

# NATO rejects Russian-brokered deal: Air strike continues

WASHINGTON, Mar 31: NATO vowed Tuesday to continue air strikes against Yugoslavia, rejecting a Russian-brokered proposal to end the bombing while US officials warned Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic he risked losing Kosovo, reports AFP.

Warplanes continued their Aerial Blitz of Yugoslavia after the Russian mediation mission failed to budge Belgrade enough to satisfy alliance leaders.

Seven explosions were heard early Wednesday southeast of Pristina, Kosovo's provincial capital, as the attacks entered their eighth day. Tanjug News Agency reported.

"President Milosevic's proposal is unacceptable," US President Bill Clinton said in a statement after a telephone conversation with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who shared Clinton's assessment.

Schroeder was briefed on the Milosevic plan by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who travelled to Belgrade earlier Tuesday in an effort to restart talks over the Kosovo crisis.

The German leader dismissed the Russian effort as "no basis" for a settlement. In talks with Primakov, Milosevic agreed to "begin to withdraw part of the forces" in Kosovo, but only if the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation halted its air strikes first.

We remain firmly committed to a political settlement through negotiations," Milosevic said.

He put two conditions before any political settlement: "A total halt to NATO support for Kosovar separatists who have resorted to terrorism" and "a return to the situation in the region which preceded the concentration of NATO forces on

the borders of Yugoslavia" — an implicit call for the withdrawal of 12,000 NATO troops deployed in Macedonia.

But British foreign secretary Robin Cook said NATO attacks would only stop when Milosevic called a ceasefire and accepted the peace plan proposed by the West.

Milosevic's proposals fall far short of what is required," Cook said.

UN Chief Kofi Annan and NATO leaders decried the Serb ethnic cleansing operation that has caused nearly 100,000 Kosovo Albanians to flee.

"I am profoundly outraged by reports of a vicious and systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing conducted by Serbian military and paramilitary forces," Annan said.

As reports of atrocities continued to rise, refugees continued to stream out of Kosovo into Albanian, Macedonia and the

Yugoslav republic of Montenegro.

NATO spokesman Jamie Shea said some 118,000 Kosovo Albanians had fled the province since March 10 when NATO's air campaign began.

In Pristina, some 100,000 people have been rounded up by Serbian forces. Kosovo Liberation Army Commander Hashim Thaci told German television.

If the reports were confirmed, Shea said, "This is something we have not seen since the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge in the mid 1970s."

Air raid sirens went off Tuesday as darkness fell in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kraljevo, Nis and Trstenik, indicating more NATO missile and bombing attacks were imminent. They continued into Wednesday.

Several missiles hit southeast of the Kosovo capital of Pristina at about 1 am (2300

GMT Tuesday), and other impacts were reported around the province, the state-run news agency Tanjug said.

NATO has said it is shifting its attacks to the troops and security forces operating in Kosovo, where they are accused of terrorising the ethnic Albanians into fleeing.

Hashim Thaci, a leader of rebel Kosovars, told Germany's ZDF television that the Serbs had created three concentration camps, including one in the stadium of Pristina, which he said is holding 100,000 people.

US President Bill Clinton warned that atrocities against Kosovars would weaken Serbia's claim to the separatist province and increase NATO's determination to destroy Milosevic's army.

US officials conceded, however, that NATO's air assault is far from accomplishing its goals.



Chicago Muslims hold signs at a demonstration held by Chicago Muslims Kosovo Task Force on Tuesday at the Daley Centre in Chicago, Illinois. This gathering is to support the NATO bombing campaign targeted against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

— AFP photo



Indonesian students try to break through a police barricade yesterday during a demonstration in front of the defence ministry. Hundreds of students were baton-charged by police and soldiers as they were trying to reach the military headquarters to demand a speedier investigation into the shooting of four of their colleagues by police and soldiers last May.

