

NATO warplanes ready to start exercises

Milosevic asked to end repression on Albanians or face sanctions

BRUSSELS, June 13: NATO warplanes prepared today to stage exercises over Albania and Macedonia as the pressure built up on Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to end the violence in neighbouring Kosovo, reports AFP.

The six-nation Contact Group Friday told Milosevic to end the repression on ethnic Albanians in the southern Serbian province by the time he meets Russian President Boris Yeltsin Monday or face new international sanctions, including possible military action.

Both Albania and Macedonia quickly gave the green light

to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation air exercises, code-named 'Determined Falcon', planned for Sunday.

Albanian Premier Fatos Nano even told NATO it could use his country's airfields 'from tomorrow' to launch air strikes to end the Kosovo crisis, hailing the ultimatum on Belgrade to halt its military crackdown.

"All Albanian airports will be made available to the Atlantic alliance so that its planes can make flights which would allow an end to the Serbian military operations against the Kosovo Albanians," Nano told a

press conference.

The Macedonian government also gave the go-ahead, but only for one exercise, after a special meeting of Prime Minister Branko Cervenkovski's cabinet.

A statement said that permission would have to be sought from Skopje again for any further manoeuvres.

The communiqué said the government was conscious that the aims of the exercise corresponded with Macedonia's needs, namely to stop the Kosovo crisis spilling over on to its territory and bring about a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Friday's ultimatum, combined with the announcement of imminent manoeuvres, was aimed at forcing Milosevic to pay more attention to international opinion than he showed during the Bosnia conflict.

The Contact Group said Milosevic should "take advantage" of the meeting in Moscow to comply with its demands to halt the violence, allow international monitoring in Kosovo, permit refugees to return home, and begin an effective dialogue with ethnic Albanian leaders in the province.



Benazir Bhutto, right, former prime minister of Pakistan and leader of opposition holds meeting with Ajmal Khattak, chief of Awami National Party and former ally of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Friday in Islamabad after a budget session. ANP withdrew its alliance with Sharif after grave difference regarding building huge dam in Frontier Province. Sharif government announced to build Kala Bagh dam soon. Opposition also criticised recent budget presented by the Sharif government. — AP/UNB photo

US to lift employment restrictions on Asian students

NEW YORK, June 13: Asian students now living in the US will be getting a break as most of their countries are in ruins due to protracted economic depression, reports AP.

The US Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) has decided to lift employment restrictions on Asian students who are facing cash crisis.

Eligible students can now reduce their time in the classroom and increase their work hours. This will enable them to earn extra money but won't jeopardise their student visa status.

INS has identified five East Asian countries — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand — whose students may be facing severe financial constraints.

To be eligible for the new programme, students don't have to be citizens of these countries but will have to prove that their means of support come from one of these countries.

The INS move is not entirely altruistic. According to IPS Daily Journal, the US economy would suffer if these students were forced to return home.

During 1996-97 academic year, foreign students contributed over US\$ 7 billion in tuition payments and living expenses.

UN weapons inspector starts talks in Iraq

BAGHDAD, June 13: The chief UN weapons inspector began talks Saturday with top Iraqi officials on steps that Baghdad must take to convince arms monitors that Iraq has destroyed its weapons of mass destruction, reports AP.

The UN inspector's certification is required for the Security Council to consider lifting sweeping economic sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Butler arrive Thursday in Baghdad accompanied by 18 UN arms experts carrying evidence that Iraq is still concealing key information on its banned weapons programmes, which is the UN's position.

Baghdad says it has no more information to give Butler and says his demands are politically motivated.

Butler has said that he brought to Baghdad a list indicating what Iraq must do to satisfy the arms inspectors.

The list specifies that Iraq must hand over information on imported long-range missiles, prove that it has scrapped all biological and chemical warheads and fully account for its production of VX nerve gas.

Blair to seek EU reform

LONDON, June 13: British Prime Minister Tony Blair will seek to regain the initiative on reform of the European Union from Germany and France at next week's summit in Cardiff, the Financial Times reported today, reports AP.

Blair, hosting the summit to mark the end of the six-month British presidency, will propose the creation of a high-level group to examine the future shape of the EU, in an attempt to head off French plans for a wide men's group headed by Jacques Delors, former European Commission president.

