

Deployment of foreign troops Milosevic refuses to accept US proposal

BELGRADE, Feb 17: President Slobodan Milosevic dealt a blow Wednesday to prospects for a peace deal on Kosovo, rejecting the Americans' take-it-or-leave-it proposal that foreign troops enforce any accord, reports AP.

Milosevic's statement after a four-hour meeting Tuesday night with US envoy Christopher Hill, who arrived in from Kosovo talks in Rambouillet, France, left the status of those negotiations in more doubt than ever.

Western sources at the talks in France said Hill flew in to tell Milosevic that if he doesn't accept a Kosovo agreement by noon Saturday that calls for foreign troops in Kosovo, he will suffer NATO airstrikes.

But Milosevic, who has been known to bow to diplomatic pressure at the last moment, showed no signs of doing so now.

In a statement issued early Wednesday by the official Tanjug news agency, Milosevic said "our negative stand on the presence of foreign troops is not only the attitude of the leadership, but also of all citizens of our country."

The US proposal to deploy an international force is backed by other powers at the conference outside Paris. As many as 30,000 NATO troops, including some 4,000 American soldiers, would be sent to Kosovo immediately to police the agreement.

Hill was dispatched to Belgrade after US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright telephoned Milosevic to warn him to accept the peace deal, including the troops deployment, or face NATO strikes.

But Milosevic showed no more willingness to do so than the Serbian officials at the talks.

US warns Iraq against attacks on bases in Turkey, KSA & Kuwait

WASHINGTON, Feb 17: The United States on Tuesday again sharply warned Iraq against launching attacks on military bases in Turkey, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, saying that such a move would be met "with a very swift and sure response," reports Reuters.

Defence Department spokesman Ken Bacon said in response to questions from reporters that the US military maintained a major force of warplanes and missile-carrying warships in the Gulf region capable of quickly attacking Iraq.

His words echoed a warning by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright this week following threats from Iraq that it might strike air bases in Cilirick, Turkey, or the two Gulf states from where US and British jets have been attacking air defences in northern and

southern Iraq since December 1998. "Any attack by Iraq against one of our allies in the region would be a severe mistake and would be met with a very swift and sure response," Bacon said.

I think it is a sign of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's isolation and desperation that Iraq is making such threats. He has tried diplomacy with his neighbours. He has tried to cajole them in supporting his position and that has failed."

Bacon and State Department spokesman James Rubin said US warplanes would continue to strike targets in Iraq's northern and southern "no fly" zones as long as they were threatened or fired on by the Iraqi military.

Both also denied a published report in the London Sunday Telegraph that Russia agreed to sell some 160 million US dol-

lars in new air defence and warplanes modernisation services to Iraq in violation of a UN arms embargo put in place following the 1991 Gulf war.

I have nothing to suggest that report is true," said Bacon, noting that Moscow had denied it.

Iraq said on Tuesday it was determined to defend itself from western planes using bases in the three neighbouring countries to patrol the "no-fly" zones, set up by Washington and its allies after the war to protect Kurds in the north and Shiite Muslims in the south from Saddam.

Hillary to give 'careful thought' to senate seat

WASHINGTON, Feb 17: Hillary Rodham Clinton said she would give "careful thought" to running for a US Senate seat from New York, reports AP.

Three confidants said Tuesday she was talking with supporters about what it would take to run a serious campaign. The first lady promised to make her decision later this year. President Bill Clinton said on Monday she would be "terrific in the Senate."

Hillary's statement drew a quick response from the camp of New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, a possible Republican rival. "If Hillary Clinton announces a run for Senate, that would encourage the mayor to consider his candidacy for the Senate as well," a Giuliani spokeswoman said.

Hillary said she was deeply gratified by "the large number of people who have encouraged me to consider running" for the Senate seat being opened by the retirement of Democratic Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 2000.

Just four days after the end of her husband's impeachment ordeal, Mrs. Clinton said she had not been able to give much thought to a potential candidacy but would be able to focus on it now. She said she would make her decision later this year.

Attack on US embassy

Syrian minister withdraws his comments

WASHINGTON, Feb 17: A Syrian Deputy Prime Minister who praised an attack against the US embassy in Damascus withdrew his comments after US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright demanded a retraction, threatening to recall the US ambassador, US officials said on Tuesday.

The officials also said Syria promised to pay compensation for damages very soon, the amount is expected to total under one million dollars, one official told Reuters.

