



President Nelson Mandela (right) and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki during talks on the Congo crisis at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, Sunday. —AP/UNB Photo

Rebels suffer major setback in bid to oust Kabila

KINSHASA, Aug 24: Rebel forces pushing to topple President Laurent Kabila suffered their first major military setback when Kabila's Angolan allies on Sunday captured a key rebel stronghold in western Congo, reports AP.

The rebels acknowledged the loss, but countered by saying they would continue their drive toward the capital, Kinshasa, and had also taken control of the important eastern city of Kisangani.

The strategic Angolan victory was a boost for Kabila, but it also threatens to transform Congo into a proxy battlefield for a regionwide war of shifting alliances.

Using tanks and backed by air support, Angolan forces took the rebel-controlled airbase at Kitona, near the Atlantic coastline. The move effectively cut off the rebels from their rear supply base.

Congo's Information Minister Didier Mumengi confirmed the deployment of Angolan troops.

Quoting an unidentified Angolan military source, the Portuguese news agency Lusa reported Sunday that Kabila's troops, aided by Angolan soldiers, had moved on from Kitona to capture the nearby towns of Munada and Banana and then to Boma, about 100 kilometres to the east.

The report said the soldiers captured Matadi, Congo's only ocean-going port on the Congo River and an important strategic target, on Sunday.

The report could not be independently confirmed.

Government officials declined to make detailed comment, but Health Minister Jean-Baptiste Sondji said that: "There's fighting in the area. I can't give exact details. There

will be an important announcement tomorrow."

The rebels are caught between two foreign forces fighting on behalf of Kabila. The Angolans to the southwest and Zimbabwean soldiers deployed last week now shoring up Kinshasa's southern defenses.

Rwanda and Uganda — in support of the rebels — have repeatedly warned Zimbabwe and Angola not to get involved, threatening direct retaliatory intervention if they don't withdraw.

Zimbabwe, having extended more than \$200 million in military credits to Congo, has a financial stake in Kabila's government. Angola's involvement may be partially driven by a concern that Congo's rebels could link up with Angola's UNITA insurgent movement.

Kabila, meanwhile, remains holed up at his residence in the

southern city of Lubumbashi — the president's former rebel stronghold, Information Minister Mumengi said. Bezima Karaha, Kabila's former foreign minister who fled to the rebel side, said the fall of Kitona was actually a "tactical withdrawal."

But Karaha said the news was not all bad for the rebels, claiming rebel fighters had captured Kisangani, Congo's third-largest city. That claim could not be independently confirmed.

The insurgents, who accused Kabila of power-grabbing, tribalism and mismanagement, have pushed to within 30 kilometers (18 miles) of Kinshasa.

In South African, meanwhile, President Nelson Mandela continued efforts to salvage peace talks, despite the absence of Kabila and Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe.

Bin Laden says Retaliation will target US, Israel strategic sites

ROME, Aug 24: Islamic militants have started work on retaliation against the United States, targeting US and Israeli strategic sites and airliners, a leading Muslim activist was quoted as saying Sunday in a warning he said came directly from Osama bin Laden, reports AP.

Omar Bakri Mohammed, leader of a London-based Islamic group known to have connections to the Saudi dissident linked to the US embassy bombings in Africa, read a statement he said was signed by bin Laden to Italy's La Repubblica newspaper.

The international Islamic Front announces that the war has begun. Our response to the barbaric bombardment against Muslims of Afghanistan and Sudan will be ruthless and violent.

All the Islamic world has mobilised to strike a prominent American or Israeli strategic objective, to blow up their air-

planes and to seize them."

Mohammed is head of Al-Muhajiroun, or the Emigrants, which says it represents the interests of Muslims in the Arab world. Bin Laden has been known to send envoys or videos to his rallies, bearing messages from him.

The United States linked bin Laden's Afghanistan-based militant network to the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Thursday, US missile strikes targeted sites in Afghanistan and Sudan allegedly connected with bin Laden.

Bin Laden's whereabouts have been uncertain since the US attacks, although he is said to have survived them. Mohammed said the statement came from Peshawar, Pakistan.

Calling the missile attacks an "irreparable error" by Clinton, Mohammed said, "Our response could happen in any corner of the world."

BRIEFLY

Arafat leaves for Oslo: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat left yesterday for Oslo to attend ceremonies marking the fifth anniversary of the first Israeli-PLO peace accord and possibly engage in negotiations aimed at getting the troubled peace process back on track. AFP says from Gaza City.

Nabil Abu Rudina, an Arafat spokesman, said the Palestinian leader could discuss the stalled peace negotiations with US mediator Dennis Rose during his stay in the Norwegian capital.