The proposed body, made up of Blair's personal representatives, would look at the "unfinished business" of last year's Amsterdam Treaty, and at preparing the EU for eastwards expansion, the British Business daily said.

The British move follows this week's joint letter from the French and German leaders, Jacques Chirac and Helmut Kohl, which called for a more decentralized Europe and demanded an overhaul of EU institutions and a strengthening of common foreign and security policy ahead of enlargement.

Wheat export to India, Pakistan should go ahead, says Clinton

MONTEREY, California, June 13: President Bill Clinton said Friday the United States should continue exporting wheat to India and Pakistan despite sanctions that kicked in under US law after their nuclear tests, reports AP.

Clinton said in a radio broadcast he favours an amendment to the legislation brought by Senator Patty Murray of Washington state allowing US grain producers to continue exporting to the quarrelling countries.

"Farmers in the United States provide a significant percentage of Pakistan's wheat imports," Clinton said.

"Cutting off that supply would only hurt the citizens of Pakistan and American farmers without furthering our important goals of non-proliferation of atomic weapons," Clinton said adding "we hope this amendment is passed as quickly as possible."

Under a 1994 legislative amendment Washington must apply sanctions to any country outside the five declared powers — the United States, Russia, China, France and Britain — which explode atomic bombs.

But Clinton argued that food exports have a humanitarian value.

'China must be party to ultimate resolution of Indo-Pak dispute'

WASHINGTON, June 13: US President Bill Clinton, in his continued pandering to China on the eve of his visit, said that Beijing must be party to an "ultimate resolution" of the India-Pakistan dispute, reports IANS.

"Because of its history with both countries, China must be part of any ultimate resolution of this matter," Clinton said in a speech to the National Geographic Society here.

Clinton said that when he travels to Beijing later this month, "I will work with President Jiang (Zemin) to advance our Asian security agenda, keeping the pressure on India and Pakistan to curb their nuclear arms race and to commence a dialogue."

He said that "as a nuclear power with increasingly sophisticated industrial and technological capabilities, China can choose either to be part of the problem or a part of the solution."

According to the President, "a self-defeating, dangerous, and costly course" was now under way in South Asia. He warned that "this course, if continued, not moderated and ultimately changed, will make both the people of India and the people of Pakistan poorer, not

richer, and less, not more, secure."

Consequently, Clinton said that "resolving this requires us to cooperate with China." He recalled that "last week, China chaired a meeting of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council to forge a common strategy for moving India and Pakistan back from the nuclear arms race edge."

Additionally, Clinton noted that Beijing "has condemned both countries for conducting nuclear tests. It has joined us in urging them to conduct no more tests, sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), avoid deploying or testing missiles, to tone down the rhetoric, and work to resolve their differences including Kashmir issue through dialogue."

"The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan," he warned, "are a threat to the stability we seek. They risk a terrible outcome."

Clinton predicted that "a miscalculation between two adversaries with large armies would be bad. A miscalculation between two adversaries with nuclear weapons could be catastrophic."

He said that the tests by India and Pakistan "were all the more unfortunate because they

divert precious resources from countries with unlimited potential."

Clinton declared that "India is a very great nation, soon to be not only the world's most populous democracy, but its most populous country."

He pointed out that "it is home to the world's largest middle class already and a remarkable culture that taught the modern world the power of non-violence."

Pakistan, he said, "has been a vibrant Islamic state and is today a robust democracy."

Thus, Clinton said, "it is important for the world to recognise the remarkable contributions both these countries have made and will continue to make to the community of nations if they can proceed along the path of peace."

Clinton added: "It is important for the world to recognise that both India and Pakistan have security concerns that are legitimate. But it is equally important for India and Pakistan to recognise that developing weapons of mass destruction is the wrong way to define their greatness, to protect their security, or to advance their concerns."

Freeze on loans India won't face immediate impact of G-8 decision

NEW DELHI, June 13: India said today it would face no immediate impact from a decision by industrialised Group of Eight nations to halt most loans following its nuclear tests.

An External Affairs Ministry spokesman told Reuters that there was nothing to add beyond Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's initial statement on Friday that there would be no immediate fallout.

"Let us restrict it to that now," he said.

"We had reacted before the G-8 meeting. I think we would not add anything else right now," the spokesman said.

