

NATO bombings continue despite Y'slav ceasefire

BELGRADE, Apr 7: Dismissing Slobodan Milosevic's unilateral cease-fire with ethnic Albanian rebels, NATO struck Wednesday in Kosovo and elsewhere in Yugoslavia in what British pilots called their most difficult mission yet in the 15-day air campaign, reports AP.

Macedonia, meanwhile, lashed out at the United States and its NATO allies, blaming them for failing to anticipate the flood of refugees driven out of Kosovo by Serb forces enraged over the alliance air campaign.

The attacks took place despite a declaration by the Milosevic government of a unilateral ceasefire in the campaign to crush rebels in Kosovo, a province of Yugoslavia's main republic Serbia.

The government said the ceasefire, which took effect Tuesday night, was to honour the Orthodox Easter holiday this weekend. It included an offer to forge a peace agreement with moderate ethnic Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova, under which an estimated 400,000 Kosovo Albanians refugees could return home.

In a sign that the Milosevic regime is prepared to let relief organisations return to Kosovo, a statement carried by state-run television said Wednesday. "There is full freedom of movement, especially for the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Red Cross."

If they returned, the presence of humanitarian groups likely would also shield the region — and the police and army forces stationed there — from further NATO attacks.

A statement from the Yugoslav army's Pristina Corps in the Kosovo capital said the armed forces were abiding by the ceasefire and there was no military activity in the province except the NATO attacks.

Shortly after the ceasefire went into effect, air raid sirens sounded in Belgrade and explosions were heard near a military airfield on the northern rim of the city. State-controlled media reported attacks against fuel depots and other targets throughout the country.

Government media, said targets include a fuel storage facility at the airport near Kosovo's

capital Pristina, which was struck early Wednesday. Serbian TV said NATO wiped out a residential area near the old post office in central Pristina.

"Undoubtedly there are dead and injured," it said, but gave no further details.

State television also said the garage and warehouse at an oil refinery in Novi Sad, Serbia's second largest city, were destroyed. The state-run Tanjug news agency said the industrial zone in the central Serbian city of Nis was attacked.

Serbian television said Wednesday that Western rejection of the unilateral ceasefire proved NATO's "criminal intentions" to impose foreign "occupation" troops.

British Harrier GR7 jets joined in the raids early Wednesday, attacking Serb targets in Kosovo, according to Group Capt Ian Travers Smith. He said all British planes returned safely to their base in Italy after evading the heaviest ground fire so far encountered.

In the third attack near the northern Volivodina town of Sombor, NATO aircraft hit a fuel depot some 10 kilometres



An Aerial view of the Radusha camp set up by NATO for ethnic Albanian refugees expelled from Kosovo, near Tetovo in Macedonia. Hundreds of exhausted Kosovars arrived in host countries yesterday after the international community tentatively opened its doors to relieve Albania and Macedonia of the brunt of the refugee crisis. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

4 policemen killed in Chechnya: Unidentified attackers ambushed a Russian police patrol along the border of Chechnya, killing four officers and seriously wounding a fifth, an Interior Ministry spokesman said Wednesday. AP reports from Moscow.

The attackers opened fire from within Chechnya as the police patrolled the rebel republic's border with the Stavropol region on Tuesday. Three sergeants and a private were killed, Interior Ministry spokesman Col. Yevgeny Rybatsev said.

Fire destroys bldg in Philippines: A fire believed to have been caused by faulty electrical wiring destroyed a one-storey building early Wednesday in the Malacanang Presidential Palace compound, seriously injuring one soldier, officials said. AP reports from Manila.

The fire started after midnight in the room of Ferdinand Borjon, an officer of the Presidential Security Group assigned as caretaker of the group's officers' club, which was destroyed in the blaze, officials said. Borjon suffered extensive burns over his body and is being treated in a military hospital, said the officials.

Noted Jazz musician Norvo dies: Red Norvo, who performed with such greats as Charles Mingus and Frank Sinatra and is credited with introducing the xylophone to jazz, died Tuesday. He was 91. AP reports from Santa Monica.