## DPRK rejects US demand for halting missile development

SEOUL, Mar 31: North Korea rejected a US demand for a halt to its missile development and exports but agreed to further talks with American officials, South Korean officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

"As expected, there was no agreement reached at the US-North Korea talks," Kwon Jong-rak, a South Korean Foreign Ministry official, said after meeting with US negotiators.

Kwon, Director-General of the American Affairs Bureau in Seoul's Foreign Ministry, was briefed on two days of US-North Korea missile talks which ended in the North's capital of Pyongyang on Tuesday.

Robert Einhorn, US deputy assistant secretary of state for political and military affairs, flew in late Tuesday night to brief South Korean officials on his talks with North Korean officials.

Quoting Einhorn, Kwon told South Korean reporters that while maintaining its recalcitrant stance, North Korea agreed in principle to hold another round of missile talks with the United States "as soon

as possible."

The venue and date of the next talks, the fifth since 1996, will be decided through consultations between US and North Korean diplomats assigned to the United Nations in New York, he said.

North Korea maintained that it will continue its missile development unless Washington ceases its hostile policy toward the communist country, Kwon said.

North Korea, Kwon said, also repeated its earlier stand that it would stop missile exports if the United States makes financial compensation. The North reportedly is demanding 1 billion dollars annually for three years.

Einhorn scheduled a separate briefing for the foreign news media later Wednesday.

Before briefing South Korean officials earlier in the day, the US envoy said he had intensive discussions in Pyongyang.

"Altogether, we met 11 hours over two days for quite intensive, serious talks," Einhorn said.

## Death toll rises to 110 Fresh tremor rocks quake-hit region in India

LUCKNOW, India, Mar 31: A fresh tremor rocked India's Himalayan foothills early today, two days after a powerful earthquake and aftershocks killed at least 110 people and injured more than 300, officials said, reports Reuter.

The latest earthquake, which hit the Garhwal region at 2:32 am (2102 GMT) measured 5.2 on the open-ended Richter scale.

Sridhar Pathak, Superintendent of Police in Chamoli town, told Reuters by phone that there were no reports of casualties as yet. Chamoli was hit hard by Monday's earthquake, which measured 6.8 on the Richter scale.

Pathak said he had received information of one house collapsing in the fresh tremors, but details from far-flung areas would take time.

Monday's earthquake, which jolted many parts of

northern India, western Nepal and southern China, brought houses tumbling down on thousands of people as they slept in Garhwal district.

Rescue operations were continuing in remote areas where the extent of damage remained unclear.

A strong aftershock during the night toppled more houses, severely injuring at least one person in the town of Nand-prayag, police said. A series of subsequent tremors, about one every hour until dawn, kept residents on the edge of panic.

In Gopeshwar, a town of several hundred families, most people slept in the streets, in playgrounds and even on an army helipad, listening in fear as the latest tremors dislodged more boulders from the hillsides and sent them crashing down the scarred slopes.

Some 350 people were injured in Monday's quake and

2,500 houses destroyed. Helicopters evacuated the most seriously injured. Tents and makeshift shelters sprang up in the towns for the survivors.

Men walked from distant villages to plead for help from relief and rescue workers who have focused their efforts on the worst hit town, Chamoli, and on the towns along the few paved roads in the Garhwal hills about 300 km north of New Delhi.

"It is the wrath of the gods. This is very unusual. We have never had so many shocks," said Vijay Prasad, the priest in charge of the 2,800-year-old temple of Gopinath.

The quake, which struck shortly after midnight Monday morning, measures 6.8 in intensity, one of the strongest in India in recent times and the most powerful this century in this quake-prone district in the lower Himalayas.



Family members sit in front of their damaged house in Chamoli Tuesday. More than 100 people have died as a result of an earthquake which struck the region in the Himalayan foothills on Monday.