The G-8 foreign ministers' meeting in London Friday had ordered a freeze on loans to India and Pakistan in protest against their nuclear tests last month, but exempted humanitarian loans from their decision.

After receiving indications that the G-8 would bar fresh loans, Finance Minister Sinha told Reuters on Friday: "The impact will not be immediate... there is a long pipeline (of loans). If approved protests are not held up the impact which is not immediate."

Fresh violence grips Java More unrest in Indonesia as Timorese protests go on

DLI, Indonesia, June 13: Stepping up their demands for independence from Indonesia, more than 1,000 students protested Saturday in East Timor, dancing, raising their fists and chanting the name of the jailed rebel chief they adore, reports AP.

It was the second large protest this week in the former Portuguese colony, with demonstrators reiterating demands for a vote on independence as well as the release of rebel Xanana Gusmao, who is serving a 20-year sentence in a Jakarta jail.

Smiling protesters, many wearing headbands declaring "Referendum," held hands and shuffled in a traditional dance. "The struggle continues," they shouted in Portuguese.

Animosities among East Timorese runs deep toward Indonesia, which invaded in 1975 and wiped out most armed resistance in a military campaign that lasted several years. Human rights workers say tens of thousands of people died.

Indonesia defends its record, pointing to the large amount of aid it has funneled into East Timor after centuries of Portuguese neglect. A large minority of the population now consists of entrepreneurial newcomers from other Indonesian islands.

President BJ Habibie, who is promising a new era of reform after the downfall of his au-

thoritarian mentor, Suharto, has suggested special status for troubled East Timor.

However, East Timorese activists reject the measures as inadequate, saying they will settle for nothing less than total independence.

Meanwhile AFP reports: Fresh violence has broken out in a small town in the Indonesian province of central Java, with rioters damaging scores of shops and offices, reports received here said today.

Hundreds of people went on a rampage in Parakan, Temanggung district, on Thursday, pelting and damaging 35 shops, banks, houses and government offices there, the Kompas Daily said.

Indian official hopeful about talks with Pakistan soon

WASHINGTON, June 13: A senior Indian official said on Friday that talks with arch-foe Pakistan would go ahead despite the failure to agree on a time and a place, reports Reuters.

"It's just a question of fixing the date and the venue," Jaswant Singh, a cabinet member with close ties to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, said in an interview on CNN.

Asked if talks between India and Pakistan would take place soon, Singh replied: "oh yes, of course without a doubt."

India on Friday invited Pakistan to talks in New Delhi on June 22, but Islamabad called it a "gimmick" and made a counter-offer, setting its own terms for a dialogue on June 20.

Singh said he held a two and half-hour meeting earlier on Friday with Deputy Secretary of

State Strobe Talbott, the highest-level US-India talks since New Delhi provoked an international crisis by testing nuclear weapons last month.

India sparked fears of a nuclear arms race in South Asia when it tested nuclear weapons for the first time in almost 25 years. Pakistan, which had never before tested, followed suit. The United States slapped sweeping sanctions on both countries.

Singh described the session with Talbott as "cordial, frankly a very good meeting," but declined to provide specifics, saying only that the two discussed the entire spectrum of US-India relations.

The state department declined to give details or confirm the meeting took place, on the grounds that it was not part of Talbott's public schedule.

US Secretary of State Madeline Albright addresses a press conference Friday at the Foreign Office in London after a meeting with G-8 members regarding the recent nuclear tests in India and Pakistan and the deteriorating situation in Kosovo.

— AP/UNB photo

US steps up security at ME, S Asia missions

WASHINGTON, June 13: The United States is tightening security at embassies and other facilities in the Middle East and South Asia and advising Americans to be alert and inconspicuous when travelling in the region, reports Reuters.

The State Department said on Friday it was taking serious renewed threat from extremist Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden, who told ABC news this week he would target all Americans in his holy war on US forces in the region.

Arafat tells Arab ambassadors in Italy Collapse of peace process to plunge ME into endless violence

ROME, June 13: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat warned late Friday that the collapse of the Middle East peace process would plunge the whole region into an endless cycle of violence and instability, reports AFP.

Arafat was speaking at a dinner organised by Arab ambassador in Italy and the Italian-Arab Chamber of Commerce, following a meeting earlier in the day with Pope John Paul II.