Norvo died at the Fireside Convalescent Home, grandson Aaron Corlin said. He was a fabulous man," Corlin said. "He was always thinking about music, it was his life. ... His position in jazz history says a lot for itself." Born Kenneth Norville in Beardstown, Illinois, he taught himself how to play piano and xylophone. By age 17, he was touring with a vaudeville show and later joined the Paul Ash Orchestra.

Paintings stolen in Russia: Thieves stole two works by renowned Russian artist Vasily Perov on Tuesday, worth more than 1 million dollars combined, and escaped after a brief shootout with police, AP reports from St Petersburg.

The burglars broke a first-floor window in the Russian Museum in central St Petersburg, one of the country's most popular museums, early Tuesday morning and grabbed the 19th century works as alarms sounded, according to police spokesman Nikolai Fogel.

Gunman kills 5 in Canada: Five people were killed and two others wounded Tuesday when an angry former employee went on a shooting spree at Ottawa's main bus station before turning his weapon on himself, police said. AP reports from Ottawa.

The gunman who was not identified arrived at the station Tuesday afternoon with a rifle and opened fire on his former workmates, police said. He spent the entire afternoon shut up in the building surrounded by police before finally shooting himself, police said.

Zemin seeks to strengthen military preparedness

BEIJING, Apr 7: President Jiang Zemin Tuesday called on China to strengthen and modernise its military preparedness in the face of rising hegemonism, reports AP.

"At present, the international situation is generally relaxed, but... instable elements continue to exist as new developments in hegemonism and power politics appear," Jiang said, quoted by China Central Television.

His comments came as Prime Minister Zhu Rongji headed to the United States for a tricky official eight-day visit amid differences over the Kosovo crisis. China has bitterly criticised the NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia, as interference in another country's affairs.

China must strengthen its military power through science and technology and boost its fighting capabilities, Jiang told

Confce for peace in 21st century set for May

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 7: More than 1,000 organisations, dozens of governments and the UN General Assembly are backing a global conference to create a more peaceful 21st century, as the crisis in Kosovo closes out one of the most war-ridden centuries in history, reports AP.

More than 3,000 participants are expected at the May meeting in the Netherlands. They will hear addresses by UN Secretary-general Kofi Annan, Queen Noor of Jordan, South Africa's first lady Graca Machel and four Nobel Peace Prize winners, organisers said Tuesday.

"For the first time, representatives of peace, women's, environmental, disarmament and human rights movements will work with governments towards a common goal: Achieving a culture of peace for the 21st century," said US peace activist Cora Weiss.

The conference, from May 11-15, is called The Hague Appeal for Peace and will be held at the site of the first Hague appeal convened by the Czar of Russia 100 years ago.

The Hague Appeal was supposed to be the last UN world conference of the 20th century — following those on the environment, human rights, social development, population and women, said Bill Pace, the appeal's secretary-general.

50 detained NLD members allowed to attend religious ceremony

YANGON, Apr 7: Leaders of Myanmar's embattled opposition have been temporarily released from detention to take part in a ceremony marking the restoration of the country's most venerated Buddhist shrine, sources said Tuesday, reports AP.

Some 50 members of Aung San Suu Kyi's democratic opposition, including elected members of parliament, were given passes to see the hoisting of a large gold and gem-encrusted ceremonial umbrella atop Shwedagon Pagoda.

"I am out here because we made a special request to the authorities. For Buddhists, this is the event of a lifetime," one MP said, requesting anonymity.

The two-day passes were granted Monday to enable top members from the party's Yangon division to witness the final stages of the restoration, the temple's first in 128 years. "We are OK," he told AFP, referring to senior members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) under detention since a renewed crackdown on dissent which began in September last year.

Myanmar's main opposition party in September announced the formation of a 10-member "representative committee" to implement its decision to convene a parliament elected in 1990 polls.

The move led to the detention of hundreds of party faithfuls in what authorities described as "government guest house."

