

International

\* Y'slav forces stopping refugees from leaving country

Serbs may have killed 1 lakh Kosovars

WASHINGTON, Apr 19: Tens of thousands of young ethnic Albanian men possibly as many as 100,000 — may have been killed by Serb ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, the US ambassador for war crimes said Sunday, reports AP.

Asked about a NATO claim that ethnic Albanian refugees had reported 3,200 deaths at the hands of Serb security forces, Scheffer said: "That's a very low estimate."

Based on unconfirmed refugee reports and other sources of information, Scheffer said: "You're actually looking at the possibility of tens of thousands of Kosovars who not only are at risk, but also may actually have perished by this stage. ... We have upwards to about 100,000 men that we cannot account for."

Refugees have spoken of ethnic Albanian men, largely those of fighting age, being separated from relatives before the families were forced to flee. "We have no idea where those men are now," Scheffer said.

Scheffer, appearing on Fox television, "brought side-by-side photographs of the west-central Kosovo ethnic Albanian town of Izbica that he said proved mass killings by Serbs."

The photos, released Saturday by NATO, depicted an area taken at different times. In the photo on the right, up to 150 graves had appeared where nothing existed before. Scheffer called it "a classic example of ethnic cleansing."

to support her investigation. ... Meanwhile, President Clinton branded Slobodan Milosevic a "belligerent tyrant" and said Sunday the Yugoslav president could not be part of any democratic transition by his nation into a free Europe. Clinton stopped short of calling for Milosevic's immediate removal.

Writing in a London newspaper, Clinton said NATO airstrikes that began March 24 will continue until Milosevic's Serb forces are too weak to fight in Kosovo or until he agrees to peace and autonomy for the Serbian province's ethnic Albanians.

"Our campaign will continue, shifting the balance of power against him until we succeed," Clinton said in an opinion piece in the Sunday Times. "Ultimately, Milosevic must either cut his mounting losses or lose his ability to maintain his grip on Kosovo."

Also Sunday, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said NATO airstrikes at oil refineries, ammunition depots and Serb military command and control centers are "wearing down" Milosevic's military and choking off vital supplies.

As hundreds more aircraft join NATO's air campaign, a less-noticed array of ground forces is assembling on the southern rim of Yugoslavia, chiefly for humanitarian work.

NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana said Sunday the allies have no plans to authorize a land invasion. But "if the moment comes when it is necessary," he added, "I'm sure the countries that belong to NATO will be ready to do it."

Britain's Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, stressed it would take two to three months to prepare an invasion, if one were ordered. Military experts agree.

Both British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany endorsed the US position.

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President of the Congress (I) Party Sonia Gandhi (C) greets a colleague as senior Congress leaders Sharad Pawar (L) and Manmohan Singh (R) sit by prior to a Congress Parliamentary Party meeting at parliament Monday in New Delhi. Sonia Gandhi vowed to form an alternative government following the fall of the Hindu nationalist coalition on Saturday. — AFP photo

Her political career hangs in balance Benazir's lawyers prepare to appeal against conviction

ISLAMABAD, Apr 19: Lawyers for Benazir Bhutto prepared to appeal her conviction, but party stalwarts said Monday that it's likely to be two weeks before the embattled former prime minister returns to Pakistan, reports AP.

The court also ordered their property confiscated. Benazir says she is innocent and accuses Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government of trying to destroy opposition politicians in Pakistan.

Bhutto has seen it all in a colourful political career, but once again her future hangs in the balance. The former premier has vowed to fight a conviction last week for corruption which barred her from political life, and she can take heart from the fierce support she still commands in her home province of Sindh.

It's still not clear whether Benazir has to personally appear in the Supreme Court when her appeal is filed, said her spokesman Farhatullah Babar. Her lawyers still were struggling with that question.

Despite the possibility of jail, Benazir's party workers say she will return to Pakistan. "Benazir is innocent and she will come back to the country despite all the odds," said Senator Raza Rabbani, deputy opposition leader of her party in the Senate or the upper house of the Parliament.

The 46-year-old opposition leader slammed the conviction as a "gross miscarriage of justice" by the special court, which she said was set up by the government of arch-rival Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to end her political career.