He accused the Israeli government of exposing the peace process to a slow death by stalling on previous agreements with the Palestinians and assisting Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

But Arafat expressed confidence that wisdom would prevail, saying, "peace is in the interest of our people, and the Israeli people and all the Arab and non-Arab peoples of the Mediterranean."

During his 15-minute private meeting at the Vatican, Arafat informed the Pope of the "tragic situation in which the Palestinian people find themselves now that the peace process is threatened on all sides," papal spokesman Joaquin

Navarro told reporters after the talks.

The Palestinian leader's visit to the Vatican, his sixth, was aimed at asking for political backing to relaunch the peace process which has been deadlocked for a year.

"John Paul II reiterated the Holy See's support of the peace process, which should be pursued in good faith by all the parties concerned and in respect of international law and commitments taken," said Navarro.

Arafat also criticised the "Israeli violations of the peace accords, in particular the expansion of Jewish settlements in eastern Jerusalem," said the spokesman.

The Vatican called on Israeli authorities in April to accept major compromises to break the year-old deadlock in the peace process with the Palestinians.

Misery can drive people to despair and from there to fanaticism," he warned.

Massimo d'Alema, from the main party in the ruling coalition, the Democratic Party of the Left criticised Israel's "Strongly negative attitude," as instrumental in blocking the peace process.

After the audience with the head of the Roman Catholic church, Arafat held separate meetings with a number of Italian political leaders.

Right wing opposition leader and communications magnate Silvio Berlusconi said after meeting Arafat that it was vital the world's wealthier nations gave aid to the Palestinian Authority.

The Pope has regularly expressed a desire to visit Bethlehem to mark 2000 years since the traditional date of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Any chance of the Pope visiting the Middle East was ruled out as impossible under the "current prevailing circumstances," the head of the Vatican's diplomatic service, Jan Louis Taurina, said in April.

Arafat arrived in Italy at 10:00 am (0800) from Gaza aboard a chartered jet.

UNSC sounds tougher sanctions against UNITA rebels

UNITED NATIONS, June 13: The Security Council has given former Angolan rebels until June 29 to fulfill conditions of a peace plan or sweeping economic sanctions will take effect automatically two days later, reports AP.

The sanctions include a freeze on foreign bank accounts of the UNITA movement and a ban on sales of diamonds mined in areas under UNITA's control. UNITA earns hundreds of millions of dollars annually from diamond exports.

Under a unanimous resolution, UNITA must demobilise its remaining forces, hand over its central highland strongholds, allow UN monitors to verify compliance and cease attacks on UN and government personnel by June 23.

Otherwise, the sanctions kick in automatically at one minute after midnight June 25 New York time.

Envoys from the United States, Russia and Portugal, which oversee the 1994 Angolan peace agreement, said the sanctions were designed to save the peace process and appealed to UNITA to meet the deadline for compliance.

The international community, which has invested heavily in helping Angolans toward peace, is in a position now to demand that these substantial efforts (toward peace) not be thrown away," Portugal's ambassador, Antonio Monteiro, said.

"We appeal to UNITA to heed the message of this council," he added. "UNITA should seize this

opportunity to cooperate fully as a political party in the consolidation of democracy in Angola," he said.

Under the 1994 agreement, UNITA also agreed to demobilise its fighters and integrate them into the national army in return for a role in the government. But implementation has been slow, and the United Nations blames UNITA for most of the delays.

The UN special representative to Angola, Alioune Blondin Beye, has accused UNITA of hiding armed men in remote areas of the vast southwest African nation. UNITA denies the charge.

But US envoy Nancy Soderberg said recent, credible reports indicate UNITA "has retained and even reconstituted its fighting force. This behavior is unacceptable."

Soderberg also said the United States was concerned about reports of attacks by government police against UNITA supporters and called for them to cease.

The United States supported UNITA during the Cold War in its fight against the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, the former Marxist group which dominates the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation.

The resolution also prohibits all member states from official contacts with UNITA officials except in the capital Luanda and other areas under government control.