The NLD won a landslide victory in 1990, taking 382 of possible 485 seats.

HR issue won't strain Sino-US ties: Zhu

LOS ANGELES, Apr 7: Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji mixed humour with a discussion of serious issues, acknowledging concerns about human rights violations in China and joking about allegations his nation received stolen US military secrets, reports AP.

Zhu's visit marked the first to the United States by a Chinese premier in 15 years.

At a banquet Tuesday night, he assured the mostly Chinese-American audience that the trade deficit, human rights violations and other controversial issues won't strain US-China relations.

"All the tensions and problems between China and the United States can be solved and are no more than an episode in a longer history," he said.

Zhu also sought to use humour in a reference to recent allegations that China spied on the United States and stole nuclear weapons technology.

"Please remember when you return to China, don't bring any materials so you can avoid being investigated," he said.

The remarks drew laughter and applause from the dinner audience of about 1,000.

Zhu was scheduled to leave Los Angeles on Wednesday morning to continue his nine-day tour of the United States, which includes stops in Washington, D.C., Denver, Chicago, New York and Boston.

Earlier in the day, Zhu's arrival was met with small but vocal demonstrations by about 50 people advocating a free Tibet and an independent Taiwan.

The protesters waved banners and chanted "Free Tibet before free trade" in the rain outside the Century Plaza Hotel, where Zhu addressed a luncheon hosted by Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan.

The premier, speaking through a translator, said California Gov. Gray Davis had raised the issue of human rights but that they did not have time for an adequate discussion. Davis' office said they met for 25 minutes.

"It would have taken all morning," Zhu said. He added that he was not sure Davis was satisfied with his explanation.

On the agricultural trade agreement, Zhu said China has agreed to lift bans on citrus products from four US states

Rebels ambush boat in Sierra Leone: 60 killed

FREETOWN, Apr 7: Sierra Leonean rebels ambushed two passenger boats on a jungle-lined river, leaving some 60 people dead, a boat captain said Tuesday, reports AP.

Abdullah Turay said that a group of rebels opened fire with automatic weapons on his boat and another carrying passengers and supplies to isolated villages up the Mabang River, some 150-km southwest of the capital, Freetown.

Several people were killed in the hail of bullets and others drowned when they jumped into the swift-flowing river to escape the gunfire.

Turay said he jumped from his boat, which was loaded with kerosene, gasoline, onions and sugar, and swam to shore. The rebels stole the supplies.

Kumaratunga's party wins all 5 provincial polls

COLOMBO, Apr 7: President Chandrika Kumaratunga's governing alliance won elections in all five provincial councils, Election Commission announced Wednesday, reports AP.

The victory may encourage Kumaratunga, whose People's Alliance commands a one-seat majority in parliament, to advance federal elections due early next year.

She is likely to trumpet the results as an endorsement of her plan to give wide autonomy to Sri Lanka's provinces, including the north and the east where separatist Tamil rebels have been fighting for an independent homeland since 1983.

Kumaratunga needs a two-thirds majority in parliament to amend the constitution to carry through her autonomy plan.

While her People's Alliance won decisive victories over the main opposition United National Party in three provinces, it won the other two provinces with the help of two bonus seats in each province.

In the Western Province, which includes the capital Colombo, the People's Alliance and the UNP won 44 seats each, but the Kumaratunga's party was awarded the two bonus seats since it received 10,000 votes more than the UNP's 879,000 votes. The radical Marxist group Janatha Vimukthi Peramanna, or JVP, emerged as a third force winning eight seats in the Western Province.

The Alliance also won the Central province with the help of the bonus seats. In the North Central Provincial Council, the PA won 17 seats to UNP's 12, while the JVP finished with two seats.

In Uva, the PA won 20 seats, edging out the UNP's 19 seats. The JVP grabbed two seats.

Ban on beard goes

NEW DELHI, Apr 7: Delhi police yesterday withdrew its controversial order making it mandatory for its personnel to shave off their beards, which had sparked off protests from Islamic organisations saying it violated the constitutional rights of Muslim personnel in the force, reports PTI.

