

Debate looms on prospects of ground-force NATO airstrikes not enough to protect citizens in Kosovo

WASHINGTON, Oct 10: A NATO air campaign in Kosovo may not be enough to protect citizens in the troubled Serbian province, and already policy-makers are talking of a follow-up ground force, reports AP.

A fierce debate has ignited over the pros and cons of such a force — with critics warning of another long-term entanglement for Western allies much like Bosnia.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said that, at a minimum, a "verification mission" will be needed — although she predicted Americans won't participate. If a peace settlement is obtained, a longer serving international peacekeeping force might be required, she said.

US lawmakers, about to recess this weekend until the November elections, aren't too keen on the prospect of President Bill Clinton ordering US military action while they are away. And there's even less appetite for a new commitment of ground troops, with thousands

of US servicemen and women now deployed in Bosnia and the Gulf.

"We must send a clear signal to the administration that we will not paint ourselves into another Bosnia," cautions Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici. He said the US defence budget is already stretched too thin and the morale of US troops overseas drained by mission fatigue.

Administration officials have tread lightly on the issue of a ground force in Kosovo, mindful of congressional sensitivity over the extended US stay in neighbouring Bosnia.

About 8,000 Americans remain there as part of 35,000-strong 3-year-old NATO peacekeeping force. Clinton asked Congress for an additional 1.9 billion dollars to keep US forces there at least another year.

US officials offer sketchy details of any ground force, other than saying it should be composed of Europeans.

But Defence Secretary William Cohen, when pressed by members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, conceded US participation in such a force was "a possibility," although he called it a slim one.

The United States has warned Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic that NATO airstrikes are all but inevitable if he does not end his attacks on ethnic Albanians who live in Kosovo and allow tens of thousands of refugees to return to their homes.

Advocates of a ground force, including Republican Sen. John Warner, assert that airstrikes alone will do little to end the strife and that a ground presence is needed to help distribute aid and prevent renewed clashes.

Given the ethnic hatred between Serbs and Albanians, airstrikes without a follow-up could lead to even more repression by Milosevic's troops, Warner suggested.

C'wealth calls for lifting of sanctions against Nigeria

LONDON, Oct 10: Commonwealth ministers called on member nations Friday to begin lifting sanctions against Nigeria as a reward for its promise to return to civilian rule next year, reports AP.

But Nigeria may not fully rejoin the commonwealth, the 54-nation association of Britain and its former colonies, until the ministers are assured that Nigeria's Feb. 27 presidential elections succeed in creating a democratic government, said Commonwealth Secretary-General Emeke Anyaoku.

Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth in 1995.

"We want to give you encouragement to continue along the correct path you now have chosen," Anyaoku said to Ignatius Oluisekema, the foreign minister of Nigeria who attended the eight-nation meeting of Commonwealth ministers in London.

Nigeria's new government, led by Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, has moved quickly to end the country's international pariah status. Abubakar came to power in early June following dictator Gen Sani Abacha's sudden death by a

heart attack.

Abubakar has freed political prisoners, welcomed in foreign envoys, invited exiles to return and committed his military government to elections next year.

In return, Abubakar has continually appealed for the international community to recognize the changes and lift economic sanctions.

The US has said it is willing to give military aid to Nigeria if Abubakar follows through on his pledge to hand over power after the election.

Britain also has said that it expects the 15-nation European Union, which imposed an arms sale ban, a sports boycott and blocks on some development aid in November 1995, to lift all embargoes soon, except on arms.

Most of the sanctions against Nigeria were imposed after Abacha's regime hanged nine dissidents, including playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa.

By calling for Commonwealth nations to begin lifting sanctions, the committee said they were "recognising the progress made by Nigeria so far."



