take Islam more seriously, attending mosque services and voluntary religious education classes. Arabic has become a popular second language to learn in high schools.

Cultural organisations such as the intellectual-led Bosnian Assembly, have made it their task to define and encourage a Bosnian national identity.

"We Bosnians are a special nation with our own unique cultural identity, of which Islam is one part," explains writer and Bosnian Assembly president Alija Isakovic. "This must be strengthened if we are to survive."

Nationalist voices among the Muslims are increasingly making themselves heard. The danger of Bosnian Islam drifting in a fundamentalist direction came to light in 1993 when Reis-ul-Ulema Mustafa Ceric, Bosnia's highest Muslim authority, spoke out against the sale of pork in Sarajevo. Although he stopped short of calling for its ban, isolated police units took the matter into their own hands, confiscating all pork in Sarajevo stores. The action prompted a public outcry and two days later the meat was back on the shelves. Ceric issued assurances that he was speaking only to the Muslim community, although observers say that his remarks opened the door for the unauthorised raids.

Even critics see Ceric, a graduate of the Chicago School of Divinity, as a liberal, open-minded figure. "Ceric would never try to outlaw pork episode shows that this faction exists. Although a minority, they are in the police, the military and even the political parties."

A handful of Islamic mercenaries from countries such as Pakistan, Algeria and Saudi Arabia have joined the Bosnian army as volunteers.

"They're fanatics, but we're not going to turn them away either," says government army General Jovan Devetak, who puts their total number at less than 200. Other sources say as many as 2,000 mujahedin guerrillas are fighting in the mountains between Tuzla and Sarajevo.

So far the Bosnian government has shown no signs of accommodating nationalist hardliners. Its leadership remains staunchly committed to a Western-style democratic state. But others argue that the West has abandoned Bosnia, and that if it is to survive, Bosnia must ally itself more closely with its friends in the Islamic world.

Should the Bosnian Muslims turn in this direction, say the democrats, the West will have only itself to blame.

— Gemblit News



Israel to get 50 more F-16s by month end

JERUSALEM, Jan 12: Israel will have 50 surplus F-16 fighter planes from the United States by the end of the month, the air force says, reports AP.

All but two of the aircraft are already in the country. Brigadier-General Amnon Harari announced Wednesday night.

Israel is upgrading the on-board communications and computer systems before the fighters become operation in a new squadron by the end of the year.

These are 1979-1980 vintage jets, but they flew very few combat missions or simulations," said Harari, air force equipment and logistics chief.

"The have the best manoeuvrability in their force fleet. We've assigned them to defend the skies."

Harari added that the air force faces a budget shortage of 660 million dollars by the year 2000 if it is to meet its expansion goals.

Israel confirmed last year that it was to take delivery of several dozen F-16 a/b "lightning falcon" planes from US stockpiles, starting from July.

Israel, which receives 1.8 billion dollars in annual US military aid, has US approval to buy 20 of the latest F-15 "strike eagle" jets in a two-billion-dollar contract with an option to buy five more.

They are due for delivery in 1997.

The Israeli air force, the biggest and most up-to-date in the Middle East, has some 740 combat aircraft, including more than 200 F-16s and 73 F-15, according to Tel Aviv's Jewish centre for strategic studies.

This article is written by Paul Hockenros, a US freelance journalist based in Berlin.