Suharto's son-in-law fired: A senior general who is the son-in-law of former President Suharto was fired on Monday amid suspicion he ordered the kidnappings of political activists. AP says from Jakarta.

Gen. Prabowo Subianto is a former chief of Indonesia's special forces, which have been implicated in abductions and torture of Suharto's opponents since last year. Wiranto did not rule out a court-martial of Prabowo if evidence of his involvement emerges in the case against 10 lower-ranking soldiers arrested in connection with the kidnappings.

2 Russian children die in bus plunge: A bus carrying children plunged off an embankment yesterday in southern Russia, killing at least two youngsters, the Interfax news agency reported. AP says from Moscow.

Five other people were injured in the accident in the Tuapse district of Krasnodar region, about 1200 km south of Moscow. Interfax said, citing the Ministry of Emergency situations. No other details were available.

Editor to face trial in Vietnam: The former editor of the state-controlled business newspaper Enterprise will go on trial September 10 for revealing state secrets, a Hanoi court official said Monday. AP reports from Hanoi.

Nguyen Hoang Linh, 46, was arrested last October after running a series of stories into alleged graft at the General Department of Customs, particularly relating to a deal to buy used high-speed boats from Ukraine.

King Fahd hospitalised: Saudi King Fahd was hospitalised late Sunday less than two weeks after being discharged, diplomats said, AP reports from Dubai.

The king, who is in his mid-70s, had his gallbladder removed by a medical team led by a US surgeon on August 12. King Fahd was admitted to King Faisal Specialist Hospital in the capital, Riyadh, diplomats said on customary condition of anonymity. They gave no further details about his condition. Hospital officials were not available for comment.

Blast kills 2 in Algeria: A fireman and a security guard died Sunday when an explosion and a fire occurred at a water treatment plant in eastern Algiers, state radio said citing police. AFP reports from Algiers.

The cause of the blast was not immediately known, but emergency workers at the scene believe it may have been caused by an infiltration of oil or gas into the water, the radio reported.

Tainted liquor kills 45, blinds 100 in Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Tainted liquor served at a village party killed 45 people, blinded 25 and put at least 100 others in hospital in south India, domestic news agencies reported Monday, reports AP.

The dead included eight women in Paruvathi village in the state of Tamil Nadu where potent locally brewed liquor bought from a village shop was served to a large gathering Saturday night. Press Trust of India quoted police as saying.

Liquor poisonings occur frequently in India. Unauthorized manufacturers mix methyl alcohol with their homemade brew to give it more punch, but too much can affect the nervous system, causing blindness or death.

Homemade liquor is cheaper than the cheapest brand sold at authorized shops. Increasing alcohol deaths have also provoked a violent movement for prohibition in several states in recent years.

Village women armed with brooms have publicly thrashed drunkard husbands and picketed liquor shops, but two provinces which officially banned liquor had to withdraw the move last year after huge tax losses to the government.

Union Law Minister M Thambi Durai, who visited the hospital, demanded the resignation of Chief Minister M Karunanidhi owning moral responsibility for the August 22 incident near Hosur.

Five people died Monday and 20 more were in serious condition, United News of India said.

The drink was believed to be a locally made arrack laced with methyl alcohol to make it more potent. PTI quoted senior police official Shaakeel Akhtar as saying.

Eight people have been arrested for manufacturing and selling the liquor. At least 30 policemen have been suspended in connection with the tragedy. PTI said, but did not give details of the charges against him.

Lawyer among 5 shot dead in Karachi

KARACHI, Aug 24: Five people including a lawyer and two political activists have been shot dead in Pakistan's violence-plagued largest city of Karachi, police and party sources said today, reports BSS.

The lawyer was killed in the main business district of Saddar while two activists from MQM-Haqiqi, a breakaway faction of an influential ethnic party, were shot dead in the eastern Shah Faisal colony, they said.

Two people were killed elsewhere in the city overnight.

The lawyer, Hasnain Abbas, 38, was shot by two motorcycle riders while waiting for public transport and died in hospital, police said. The motive was not immediately known.

MQM-Haqiqi accused police of "executing" its two activists during raids, saying officers colluded with its rival the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). Police denied the charge.

Following the killing of the activists, groups of armed men forced shopkeepers to close their business in the area.

India assures Iraq of support on UN sanctions

BAGHDAD, Aug 24: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein met Indian parliamentary Speaker GMC Balayogi on Sunday, who assured him of India's support over the UN sanctions, Iraq's official INA news agency said, reports AFP.