The US embassy in Damascus was attacked last Dec. 19 by protesters angry about US and British airstrikes against Iraq. Syrian Defence Minister Li Gen. Mustafa Tlas who is also a deputy prime minister, was quoted in an interview with the official daily Tishreen last week as praising the assault.



Natalie Imbruglia, winner of the "Best International Newcomer Award" holds her trophy during the Brit Awards ceremony at the London Arena on Tuesday. Imbruglia was also awarded Best International Female Solo Artist. — AFP photo

New study reveals

Tomato can lower risk of cancer

WASHINGTON, Feb 17: Spaghetti sauce and ketchup can be good for you, says a study confirming a long-suspected view — that eating lots of fresh and processed tomatoes can lower the risk of some kinds of cancer, reports AP.

The summary study in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute found there is now enough data to show convincingly "that high consumers of tomatoes and tomato products are at substantially decreased risk of numerous cancers, although probably not all cancers."

The study, to be published Wednesday, analyzed 72 past studies that had examined the link between various cancers and the consumption of tomatoes and tomato-based products. Some of the studies also examined the blood levels of lycopene, a compound principally found in tomatoes that powerfully protects cells from oxidants that have been linked to cancer.

In all, 57 of the 72 studies

linked tomato intake with a reduced risk of cancer, said Dr. Edward Giovannucci of Harvard Medical School, author of the report. In 35 of these studies, he said, the connection was strong enough to be "statistically significant," while in another 15 the link was inconclusive or only "slight."

The data are most compelling for cancers of the prostate gland, lung and stomach, Giovannucci said. The findings also suggest links between tomatoes and lower levels of several other cancers, including pancreatic, colorectal, esophageal, oral, breast and cervical cancers.

Dr. Clare Hasler, executive director of the Functional Foods for Health Programme at the University of Illinois, called Giovannucci's work the most comprehensive to date on the issue.

"It shows that people who eat a large amount of tomato have a reduced risk for a number of types of cancers," she said.

Talks on hand over of Lockerbie suspects at 'delicate stage'

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 17: Discussions on handing over two Libya suspects for trial in the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am jet are at "a delicate stage," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Tuesday, reports AP.

"We are in discussions and I prefer not to go into details," he told reporters as he arrived at UN headquarters. "I would hope that in the next week or so we will have a clearer indication of what is happening."

Annan refused to comment on whether UN legal experts are drafting a letter with assurances that the Libyan government is seeking.

At issue is the trial of two Libyan suspects wanted for the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am passenger jet over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people. Weekend reports from South African and Saudi Arabian officials, who were asked to mediate on behalf of the United Nations, said a deal is imminent for trial in The Netherlands.

Asked why the issue was so delicate now, UN spokesman Fred Eckhard said Tuesday: "I

think the secretary-general feels that we're moving closer to a final resolution (and) he doesn't want to do anything that will upset the apple cart."

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said Tuesday that efforts in recent weeks — including visits to Libya by Saudi and South African envoys — have merged to bring a deal within reach, and that not much was left to negotiate.

"In the coming few days, there may be an agreement on the remaining details," Moussa told reporters in Cairo after returning from the Libyan capital, Tripoli, where he met his counterpart, Omar al-Muntasser, on Monday.

In August, Libya accepted in principle a US-British proposal for a trial before Scottish judges in the Netherlands. But Libya later balked at the prospect that the suspects, if convicted, would be imprisoned in Scotland.

Saudi officials told Annan on Friday that the Libyans had agreed to the suspects' imprisonment in Scotland, if convicted, Eckhard said.



King Abdullah ibn Hussein (R) and his wife Princess Rania play with Jordanian orphans at an orphanage on Tuesday. The Royal couple made a tour of the Hashemiyeh Palace, a two storey mansion which King Hussein had converted into an orphanage just over a year ago. King Hussein, who died of cancer on Feb 7, and his wife Queen Noor used to pay regular visits to the 200 orphans who live in the palace. — AFP photo

Prison terms upto 20 yrs

Cuban lawmakers crack down on dissidents with tough laws

HAVANA, Feb 17: Cuban lawmakers set prison terms of up to 20 years for people accused of promoting US policy aimed at forcing a change in the communist government, reports AP.

The "Law for the Protection of Cuba's National Independence and Economy" was unanimously approved late Tuesday by the parliament, three years after it was proposed in response to the tightening of the US trade embargo against Cuba.

