

Russian warship on way to Mediterranean

3 US soldiers face charges in military court, Clinton warns Milosevic

BELGRADE, Apr 2: Three captured US soldiers faced charges before a military court in Kosovo, where Serbs are stepping up their "systematic" expulsions of ethnic Albanians. The United States hopes to halt the move by deploying more planes to aid in airstrikes, reports AP.

Despite the capture of the US soldiers and the trainloads of refugees being forced out of Kosovo, NATO has said the bombardment of Yugoslav forces will continue until President Slobodan Milosevic halts the carnage in Kosovo and agrees to a peace deal granting the southern Serbian province autonomy.

Military court proceedings against the US soldiers were to begin Friday in the provincial capital of Kosovo, said Jovica Jovanovic, of Kosovo's temporary executive council. The announcement was carried on the state-run Tanjug news agency.

The three grim-faced soldiers, part of a NATO peace-keeping force, were shown on Serbian television Thursday dressed in camouflage, with bruises or abrasions on their faces.

President Bill Clinton delivered a blunt warning on Thursday to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic about the three men "the United States takes care of its own."

He said Washington would hold Milosevic personally responsible for the safety of the men, who were seized on Wednesday while on patrol along the Macedonia-Yugoslavia border.

Earlier on Thursday, Yugoslav Deputy Prime Minister Vuk Draskovic had promised that the prisoners would receive humane treatment and he urged their families not to worry.

In Albania's capital Tirana, aid officials urgently sought more trucks to evacuate the swelling number of Kosovo refugees fleeing what many called unbridled attacks in the southern Serbian province by Yugoslav troops enraged by NATO's raids.

Thousands of refugees continued pouring out of the province with stories of an apparent eradication campaign that NATO officials contend is aimed at altering forever the ethnic makeup of the embattled Serbian province. More than 180,000 have overwhelmed neighbouring territories in the past week.

Two trains jammed with more than 10,000 refugees arrived Thursday at the Macedonian border, where UN refugee

officials described scenes of pandemonium.

"People were ... crammed on to the train like sardines," said UNHCR spokeswoman Judith Kunin in Geneva. "Two old people died in the crush and three women gave birth."

The NATO aerial bombardment continued, deterred by what officials called poor weather that prevents some planes from carrying out their sorties.

NATO missiles hit an army barracks early Friday in the town of Vranje in southeastern Serbia, state television reported. First reports said there were no casualties although the barracks are located in a populated area.

Strikes Thursday took out a bridge over the Danube, halting international river traffic through the region.

At least eight cruise missiles were fired from US ships in the Adriatic about midnight (2200 GMT) Thursday, and the Pentagon dispatched a dozen F-117A stealth fighters to the region to join 11 of the radar-evading planes already operating over Yugoslavia.

The prospect of the three army cavalry scouts being paraded into a courtroom a day after being shown, bruised and exhausted on Yugoslav state television, caused concern within the US administration and congress.

Meanwhile, a Russian warship left for the Mediterranean on Friday to shadow NATO vessels participating in airstrikes against Yugoslavia as Moscow continued to insist that the attacks must end.

The frigate left from the Black Sea fleet's base at Sevastopol and was expected to pass through the Bosphorus strait and into the Mediterranean on Saturday. Six other warships were on standby for deployment in the Mediterranean.

Russia has said it will not become involved in the military conflict despite its close ties with Yugoslavia. NATO and the United States are unhappy about the Russian naval deployment.

Deploying Russian ships near NATO warships in action against Yugoslavia has raised concerns about an accidental confrontation.

Russian officials reviewed the Kosovo situation Friday and said they would continue efforts to find a political solution. The government would support any proposal to restart talks, officials said.