— AFP photo

## BRIEFLY

**Land Day rally in WB, Gaza:** Arab communities in Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip held annual Land Day demonstrations to protest against confiscation of Arab land by Israel. Xinhua reports from Jerusalem.

About 10,000 Arab residents in the Galilee, Northern Israel, held a peaceful demonstration to mark the 23rd anniversary of the Land Day, according to Israel Television. The Land Day which falls on March 30 is to mark the killing of six Arabs by Israeli troops in 1976 in Arab protests against the confiscation of land from their communities in northern Israel.

**4 Lebanese soldiers hurt in attack:** Four Lebanese army soldiers, including an officer, were wounded Tuesday by Israeli helicopters raid in the country's eastern West Bekaa Valley. Xinhua reports from Beirut.

The soldiers were hit during an exchange of fire with Israeli helicopters in the area of Jineh just north of the Israeli occupied border zone in South Lebanon, a statement issued by the army said. The Israeli helicopters were carrying out a mission of bombardment on nearby hills and areas believed to be hide-outs for guerrillas of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, or party of god.

**Bus accident kills 8 in Philippines:** Eight passengers were killed and several others wounded when two buses collided in the central Philippine island of Samar, police said Tuesday, AFP reports from Manila.

A police report to headquarters in Manila said the Philtranco bus smashed against another vehicle running in the opposite direction on Monday in the town of Gaudara.

## Grenade attack on US embassy in Moscow

MOSCOW, Mar 31: Grenades were launched at the US embassy compound on Sunday while hundreds of protesters were demonstrating outside the central Moscow building against NATO action in Yugoslavia, witnesses said, reports AP.

Two grenade launchers were abandoned on the ground after a white jeep drove by the central Moscow building. The gunmen drove off undetected.

A spokesman at the embassy said he was aware of the report but could not say whether the embassy had been hit by gunfire.

"We cannot confirm anything at the moment," a US embassy spokesman said. "We have reports of gunfire directed at the US Embassy, and the Moscow police are investigating."

Witnesses said the shooting occurred at 1:40 pm (0940 GMT), with no one hurt in the attack.

## Russia to deliver 124 T-90 tanks to India

MOSCOW, Mar 31: India will start to equip armoured regiments with the new Russian T-90 tank by the end of 1999 and New Delhi may receive a licence to assemble the tanks, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported Wednesday, says AP.

Citing unidentified Defence Ministry sources, the report said a batch of 124 T-90 tanks will be delivered to India. A second batch of tanks may be assembled in India if the two nations reach a production agreement, it said.

The Russian tanks will be used as a counter to 320 Ukrainian-made tanks.

Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev discussed sales of the T-90 during a recent visit to New Delhi.

The T-90 is Russia's most advanced tank and is armed with a 125 mm gun and advanced protective armour.

## Sudanese rebels kill 83 troops

CAIRO, Mar 31: Sudanese rebels said on Monday they killed 83 government troops, including nine officers, during weekend fighting in southern Sudan and warned foreign oil companies to leave the region, reports AP.

The Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) said in a statement sent to Cairo that its fighters wounded another 200 troops, including six officers, during fighting Friday and Saturday in Ulu in the southern Blue Nile state.

There was no immediate independent confirmation of the report.

"Our forces managed to inflict a stinging defeat on the forces of the Khartoum regime which had surrounded the liberated city of Ulu," said the statement faxed to Cairo from the Eritrean capital Asmara. The SPLA said it had liberated the city in the last four months.

## Future of N Ireland peace accord hangs in balance

BELFAST, Mar 31: The prime ministers of Britain and Ireland are committed to brokering this week's negotiations day and night to keep Northern Ireland's nearly year-old peace accord from unraveling over IRA disarmament, reports AP.

Tony Blair, trying to keep one eye on Britain's commitment to the NATO bombardment of Serb military targets, had hoped to achieve a breakthrough during the course of 15 hours of talks Tuesday alongside Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern.