Key government coalition ally Jayalalitha Jayaram, left, meets with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Friday. The meeting was organised to discuss greater cooperation between coalition partners. — AP/UNB photo



President Clinton waves as he poses with some of the nation's police officers and Attorney General Janet Reno, left, during the "Top Cops" award ceremony in the Rose Garden of the White House on Friday. The recipients of the 1998 National Association of Police Organizations awards were honoured by the President for outstanding services to their communities during the previous year. — AP/UNB photo

'Success of ME talks depends on Israel'

HELSINKI, Finland Oct 10: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat warned Friday that the Middle East will be thrown into confusion if the peace process fails, and said the success of next week's talks in Washington depends on Israel, reports AP.

"The most important thing is that if we do not do our best, all of us, to protect... the peace process, then confusion will happen in the whole area of the Middle East," Arafat told reporters on a short visit to Helsinki.

"We have to wait and see how the Israelis will react to the American initiatives which we have accepted," he said.

Arafat said he had the right to declare an independent state for the Palestinians next year but stopped short of saying he would do so.

"According to the (Middle East peace) agreement I have the right to declare the independence of a Palestinian state at the end of the five years of the interim agreement," Arafat said.

"And, no doubt, on the fourth of next May '99, we have the right to declare our independent state," he added, but declined to comment further.

Arafat arrived in Finland

Arab Group rejects Turkish threats against Syria

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 10: The 22-member Arab Group at the United Nations has rejected what it called Turkish threats against Syria, confirmed its solidarity with Damascus and demanded that Turkey exercise maximum restraint, according to a statement issued on Friday, reports Reuters.

This followed a meeting of the group on Thursday to discuss charges by Turkey last week that Syria was waging an "undeclared war" by backing Kurdish separatist guerrillas seeking autonomy in southeast Turkey. Turkey also demanded that Damascus hand over Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Syria denies helping Ocalan and has looked to Arab countries for support.

An unofficial translation of the Arab Group's statement, issued in Arabic, said the group "confirmed its rejection of the Turkish threats and its full solidarity with Syria."

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Losses of troops in fighting Lankan opposition asks govt to stop lying

COLOMBO, Oct 10: Sri Lanka's main opposition on Friday demanded a parliamentary committee be set up to ascertain troop losses in last week's massive Tamil rebel attack in the north, accusing the government of "lying", reports AFP.

"Stop lying to the people and the House," said Ranil Wickremesinghe, leader of the United National Party, initiating a debate on a mandatory government motion for extending the state emergency by another month.

"This is the worst disaster we have faced and it is a failure of the government's military strategy to defeat the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)," he said referring to the fall of Killinochchi town to the rebels.

Wickremesinghe ridiculed Junior Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte's statement earlier that 186 soldiers were killed, 426 wounded and 789 missing in the three-day battle.

He said his party legislators alone had attended more than 186 funerals of soldiers from Killinochchi.

Wickremesinghe said the official figure of soldiers killed was lower than the 684 bodies the Red Cross had handed over

to the army and said the government, like Jessus Christ, had performed a "miracle" by "resurrecting" dead soldiers.

A total of 1,900 soldiers had been killed and 2,000 wounded in the Killinochchi attack, he said, adding troop casualties since the government launched a massive offensive to capture vital northern highway in May 1997 stood at 3,566 killed and 11,200 wounded.

Since the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga took office in late 1994 till September, a total of 11,548 soldiers had been killed and 23,037 injured, as against nearly 4,000 between 1983 and 1994, he said.

Describing the fall of Killinochchi as a "turning point" in the ethnic war, Wickremesinghe said the loss of the strategic town had virtually ended the military campaign Jayasikuru (Sure Victory) to capture "the highway."

Deputy Defence Minister Ratwatte said the loss of about 4.5 kilometres (three miles) of the highway around Killinochchi to the rebels was "temporary."

He said the LTTE launched the attack on Killinochchi to prevent the troops from capturing Mankulam.

BRIEFLY

ROK leader returns home President Kim Dae-jung urged South Koreans on Saturday to become more realistic in embracing Japan, a former colonial ruler still deeply resented by most Koreans, AP reports from Seoul.

