

Croat general in Hague to face trial for war crimes

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, Apr 2: A Bosnian Croat general gave himself up to the international war crimes tribunal Monday in an effort to prove his innocent involvement in massacres in the Lasva Valley, reports AP.

But in Pale, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic pardoned a Bosnian Croat sentenced to death for slaughtering Serbs, sources close to the leadership said.

The search for evidence of war crimes in former Yugoslavia mounted Monday as six investigators arrived in the northern Bosnian city of Tuzla on their way to suspected mass grave sites in eastern Bosnia.

The general taken into custody, Thomir Blaskic, was indicted in November for allegedly ordering troops to kill hundreds of Muslims in central Bosnia's Lasva Valley in late 1992 and early 1993. Blaskic's lawyer, Zvonimir Hodak, said the former Bosnian Croat army chief of staff would plead innocent to charges he commanded troops who rampaged through the valley in 1992 and 1993. Most notorious of the alleged atrocities was the destruction of the village of Ahmic where Bosnian Croat forces massacred 120 Muslims and torched their homes in April 1993.

Indicted with Blaskic were Dario Kordic, ex-chairman of the ruling Croatian party in Bosnia, and five other Bosnian Croats. They are still at large.

In Pale, sources gave no explanation for Karadzic's decision Monday to pardon Ivan Stjepanovic, 26 found guilty last week of war crimes against Serb civilians by a Serb military court in the northwestern town of Banja Luka.

Besides Stjepanovic, eighteen Muslim prisoners who are being screened for war crimes by local Serb authorities might also be extradited, the sources said.

The Hague court, formed by the United Nations to try war crimes suspects in the former Yugoslavia, has indicted Karadzic for his alleged role in mass killings of Muslim civilians in Bosnia.

Hawala Case : 7 ex-ministers won't get Cong nominations

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: India's ruling Congress Party has said that it will deny tickets to run in general elections to seven former government ministers charged in an 18 million dollar political corruption scandal, reports Reuters.

Considering the present situation, it is not feasible to give Congress tickets to the seven erstwhile ministers in the Union Council of Ministers who resigned recently on being charge-sheeted. Janardhana Pojary, General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee said in a statement.

Pojary, who released the statement after a meeting of the Congress Central Election Committee late on Monday, was referring to seven ministers who recently quit after being implicated in the "hawala" or black money scandal.

The seven are Bairam Jakkhar, R K Dhawan, Buta Singh, V C Shukla, Madhav Rao Scindia, Kamal Nath and Arvind Netam. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has brought charges against all seven.

They have all denied wrongdoing. The bribes-for-favours case has hit all major political parties, forcing the leader of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, L K Advani, to quit his seat in parliament before being charged.

The Press Trust of India said the Congress election committee took no decision on C K Jaffer Sharief, a former minister who was no longer in the government when charged in the widening case, which is still under investigation by the CBI.

Meanwhile, the first major opinion poll ahead of Indian general elections said today that the ruling Congress Party

appeared likely to lose its parliamentary majority but could remain the single biggest party.

The poll, printed in the weekly magazine outlook and conducted by Dun and Bradstreet Marketing Research Pvt Ltd, said respondents indicated that if the election were held now, Congress would win 191 of 537 parliamentary seats covered in the survey.

The poll said the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would capture 170 seats and the left front, a coalition of left wing parties, would win 139. Other parties and independents would take the remaining 37, it said.

In the last general election in 1991, Congress fell short of an absolute majority with 227 seats but with subsequent defections and the support of allied parties later clinched a majority.

Expel Masari or lose arms contracts, KSA warns UK

LONDON, Apr 2: Saudi Arabia's ambassador to London on Monday made clear his country would pull out of huge arms contracts with Britain unless it expels a Saudi dissident who has campaigned against the Saudi royal family, reports Reuters.

Ambassador Ghazi Algosabi told the BBC in a television interview screened on Monday evening that Britain will lose millions of pounds (dollars) in contracts unless Mohammed Masari is deported.

"If you are so insistent that I am going to tell you that the continued presence here will harm British relation and trade relations I'm going to tell you that yes."