The withdrawal of the order follows a meeting of the Jamia Ulama I Hind delegation led by its secretary Maulana Mahmood Madani with Home Minister LK Advani earlier in the day during which they apprised him of the harassment of Muslim police personnel and the community's resentment over the issue.

When contacted city police commissioner VN Singh told "we have reviewed the order and we decided to accommodate the sentiments of the Muslim community."

Police sources said VN Singh was summoned by Home Secretary BP Singh in the evening and asked to withdraw the order on the instructions of Advani.

Violence leaves 8 more dead in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Apr 7: At least three people were killed Wednesday on the island of Borneo after soldiers fired into an angry mob demanding the release of fellow villagers arrested by police, a television station reported. In another incident, five refugees were killed outside a church in East Timor, report agencies.

The clash occurred after thousands of villagers forced their way through a military barricade that had blocked them from marching into Singkawang, a town near the western coast where 70 villagers were detained, private SCTV television said.

It quoted Col. Chaerul Rasidi, chief of the local police, as saying three people were killed.

The angry villagers who were stopped about 5-km from Singkawang, were coming from the nearby districts of Pemangkat and Tebas.

The 70 were arrested Monday amid fresh ethnic violence directed against migrants from Madura island by local Dayaks and Malays in Indonesia's West Kalimantan province.

They were captured while attacking Madurese and burning houses in the region.

The five refugees were killed and at least 20 wounded outside a church where they had taken shelter in east Timor, a top official said today.

But there was no evidence of an attack inside the church in the town of Liquisa where reports Tuesday said 45 people had been killed by pro-Indonesian militia.

The head of the Liquisa regency, Leoneto Martins, said the five were killed and at least 20 wounded in the church grounds.

Chile to ask UK to block Pinochet's extradition

SANTIAGO, Chile, Apr 7: Claiming Chile has a more compelling right to try Gen. Augusto Pinochet for alleged torture, the government will ask Britain's Home Secretary to block the former dictator's extradition to Spain, reports AP.

The Chilean Foreign Ministry on Tuesday confirmed that it would file the request with the British official, Jack Straw. The ministry cited "juridical and political" considerations but refused to discuss details.

Public comments by Foreign Minister Jose Miguel Insulza and other Chilean officials, however, point to a government strategy to try Pinochet at home.

Insulza told the Santiago daily El Mercurio that the International Convention Against Torture, mentioned in the case against Pinochet, states that torture crimes should be tried in the country where they were committed, or where the accused is.

That would give Chile and Britain precedence over Spain.

The London High Court has given Straw until April 15 to decide whether to let Spain seek Pinochet's extradition. That came after a House of Lords' ruling last month that drastically reduced the number of charges against the 83-year-old retired general.

Pinochet was arrested on October 16 in London on a warrant by Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon.

An official Chilean report says 3,197 people were killed or disappeared at the hands of Pinochet's secret police after he toppled elected president Salvador Allende in a bloody coup.

500-yr-old Inca mummies found in Andes

BUENOS AIRES, Apr 7: Three 500-year-old Inca mummies, the apparent victims of a ritual sacrifice, have been found frozen and in near-perfect condition on an Andean volcano peak in northern Argentina, reports AP.

Dr Johan Reinhard said Tuesday that the exceptionally well-preserved remains of two girls and a boy found in last month atop the 22,000-foot (6,700-metre) Mount Llullaillaco near Argentina's border with Chile may offer scientists a rare opportunity to conduct DNA testing on centuries-old bodies.

The mummies apparently contain frozen blood in their heart and lungs, which could reveal ground-breaking clues about diet, disease and conditions during the time of the Incas, the US archaeologist said.

Speaking with The Associated Press, he said the mummies had to be removed from under nearly six feet of dry rock and earth from a burial platform.

Reinhard said two of the mummies were wrapped in intricately woven textiles, but an exact cause of death was not immediately clear. He said CAT scans of the mummies showed all of their internal organs were intact.