A US soldier fixes a missile on the wing of a F-16 fighter plane at Aviano Air Base in northern Italy on Thursday. Aircraft from the US, Canada, UK, Spain and Portugal are at Aviano supporting NATO's Operation Allied Force. About 100 aeroplanes have taken off from the US Air Force base of Aviano over the past 24 hours. This is the biggest number of take-offs since NATO began air attacks on Yugoslavia. — AFP photo



Pristina's railway station is crowded with ethnic Albanian refugees trying to leave the area Thursday. More than 60,000 inhabitants of the Kosovo capital Pristina have left the town, fleeing NATO air strikes, the Serb Information Centre here said Thursday, citing estimates. — AFP photo

BJP meets to map out strategy as AIADMK threatens to quit

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: India's ruling Hindu nationalist-led government today began an annual meeting of top leaders amid signs of growing discontent which could topple their minority coalition government, reports AP.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani and all the BJP's top brass met in the western state of Goa to assess the party's performance over the past year and map out future strategy, officials said.

The meeting came a day after the regional AIADMK party, which has 18 MPs in Vajpayee's multi-party coalition, threatened to pull out at an hour's notice.

Top leaders of Jayalalitha's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party said in a statement on Thursday that a tie-up with main opposition Congress Party was a possibility.

Her party's support with 18 lawmakers in Parliament is crucial to the survival of Vajpayee's shaky coalition. Since Vajpayee was sworn in as prime minister a year ago, Jayalalitha has repeatedly threatened to withdraw support to his government on some issue or the other.

There was no immediate reaction by Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party.

Thursday's statement came two days after Jayalalitha had met Sonia Gandhi, the Congress Party chief, in New Delhi fuelling speculation about the fu-

ture of the Hindu nationalist-led government. The southern state of Tamil Nadu is Jayalalitha's stronghold.

On Monday, Jayalalitha demanded that Defence Minister George Fernandes be removed from his job. She also lent support to the Congress party's demand for a parliamentary probe into the dismissal of Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat by the defence minister late last year.

What irked Jayalalitha Thursday was a statement by Parliamentary Affairs Minister PR Kumaramangalam who accused her party of changing its position on the navy chief's dismissal and said she was free to pull out of the government.

The Vajpayee government has agreed to debate the Bhagwat issue in Parliament when it reconvenes on April 15 to approve the 1999-2000 federal budget.

N Bhaskar Rao, director of the India Centre for Media Studies said the BJP meeting in Goa would concentrate on ironing out internal differences and the fallout of Jayalalitha's public flirtation with the main opposition Congress Party.

"They will try to reassess themselves. It is a psychological game because all around things are falling apart," he said.

"Jayalalitha is trying to have both ends ... she is gauging what is best for her," he said referring to her party's declaration that it could withdraw

from the ruling coalition at short notice.

"She is meeting President KR Narayanan on the 11th, every one in the BJP will be looking at that with bated breath that could be a bombshell or an earthquake."

Rao described Vajpayee's statement that the government would not fall if one ally withdrew support as mere bravado.

Recalling a parliamentary motion in which the government only won by a slender majority, he said, "The Prime Minister himself said that he won the motion by 27 votes. If Jayalalitha leaves with 18 people, where does that leave him?"

Analysts said other shadows darkening the meeting are an increasing divide between the moderates in the party, led by Vajpayee, and the Hindu hardliners, who look up to Home Minister Advani.

There is also a deep division within the party on continuing reforms as well as Fernandes' sacking of the navy chief.

The BJP's troubles are compounded by the fact that the main opposition Congress Party, appears to be bracing for fresh polls.

Rao said the fate of the BJP-led coalition, which came to power last year following general elections which led to a hung parliament was at best uncertain.

"I do not see them lasting till the year-end," he said.

Yeltsin tries to sack prosecutor general again

MOSCOW, Apr 2: President Boris Yeltsin today once again tried to remove the government's prosecutor general, just as a corruption probe into the Kremlin gathers steam, reports AP.

Yeltsin wrote an order today suspending Prosecutor General Yuri Skuratov while he is investigated on charges of abuse of power in connection with a video that apparently shows him having sex with two prostitutes.

Skuratov has been feuding for months with Yeltsin, who removed the prosecutor in February. But the upper house of parliament, the only body which can dismiss Skuratov, refused to back the president.

When Skuratov returned to work, Russian state television aired segments of the video. Politicians across the spectrum called the tape an attempt to smear the prosecutor.

Skuratov said Yeltsin's latest order was illegal, and called the abuse of power charges against him a ploy. "The case against me is fabricated and is that's obvious to anyone," Yeltsin retorted that the order is "indisputable," saying Russian law allows him to temporarily suspend an official who is being investigated on criminal charges, the Interfax news agency reported.

Heads of CIS states meet to talk missile defence system

MOSCOW, Apr 2: The leaders of an alliance of former Soviet republics met in the Kremlin today to discuss developing a missile defence system and ways to make the body more effective, reports AP.

President Boris Yeltsin, current chairman of the Commonwealth of Independent States, met each of the 11 other leaders one by one before the start of closed-door meetings, giving them hugs, kisses and handshakes.

The top item on the agenda was expected to be how to make the alliance more effective by creating an economic committee that will facilitate trade between member states.

The group was also expected to consider developing an anti-missile system for the entire CIS, apparently in response to American plans to consider such a system.

But the CIS members are so broke and its territory so vast that it is unlikely the member

states could afford the multi-billion dollar development project.

In addition, most CIS members have been reluctant to give up their independence to the group, which they perceive as dominated by Russia.

The latest CIS summit was also tinged with scandal, because the body's executive secretary, Boris Berezovsky, was barred from flying into Moscow on Thursday night to attend the meeting.

Last month, Yeltsin fired Berezovsky from his post as CIS executive secretary even though the decision can only be made by all the CIS leaders.

Other alliance leaders expressed annoyance at Yeltsin's decision. But Russian media have reported that eight of the 12 leaders had approved Berezovsky's removal in writing, and two had given their approval orally.

China confirms Zhu's US visit

After an unusual delay that reflected government concerns over NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, and protracted trade negotiations, China confirmed Friday that Premier Zhu Rongji will go to the United States next week for a visit he expects to be rocky, AP reports from Beijing.

The Foreign Ministry, in a statement carried by state media, announced that Zhu will visit the United States and Canada from April 6 to 20, quashing speculation he would cancel. The US government announced the dates a week ago but China had held off while senior leaders debated whether he should go.

LTTE kills 5 policemen

Tamil Tiger rebels killed five Sri Lankan policemen and wounded four others in an attack on a police post in northern Sri Lanka, police officials said Friday, AP reports from Vavuniya.

The rebels raided the post outside Mannar town with mortar fire late Thursday, killing the policemen on the spot, said the officials on condition of anonymity.

Lightning hits S'porean jet

A Singapore Airlines Airbus A310 was struck by lightning en route from Singapore to Kaohsiung, Taiwan, a news report said Friday, AP reports from Singapore.

The plane, carrying 85 passengers and nine crew, turned around after being struck and returned safely to Singapore's Changi Airport at about 11:00 am local time Thursday, a Television Corporation of Singapore news report said. At no time was the flight, SQ 878, in any danger, the report quoted Singapore Airlines as saying. The passengers and crew were transferred to another A310 plane and arrived in Kaohsiung just after 4:00 PM. The aircraft was back in operation Friday after minor damage was repaired.

34 landmines defused in India

Thirtyfour powerful landmines, planted by suspected Naxalites, were detected along the roadside in Vanshakonda village of Karimnagar district in Andhra Pradesh last night, police said Thursday, PTI reports from Hyderabad.

The land mines, each weighing five kgs, planted along the roadside under Ibrahimpatnam Mandal, were detected by a police party engaged in combat operation who later defused all the explosive material, police added.

Toxic fumes kill 2 in China

Two people were killed and 300 rushed to hospital after being stricken by toxic fumes leaking from a pharmaceutical plant in central China's Hunan province, it was reported yesterday, AFP says from Hong Kong.

Residents within a square kilometer (0.4 square mile) of the plant in Datianwan, near the border with Sichuan province, were evacuated after the chlorine leak late Wednesday, the Chinese-language Apple Daily said.

Serial killer to die in Ukraine

A Ukrainian who described himself as a robot without feelings was sentenced to death on Thursday for murdering 52 people in the worst spate of killings to have hit the country in modern times, AP reports from Kiev.

It took a judge nearly two days to read the verdict against Anatoly Onoprienko, who used a sawed-off hunting rifle, knives and axes to slaughter his victims.

Onoprienko's accomplice in nine of the murders, 36-year-old Afghan war veteran Serhy Rogozin, was sentenced to 13 years in prison. Onoprienko's murderous spree apparently began in 1989, when he and Rogozin robbed and killed nine people. He resumed his rampage in 1995-96, killing a total of 43 people in less than six months.

78-yr-old gets double life sentence for war crimes

LONDON, Apr 2: Nazi hunters welcomed a double life sentence imposed on a 78-year-old former rail worker after a jury in Britain's first war crimes trial found him guilty of murdering Jews in Belarus during World War II, reports Reuters.

Anthony Sawoniuk, dressed in a dark blue blazer and with a nurse by his side, sat motionless on Thursday as two guilty verdicts were read out to a silent court with only six spectators present.

While he waited in a court cafeteria for the jury to end its deliberations, Sawoniuk, who used a walking stick, told listeners, "I don't care what they do to me. I will die in prison if I need to."

It took the jury two days to reach verdicts on two charges of murder against Sawoniuk, who came to Britain from Belarus in 1946 and worked as a railway ticket collector.

Jurors convicted him unanimously on one charge and by a 10 to one decision on the other. One sick juror was absent.

During the year-long trial, the prosecution accused Sawoniuk of enthusiastically carrying out Nazi policies of genocide against Jews as a policeman in his native Belarus.

The murder charges arose from his participation in a search and kill operation to round up survivors of a 1942 massacre of 3,000 Jews in his home town Dumachevo.

British, Irish PMs come up with new plan to break deadlock

BELFAST, Northern Ireland, Apr 2: Good Friday 1999 should have been the day when Northern Ireland's politicians finally subdued their suspicions and formed a government together, the pivotal commitment of the Good Friday accord of 1998, reports AP.

Instead, after failing all week in negotiations to solve the issue of Irish Republican Army disarmament, the British and Irish prime ministers went public Thursday with bold plans that they predicted would coax Protestant politicians to accept IRA supporters as partners in government.

Britain's Tony Blair and Ireland's Bertie Ahern gave the politicians until April 13 to mull over their proposal.

They would allow the IRA-allyed Sinn Fein party to receive two posts in the 12-member government one month before the IRA would be required to hand over an arms cache.

Seeking to persuade the IRA that its first act of disarmament could be positive and not a symbolic surrender, Ahern and Blair proposed it should take place on a new all-Ireland peace holiday — they called it a "national day of reconciliation" — that would feature matching moves by the IRA's military opponents.

Ahern and Blair expected that on this day, Northern Ireland's major pro-British paramilitary groups would make their own weapons offerings, while the British army

Jailed for lying

SINGAPORE, Apr 2: An Indonesian domestic help who lied to Singapore police that she was raped has been jailed for three months in one of the heaviest jail terms imposed here for making a false police report, it was reported today, reports AP.

Tarinah Cartian, 25, pleaded guilty in the District Court to two charges of lying to police that a Bangladeshi security guard had broken into her employer's house and twice raped her, the Straits Times daily said.

The court was told that Tarinah had sex willingly with the Bangladeshi Mozammal Hoque, 22, in her employer's house.

When Tarinah suspected that she was pregnant, she had called Mozammal repeatedly for money for an abortion but he did not have any.

The jail term imposed on the Indonesian was one of the heaviest for making a false police report, the Straits Times said.

