NATO states to take in refugees

# US to send helicopter gunships, 2000 troops to Albania

BELGRADE, Apr 5: NATO warplanes pounded Yugoslav targets for a 13th straight day today, Serb media reports said. as alliance nations moved to shelter an ever-growing flood of refugees from the embattled province of Kosovo, reports AP.

Amid a new wave of airstrikes late Sunday and early today across Serbia, the United States signalled an escalation of firepower against a campaign by Serb forces to rid Kosovo of ethnic Albanians.

In order to give NATO the ability to directly attack Serb troops and tanks in the southern Serbian province, Washington agreed to send 24 Apache helicopter gunships, 2,000 troops and a missile launching system to Albania.

NATO leaders meeting today must approve using the weapons, followed by US President Bill Clinton.

Deploying Apaches and support troops in Albania would mark a substantial escalation of the NATO campaign — and a rise in risks. The low-flying helicopters would operate in hostile territory, with accompanying troops deployed close to the

In the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade, air raid sirens sounded Sunday night to signal the onset of another night of airstrikes, that lasted into the pre-dawn hours, striking a number of targets across Ser-

The independent Beta news agency reported a powerful explosion in the Belgrade area around midnight. More than 20 explosions during a half-hour span were heard around the Kosovo capital of Pristina, where NATO planes later targeted an oil depot, it said.

Hours later, NATO planes hit two suburbs of the Yugoslav capital — Rakovica to the south and Surcin to the northwest the Belgrade crisis centre said. A stone quarry was targeted in a populated part of Rakovica, while a missile struck near the main terminal of Belgrade airport near Surcin, the official

Tanjug news agency reported. Three powerful detonations early today rocked Zemun, a town north of the capital. Stu-

Russia against

arms race

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov

said Sunday that Moscow does

not want to be involved in a

In a television interview, he

stressed however. Russia will

make every elfort to maintain a

high-level and powerful na-

tional armed force with high

transferring Russian economy

into "military system", espe-

cially, to strengthening the

country's international status

in solving the Balkan conflict,

Ivanov said that Russia, as a big

Referring to the feasibility of

arms race, reports Xinhua.

battle effectiveness.

US dollars.

MOSCOW, Apr 5: Russian

dio B radio said one of the targets was the air force command

building in the town centre. In Obrenovac, outside of Belgrade, Tanjug said a missile was downed and several detonations were heard early today. Witnesses claimed two cruise missiles as well as a plane were hit, and fell north of the town.

Explosions were also reported early Monday in the eastern Kosovo town of Gnji-

Later, state-run media said NATO planes targetted an army barracks in the town of Raska. about 160 km south of Belgrade. Some injuries were reported. but no détails were given.

One missile hit a bridge on the Ibar river, and a TV relay tower was also targeted, state media said. Both ends of a railway tunnel in the Ibar river val-ley were targeted, effectively cutting the line.

Four detonations were heard in the greater Nis area, 200 kilometers (125 miles) south of Belgrade, Beta reported. One of the targets was later identified as a military barracks in the center of the city, Politika TV reported.

Tanjug reported anti-aircraft fire was heard in Novi Sad, the nation's second-largest city, followed by an explosion.

The refugee crisis, meanwhile, was swelling to epic proportions. Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians have been pouring into neighbouring states, bringing stories of terror and forced explusions by Serbian troops and allied paramilitary forces.

The human tide has overwhelmed Albania, Macedonia and the Yugoslav republic of Montenegro, and on Sunday, NATO announced plans by most of its member states to temporarily take in refugees to ease the pressure on the region.

The largest number were headed for Germany, which was to take 40,000 refugees, and the United States, which agreed to take 20,000.