Balayogi assured the President that "the government and people of India support Iraq's legitimate demand for the lifting of the embargo" imposed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The Indian diplomat also met Iraqi parliamentary Speaker Saadun Hammadi, Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz and Health and Industry Ministers during his visit.

Iraq suspended cooperation with UN arms monitors on August 5, demanding restructuring of UNSCOM to lessen US "dominance" of it and lifting of the UN sanctions imposed on Baghdad.

The UN Security Council called Iraq's decision "totally unacceptable."

For eloping with Muslim boy...

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: A Hindu father strangled his daughter to death for eloping with a Muslim boy and calmly surrendered to the police, it was reported today, says AFP.

Surender Singh Solanki was arrested on Sunday on charges of murdering his daughter, Meenu, who had eloped with a Muslim boy in May but returned to a relative's home recently.

The Hindustan Times said Solanki, on realising his daughter's whereabouts, marched into the relative's home and strangled her while the family looked on in horror.

Hindu-Muslim marriages are rare in Hindu-majority India, where Muslims form the largest minority.

Taliban restrict Bin Laden's movements

ISLAMABAD, Aug 24: The hospitality Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have extended Osama bin Laden cooled Sunday, days after American missiles hit an area in the eastern of the country where he is accused of training an international army of Islamic militants, reports AP.

Taliban spokesman Mullah Abdullah, reached on satellite telephone in the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar, Afghanistan, said bin Laden would be allowed to travel only "in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and he will be provided security by Taliban fighters."

Abdullah described it as a security measure, but it amounted to a restriction on

the movements of bin Laden, whom Washington blames for the Aug 7 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The United States launched missiles Thursday at what officials described as a bin Laden military training camp.

In an interview with the BBC Sunday, supreme Taliban leader Mullah Omar expressed displeasure with reported statements from bin Laden that called for Muslims to strike at the United States.

Omar was quoted as saying he was sending an envoy to bin Laden in an unknown location in Afghanistan, to make clear the Taliban would speak for themselves about how to respond to US action in their country.

The statements Sunday clearly indicated unhappiness with bin Laden. But after the US missile strikes sparked large and violent anti-American, pro-bin Laden protests across Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, it appeared unlikely Omar would completely disown the man he has described as an honoured guest.

Nonetheless, Taliban response to the strikes has been muted, perhaps because they are undecided of their position on bin Laden. Omar has said bin Laden would not be handed over, while Taliban envoys at the United Nations have said they would be willing to discuss such a solution if the United States could prove terrorism charges against him.

NLD plan to convene parliament illegal, warns Junta

YANGON, Aug 24: Myanmar's military government warned the opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi that its plan to convene parliament is illegal and will jeopardize possible talks with military leaders, a government spokesman said Monday, reports AP.

"Such an action by any individual party would be in contravention of Myanmar law, and seems designed to derail the on-going discussions between the government and the National League for Democracy," (NLD) said the spokesman on condition of anonymity.

The comment came as Suu Kyi, her health problems mounting, entered the 13th day of her roadside protest against government restrictions on her right to travel freely.

The Nobel Peace laureate

and three colleagues are staying in a van on a bridge 32 kilometers (19 miles) west of Yangon. They were stopped there nearly two weeks ago by authorities. They were attempting to travel to the city of Bassein to meet NLD members for the fourth time in two months.

On Saturday, the authorities refused permission for Suu Kyi's two doctors to examine her. In earlier examinations, the doctors said she was suffering from low blood pressure, kidney problems, dizziness and urinary tract problems.

Suu Kyi's party set Aug 21 as the deadline for the military to convene the parliament, which was elected in 1990. The NLD won 392 of the assembly's 485 seats.

Although it promised to hand over power to the winners

before the polls were held, the military refused to honour the result after the NLD victory.

When the military ignored the NLD's latest deadline, the party announced it would convene parliament on its own. Past attempts to gather NLD lawmakers for party meetings were met with mass arrests by the military.

The military held out an olive branch to the NLD earlier this month when Gen. Khin Nyunt, one of the junta's most powerful generals, met face to face with Aung Shwe, the NLD chairman, for talks.

Previous attempts at furthering discussions between the two failed, however, when the general refused to include Suu Kyi in the talks, something her party — and the international community — has demanded.



German Chancellor Helmut Kohl accompanied by his wife Hannelore, center, is welcomed by wellwishers at the Dortmund Westfalia Hall Sunday, where his party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), started campaign for the national elections on September 27. — AP/UNB photo

Embassy bombings Key suspects may be tried in US

NAIROBI, Aug 24: Key suspects in the east African US embassy bombings may be tried in the United States, The East African Standard reported today, quoting unnamed senior Kenyan police sources, reports AFP.