The measure also sets fines for those accused of crimes that affect "the fundamental interests, political or economic" of Cuba.

"What we have done not only reaffirms our spirit of resistance and our continued fight to preserve our revolution," Ricardo Alarcon, president of the parliament, said in a comments carried by Cuba's Prensa Latina news service.

"It also opens a new chapter in which we confront the attempts to force upon us from the outside a model of society that we have since rise above," Alarcon said.

Before the law was passed, lawmakers agreed to President Fidel Castro's proposal to reduce from 30 to 20 years the maximum prison limit for those convicted under the new law.

The new tough measures, discussed in parliament Tuesday, appear to be aimed espe-

cially at independent Cuban journalists, many of whom are in regular contact with the US government's Radio Marti, which opposes the Castro government.

The measures would ban the introduction of "subversive" materials into the country, along with the importation of equipment designed to disseminate such information.

The move comes a little more than a month after President Bill Clinton announced measures designed to increase contact between the American

and Cuban people while maintaining the US embargo against Cuba.

Cuban officials were infuriated by Clinton's proposal, which they said did nothing to ease the sanctions.

The crackdown on pro-US dissidence also comes amid a general toughening throughout Cuba's government.

Revisions in the penal code approved Tuesday call for the death penalty for government officials who engage in drug trafficking and lengthened sentences for smugglers of aliens.

The new penal code increases Cuba's longest prison sentence from 20 years to 30 years, lengthens terms for repeat offenders and implements the use of life sentences.

Cuba's top Roman Catholic church leader on Tuesday expressed concern about the strict new measures for both common and political crimes.

"This is not the way to resolve things," Cardinal Jaime Ortega said. "The problem is more than that. It's in our values, in the family, in education."

Of capital punishment, Ortega said, "One bad thing cannot be resolved with another bad thing."

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Where has Bin Laden gone?

ISLAMABAD, Feb 17: The Taliban militia of Afghanistan, which claims to have launched a search for Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden after his reported disappearance last week, claims efforts to locate him have borne no fruit, reports IANS.

Diplomatic sources here said there were several possible destinations for bin Laden, including Chechnya in Russia or several isolated African countries. With the US pressing the Taliban for exact information of bin Laden's whereabouts, the Taliban chief, Mulla Omar, made it clear that his administration would not be cowed down by threats of fresh air strikes against Afghanistan.

"Let me say that Afghans will not yield to threats; nor will we accept untenable (American) demands buckling under pressure," Mulla Omar told Radio Shariat in Kabul on Monday night.

Afghan sources claiming proximity to the Taliban, while reiterating that there had been no success yet in locating bin Laden, said here that the militia's top leadership would refuse to extradite the dissident leader to Saudi Arabia or hand him over to the United States.

Washington, which alleges that bin Laden masterminded the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania last August, has announced a reward of \$5 million on his head. The US had, following the Africa bombings, launched a missile strike on Afghanistan's Khost province on the suspected terror camps run by bin Laden.

The militia's supreme leader took pains to explain that the



Saudi fugitive had not been forced out of war-wrecked Afghanistan, saying bin Laden was at liberty to go anywhere he wished.

A Peshawar-based Urdu newspaper, however, claimed the alleged terrorist, along with five close confidants — three of whom were identified as Aiman Al-Mazhar, Saad Sharif and Abu Asad — and ten guards, had sneaked out of his hideout after developing differences with his dogmatic hosts, the Taliban. The Afghan Islamic Press (AIP), quoting competent sources, said bin Laden was at odds with the Taliban over the militia representatives' recent meetings with American and British officials in Islamabad. "The row culminated in Osama's decision to leave Afghanistan," it said. Another private network, Sahar News Agency, claimed the Saudi national had been spotted in the Nimroz, capital of Zaranj, bordering Iran. It

said diplomats had also seen five vehicles carrying bin Laden, his aides and guards on Thursday at 11 a.m.

Mulla Omar reiterated that bin Laden had not been forced out of Afghanistan. He said the Taliban had met all its obligations towards bin Laden, adding that there were three reasons why he had not been handed over to international authorities.

"First, if we handed over Osama to anybody this would be a black spot on Afghan history and would have gone against fraternity and the tradition of Afghanistan because he was our guest," Omar said. Secondly, he said, no other Muslim country would provide him with sanctuary, "which is extremely regrettable." And thirdly, the U.S. had denied Osama bin Laden his right to express his views, he added.