Benazir faces five other corruption charges. Benazir's party plans to stage nationwide protests throughout Pakistan on Tuesday.

AFP adds: From detention and exile to the pinnacles of power, Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto has seen it all in a colourful political career, but once again her future hangs in the balance.

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Libyan President Moammer Gaddafi (R) holds a three-way summit with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (C) and King Abdallah II of Jordan in the Mediterranean port of Sirte Saturday. The visit of King Abdallah and Arafat follow the suspension of a seven-year air and arms embargo on Tripoli after it handed over for trial two suspects wanted in connection with the bombing of an airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Troops kill 5 Tigers: Government troops shot and killed five Tamil Tiger rebels during an attack on rebel positions in the north, military officials said Monday, AP reports from Vavuniya.

Bridge collapse kills 9 in China: At least nine workers died and 10 more were injured when a bridge under construction in southwestern China collapsed 40 meters (130 feet) into a gorge, a state-run newspaper reported, AP says from Beijing.

8 die of food poisoning in Vietnam: Eight relatives, including three children, died after eating poisonous mushrooms at a family dinner, doctors said Monday, AP reports from Hanoi.

Saudi prince dead: Saudi Prince Fahd ibn Saad ibn Saud ibn Abdel Aziz died Sunday at age 41, the palace said in a statement, reports AFP.

Sunil Dutt hurt in road mishap: Indian film star turned politician Sunil Dutt was slightly injured after bumping into the windshield of a vehicle he was travelling in which suddenly screeched to a halt, police said Sunday.

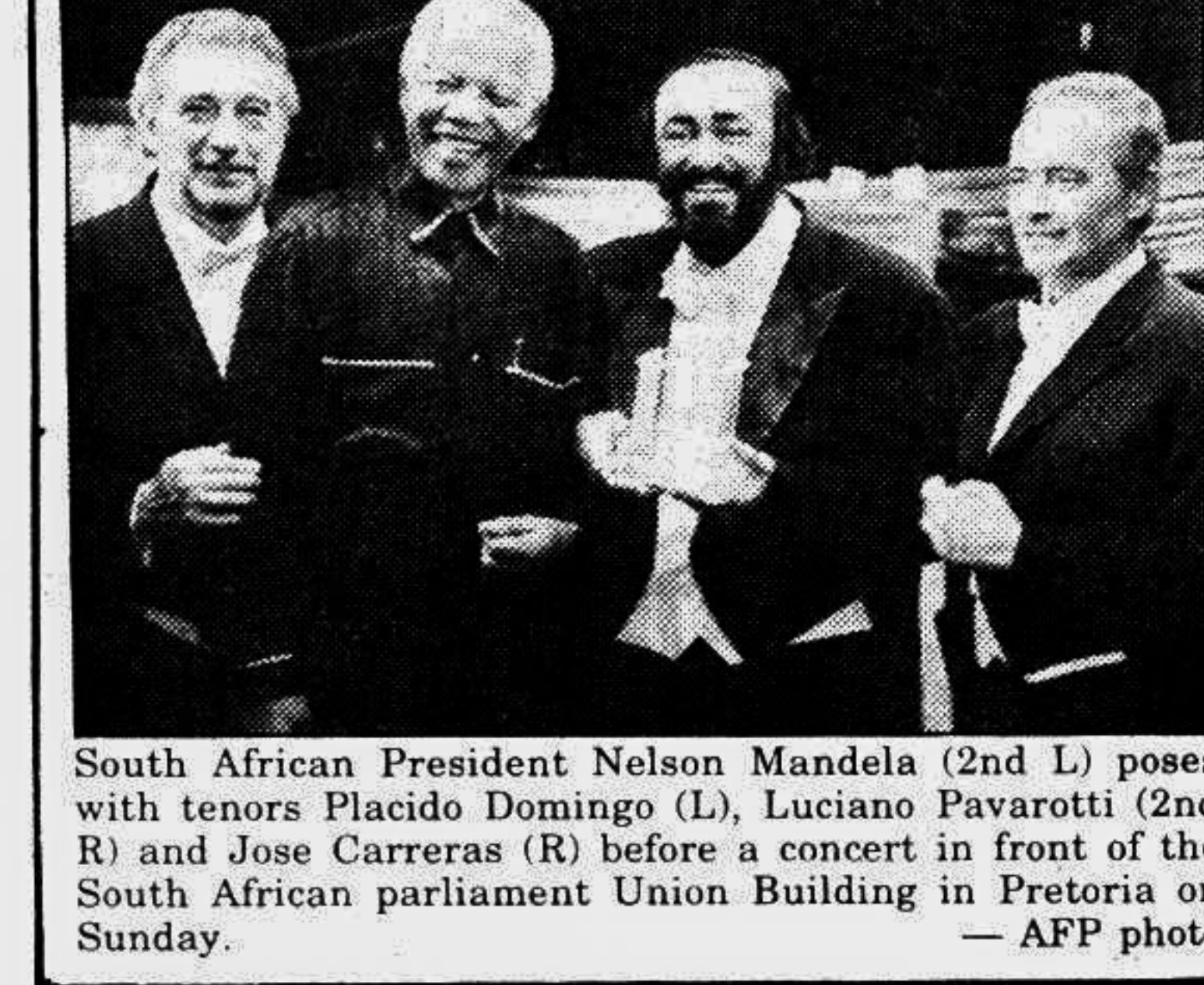
The incident occurred Saturday at Chitauri, south of Kathmandu, in darkness. Dutt told AFP.