Airlifts of some of the more than 100,000 refugees in Macedonia were to begin in earnest as soon as Monday. NATO was working to help with transport from other refugee-clogged ar-

parliament reconvenes, reports

Vajpayee's Cabinet discussed

the demands by its most

unpredictable coalition

partner, Jayaram Jayalalitha,

to dismiss his defence minister

and set up a probe into the

sacking of the country's naval

commander in December. A



Ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo arrive Sunday in Albania via the border crossing of Morina, a few kilometers from Kukes, north eastern Albania. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 350,000 ethnic Albanians have left Kosovo or are amassed on the borders. Some 204,000 Kosovars have arrived in Albania since March - AFP photo

eas, it said.

NATO also agreed to use its nearly 12,000 troops now deployed in Macedonia to assist in the humanitarian effort Those troops originally were deployed to implement an elusive Kosovo peace agreement between ethnic Albanians and the Serb-led Yugoslav government.

The troops were building temporary refugee centers capable of sheltering 20,000 people and transporting food and water to border areas. NATO officials said Sunday.

British military spokesman Doug Henderson told reporters Sunday the NATO attacks were "cutting deep into the Serbian war machine." But Vladislav Jovanovic, the Yugoslav ambassador to the United Nations. maintained Belgrade's defiant

stance toward the NATO cam-"It only increases our resolve

in defending our country," he said on the "Fox News Sunday" US television programme.

The alliance launched air attacks on March 24 to try to force Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to accept a peace plan for Kosovo that would include NATO peacekeeping troops.

Meanwhile, Russia has sent only one warship into the Mediterranean to monitor developments near Yugoslavia. though it has permission send seven more, a navy spokesman said today.

The Russian intelligencegathering ship Liman travelled from its Black Sea port and through the Bosporus strait on Saturday on its way to the

Mediterranean. Russia sent the ship to keep an eye on NATO warships that are participating in the attacks on Yugoslavia.

Turkey, a NATO member that controls the Bosporus, has given Russia permission to send seven additional ships through the narrow strait and on to the Mediterranean. The timetable authorised three ships to pass through the strait Sunday and another four by Thursday.

But Russia said today that six additional ships that might be sent to the region were still on standby at the Black Sea port of Sevastopol.

"The Liman is in the Mediterranean now," said Navy spokesman Igor Dygalo. "The other six ships are in full readiness at their base. If a political decision is adopted.... they can go at any minute."

## Mahathir's condition improving

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 5: The condition of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, admitted to hospital for a lung infection, was improving today. but the 73-year-old leader was still not allowed to meet visitors, an aide said, reports AP.

"We want him to have complete rest," said the aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "There is nothing to worry about."

Mahathir was admitted to the country's National Heart Institute on Friday. He is expected to remain hospitalised

for several more days, the aide said. Mahathir has ruled

Malaysia for 18 years and has been in power longer than any other current leader in Asia.

He was taken ill after his return Wednesday from Makkah, Saudi Arabia, where he performed Hajj. He cancelled many of his meetings last week and all engagements this week, including today's opening of a new session of Parliament.

Mahathir underwent triple bypass heart surgery in 1989. But he still keeps up a hectic schedule of work and travel.

#### Strike in Kashmir over price hike of essentials

SRINAGAR, Apr 5: A strike called by a trade and business groups silenced Kashmir today to protest tax increases on fuel, medicines and other essentials. reports AP.

Truckers also called an indefinite strike, threatening to cut the supply network to the Kashmir Valley which depends entirely on road links for its provisions. Schools, government offices and stores were closed. Private buses also were off the roads.

Kashmir. India's only Muslim-majority state, is accustomed to political strikes sponsored by pro-separatist groups seeking independence from India. Since February, when the state government presented its budget, it has been shut down several times over economic issues.

The budget raised taxes on kerosene, diesel, cooking gas, oil and spare parts for cars, and more. It also hiked the road tax for transporters.

#### University for Afghan girls

PESHAWAR, Apr 5: A university for Afghan refugees opened today in this Pakistani border city giving 2,000 Afghan girls an opportunity to study. something denied them in their war-torn homeland, reports

in the 90 per cent of Alghanistan ruled by the Taliban religious army, girls have not been allowed to attend school. The Taliban say they will open schools for girls after peace comes to their war-shattered country.