But their effort, which broke up at Hillsborough Castel southwest of Belfast shortly before midnight, produced little beyond a red-eyed determination to try again Wednesday morning. The goal of forming a new Protestant-Catholic government by Friday — one year after the Good Friday accord — remains elusive, and the future of much of the landmark accord hangs in the balance.

"I will not stop or rest until this thing is done," said Blair.

Ahern — who earlier said he didn't intend to stay in Northern Ireland unless both sides were prepared to compromise — flew back to his Dublin home for a few hours' sleep before a planned return. Irish government aides, envisaging deadlock, booked weekend accommodation in Belfast.

The future Northern Ireland government's 12 members — six Protestant, six Roman Catholic — are supposed to receive powers gradually from Blair's government, and pursue joint policy-making in committees with Ahern's government.

But the largest Protestant party, the Ulster Unionists, is insisting that the Irish Republican Army — now 20 months into a truce after violently destabilising Northern Ireland for 27 years — must start to disarm before the outlawed group's Sinn Fein party can receive two posts in the government.

## Indo-Pak expert level talks next month

ISLAMABAD, Mar 31: India and Pakistan will hold expert level talks here next month on several crucial issues including advanced notification on ballistic missiles, reduction of risks of an accidental use of nuclear weapon and preparations for their future, and the future of much of the landmark accord hangs in the balance.

in Beijing said Monday.

With the joint working group (JWG) meeting on the Sino-Indian border issue expected to take place soon, Beijing would like to wait and watch the political developments that may occur in New Delhi before giving the final nod for the JWG, the sources said.

Here is a feeling that time is not ripe to discuss important issues with the BJP-led government which seems to be unstable, they said.

China has expressed its willingness to hold JWG which were suspended last year after May nuclear tests. However, Beijing has not given any firm date for discussion on JWG.

Chinese ambassador to India Zhao Gang was also present at the tea party hosted by Swamy.

## Violence leaves 7 dead in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Mar 31: Four Indian soldiers and three militants were killed in separatist-linked violence in the troubled state of Kashmir, police said on Sunday, reports AP.

Three soldiers and an equal number of militants were killed in two separate gunbattles in the northern Kupwara and southern Anantnag district of the disputed Himalayan state on Saturday, a police spokesman said.

In a third incident "in a fire-fight with militants in Rajouri district of Jammu, late Saturday a soldier was killed," he said.

Thirty civilians were also injured in a grenade attack by Muslim separatist militants in a village near Anantnag, the spokesman said.

## Junta condolees death of Suu Kyi's husband

YANGON, Mar 31: The Myanmar junta on Sunday offered its "sincere condolences to opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi over the death of her husband," reports AP.

The junta said it would allow Aung San Suu Kyi to go to England to attend Michael Aris's funeral.

The government of Myanmar is deeply saddened to hear Michael Aris's demise and sends its sincere condolences and sympathy to the bereaved family in this time of grief," it said in a statement.

The junta, which strictly controls Aung San Suu Kyi's movements, had effectively refused Aris a visa to Myanmar to allow him to visit his wife to say goodbye before he died.

The academic died in a British hospital on Saturday of cancer.

The junta said Sunday it would help with funeral rites in Yangon and "stands ready in providing Suu Kyi with all possible assistance if she desires to travel to England to attend the funeral rites and family affairs at this time of bereavement."

Authorities in Yangon said they were reluctant to allow Aris to visit Myanmar in the condition he was in and said it would be more "humane" if Aung San Suu Kyi visited him in England.

But sources close to the National League for Democracy (NLD) leader said she doubted she would be allowed to return despite assurances from the junta that she could come back.

NLD sources told AFP that preparations were underway to arrange Buddhist funeral rites in Yangon later this week involving more than 50 monks in a ceremony at Aung San Suu Kyi's home.

Aung San Suu Kyi married Aris in 1972. Their two sons live in England.