When (the driver) hit the brakes, the impact threw my head right on to the windshield... I received a slight cut on my forehead," he said.

Saudi prince dead: Saudi Prince Fahd ibn Saad ibn Saud ibn Abdel Aziz died Sunday at age 41, the palace said in a statement, reports AFP.

Cited by the official news agency SPA, the palace said the prince will be buried today following afternoon prayers. It did not specify the cause of death.

Prince Fahd was a grandson of former king Saud, who ruled the kingdom from 1953-1964 and died in 1969.



South African President Nelson Mandela (2nd L) poses with tenors Placido Domingo (L), Luciano Pavarotti (2nd R) and Jose Carreras (R) before a concert in front of the South African parliament Union Building in Pretoria on Sunday. — AFP photo

Secularist PM leading in Turkey's polls

ANKARA, Apr 19: Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's staunchly secular party was leading in early elections results Monday, while a pro-Islamic party appeared to have suffered a major decline in support, reports AP.

An ultra-rightist group made stunning gains in Sunday's elections and could emerge as the second largest group in parliament, according to results based on a count of 50 per cent of the votes.

Analysts said voters may have abandoned the Islamic Virtue party — the largest in parliament — because of its friction with the staunchly secular military and chosen the ultra-nationalist movement, which is also deeply religious.

Ecevit's Democratic Left party was leading with 23 per cent of the ballots. Ecevit, who is widely respected, appeared to be picking up votes from people disillusioned by the constant scandals that have plagued other administrations.

"I am happy with this result," Ecevit said at a post-election news conference. "I think the period of using religion for political purposes is over."

The Islamic Virtue Party was taking just 16 per cent of the votes, a sharp decline from the 21 per cent that its predecessor, the Welfare Party, garnered in 1995 to win parliamentary elections and eventually take power before being pushed out by the military.

Virtual appeared, however, to have retained control over the municipalities of Istanbul and Ankara. The party has a strong reputation for delivering social services.

The Nationalist Movement Party was taking 18 per cent of the vote. In 1995, the party did not pass the 10 per cent mark necessary to gain seats.

Known as the MHP, the ultra-nationalist party, which will likely be part of a future coalition, calls for no compromise with Kurdish activists and appears to have benefited from the mid-February capture of Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan.

MHP leader Devlet Bahceli appeared surprised by his party's strong gains. People "were forced to make a new choice" because of instability in the government and political corruption, he said.

In Istanbul, overjoyed ultra-nationalists took to the streets Sunday, waving the party's three-crescent flag and chanting, "Stand Kosovo, we are coming!"

The government's collapse sparked immediate fears about the fate of the budget, which had been widely hailed as a blueprint for reversing a two-year economic slowdown.

Failure to pass the budget before a May 13 deadline would have invalidated crucial tax changes proposed by outgoing Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha and triggered a serious fiscal crisis.