This despite the fact that most of the fighting is restricted to roughly 10 per cent of the country where the northernbased opposition, led by former president Burhanuddin Rabbani, still rules.

The Taliban have imposed their brand of strict Islamic law which also forbids women from working, forces them to wear the all-enveloping burga that covers them fully and requires them to be accompanied by a male relative when travelling outside their home.

At the university in Peshawar, girls will be taught separately in keeping with strict Islamic traditions, said school officials something teachers and students alike ac-

The chancellor of the new university is a former Afghan rebel leader and Islamic Sibghatullah scholar Mojaddidi.

According to a spokesman for Mojaddidi the Taliban have supported the university with letters of congratulations from the Talibans' Foreign Minister Mullah Mohammed Hassan and its Minister of Higher and Vocational Education Mullah Hamdulla Nomani.

The university, which is being funded by the Pakistan government, "is the fruit of eight months of effort on our part." said Zalmay Zamani, head of the university's students union.

"We knocked on every door for our basic right of education,

# Off the Record

#### Competition for first millennium baby

AUCKLAND: No prizes for guessing what Rachel and Steve Knowler will be doing this Friday night as they and 99 other couples take part in a competition to conceive the first baby of the new millennium, reports AP.

The Knowlers are one of 100 couples who will be given a room in an Auckland hotel by a radio station which is running

the competition as part of a promotional campaign.

The station claims health professionals have identified April 9 as the best day to conceive a baby which would be born on January 1, 2000. With New Zealand some 1,200 kms west of the International Dateline, the first baby born here stands a good chance of being the first of the millennium.

Winning may not be as easy as it sounds. If a contestant has an exactly nine-month pregnancy, the baby must be conceived on Friday or within about 24 hours to have the best chance of winning.

Most women have about a 20 per cent chance of conceiving in any one ovulation cycle.

The Knowlers have been married for three months and say they plan to have a baby regardless of the radio station's "Night of Love" promotion.

"Whatever happens but I've got my fingers crossed." Rachel Knowler said. "It wouldn't matter to me when it came, it would just be amazing, full stop." Another couple, Katrina and David Wijohn, who already

have two daughters, said they would like to have a son and that the idea of a night together in a hotel "without the kids" was one of the attractions.

The radio station said it had been flooded with applications from across the country.

## Tigers' day-off

WASHINGTON: "The Greatest Show on Earth" went on, but 10 trained tigers got the day off, reports Reuters.

Seven animal rights protesters and two journalists were arrested on Sunday for disorderly conduct after two women attached themselves to a car blocking an entrance of the DC Armory used for animals of the visiting Ringling Bros and Barnum and Bailey Circus.

It took District of Columbia firefighters two hours to free the women and move the car although the afternoon performance of the self-proclaimed "Greatest Show on Earth" went on as scheduled, an act involving 10 Royal Bengal Tigers had to be cancelled.

The three women and six man who were arrested were released later on Sunday afternoon, police said.

"We're just so happy that at least some of the animals got a day-off." said Miyun Park, 28, one of the car protesters and a member of Compassion over Killing, an animal rights group that accuses the circus of mistreating animals.

Ringling Bros, spokeswoman Barbara Pflughaupt denied that any animals performing in the circus were mistreated and said Ringling and never been charged with violating animal welfare laws.

#### Crime that made the sky shudder

CAIRO: A Cairo court Sunday ordered the hanging of a man who abducted a three-year-old girl and repeatedly raped her in the two-month-plus captivity, reports Xinhua.

After the sentence, Judge Ahmed el-Ashmawi said he was punishing a man "who committed a crime that made the sky shudder.'

Talaat Abdel-Mawgoud, 27, confessed to kidnapping the girl in January and then repeatedly raping her. His court-appointed lawyer requested mercy, but told the judge there was nothing he could say in his client's defence.