"These bodies were frozen, as opposed to past bodies which were freeze-dried," said Reinhard, speaking in an interview from Salta, a northern Argentine city near the site. "They are very lifelike."

"I expect that when we unwrap them, we will even be able to see the expressions on their faces," he said. "The arms looked perfect, even down to the peach fuzz hairs, and the CAT scans have shown that even the kidneys are intact."

Scientists said the burial platform also held offerings to the Inca gods, including 35 gold, silver and shell statues. Also recovered were ornate woven and embroidered textiles, moccasins and pottery, some still containing food.

"Almost all of the statues are in a state of perfect preservation, including lids on the pottery and even food offerings of meat jerky," said Reinhard.

The expeditionary force that recovered the mummies included American, Argentine and Peruvian researchers who

had to brave sometimes extreme conditions such as snowstorms and high winds. A grant from the National Geographic Society partially funded the dig.

Reinhard's crew needed 12 days at the volcano's peak to recover the bodies.

Reinhard said he decided to search the area because he had read that Inca ruins had been found on Mount Llullaillaco, which he had climbed several times since 1980.

The three mummies are being kept at a university in Salta, where at least two of them are to remain until the Argentine government finishes building a research facility to house them next year.

Reinhard said at least one body was expected to be sent to the United States for extensive testing.

The discovery was the latest for Reinhard and his mummy hunters.

Last September, they found six frozen mummies on the El Misti volcano in southern Peru, believed to be a sacrificial offering to Inca gods. That burial site included a rare find of ceremonial pots of gold and silver, shedding new light on ancient

ULFA rejects truce proposal for Bihu

GUWAHATI, Apr 7: The banned United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) last night rejected the proposal for a ceasefire during the Assam National Festival of Bihu this month, reports PTI.

In a fax statement to the local media here last night, the ULFA chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa said the outfit was against the idea as it would signify that it only represented people of the Assamese community.

Apart from the Assamese people from the communities as Rabha, Bodo, Mising and Christians, among others, were present who also had their national festivals.

By announcing a ceasefire only on the month of Bihu would mean that the outfit only stood for the interest of the Assamese people, Rajkhowa said.

The ULFA welcomed peace but believed at the same time that permanent peace would not be possible without a sovereign Assam, he said.



Former Swedish pop-legend Abba group member Bjorn Ulvaeus (2nd right) poses with Siobhan McCarthy (R), Lisa Stokke and Andrew Langtree, who all starred in the new musical "Mamma Mia!" at the Prince Edward Theatre in London on Tuesday, during a curtain call after the evening performance. — AFP photo

Pak anti-terrorist court sentences two to death

MULTAN, Pakistan, Apr 7: A special anti-terrorist court in central Pakistan sentenced to death two Sunni Muslim militants convicted of killing five Shiite Muslims in a mosque attack, court officials said today, reports AP.

The court announced the sentence Tuesday in DG Khan, 40 km southwest of Multan. The September 1998 shooting spree at the mosque killed five people and wounded six others in Kot Abdul, 30 km northwest of Multan.

The two men belonged to an extremist Sunni Muslim group, Sipah-e-Sahaba, or the Guardians of the Prophet, which is blamed for most of the religious killings in eastern Punjab province.

The Sipah-e-Sahaba wants Pakistan to be declared a Sunni Muslim state. But Shi'ites, who comprise 15 per cent of Sunni-dominated Pakistan, are opposed.

Malaysia, Russia to boost defence cooperation

MOSCOW, Apr 7: Russia and Malaysia have agreed to increase defence cooperation, including training and joint production of defence material, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported today, says AP.

A memorandum outlining cooperation was signed Tuesday in Kuala Lumpur by Russian First Deputy Defence Minister Nikolai Mikhailov and Malaysian Defence Ministry officials, the report said.

The agreement calls for creation of a commission to investigate ways to increase military cooperation. Among other things, the agreement calls for exchanges of military personnel on training assignments.

The report said it was the first time a high-ranking Russian military delegation had visited Kuala Lumpur.