The main opposition Congress Party, currently struggling to form an alternative government to replace the outgoing coalition, had been urged by President K.R. Narayanan not to delay the budget's passage.

Congress leader and former finance minister Manmohan Singh said Monday that while the budget would be passed without amendments, changes could be made in the future.

If the new government wants to bring in amendments, it could always do so at a later stage," he said.

The 30-share BSE sensitive index rose 49.32 points to 3,376.32 points after news of the all-party decision broke.

The market is relieved the budget will be passed. We have been waiting for this. Prices have started moving up," said broker Gaurav Sanghvi.

The index had plunged seven per cent in a special day's trading Saturday after the government lost its confidence motion.

In the immediate aftermath of the government's collapse, the budget became a political football, with the outgoing Hindu nationalists refusing to support its passage if changes were made.

The Congress was under pressure to introduce amendments from communist parties opposed to free-market reforms, which they argue will turn the country into a hunting ground for foreign multinationals.

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India avoids looming financial crisis All-party meeting agrees to pass national budget

NEW DELHI, Apr 19: India avoided a looming financial crisis today, when an all-party parliamentary meeting agreed to pass the pending national budget without amendment after the ouster of the ruling coalition, reports AP.

The budget will be passed "in toto" through parliament on Wednesday, together with other pending financial business, opposition leader Sharad Pawar told reporters after the meeting.

Whatever the government proposes on the budget, we shall agree," Pawar said.

Share prices on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) climbed 1.5 per cent on the news.

Monday's meeting had been called by parliamentary speaker GMC Balayogi, after the budget looked set to fall victim to India's current political crisis.

The Hindu nationalist coalition, which drew up the budget document for the fiscal year beginning April 1, was ousted Saturday in a vote of confidence.

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Indonesia's Aceh province Residents raise separatist flag

LHOKSEUMAW, Indonesia, Apr 19: Residents today raised separatist flags over their homes in several villages of Indonesia's northern Aceh district, a day after the flag figured prominently in a mass rally here, a witness said, reports AP.

The flag has a bright red background contrasting with the white crescent and star symbol trapped between two thick black horizontal stripes.

The children in Sunday's parade wore red headbands bearing the same symbol and mounted large flags on the backs of bicycles.

People were overjoyed and welcomed the flying of the flag, widely seen here as a symbol of independence," the source added.

A few police officers stood by and largely ignored the yells of some students who demanded a referendum on self-determination, he said.

This was the first time ever that the independence flag has been openly displayed," a resident said.

Today most homes in the villages in the northern Aceh district are flying the separatist flag," he added.

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Queen Elizabeth in S Korea

SEOUL, Apr 19: Queen Elizabeth II arrived in South Korea today, becoming the first British head of state to visit here in 116 years of official ties between the two countries, reports AP.

Off the Record

Wake-up call for kids before they wet bed!

TOKYO: Japanese researchers have come up with a 180 million yen (1.5 million dollars) answer to an age-old problem: An electronic alarm that stops kids from wetting the bed, reports AP.

The new machine — devised by a urologist and a telephone maker — measures a child's brain waves and monitors the bladder. When it's time to go, an alarm goes off and the child heads for the toilet.

Clinical testing was finished in January and the device is awaiting approval by the Health and Welfare Ministry, said the Japan Science and Technology Corp, a government-funded group that financed the project.

"It's a landmark invention that causes no side-effects," Shinobu Masubuchi, a spokesman for corporation, said Monday. He said the gadget is better than medication often used to treat bed-wetting.

Telephone maker Kanda Tsushin Kogyo, an affiliate of the major electronics maker Fujitsu Ltd., produced the machine with a urologist Hiroki Watanabe.

The new machine was tried out for six days on 60 children, aged 8 to 15, in three hospitals. They were connected to the machine when they went to sleep, and 41 woke up in time to make it to the bathroom, Masubuchi said. Twelve of the children wet their beds at home less frequently after the test, the spokesman said.

Kanda Tsushin said the device, which is initially aimed for use in hospitals, is 30 centimeters (12 inches) wide, 40 centimeters (16 inches) front-to-back, and 50 centimeters (20 inches) tall.