## Paraguayan president resigns, flees to Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO, Mar 31: Former Paraguayan President Raul Cubas has fled to Brazil where he arrived early yesterday and was granted political asylum, the government-run news agency Estado said, reports AP.

Cubas, who resigned Sunday in the midst of a political crisis and violent demonstrations, landed at Itajai in the southern state of Santa Catarina, 680 kilometres southwest of here.

He was quickly whisked away to an undisclosed location without speaking to reporters. Cubas reportedly owns a summer beach home near Itajai.

Cubas arrived in a Brazilian air force plane together with his wife and two daughters. The family was accompanied by a Brazilian foreign ministry official.

Before leaving Asuncion, Cubas had sought refuge at the residence of Brazilian ambassador Bernardo Pericass, who forwarded Cubas request for asylum to the Brazilian government on Monday morning. Prosecutors in Paraguay sought to place Cubas under house arrest on charges of negligent homicide stemming from the deaths of five protesters.

After granting asylum, Brazil ordered an air force plane to fly to the Paraguayan capital to pick up Cubas.

The former president was guaranteed safe passage out of Asuncion by Paraguay's secretary general of the Presidency, Juan Billamayor, and President of the Colorado party Dader Lichi, radio O Globo here said.

Another report adds: Paraguay's new president Tuesday swore in the country's first coalition government since 1946, while his predecessor started a life in exile after being granted asylum in Brazil.

President Lftis Gonzalez Macchi named four members of the opposition in his 10-strong cabinet, with the remaining portfolios going to members of the ruling Colorado party,

which has governed the country for 52 years.

The foreign affairs portfolio went to Miguel Saguer, 53, leader of the opposition Authentic Liberal Radical Party (PLRA) and a lawyer, who teaches at the Catholic University here.

Paraguay's last coalition government, in 1946, collapsed after only six months, plunging the country into a 10-month civil war.

Gonzalez Macchi, 51, was sworn in on Sunday night, barely an hour after embattled leader Raul Cubas stepped down following six days of violence unleashed by the assassination of the country's vice president.

## Five more die of pig-borne virus in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 31: Five more people have died of a pig-borne virus that has left Malaysia's prosperous hog farming industry in shambles, a news report said today, reports AP.

The new victims either worked on pig farms or lived near them in Negeri Sembilan, the worst-hit area, Bernama news agency reported.

At least 61 of the 76 deaths have been from that region, barely 100 km southeast of Kuala Lumpur.

On Tuesday, Malaysia said it would destroy 1.3 million pigs to help curb the epidemic. Soldiers and policemen, covered head-to-toe in plastic suits, have entered pig-farming villages as part of a massive campaign to shoot the pigs. Health authorities have also launched a drive to spray chemicals to kill mosquitoes that carry the disease from pigs to humans.

Malaysian and international experts are still struggling to identify the cause of the outbreak of viral encephalitis,

## Fresh violence erupts in Indonesia: 7 killed

AMBON (Indonesia), Mar 31: At least seven people were killed and five wounded in fresh violence erupted today in province of Maluku, officials and reporters said, reports AP.

Two crudely armed groups clashed before dawn in south-east Maluku forcing hundreds of villagers to flee to nearby military barracks during two hours of fighting that included the use of explosives.

"The violence took place this morning between villagers from Wattur and Kiom, but the situation has now calmed down although it remains tense," a telephone operator in Tual, the main town of the district, said.

Reports of dead and injured given by local journalists there could not be immediately con-

firmed by the military of hospital nor could the cause of the violence.

A spokesman of the Maluku province administration here, Cak Saimima, denied there had been any deaths.

"There was no one killed, only several people wounded," Saimima told AFP.

He added that the head of the Irian Jaya based military command overseeing security in Maluku, Major General Amir Sembiring, had flown to Tual today.

Weeks of bloody confrontation between Muslims and Christians here and in several islands in the Maluku province since mid January, has left more than 200 people dead and massive destruction.