

International

US pressing allies to impose sanctions on Y'slavia

NATO bombs Milosevic's party HQs

BRIEFLY

Fire kills 3 Indians in UAE: Three Indian workers suffocated to death and a fourth was badly burnt in a blaze on the balcony of a restaurant in the United Arab Emirates capital, a newspaper reported yesterday.

A father and son were among the dead, police told the Gulf News but refused to comment on the cause of Tuesday's fire at Abu Dhabi's Blue Star tourist restaurant pending an inquiry.

Neighbours told the daily faultily writing was the most likely cause of the blaze which took three hours to extinguish.

Int'l kite festival in China: Some 70 kite-flying teams from France, Japan, the United States and 24 other countries and regions have come to Weifang, a major city in east China's Shandong province, to attend the ongoing 16th Weifang International Kite Festival.

Malaysia to kill stray dogs: Malaysia is to kill stray dogs found infected with a mysterious virus, suspected to have led to 98 deaths in an outbreak of encephalitis spread via pigs, reports said yesterday.

Bomb found in HK shopping mall: A week after a small bomb exploded in a Hong Kong mall, police found another homemade explosive in another busy shopping centre.

UK to provide \$6.4 lakh for demining: Britain said yesterday it would provide 640,000 dollars to aid Cambodian demining efforts in areas being settled by refugees returning from camps in neighbouring Thailand.

Student killed in Nicaragua: Police fired rubber bullets and bursts from automatic rifles on Tuesday, trying to disperse dozens of pro-Sandinista students who stormed the Central Bank demanding increased university budgets.

State of emergency in Argentina: A state of emergency has been declared for Chaco and Formosa provinces of Argentina due to heavy rains.

Russia launches UK's satellite: Russia launched the British research satellite atop a converted missile on Wednesday, the first step in a project to earn much-needed cash from its aging rocket arsenal.

BELGRADE, Apr 21: NATO jets struck a Belgrade high-rise housing offices of Slobodan Milosevic's ruling party Wednesday and the United States rushed more troops and equipment to neighbouring Albania, where border clashes raised concern of a wider Balkan conflict, reports AP.

Fears were heightened Tuesday, when Croatia charged that Yugoslavia moved up to 300 troops into a UN-controlled demilitarised zone between Croatia and the Yugoslav republic Montenegro.

And Macedonia's president warned that his country faces its gravest crisis since independence in 1991 because of the influx of 130,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees and the presence of thousands of NATO troops.

At least three missiles struck the 18-storey business centre located across the Sava River from the heart of the capital, which houses several offices of the Yugoslav president's Socialist Party as well as three local television and radio stations.

The pre-dawn strike left a gaping hole on the first floor and plunged the upper floors into flames that firefighters were still battling hours later. At least 20 people were reported to be in the building at the time, but Belgrade Deputy Mayor Spasoje Krunic said there apparently were no casualties.

Milosevic's daughter Marija visited the site along with other top officials. She owns Kosava Radio and TV, and others who are close to authorities control privately owned Pink Radio and TV and BK TV, also located in the building.

western Serbia, both of which have military airfields that have been targeted repeatedly throughout the air campaign. A strike also was reported on Novi Slankamen near Novi Sad.

Air-raid sirens sounded the all clear signal in Belgrade at 7:21 am (0521 GMT).

In neighbouring Albania, US cargo planes ferried in more soldiers and equipment to support 24 Apache attack helicopters which were expected in the country later Wednesday.

The Apaches will be used to attack Yugoslav tanks and armoured vehicles which have been used in Milosevic's campaign to drive ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, a province of Yugoslavia's main republic Serbia.

In Washington, US Defence Secretary William Cohen announced that 11 additional Apache helicopter crews were being dispatched. The total Apache-related force assembling in Albania will be about 3,300 soldiers, or several hundred more than envisioned just days ago.

The Clinton administration planned to use the three-day NATO summit beginning Friday to press allies for agreement on an oil embargo and other economic sanctions to weaken Yugoslavia's resistance.

Although NATO leaders have yet to embrace any sanctions, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has vigorously lobbied Allied foreign



Street cleaners look at the building of the headquarters of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party, still in flames after being hit during an early morning NATO air attack on Belgrade Wednesday.