He denied the demands amounted to blackmail saying "It's not blackmail, blackmail is when you do something illegal... we are a sovereign country. We can buy wherever else we want," said Algosabi.

AP adds: Britain Monday night stressed how much it values ties with Saudi Arabia following a warning by the Saudi envoy that trade deals are at risk unless London expels a leading dissident, reports AP.

Former Saudi physics professor Mohammed Al-Masari, 49, a fierce critic of Saudi Arabia's ruling royal family and of its human rights record, is fighting deportation to the Caribbean island of Dominica, which has offered to accept him.

Britain must say this week whether it will revoke its decision to deport Al-Masari. Prime Minister John Major's government has said his activities in London jeopardize Saudi contracts with British companies, including defence contractors.

Britain, which competes mainly with the United States to sell arms to Saudi Arabia, is keen to boost its sales there.

In 1985, Saudi Arabia signed to buy more than 15 billion worth of British arms and in 1993 ordered 48 Tornado fighter planes and other British military equipment worth 6 billion.

Britain also sells its Challenger tank to the Saudis.

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BRIEFLY

Mother Teresa leaves hospital: Nobel peace laureate Mother Teresa was released from hospital yesterday after fracturing her collar-bone in a weekend fall, an aide said, Reuters reports from Calcutta.

"We are very happy to see her back, but she will need at least two weeks of rest," Sister Pricilla of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta told Reuters.

The 85-year-old Catholic missionary, fitted with a heart pacemaker, fell late on Sunday and broke her collar-bone.

Lorry mishap claims 40 in Zaire: At least 40 people died, many of them burnt alive, when a lorry carrying passengers and barrels of petrol and diesel oil crashed and caught fire near the Zaire capital, Kinshasa state radio said on Monday, Reuters reports from Kinshasa.

The radio said the casualty figure was provisional as many people had been burnt in the inferno which followed the crash on Sunday night at Matadi Mayo 25 km (15 miles) outside Kinshasa.

UNITA frees 18 POWs: Angola's UNITA opposition group on Monday released 18 Prisoners of War (POWs), most of them government soldiers from prisons around its bush headquarters in Bailundo, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) said, Reuters reports from Luanda.

On April 1 the ICRC supervised the releases of 18 people detained by UNITA in the location of Bailundo in the province of Humbo a statement by the ICRC said.

The detainees were taken to locations of their choice, the ICRC said, adding that nine of the prisoners had chosen to remain in Bailundo.



Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres receives a golden sword from Sultan Qaboos in his palace in Salalah in Oman on Monday. Peres makes his first historic visit to Oman, the first in a Gulf Arab country. — AFP/UNB photo

3 prisoners killed in Argentina: Three prisoners were apparently killed and a hostage was wounded after a gun fight broke out on Monday among inmates who have seized control of a maximum-security Argentine prison, prison authorities said, Reuters reports from Buenos Aires.

12 missing as ferry sinks in China: Twelve people are missing and presumed dead after their overloaded ferry sank in southern China during an excursion to pay respects to the tombs of their ancestor, it was reported yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Nine others were rescued when the overloaded boat sank in a reservoir in Hualji county, Guangdong province, on Sunday, the China-funded Ta Kung Pao daily said.

Although a search continued for survivors, authorities said there was little chance any survived, the paper said.

Noted Indian journalist dies: Veteran journalist and former correspondent of "Time and Life" and "Newsweek", R Ramanujam, died of cardiac arrest in Bangalore on Monday, PTI reports from New Delhi.

He was 82 and is survived by son Murlimanohar who works with the United News of India (UNI).

The senior journalist was currently working for the Eastern Express of Calcutta. Ramanujam went to Bangalore on Thursday and was admitted to Mallya Hospital after he complained of chest pain. He could not survive the bypass surgery performed on Saturday, family sources said.

Rao to run from 2 seats in polls

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao will run for election to parliament from two constituencies in general elections, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said today, reports Reuters.

Rao, president of the ruling Congress Party, filed his papers today from Bherampur in the eastern state of Orissa, the news agency said. Earlier he had announced his decision to run from Nandyal in Andhra Pradesh, where he was elected in 1991.