Returning from a four-day trip to Japan, his first as president, Kim said it was time for his country to put behind the animosity stemming from Tokyo's harsh 1910-45 colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula. "We must not confuse emotion with reality," Kim told a news conference at the Seoul Airport, broadcast live on the country's major TV stations.

75 immigrants detained in Cyprus Seventy-five illegal immigrants have been detained at a British military base on Cyprus after arriving on the Mediterranean island in a boat described as a "floating coffin," AFP reports from Nicosia.

The group includes a baby who was born at sea shortly after the vessel set sail from Lebanon in a bid to reach Italy, the British bases in Cyprus said in a statement on Friday. Ten women, 19 children and five infants were among the group described as being of "Middle Eastern origin." A spokesman for the British bases, Captain John Brown, said the base authorities were discussing what to do with the immigrants with the Cypriot government.

Thai party expels defectors Thailand's most outspoken conservative politician engineered the expulsion on Saturday of 12 members of his party who disobeyed his orders and joined the coalition government of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, AP reports from Bangkok.

As police kept rival groups of protesters apart outside the headquarters of the Prachakorn Thai (Thai Citizens) Party, its leader, Samak Sundaravej, made good on his 11-month-old threat to expel the renegades, whom he had dubbed "the Cobras." The defection of the 12 enabled Chuan to forge a coalition with a majority in parliament and become prime minister in November 1997. He succeeded Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, who was driven from the top post after street protest erupted over his mishandling of Thailand's crumbling economy.

Former Chilean president honoured Former Chilean President Patricio Aylwin received on Friday the J William Fulbright Prize for his efforts in promoting international understanding, AP reports from Washington.

In an speech to a gathering of several hundred people at the State Department, Aylwin called attention to the plight of the more than 1 billion people around the world who live in extreme poverty. He praised the role of the United States in defeating totalitarian movements this century but the questioned whether Washington has the will to carry out the lofty goals set forth at hemispheric summit meetings in 1994 and this past April.

Ugandans urged to fight terrorism President Yoweri Museveni on Friday urged Ugandans to be vigilant in the fight against terrorism after an alleged plot to blow up the US Embassy and the bombings of several buses later in August in which 30 people were killed, AP reports from Kampala.

"Terrorism is a weapon of the weak and dispirited. Our opponents have resorted to terrorism, and it is an indication that our opponents cannot fight government by military means or by the ballot," Museveni told thousands of people celebrating Uganda's 36th anniversary of independence from Britain. "I ask each Ugandan to be at each other's keep. Report anyone who jeopardises security. When our opponents are desperate, they adopt terrorism. They cannot get power democratically and begin to strike innocent people using terrorism, Museveni said.

Thai lawmaker resigns The chairman of the Committee on Justice and Human Rights in Thailand's House of Representatives has resigned after being accused of striking a woman in the mouth with his mobile phone, Thai papers reported on Saturday, AP says from Bangkok.

Police Col Vajit Suvit, a member of the Democrat Party, gave up his chairmanship but not his seat in parliament, according to the Bangkok Post newspaper.

China's Communist Party expels official China's Communist Party has expelled a senior official who allegedly helped his daughters profit from illegal land sales, state media said on Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

Yu Fei, former vice chairman of southern Guangdong province's local parliament, was the latest senior official caught in a five-year-old government campaign against corruption.

Clinton signs temporary spending measure to avert govt shutdown

WASHINGTON, Oct 10: President Bill Clinton on Friday signed a temporary spending measure, averting a government shutdown while Congress and the White House try to break a stalemate over the federal budget, reports Reuters.

The president last night signed a clean continuing resolution to keep the government operation until Monday at midnight, a White House spokesman said.

Clinton signed the temporary measure just hours before a deadline expired. A similar continuing resolution that had kept the federal government in business since the October 1, start of the fiscal year, was set to run out at midnight.