The company also plans to make a smaller version for private homes. An estimated 1 million Japanese children from the ages of 5 to 15 have repeated bed-wetting problems, said the Science and Technology Corp.

Fitness first LONDON: Britain's royal bride-to-be Sophie Rhys-Jones has been to a centre for natural health and counselling, the Daily Mail reported today, says Reuter.

Sophie was determined to be in the best possible shape mentally and physically for her wedding to Prince Edward in June, the newspaper said.

It said the 33-year-old public relations executive had been spotted entering the centre, which usually caters for stressed workers from London's City financial district.

Heavy fighting on in Afghan province

KABUL, Apr 19: Beyond the snow-clogged mountain passes in central Bamian province fighting between the Taliban religious militia and their Shiite opponents was ferocious, opposition soldiers said Monday, reports AP.

Queen Elizabeth in S Korea

SEOUL, Apr 19: Queen Elizabeth II arrived in South Korea today, becoming the first British head of state to visit here in 116 years of official ties between the two countries, reports AP.

The queen, who arrived at a military airbase on a special 11-hour 40-minute flight after an overnight stay in London, was greeted by South Korean Foreign Minister Hong Soon-Young.

Wearing sky-blue two-piece suit and hat, the queen and her husband Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, were whisked off to South Korea's National Cemetery where the monarch will pay tribute to Korean heroes and war dead.

Heavy fighting on in Afghan province KABUL, Apr 19: Beyond the snow-clogged mountain passes in central Bamian province fighting between the Taliban religious militia and their Shiite opponents was ferocious, opposition soldiers said Monday, reports AP.

Contacted by satellite telephone, the Shiite Muslim party, Hezb-e-Wahadat, reported heavy fighting west of Bamian city, some 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the capital of Kabul.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The region still is isolated by heavy snows that have blocked mountain passes into central Bamian province inhabited largely by Afghanistan's minority Shiite Muslims, whose military representatives belong to the anti-Taliban alliance.

Opposition blamed for violence in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 19: In his first comment since Anwar Ibrahim was sentenced to six years imprisonment, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad blamed opposition parties for inciting street violence, newspapers reported, reports AP.

Mahathir, 73, who has been recovering from a lung infection made his first public appearance in nearly three weeks at an exhibition of carpets from Kuwait on Sunday, in such unbecoming manner," Mahathir was quoted as saying about opposition parties by The Star newspaper.

Mahathir attended office on Monday for the first time since his illness, the national news agency, Bernama, said. He was hospitalized on April 2, two days after he returned from a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He was released 10 days later and has been resting in his private residence since then.

Anwar's wife quickly distanced herself from the violence, saying it was probably the work of government agents.

African leaders sign pact to end Congo conflict

CAIRO, Apr 19: The presidents of four African countries meeting in Libya signed a peace agreement Sunday aimed at ending the civil war in Congo, the Libyan news agency reported. However, Congolese rebels were not part of the deal, report AP.

The agreement was reached after two days of talks in the Libyan coastal town of Sirte, hosted by Libyan leader Moammer Gaddafi, Libya's state-run JANA news agency said.

The rebels have previously rejected any deals without their direct participation and it was not clear how effective the Sirte pact would. Also unrepresented in the agreement was Rwanda, the principal backer of the rebels, who now hold the eastern third of the country in their bid to seize power.

But the presence of President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, who also supports the rebels, may lend the pact some weight, JANA said three of the signatories to the peace agreement were Museveni, President Laurent Kabila of Congo and his ally, President Idriss Deby of Chad. Also signing on was President Isaias Aferwerki of Eritrea, which does not have a role in the conflict but has good relations with Kabila's government.

JANA said "a peace treaty was signed which entails the end of the bloody struggle in the (Great Lakes) region in general and in the Republic of Congo in particular."

The agreement calls for a ceasefire, the installation of African peace keeping forces in areas of conflict, the withdrawal of foreign troops, non-interference in internal affairs of Congo and encouraging Congo to start "a national dialogue with all sides."



Bangladeshi Ambassador to the USA K M Shehabuddin and Mrs. Shehabuddin are seen with US President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton at a reception held recently at the White House in honour of the Heads of Missions.