Rao's decision to run in a second constituency appeared to reflect his uncertain standing in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, lawmakers said.

UK Parliament asked to enact anti-terrorism law

LONDON, Apr 2: The government asked Parliament on Monday for new anti-terrorism powers to allow police to stop and frisk pedestrians, search unaccompanied cargoes at ports and to search non-residential premises, reports AP.

The Labour Party agreed with the government's plan to enact the new laws before the Easter recess.

"We face a real threat of a continued IRA campaign of murder," Home Secretary Michael Howard told the House of Commons. "No one should be deceived by the fact that for a few weeks we have had a lull."

The IRA called off its cease-fire on February 9, killing two Londoners that night with a large bomb in a business district.

Pro-democratic groups in Nigeria to oppose govt unitedly

OSLO, Apr 2: Nigerian pro-democracy groups said on Monday they had decided to join forces under an umbrella organisation to oppose Nigeria's military government, reports Reuters.

At secret weekend talks in Oslo and Johannesburg 13 organisations agreed to call themselves the United Democratic Front of Nigeria (UDFN) and voted to peacefully strive to restore civilian rule in the West African country.

Russia, Belarus to form new community within CIS

MOSCOW, Apr 2: Russia and Belarus plan to form a new tight-knit political and economic community within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) according to a draft treaty between the two countries, reports Reuters.

The treaty establishing the community of sovereign, republics a copy of which was obtained by Reuters on Monday, was due to be signed by Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Alexander Lukashenko in the Kremlin today.

MQM calls strike to protest killings in Karachi

KARACHI, Apr 2: The ethnic Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) called today for a strike to protest at what it said were summary killings of six of its activists by the security forces in the previous two days, reports Reuters.

A MQM statement said the opposition group's coordination committee had appealed for people in the southern province of Sindh, of which Karachi is the capital, to stay away from work on Wednesday and observe a day of mourning.

It said that unless those involved in the killings were arrested and prosecuted the strike would be extended to Thursday.

there as long as that mission needs to be accomplished."

About 560 American troops are part of the 1,200-man UN contingent in Macedonia. Other forces are from Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland.

Perry would not say whether he favours pulling out of Macedonia once the Bosnia mission is completed. He and other officials said in 1993, when the United Nations sent troops to Macedonia, that it was needed mainly to prevent the Bosnia civil war from spreading south.

"I don't want to forecast that," Perry said.

"There are factors affecting the situation in Macedonia besides the Bosnia problem, he said. Among them are tensions



Defence Ministers Oltan Sungurlu of Turkey (L), Domenico Corcione of Italy (2nd L), Safet Zhulali of Albania (3rd L), US Secretary of Defence William Perry (3rd R), Bulgarian Defence Minister Dimitar Pavlov (2nd R) and Macedonian Defence Minister Blagoj Handziski hold a press conference at the end of the two-day conference on southern Balkan security on Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

Yeltsin's order defied Military actions on in Chechnya, says Dudayev

GROZNY, Russia, Apr 2: Russian forces pressed on with air, artillery and ground attacks against Chechen rebels a day after President Boris Yeltsin ordered a halt to "military operations," an aide to separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev said, reports Reuters.

"At this hour, on the territory of the Chechen republic, intensive military action is continuing," Movladi Udugov told NTV television by telephone on Monday evening, long after Yeltsin's Sunday midnight deadline to halt the army offensive.

Troops had launched air strikes and artillery barrages against rebel positions around Vedeno, a mountainous area in the southeast where Dudayev's forces are particularly strong, as well as at nearby Nozhai Yurt and in southern and western areas that were the scene of fierce Russian bombardments last month.

The fighting, however, appeared not to be inconsistent with the plan revealed on Sunday by Yeltsin, who is seeking to show progress in ending the 16-month war as he struggles to overcome a searing communist challenge at June's presidential election.