— AFP photo

The influx of Kosovo Albanians into Macedonia threatens to upset the ethnic balance in the former Yugoslav republic. Between 23 per cent and 33 per cent of Macedonia's 2 million people are ethnic Albanians and the rest mostly Slavs.

"I believe dangers for Macedonia are growing," Gligorov said, warning that up to 400,000 refugees could end up there. Macedonia's state interest is to preserve internal stability and external security. Months before NATO's air

campaign against Yugoslavia began, the alliance has stationed thousands of troops in Macedonia to go into Kosovo if a peace deal for the Serb province is signed. Gligorov said 16,500 NATO troops are in the country and 4,000 more expected.

"Macedonia has said it would never allow its territory to be used for an attack against a neighbouring country," said Gligorov, adding NATO had assured him the alliance so far has no plans for such a move.



Indian Hindu Nationalist Members of Parliament shout anti-Sonia Gandhi slogans during a protest inside the parliament complex Wednesday. A dozen MPs from outgoing Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP Party picketed the main entrance, saying that Italian-born Congress (I) Party President Sonia Gandhi should be barred from running for the premiership.

Benazir wishes good luck to Sonia

LONDON, Apr 21: Pakistan's former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, facing trial on corruption charges, wished good luck to Sonia Gandhi in her bid to become head of government of neighbouring India, reports AFP.

"I wish her luck because she needs it, in our countries there is a real battle between the past and the future, however she has got a lot of courage and I'm sure she'll do a good job," Benazir said in an interview with the British Press Association news agency.

India's main opposition Congress Party said Tuesday that Sonia would be the next prime minister, but problems persisted in efforts to install a new viable government to succeed the Hindu nationalist-led coalition that collapsed Saturday.

"The people of India will vote for her because they feel that here is a lady who has shared our triumphs and our tragedies and whose family has given so much," Benazir said.

Benazir, currently in London, has denied any wrongdoing and described her conviction as politically motivated.

PPP urges CEC to delay decision on ousting Benazir from parliament

ISLAMABAD, Apr 21: The main opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) today urged the Chief Election Commissioner to delay a decision on ousting its leader Benazir Bhutto from parliament after she was found guilty of graft, reports AFP.

The leader of the opposition in the upper house, Senate Aitzaz Ahsan, urged CEC Chaudhury Abdul Ghafoor in a letter not to give his decision as both Benazir and her husband Asif Ali Zardari intend to file appeals in the Supreme Court.

"The respondents have given definite and express instructions in this behalf," Ahsan, who is a top lawyer, told the Chief Election Commissioner.

His letter followed speculation the couple could be stripped of their parliamentary membership in the next 24 hours after being convicted by a two-judge Lahore High Court bench. "I request you to withhold your decision until the period of limitation has expired and you are informed that an appeal has not been filed in that duration," Ahsan said.

Heavy rain causes flash flood in Lanka: 2 killed

COLOMBO, Apr 21: Heavy rain has claimed two lives in mudslides in central Sri Lanka and flooded several areas of the capital Colombo, forcing the closure of schools, officials said today, reports AFP.

First confce on landmines Steps to implement ban tops the agenda

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 21: Reports that land mines are being laid in Kosovo and Angola add new urgency to an upcoming conference to chart the next steps in implementing the world's first universal ban on the deadly devices, organisers said Tuesday, reports AP.

Laying new mines is expected to be a major topic at the first conference on the land mine treaty since it went into effect March 1. Mozambique, which has an estimated 2 million land mines from its civil war, is hosting the May 3-7 meeting in the capital Maputo.

The treaty, which was only drafted in December 1997, has already been signed by 135 countries and ratified by 72 — a near-record number in such a short time.

"In the main the news is good, the figures speak for themselves... and they are rather dramatic," said Robert Fowler, UN ambassador for Canada, which hosted the conference that drafted the treaty, known as the "Ottawa Convention."

But Fowler cautioned that efforts to de-mine Angola have been "seriously put into question" after the government and rebels reopened a civil war in December, sparking the United Nations to withdraw its peacekeepers.

Jakarta to relinquish control of E Timor if it chooses independence

SYDNEY, Apr 21: Indonesian President B J Habibie has renewed his pledge to relinquish control of East Timor if it chooses independence, and said he wants the transition to be peaceful, reports in Australia said Wednesday, reports AP.