## US, British jets attack targets in Iraq

WASHINGTON, Apr 5: The United States confirmed that US and British aircraft attacked targets in Iraq's southern no fly zone on Sunday responding to violations of the banned airspace by three Iraqi aircraft, reports Reuter.

No Western aircraft were damaged during the incident which occurred at about 1 pm EDT (1700 GMT), the Defence Department said in a statement.

A US Air Force F-16cg, US Navy FA 18 Hornet and a British Royal Air Force G-1 Tornado aircraft struck an Iraqi surface-to-air missile site located about 176 km, south of Baghdad near Faysaliyah, the Pentagon said.

They also struck two lraqi

station used by Iraq to export oil via its southern terminal of Mina Al Bakr but oil flow via the terminal resumed fully after the installation of an emergency control system. AFP adds from Baghdad: An

military communications sites.

about 312 km south of Baghdad

near Al Salman and 256 km

southeast of Baghdad near

or British warplanes bombed

and destroyed a key control

centre of the main pumping

On Friday Baghdad said US

Iraqi was wounded and a house destroyed in US and British air raids Sunday on military and civilian sites in southern Iraq, a military spokesman in Baghdad said.

## China, ASEAN open talks over sea territorial dispute

KUNMUNG (China), Apr 5: China and ASEAN countries opened talks here today to discuss regional cooperation, with a long-standing South China Sea territorial dispute due to figure on the agenda, reports

The annual talks will focus on a treaty of amity and cooperation as well as the regional economic situation, officials

Senior officials of the association of Southeast Asian nations will also ask China to sign a regional code of conduct in a move to check alleged ex-

pansion in the Spratly islands. "This is a regional plan of action discussed in Hanoi in 1998 which we want regional countries and claimants to Spratly islands to sign," the Philippines' Foreign Undersec-

retary Lauro Baja told AFP.

The move comes amid nervousness in the region over a diplomatic row between Beijing and Manila over Chinese structures on a coral reef just 135 nautical miles from the Philippines island of Palawan.

China, Taiwan and four of the eight ASEAN nations all partially or wholly claim the Spratlys, a group of reefs, islands and shoals which lie along strategic shipping lines and are believed to harbour rich oil reserves.

Analysts have identified the Spratlys as a potential flashpoint in the East Asia region.

The four ASEAN members which lay whole or partial claim to the Spratlys are Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand are the other ASEAN members.

# help Clinton's reelection in '96'

LOS ANGELES, Apr 5: The head of Chinese military intelligence sent a Democratic fundraiser in Southern California 300,000 dollars in campaign donations to help President Bill Clinton's reelection in 1996, the Los Angeles Times reports, says

Gen Ji Shengde sent the money to Johnny Chung, but only a portion of the money reached Democratic coffers, the newspaper said Sunday.

Chung's testimony has given investigators their first direct link between a senior Chinese government official and illicit foreign contributions, the Times said, citing sources familiar with Chung's sealed statements to federal prosecu-

It is illegal for US political parties or candidates to accept contributions from foreign

Chung, a Taiwanese-born businessman who is now a US citizen, donated nearly 400,000 dollars to Democratic candidates and causes from 1994 to 1996, but the money was returned after questions arose about its legality. Chung admitted making

nearly 30,000 dollars in illegal contributions to Democrats including 20,000 dollars to the Clinton-Gore reelection campaign. In December, he was sentenced to five years probation and 3,000 hours of community service as part of a plea bargain. Chung and Ji were brought

together by Liu Chaoying, who was a Chung business partner as well as a lieutenant colonel in the People's Liberation Army, the Times said. Liu did not respond Friday to questions sent by the Times to her office in Hong Kong. In their first meeting in Au-

gust 1996, Chung said, he declined Ji's money but the general said he was already engaged in similar transactions with others serving as conduits for Chinese funds to support Clinton's reelection. Within a few days, Lui de-

posited 300,000 dollars into

Chung's Hong Kong bank account, telling him it was from Ji, sources told the newspaper, Federal election records

show that five weeks after receiving the money, Chung do-nated 35,000 dollars in three checks to the Democratic National Committee. The remaining funds went to one of Chung's California bank accounts but it is not known how that money was used. The Democratic Party "was

unaware of any supposed rela-tionship" between Chung and the Chinese government at the time of the contributions, said DNC spokesman Rick Hess. Chung declined to speak with the newspaper, saying he has "already told the whole

truth to the grand jury."

A spokesman for China's embassy in Washington denied any involvement in the 1996 elections. "All these allegations about so-called Chinese government officials' political contributions into US campaigns are sheer fabrications," said Yu

Shuning.



Spectators gather around a giant mosaic comprised of some 38,400 coloured eggs covering an area of 120 square meters in front of the Olympic Museum in Lausanne-Ouchy in Switzerland Sunday. Said to be the biggest egg-composed mosaic in the world, it took two days for the egg-artists to complete the work which they hope to have registered in the Guinness Book of Records. The eggs were donated by members of the public and will be given to charitable organisations.

#### power in the world and a perspokesman said the demands manent member of the United were "out of the question." Nations Security Council. Jayalalitha appeared to should consider both its own working toward shifting security and the positive role it allegiance to the main should play in reversing the opposition party, the Congress worldwide stability and secu-Party, and has hinted that if her demands are not met she

BUILITERY

reported, AP says from Beijing. The Egyptian leader will ask Chinese President Jiang Zemin to support efforts to reduce tensions between Palestinian and Israeli officials over the timing of Palestinian statehood, China's official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Mubarak in Beijing: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak arrived in Beijing Monday for a five-day visit

that will include talks with Chinese leaders about efforts to

revive the troubled Middle East peace process, state-run media

Syrian president to visit Russia: Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad will pay a state visit to Russia on April 13 to enhance military and economic cooperation,

diplomatic sources said Sunday. Xinhua reports from Al-Assad will hold talks with Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov during his three-day visit. Syria and Russia have recently exchanged military missions that led to arms deals worth more than 2 billion

Jordanian king in Saudi Arabia: Jordan's King Abdullah Bin Hussein arrived in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah Sunday on a three-day official visit to strengthen bilateral ties and seal a financial aid package promised by Saudi leaders, Xinhua reports from

Abdullah was greeted at the airport by Saudi King Fahd Ibn Abdul-Aziz, along with Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ibn Abdul-Aziz. The two monarchs will hold talks later in the day on a number of political and economic issues of mutual concern including the Middle East peace process and the promised Saudi aid to Jordan, according to the Kuwait News

Chopper crashes in Indonesia: A pilot was killed and six passengers were missing after their nelicopter crashed off the coast of Indonesia's East Kalimantan province, a report said yesterday, AFP says from Jakarta. Five surviving passengers and the body of the pilot were found by a search and rescue team Sunday, a day after the Bell

helicopter of the Gatari air charter firm crashed, the state-run Antara news agency said. The survivors were under intensive care at a hospital in Bontang, some 13 km north of Tanjugsantan, in Kutai district where the helicopter took off Saturday. Fireworks blast kills 9 in China: A farmer who illegally produced fireworks in his southern

China home has been arrested after an explosion that killed nine people, mostly his neighbours, and seriously injured two others, state media said Monday, AP reports from Beijing.
Four of those killed in Saturday's blast in Xinyuan Village in Hunan province were children, the official Xinhua News Agency said. The explosion occurred as the farmer, Jiang Guobin, was making fireworks at home, it said.

leader the Dalai Lama, arrived in Brazil Sunday for a four day visit during which he was to meet with religious leaders and speak at a number of conferences, AFP reports from Rio de Janeiro. He was also scheduled to meet Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso although the visit had not been confirmed by the Brazilian support committee for Tibet which organised the

Dalai Lama's trip here.