White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles, after a meeting earlier on Friday with Republican leaders, said disagreements with the Republican-controlled Congress over the spending bill were unlikely to be worked out at the weekend.

Congress and the White House have failed to agree on several of the 13 spending bills that fund the government, and are trying to roll these most contentious bills into a huge compromise spending measure to keep money flowing to federal agencies and let Congress adjourn for the year.

Hillary brings home a taste of Arkansas

WASHINGTON, Oct 10: Hillary Rodham Clinton brought home a taste of Arkansas to President Bill Clinton for a celebration of their 23rd wedding anniversary on Friday, reports Reuters.

The First Lady got takeout food from three of Clinton's favourite restaurants in Little Rock: Doe's Eat Place, Shug's and Juanita's.

"There's stak and tamales from Doe's, ribs from Shug's and tacos and enchiladas from Juanita's," said the First Lady's spokeswoman, Marsha Berry.

The first couple's 23rd anniversary is on Sunday but they decided to celebrate with a quiet evening at home on Friday, even as Mrs Clinton will not be in town for the anniversary.

She leaves on Saturday on a trip that will take her to Sofia, Bulgaria, for the Women in the 21st Century Conference and to Prague, Czech Republic, to participate in Forum 2000, an international conference to discuss global issues.

The Clintons have been trying to repair strains in their marriage brought about by the president's extramarital affair with Monica Lewinsky.

Police deployed to stop anti-Mahathir rally

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 10: Police patrolled parts of downtown Kuala Lumpur to keep pro-democracy protesters from gathering on Saturday as weekend shoppers were warned to keep away from the area, reports AP.

The protest planned on two of the busiest streets in Kuala Lumpur for Saturday, however, did not start. Shops remained open and the sidewalks bustled with people.

Five police trucks were parked nearby and dozens of police officers in uniform and many more in plainclothes mill about in the crowds, waiting to strike at the first indication of a gathering.

On Friday, police warned people to stay away from gatherings that authorities have banned. Kuala Lumpur and many other Malaysian towns have been rocked by street protests and loud rallies demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

The rallies were triggered by the firing and subsequent arrest of Anwar Ibrahim, who was once Mahathir's anointed successor and is now his fiercest critic.

Although support for the opposition has swelled in recent weeks, particularly among the country's majority Muslim population, public protests have ebbed since Anwar appeared in court on September 29

India, Pakistan urged to sign CTBT

GANGTOK, Oct 10: The Israeli ambassador to India, Dr Yehoyada Haim, has called upon India and Pakistan to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) before the September, 1999 deadline and says that his country will follow suit, reports PTI.

Talking to reporters here last evening, Haim said that atomic bombs were now in the hands of some regimes which posed a great danger to the existence of Israel. "We have to create a peace-loving and democratic world through negotiations and restrictions to offset this danger," he felt.

The CTBT should be signed by all the nuclear-haves and "we are asking everybody to endorse it," he was here as part of his visit to various north-eastern states to see areas of cooperation between the two countries, he said.

Bodo rebels kill 14 in Assam

NEW DELHI, Oct 10: Militants shot dead 14 people in a remote district in India's northeast Assam state while a parliamentary committee was touring the area to assess the law and order situation, newspapers reported on Saturday, says AP.

The killers were suspected members of the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland who oppose the Indian government and also other tribal groups living in Assam, the times of India newspaper reported.

The Bodos make up nearly 1.2 million of Assam's 22 million people.

The assailants came armed with automatic weapons and attacked three villages in Darrang district late Friday night killing their victims in four separate incidents. The area is 1,500 km east of the Indian capital New Delhi.

It was not clear what was the motive behind the killings. The victims included members of the majority Hindu community and a linguistic minority, the Times of India said.

Officials in the state capital Gauhati told the visiting parliamentary team that there has been no let up in violence in the state. At least 1,000 people have died in inter tribal conflicts in the last two years.

Fate of 94,000 refugees 'India must act to end deadlock between Nepal, Bhutan'

KATHMANDU, Oct 10: India must intervene to break a deadlock between the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan over the fate of more than 94,000 stateless refugees, Nepal's Prime Minister said here today.

Girija Prasad Koirala also told Reuters that he wanted to call a general election in Nepal within six months to end almost four years of unstable revolving-door politics, and pledged to crackdown on Maoist insurgents to ensure peace.

The 73-year-old Koirala said he had sent an emissary to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan which, human rights activists say, forced ethnic Nepalis to flee and settle in Nepal after 1991.

"We hoped there would be ministerial-level talks very soon.

There have been no ministerial talks since a seventh round in 1977, and the two countries remain bitterly divided over how to resolve the future of the thousands living in seven United Nations-run camps in southeast Nepal.

He said that since the refugees had flooded into Nepal, and since India had turned back several hundred who tried to return two years ago, it is a trilateral — not bilateral — issue.

"I have requested the Indian prime minister to give support

in solving this issue," he said.

Without India's cooperation this problem is not going to be solved, so I am requesting India to involve herself or mediate... to solve this issue.

7 projects win Aga Khan Award for Architecture, '98

GRANADA (Spain), Oct 10: In their review of the 424 projects presented in the award's seventh cycle, the 1998 master jury paid particular attention to the continuity and ongoing process of the Award programme. They specifically refrained from the selection of projects that represented trends, messages, or statements that had been made in the past. They believe that each of the seven winning projects speaks clearly for itself, and conveys a universal message with eloquence and poignancy, says a press release.

Seven projects selected for Aga Khan Award for Architecture, '98 include Rehabilitation of Hebron Old Town-Slum Network of Indore City, India-Lepers' Hospital, Chopda Taluka, India-Salinger Residence, Selangor, Malaysia-Tuwaiq Palace, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia-Alhama Arts Council, Lahore, Pakistan — and Vidhan Bhavan, Bhopal, India.

AI chief slams US for 'hypocrisy' over HR situation

MEXICO CITY, Oct 10: The head of Amnesty International criticised the United States on Friday for what he described as "hypocrisy" over its "bad and deteriorating" human situation, reports Reuters.

Echoing a damning report published earlier this month by the international human-rights organisation, Secretary General Pierre Sane said police brutality was widespread, prisoners suffered inhuman treatment, the use of the death penalty infringed various international laws, asylum seekers were abused and minorities were targeted in the United States.

"The human rights situation in the United States is bad, and it is deteriorating," Sane said on a visit to Mexico, where he was seeking Mexican support for a campaign to improve respect for human rights in the world's only remaining superpower.

"We want to bring to light the hypocrisy of the US government. The US government uses international law and international justice when it suits it and disregards the very same international laws and international justice when it doesn't suit it," he said.

4 to die in China

BEIJING, Oct 10: A city court near China's ancient capital Xi'an has sentenced four people to death and jailed nine for stealing and selling 1,000-year-old frescoes. The China Daily reported on Saturday, reports Reuters.

The 13 were caught after a two-year investigation showed they forged a key to a museum and stole 15 frescoes which had been found in the tomb of an imperial concubine from the Tang Dynasty (617-907), the report said.

Aided by a museum worker who was the wife of their ring-leader, the thieves stole the paintings during four raids on a museum in Xianyang in northern Shaanxi province from 1992-94.

They sold the relics in southern Guangdong province, from where they were smuggled overseas. Only two had been recovered, the report said.



Police block an opposition rally in central Baku on Friday attended by about 10,000 people and beat several people demonstrating against upcoming presidential elections. Azerbaijan's autocratic President Geidar Aliev is running virtually unchallenged in Sunday's election, which the main opposition groups have decided to boycott. — AP/UNB photo