Government lawyers told Singapore's Chief Justice Yong Eung How recently that penalties for making false police reports were being reviewed as there has been a doubling of such cases involving sexual offences last year.

Hundreds attend service for Suu Kyi's husband

YANGON, Apr 2: More than 1,000 people gathered today at Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's home for a religious ceremony honouring her husband, who died in Britain having been refused a visa by Myanmar's military government to visit her one last time, reports AP.

Michael Aris, a professor of Tibetan studies at Oxford University, died of cancer on his 53rd birthday last Saturday in a London hospital. He had petitioned the government for a visa for months after learning he was terminally ill, but his requests were turned down.

A somber Suu Kyi, dressed in a white jacket and without the wreaths of jasmine and other flowers that usually adorn her hair, offered mad and saffron robes to 53 Buddhist monks who chanted sutras and prayers.

The 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner, who is the military government's strongest political opponent, made no public statement and refrained from speaking with supporters, taking time only to shake hands with several diplomats.

Ambassadors and other diplomats from the United States, European countries and Japan attended. The only Southeast Asian nation that sent a diplomat was the Philippines, which had urged Myanmar's military government to grant Aris a visa.

Curbing population growth

Delegates at UN still divided over sex education & reproductive health

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 2: Delegates from more than 170 countries have suspended negotiations on new proposals to curb global population without tackling the key issue of money — and still divided over sex education and reproductive health, reports AP.

Nonetheless, Dr Nafis Sadik, director of the UN Population Fund, said there has been progress and she is confident there will be consensus on new ways to implement the ambitious goals adopted at the 1994 UN population conference in Cairo.

"I think we will move forward," she said.

Since last week, the delegates have been debating proposals for key actions to further implement the Cairo accord. But by Thursday's scheduled end of their meeting, they had only completed two-thirds of the draft document.

Delegates agreed Thursday night to resume the preparatory meeting, and to let Bangladesh's UN Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, who is chairing the preparatory committee, decide the date.

The proposals are scheduled to be presented to a special General Assembly session in June. Chowdhury told The Associated Press that he hoped to resume the preparatory committee meeting "well ahead" of the special session, "maybe towards the end of May."

Women's rights and pro-choice groups have accused the Vatican and some Muslim countries of trying to water down proposals on sex education and sexual and reproductive health — just as they did at the Cairo conference.

While there has been significant progress in reproductive health programmes around the world over the past five years, a number of obstructionist dele-

Death toll rises to 11

More troops sent to riot-torn Indonesian island

AMBON (Indonesia), Apr 2: An extra 200 troops were flown to the riot-torn southeastern Maluku Islands today as the death toll in a fresh Muslim-Christian violence rose to 11, a doctor and residents said, reports AP.

The General Hospital in Tual, where the latest violence erupted two days ago, was also running low on medical supplies, the hospital's chief doctor Nona Notanubud said.

"The total dead in this hospital was 11 by late last night," Notanubud said today, adding another 17 were being treated for arrow, gunshot and machete wounds.

"We have asked the government to supply medicines and medical personnel from the armed forces. Several migrant doctors want to leave because they don't feel safe," she said.

Oce Kuduuban, a local government official assigned to assist at the hospital, told AFP by phone that patients continued

arriving today for treatment, but the situation was "quiet and under control."

"There has been no more violence since last night," he said.

The clashes which erupted before dawn Wednesday and raged throughout.

Thursday had left 90 houses and buildings burned. Molis, a shopkeeper in Tual, a city of 65,000 people about 540 km southeast of the provincial capital of Ambon, said security personnel held talks with religious leaders Thursday night.

He said he did not know the outcome of the negotiations but 200 troops had arrived from Ambon today and he had been told by a soldier that rioters would be shot on sight.

The shoot on sight order could not be immediately confirmed.

The Antara news agency said 90 houses and buildings had been set on fire by late Thursday by rival factions in Tual, where a Christian priest and his son were among the dead.