About the chances of another U.S. strike on Afghanistan, Mulla Omar said, "It is up to America if they want to launch rocket attacks on Afghanistan and we can say that Afghans will not yield to anyone's might, nor would Afghans accept their demand by force." He said the Taliban had not accepted any financial assistance from bin Laden "because he is suffering economic hardships himself."

The Clinton administration has so far failed to confirm the Taliban's claim that bin Laden has gone "missing". State Department spokesman James Rubin said, "We are not able to confirm reports that Osama bin Laden has left Afghanistan. We cannot confirm either that he has gone to Iraq."

Shiv Sena asks cinema owners not to screen Mehta's 'Fire'

NEW DELHI, Feb 17: In a veiled threat, Shiv Sena yesterday asked cinema owners in the capital not to screen 'Fire', Deepa Mehta's controversial film respecting the sentiments of people at large and shiv saikins in particular, reports PTI.

Shiv Sena will launch popular agitation against cinemas which screen vulgar films party's Delhi unit chief Jai Bhagwan Goyal cautioned in a statement here without directly naming the film.

Goyal's reaction comes in the wake of the recent clearance given to the film without any cuts by the Central Board of Film Certification.

The centre had referred the film to the board for re-assessment following attacks on cinema in a Delhi and Mumbai by shiv saikins protesting vulgarity in the movie which depicts a lesbian relationship.

Termining the censor board decision as unfortunate, Goyal said it would only encourage other film makers to make movies on topics which were alien to Indian culture.



A Kurdish woman shouts during a riot next to a portrait of the leader of the Kurdistan Worker's Party, Abdullah Ocalan, near the Greek Embassy in The Hague on Tuesday. Kurds organised demonstrations all over Europe and occupied several Greek and Kenyan embassies and consulates following Ocalan's extradition to Turkey. Police in The Hague have arrested some 73 Kurdish demonstrators. — AFP photo.

Ocalan's capture puts question mark on Kurdish rebellion

ANKARA, Feb 17: For the past 14 years, guerrillas of the Kurdistan Workers Party have waged a ruthless and bloody battle for autonomy in Turkey's southeast. With the capture of leader Abdullah Ocalan, their fate remains unclear, reports AP.

Ocalan was captured in a covert operation and brought Tuesday to Turkey to be tried on terrorism charges that carry the death penalty. Details of the operation were not disclosed. His capture set off massive protests Tuesday as enraged Kurds seized embassies and held hostages across Europe.

Ocalan is believed to have thousands of fighters in southeast Turkey and in Iraq, and supporters throughout Europe. It was not immediately clear if the rebels would put their arms down or intensify their fighting.

As Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit announced Ocalan's capture Tuesday, he appealed to Ocalan's fighters to surrender under a law that allows for more, lenient sentences for those who give themselves up

and keep up violence," said Dogu Ergil, president of the Foundation for the Research of Societal Problems, an Ankara-based think-tank.

PKK supporters in Europe may wish to focus on pursuing Kurdish goals through the Turkish political arena, Ergil said, adding that the government should do more to solve the crisis peacefully.

"Turkey has to accept the fact that this is a multicultural nation and the Kurds want respect to their cultural traditions. This has to be solved within means of democracy," Ergil said.

Turkish officials insist that Turks and Kurds are equal and cite a list of people with Kurdish background who have served as president, Prime Minister or as ministers.

However, Turkey does not allow 12 million Kurds to use the Kurdish language in broadcasting or education — rights that are afforded to other minorities.

Many activists, Turkish and Kurdish, who have urged greater cultural rights for Kurds or

have denounced human rights abuses by Turkish forces have been imprisoned under strict laws that restrict freedom of expression.

Attempts to launch legitimate Kurdish parties have been short-lived, with courts moving against them for their alleged support of the banned PKK. Three Kurdish parties have been shut down so far. Four former Kurdish parliament deputies remain jailed.

A new case is pending against the most recently formed Kurdish political party, ahead of April general elections.

The government has announced a project to help the economic development of the impoverished Kurdish-dominated southeastern region.

But martial-law-like rule continues in that region, drawing criticism of Turkey's human rights record.

Provincial governors can easily impose curfews, call in military forces to suppress meetings and rallies deemed illegal, order an end to strikes and obtain search warrants.