The rival Nation newspaper for its part reported opposition Kenyan leaders as calling for the arrested suspects to be tried in the United States.

Former vice-president Mwai Kibaki, head of the Democratic Party and official opposition leader, said there was an extradition treaty allowing this, and that Kenya had not the means to ensure counter-terrorist security during a protracted trial.

Some 257 people died and more than 5,000 were wounded by two massive car bomb explosions, reportedly organised by Islamic extremists, at the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam August 7.

Plight of Kosovo refugees set to worsen as winter nears

SHKOZE, Yugoslavia, Aug 24: A handful of rice. A tomato. A crust of bread. Asking Kosovo's refugees what they've had to eat on any particular day is one way to measure their tragedy, reports AP.

Visiting "homes" is another. The lucky ones are crowded dozens to a house in the shrinking areas still controlled by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) huddling on blankets spread over dirty wooden floors. The less fortunate sleep in open fields near houses.

The most hopeless cases — an estimated 50,000 — are scattered in the forests and mountains. They fled there in past weeks to escape a Serbian crackdown on separatist ethnic Albanians that left dozens of towns and villages in ruins.

And summer will soon end. With fields left unharvested and livestock scattered or dead, human rights workers are warning of an even bigger tragedy once the harsh Balkan

winter arrives.

"What can we do if people stay in the hills and do not return to their homes before winter? Not very much," humanitarian agency worker Fernando del Mundo said. "We are afraid that people are just going to die."

The KLA is fighting for independence for Kosovo, a province of the Serb republic of Yugoslavia where ethnic Albanians make up more than 90 per cent of the population.

Kosovo's refugee tragedy seems at first glance like a replay of the Bosnian crisis. But while less people have been made homeless in Kosovo, the chances of disaster are greater.

With Bosnian front lines relatively stable for much of that war, hundreds of thousands of refugees were able to settle in friendly territory relatively quickly after fleeing. That eased the task of feeding and sheltering them.

But fighting between

Kosovo's ethnic Albanian rebels and an alliance of Serbian police and the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army has produced no such status quo.

Most weeks, several villages go up in smoke in the hunt for separatists, swelling the pool of the homeless. Often aid convoys arrive to find that the refugees have fled somewhere else because of new fighting.

Local and international medical workers say children with dysentery have died because their parents feared passing Serb police checkpoints for treatment.

Serbian authorities assert nothing will happen to non-combatants wanting to return home. The refugees say otherwise.

Agram Kreyzin fled his village in the central Drenica area a month ago, leaving fields of wheat and corn, three cows, several goats and some chickens. The lost harvest has left him and his family of 10 with

no winter provisions.

"But we cannot go back," he says, speaking near the village of Shkoze, about 50-km southeast of Pristina. "The police are in our house. They burn our fields."

Kreyzin, 24, says that of the five neighbours who went back to Bubavec village to check on their property, three were killed and the two others were missing.

Soeren Jessen Petersen, a senior UNHCR official, warned recently that unless people were allowed to return home "we would have many, many people dying in the winter."

But even some of those allowed to go back cannot live normally.

Del Mundo, who works for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, says ethnic Albanian farmers told a recent UNHCR mission to Ade village, west of Kosovo's capital Pristina, that Serb police prevented them from taking in the harvest.

In the Drenica region, the situation is already dire.

Each day, Merita Toçi shares a kilo of rice with 10 other people.

She shushes a visitor who asks if she's hungry, pointing at the wide-eyed waifs around her sharing the thin-walled wooden school house serving as their shelter. "I can't say 'yes' in front of them now, can I?"

But 2-year-old Jeddine Hoti is not fooled. "I'm hungry," she wails. Her grandmother says the child subsists on bread crusts. Her own meal of the day was a tomato.

Only a few kilometres away, corn nods on the stalk and a summer wind rustles fields of wheat. Cows wander the roads in villages where Serb police are the only residents and graffiti proclaims: "I'm not only perfect, I'm also Serb."

"You have the irony of a rich, fertile country and some people starving because they cannot harvest," said del Mundo.

US attack on Sudanese factory Unanswered questions remain

KHARTOUM, Aug 24: The mystery surrounding the pharmaceutical plant attacked by the United States remains, perhaps hidden with the melted packets of pain relievers and bottles of antibiotics strewn among the rubble of red brick, splintered wood and white plaster, reports AP.

The United States says the plant was making precursors for chemical weapons. Sudan says no such work occurred.

But interviews with Sudanese officials, doctors, lawyers and plant employees suggest some of Sudan's claims are true: The plant produced antibiotics and drugs for diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, it planned to export to Iraq under UN approval, it was privately owned and it was a secret installation.