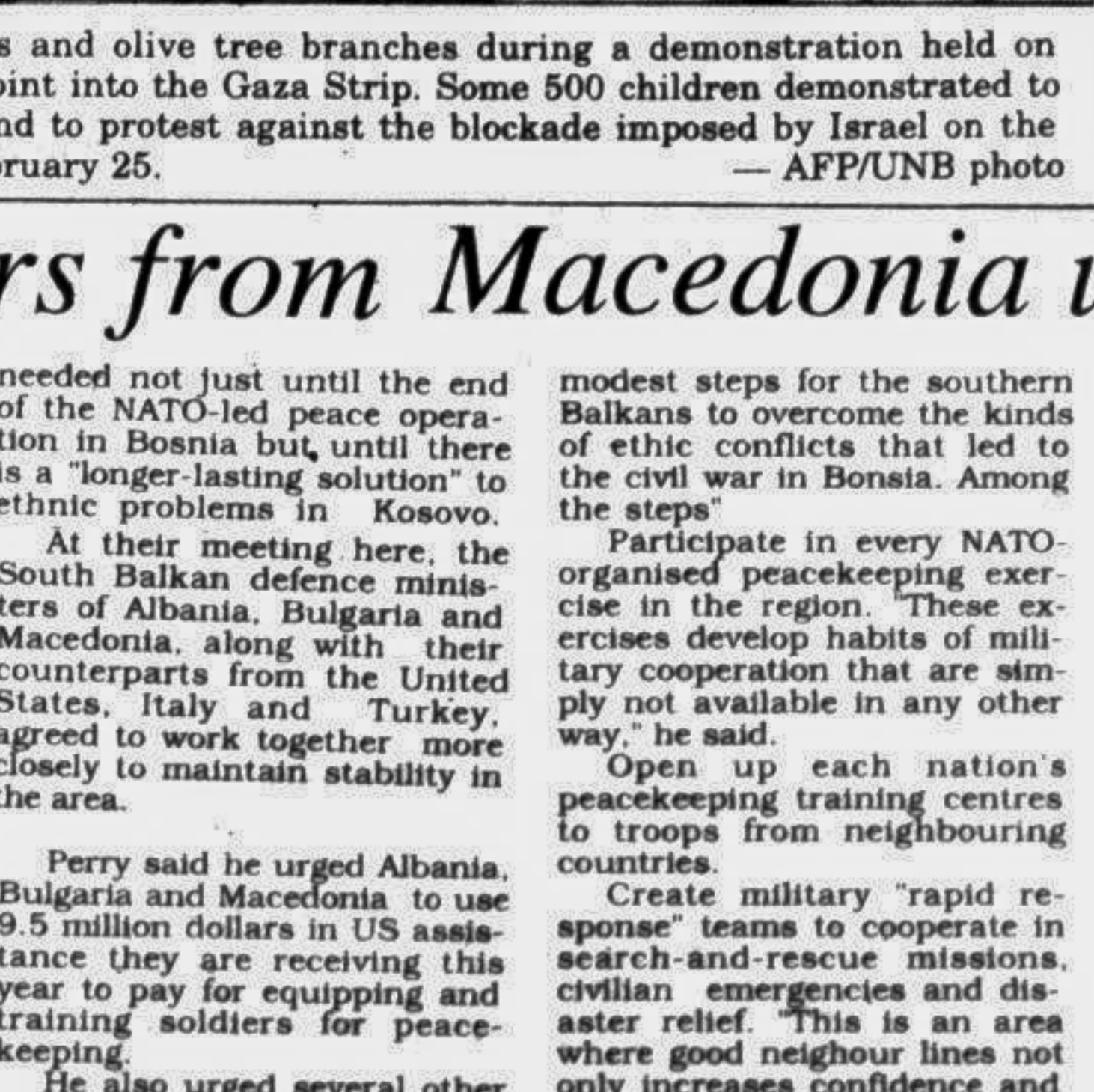
Although Yeltsin decreed an end to last month's all-out offensive, the security forces can still go after the rebels. "Special operations will continue against... terrorists, perhaps not on the same scale as before, but by the responsible organs," General Vyatcheslav Tikhomirov, Russia's army commander in the region, said in the Chechen capital Grozny on Monday.