Dalai Lama in Brazil: Tibet's spiritual

#### Vajpayee rejects Jayalalitha's demand people to judge what is wrong NEW DELHI. Apr 5: India's would support a no-confidence investigation of Bhagwat's accusations of improper and what is right." prime minister, defiant in the motion after parliament Vajpayee has had a troubled behaviour against Fernandes. reconvenes April 15 to approve face of a mounting coalition crisis, rejected an ultimatum the 1999-2000 federal budget. relationship with Javalalitha. \* To defeat a no-confidence from a key ally Monday and the powerful leader of south motion if Jayalalitha defects to The 18 seats controlled by steeled himself for a likely bid liffe opposition. Vajpayee is Jayalalitha are essential for India. So far he has placated banking on her enemies to to oust him next week when

Vajpayee, who completed one year in office this month. "The Vajpayee government is Prime Minister Atal Bihari a sinking ship. It has failed on all fronts and its allies would like to leave it at the earliest," Ved Prakash, a Congress Party

leader, said Monday. On Sunday, Vajpayee told a party conclave in the western city of Goa that the Congress is desperate to come to power. even though it has only 140 lawmakers in parliament — far short of the 273 seats required

for a majority. "We are not afraid of anything," Vajpayee told the meeting. "We will place the facts

before the nation. It is for the

COLOMBO, Apr 5: Thousands

of police were deploying today

to maintain order for crucial

local elections in five of Sri

Lanka's nine provinces, in the

tional elections next year, re-

attempted murders were

recorded among more than

1,000 incidents of violence dur-

ing the six-week campaign lead-

around polling booths for elec-

tion day and will remain on

alert through Wednesday, when

the results will be declared.

They also were instructed to

prevent voting irregularities of

the kind that plagued the elec-

tion for one provincial council

Armed police were posted

ing up to Tuesday's vote.

One assassination and five

ports AP.

last test of strength before na-

her on several issues, from Cabinet positions transferring officials probing corruption charges against her.

In the latest showdown Vajpayee rejected Jayalalitha's demand for to reinstate Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat and transfer Defence Minister George Fernandes to a less sensitive job. She wants a parliamentary committee to investigate Bhagwat's removal.

Information Minister

Jayalalitha, head of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam or AIADMK. embarrassed the prime minister by meeting Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi last week. Later, she warned a political earthquake would hit India in the coming

cross over to the government

and offset the loss.

No single party has a majority in the 545-member lower house of parliament. Vajpayee rules with a tenuous 19-party coalition that controls

Despite calls by the two leaders

for a peaceful campaign, 1,147

incidents of violence were re-

ported in the five provinces. An

all-party meeting last week set

up a committee to prevent elec-

Independent poll monitors

Voting is being held in the

In the North Western

said the violence appeared to

taper off in the final week of

Western North Central, Central,

Uva and Sabaragamuwa

provincial election on January

25, more than 700 complaints

of vote rigging and stuffing bal-

lot boxes were submitted to elec-

tion commission. Two people

tion violence.

campaigning.

provinces.

were killed.

#### Pramod Mahajan said after the Cabinet meeting the government would agree to debate the Bhagwat issue in parliament, but refused to consider a parliamentary

Lankan security forces on red

alert for today's local elections

Although the powers of the

President Chandrika

provincial councils are limited

to local affairs, the outcome has

Kumaratunga would see a

strong victory as an endorse-

ment of her handling of the war

against Tamil rebels and for

her plan to broaden the powers

of the provinces, including the

Tamil-populated northern

province to satisfy the demand

Wickremesinghe would see a de-

feat for the ruling People's

Alliance as a vote of no-confi-

Tuesday's vote by the parties re-

sulted in an upsurge of violence.

dence in the government.

Opposition leader Ranil

The perceived importance of.

wider implications.

for Tamil self-rule.