Among its products was Shi-

fazole, an antibiotic to treat parasites in animals. In January, the factory won a \$195,000 contract to ship 100,000 cartons to Iraq under a UN exemption to sanctions imposed in 1990. UN documents show. White cartons of the antibiotic were scattered in the rubble.

The plant was owned by Salah Idris, a Sudanese businessman who has homes in London, Saudi Arabia and Khartoum, according to his lawyer, Ghazi Suleiman. He Denies Idris ever met Osama bin Laden, the exiled Saudi millionaire the United States says is connected to the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

US officials contend the Khartoum factory belonged to a corporation in which bin Laden had a stake.

Strikes in Afghanistan, Sudan Majority of Americans approve Clinton's decision

WASHINGTON, Aug 24: President Bill Clinton's order to strike suspected terrorist sites in Afghanistan and Sudan was a hit with most Americans, polls suggest, reports AP.

A majority in the polls released Sunday and Friday said they don't think the decision was an attempt to draw attention away from the president's relationship with Monica Lewinsky. But many also said it was fair for members of Congress to question the military action just three days after Clinton's televised admission of marital infidelity.

"They think it's legitimate to ask the question, but they're pretty confident in the answer," said Thomas Mann, director of governmental studies at the Brookings Institution. "This is emblematic of the Clinton presidency... you go from the utter depths to a peak. People see him at his worst and then see him at his best, initiating a military strike that seems well-justified, being strong and resolute."

Mann said it was remarkable to see "two such dramatic presidential performances in one week that contrast so markedly."

Support for the anti-terrorist strikes ran from 66 per cent in a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll to 80 per cent in an ABC News poll.

Pollsters say there is often a tendency to support military actions in the immediate aftermath.

The president's approval rating in the three polls remained robust, anywhere from 61 per cent in the Gallup poll to 65 per cent in polls by ABC News and the Los Angeles Times to 69 per cent in an NBC News poll.

Yet, about 30 per cent of the Americans surveyed said they were suspicious about the timing of the attacks on sites in Sudan and Afghanistan. A majority of Democrats polled in a CBS/New York Times poll said they thought the timing of the

attacks was for military reasons, while Republicans were divided over whether it was for military or political reasons.

Those doubts come at a time when three-quarters of the American public in surveys doubt Clinton's honesty and ethics — credibility ratings as low as they've ever been. However, a majority in recent polls wants Clinton to stay in office and the Lewinsky inquiry to end.

According to a Los Angeles Times poll released Sunday, Americans generally approved Clinton's handling of the terrorist situation, with 53 per cent saying they believe he has done an excellent good job explaining why he authorised the attacks.

Seventy-three per cent of Americans trust Clinton and his advisors to make the right decisions about handling terrorism, although 50 per cent of Americans believe the president should have sought congressional support before launching the missile strikes. The LA Times poll found. The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

The ABC News phone survey of 510 adults had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.5 percentage points. The Gallup Poll of 628 adults had a margin of error of plus or minus 4 points.

The NBC poll, based on 603 interviews, had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.5 points. All were taken Thursday night. The CBS/NYT Poll of 439 interviews has a margin of error of plus or minus 5 points.

The more important question for long-range public support will be the follow-through, said Thomas Moore of the Heritage Foundation.

"I think there's a much greater burden on him than any other president in memory," Moore said. "To demonstrate he is engaging in these strikes for the purpose of crippling the threat and not public relations."

Islamic group declares 'war' on US interests in Yemen

SANNA, Aug 24: An unknown Islamic group Sunday declared "total war" on all US interests in Yemen to avenge the American raids against Afghanistan and Sudan last week, reports AFP.

But the Yemeni authorities denied the existence of the organisation and gave assurances that US interests in the country were protected.

In a statement sent to AFP's Dubai office, the Islamic Army of Aden said it "declares total war on all US interests in all of Yemen in response to the cowardly American raids in Afghanistan and the Muslim people of Sudan."

The group described the August 7 attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which left 257 dead and several thousand wounded, as "heroic

It said it was preparing to destroy US property and bases on the southern island of Socatra, the southern city of Aden and the western city of Hodeida.

The group also "announces that it supports Sheikh Osama bin Laden and its brothers in Sunda and calls on the whole Yemeni people to kill the Americans."

But a Yemeni interior ministry official said the group was fictitious.

"Its statement has been sent by someone who is mentally unbalanced or who has been inspired by parties hostile to Yemen, he said.

He also denied there were any foreign political organisations based in Yemen, adding that "the interests of the United States in Yemen and those of other foreign countries are protected."