Lanka to ban tobacco, alcohol ads in media

COLOMBO, June 13: Sri Lanka is to enforce a ban on alcohol and tobacco advertisements in newspapers, radio and television from January, a newspaper reported Saturday, reports AP.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has ordered her media minister to enforce the country's existing codes of ethics for state and private television and radio channels, which forbid promotion of alcohol and tobacco, the state-owned Daily News reported.

In addition Kumaratunga has directed that state newspapers stop accepting alcohol and tobacco advertisements as well, the newspaper said. There was no mention of privately owned newspapers.

Kumaratunga noted in her letter to Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera that alcohol and tobacco were being increasingly portrayed in soap operas and advertisements in recent months.

The president also said in her letter that the advertising was contradicting the current worldwide trend to restrict such promotions.

Angolan poet Mestre dies at 49: Leak occurs in Czech N-plant: 25 suffer burns in Ukrainian blast: 42 hurt in German train collision: Bombs detonated before Clinton's arrival:

Angolan poet and journalist David Mestre has died of a heart ailment at age 49, his associates said Friday, AFP says from Lisbon.

Mestre, who died Thursday, was Managing Editor of the Lunda Daily Journal De Angola in 1991-92 and served as press attaché to Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos.

Leak occurs in Czech N-plant: A leak of coolant Friday at a nuclear power station in the Czech Republic was confirmed to the plant and no one was affected by radiation, the CTK news agency reported, AFP says from Prague.

An official of the state nuclear safety agency said the incident occurred during pressure tests on the cooling system at the Dukovany power station of a reactor which had been taken out of use for a fuel change.

25 suffer burns in Ukrainian blast: Twenty-five workers suffered burns in an explosion at a chemical plant in the eastern Ukrainian Donetsk region, ITAR-Tass News Agency reported Friday, AFP says from Moscow.

The circumstances of the blast in the town of Avejevyvka Hursdurt which was followed by a fire were not known.

42 hurt in German train collision: Forty-two people were injured, six seriously, Friday when two suburban trains collided near the southwestern town of Karlsruhe, police said, AFP reports from Germany.

Helicopters were used to evacuate the injured, but none of the victims were in critical condition, after the two trains crashed head-on at Bad Schoenborn for still unknown reasons.

Bombs detonated before Clinton's arrival: Hours before President Bill Clinton arrived in Oregon for a visit, two explosive devices were found in a culvert at the Eugene airport where Air Force One was scheduled to land yesterday, AP reports from Portland, Oregon.

Discovery concludes NASA's last mission to Mir

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, June 13: The Space Shuttle Discovery landed at the Kennedy Space Centre here Friday, ending the orbital adventure begun by the United States and Russia three years ago, reports AFP.

Discovery brought home US astronaut Andrew Thomas — who spent over four months in orbit aboard the Russian space station Mir — when the shuttle landed at 2 pm (1800 GMT) after a 10-day mission.

"I think the thing I'm looking forward to the most is the freedom to do the things I chose, and not to have my life planned out every minute," he said earlier from the shuttle.

Thomas' return ends three years of nearly uninterrupted US presence in space, closing the first chapter in NASA's cooperation with the Russian space agency.

Since the arrival aboard the station of astronaut Norman Thagard in March 1995, seven American lodgers have called Mir home, chalking up 977 days of residence — including 812 in a row — and 15,632 orbits around earth.

"This programme has been an amazing record of statistics," said Franc Culbertson, NASA's shuttle-Mir programme manager. "That's quite a bit of experience in space that is going

Ethiopia, Eritrea for Tunisian mediation

TUNIS, June 13: Warring Ethiopia and Eritrea have appealed to Tunisian president Zine Wl Abidine Ben Ali to mediate to end their border dispute, a presidential spokesman said Friday, reports AFP.

Ben Ali received messages Friday from Ethiopian president Meles Zenawi and Eritrean counterpart Issias Afe-worki asking him to step in and help resolve the month-long conflict, the spokesman said.

The requests were written by Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin and Eritrean Local Government Minister Mahmoud Ahmed Mahmoud.

Ben Ali was concerned over "serious developments" in the armed conflict, namely "material damage and losses in human life," the spokesman said.



A boy runs away from a Greenpeace hot air balloon being deflated in the riverbed behind the Taj Mahal in India Friday. Greenpeace floated the earth shaped balloon over the Taj Mahal, India's most famous monument, to protest nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. — AP/UNB photo