The attacks were not one-sided. The Russian military said 28 soldiers were killed and about 70 wounded when an armoured column was ambushed near Vedeno in the early hours of Monday.

Udugov said Dudayev, had, as yet, no answer to Yeltsin's offer of indirect talks. That would come after the separatist chief had chaired a meeting of his "defence committee."

Those doing the fighting on the ground, on both sides, rate the chances of Dudayev and Yeltsin making peace as very slim.

Reuters from Washington adds: The White House urged Chechen forces on Monday to respect a ceasefire declared by Russian President Boris Yeltsin for the war racked region amid reports of fresh attacks on Russian troops there.



Palestinian children hold signs and olive tree branches during a demonstration held on Monday at the Erez crossing point into the Gaza Strip. Some 600 children demonstrated to show their support for peace and to protest against the blockade imposed by Israel on the Palestinian territories since February 25. — AFP/UNB photo

Lanka govt accused of not permitting free speech

COLOMBO, Apr 2: Sri Lanka's main opposition party today accused the government of not permitting free speech after 14 people were wounded in a shootout at an election rally, reports Reuters.

"This brings into question the commitment of the People's Alliance government to allow public meetings and free speech," United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe told a news conference.

Five supporters of the UNP and nine from the ruling People's Alliance were wounded on Monday when unidentified gunmen opened fire after the two groups clashed in the town of Anamadua, 120 km (75 miles) north of Colombo.

Monday's violence did not augur well for President Chandrika Kumaratunga's coalition government, which has to call local government elections by June, analysts said.

"If this is a sign of pre-election violence, then I think we have a lot more of it coming," one analyst said.

The shooting took place after alliance supporters forced their way into an area where UNP supporters were preparing for a meeting. Two men climbed on to the roof of a nearby building and began firing at the crowd, Wickremesinghe said.

"We did not want any incidents but our security people were forced to fire back," Wickremesinghe said. "This situation has been building up for the past week. The police have taken no action to protect our supporters," Wickremesinghe said.

UNP supporters in the Central Matale district too have complained to Kumaratunga of violence and harassment.

Government supporters on March 15 set fires along the path of a UNP procession, burnt vehicles and wounded a politician from the area.

Off the Record

Contraceptive pills for men!

LONDON: A team of international scientists said Tuesday that a male contraceptive pill that has been tested in a two-year trial in 15 centres around the world has proved effective in 99 per cent of men, reports Reuters.

"It is a big breakthrough," said Dr Fred Wu, of Manchester University, in central England.

"It is very significant. It is really for the first time showing the world that 'permanent' contraception for men really works. It shows there is a viable method and that men are ready and willing to use it."

Doctors said the only disadvantage of the male contraceptive is that it is given in weekly injections, but trials were underway to administer it with longer-term injections or a skin patch.

The contraceptive secretes the male hormone testosterone into the body to reduce the sperm count to a negligible amount. Earlier tests showed that sperm counts in 60 per cent of men could be reduced to zero by weekly testosterone injections. The new trials showed it could be as effective in a further 38.6 per cent of men.

"This means the vast majority of men can use it," said Dr Wu, adding that it could take up to eight years before a better technique of administering the contraceptive is perfected.

"It now depends on whether the drugs companies think they can produce it profitably in the long-term," he said.

"If we can develop it so it can be an injection three times a year and a tablet once a day I am convinced there is a huge potential and a huge market."

Thirty-seven couples took part in the trials in Manchester.

Trick to have free lunch

LONDON: Raw or cooked, one would-be Fine Young Cannibal may soon find out there's no such thing as a free lunch, reports AP.

Walesa resumes his job as an electrician

GDANSK, Apr 2: Nobel-Prize winning former Solidarity Union leader Lech Walesa, Poland's president until December, arrived at the Gdansk Shipyard early to resume his old job as a 250 US dollar a month electrician, reports Reuters.

Walesa earlier said he was returning to the ailing yard where he established the Soviet bloc's first free trade union 15 years ago, mainly because the ex-communists now in power had still not passed a law giving him a pension as ex-president.