"If the people of East Timor decide for separation, we will do everything to make it happen in peace," Habibie was quoted as saying by two newspapers. "We will separate in peace, in honour, as friends, and we will leave as neighbours and we will assist within our capabilities. It is moral, it's no problem, okay."

The comment was sourced to a briefing Habibie gave to editors of several Australian newspaper in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta on Tuesday. Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975, unleashing a separatist rebel war and human rights abuses.

Violence between supporters and opponents of independence in the former Portuguese colony has escalated since Indonesia reversed policy earlier this year and said it would let go of East Timor if its people reject an autonomy offer.

UN-sponsored talks between Indonesia and Portugal were scheduled later this week in New York to wrap up details of the autonomy proposal ahead of a scheduled vote on the offer in July.

Russia to back Palestinian state any time

CAIRO, Apr 21: Russia will support an independent Palestinian state whenever the Palestinians choose to declare it, Russia's ambassador to Egypt was quoted as saying late Tuesday, reports AP.

The statement represents a significant shift by Russia, which had urged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to delay a planned declaration of statehood on May 4.

Ambassador Vladimir Gougev told Egypt's Middle East News Agency that Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov had promised such support in a letter to the head of the Arab League, Esnat Abdel-Meguid.

"There is no choice but to declare a Palestinian state," Gougev quoted Ivanov as saying in the letter, which was delivered Tuesday.

"Russia will strongly support the declaration of a Palestinian state at any time the Palestinian Authority chooses," Ivanov wrote.

In April, Ivanov held talks with Arafat in Moscow and said he had urged him to delay proclaiming a state on May 4 — the deadline for the end of negotiations of the final status of the Palestinian territories.

Ivanov then suggested that the deadline could be extended to accommodate a renewal of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. His comments were seen as reflecting Russia's increased interest in ties with Israel.

Off the Record

Faux pas

HAHOE VILLAGE, South Korea: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II fell foul of Korean social etiquette during a visit to a dignitary's home here today and had to be asked to go outside and remove her shoes, reports AFP.

The queen, on an historic first visit to South Korea by a British head of state, made the gaffe when she was invited into the ladies' living room at the home of village patriarch Ryu Yong-Ha in this ancient hamlet, witnesses said.

Moments after entering the white-papered room, members of the aristocratic household and officials told the queen's aides she had broken the Asian rule that people should take off their footwear before going inside.

"The message was passed on and she then stepped back outside the room and took off her shoes before going back inside to sit down," a photographer on the scene said.

The monarch, wearing a blue suit and light-coloured hat, left her white pumps on the wooden step outside the ladies' living quarters of the 400-year-old house where earlier, in line with tradition, she was barred from entering the men-only living room.

At the house, the queen was shown how to make Korea's pungent national dish of kimchi — a spicy mixture of fermented cabbage, garlic and chillies — but declined to try the mixture in the flower-filled courtyard of the house. She was also offered green tea and a selection of fruit in the Ryu family home, but declined the refreshment.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (L) removes her shoes at the request of family members of her host.

Vitamin C in fruits lowers cancer risk

CHICAGO, Apr 21: US researchers calling for doubling or tripling the government-recommended intake of Vitamin C reiterated the off-heard advice on Tuesday to eat more fruits and vegetables, reports Reuters.

Diets rich in Vitamin C contained in fruits and vegetables can lower the risk of contracting several types of cancer, the researchers from the US National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, wrote in a report published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

"The evidence is that five fruits and vegetables daily decrease risk of cancer in the gastrointestinal tract, intestinal tract and the respiratory tract," Mark Levine, who authored the report, told Reuters. "Is it because of the Vitamin

Russia-NATO ties at low ebb

MOSCOW, Apr 21: Awkward from the very start, relations between NATO and Russia are at their lowest ebb since the Cold War ended a decade ago and could still sink further, reports Reuters.

Russia, angry about NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, looks set to be the most prominent absentee when world leaders gather in Washington this week for the alliance's 50th anniversary summit.

"Russia will not attend the events in Washington," Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said today after meeting President Boris Yeltsin.

Officials and media have moderated anti-NATO rhetoric this week. Some government sources even hint a representative — possibly special envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin, who looks set to visit Belgrade — could still pitch up in Washington.

Yet even if that happened, relations would remain in limbo. The bombing of Serbia has



Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan is meeting with the guests at the Bangladesh National Day reception in New York on March 26 accompanied by the host Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN.