

Macedonian President's body recovered

AP, Bitorja

Search parties yesterday recovered the body of Macedonia's president and eight others killed in a plane crash in a remote and mountainous corner of Bosnia, the Macedonian government said.

Government spokesman Saso Colakovski said the information came from a 20-member Macedonian delegation at the scene of Thursday's crash, which claimed the life of President Boris Trajkovski, a moderate leader who helped unite his ethnically divided Balkan country.

Trajkovski's twin-engine turboprop crashed in thick fog en route to an international conference in the southern Bosnian city of Mostar. Six other Macedonian officials and the plane's two pilots also were killed, officials said.

Trajkovski, 47, was widely respected for his neutral stance in the former Yugoslav republic, where tensions persist between Macedonians and the country's ethnic Albanian minority after a 2001 war. He had called for a great inclusion of ethnic Albanians in state bodies and institutions.

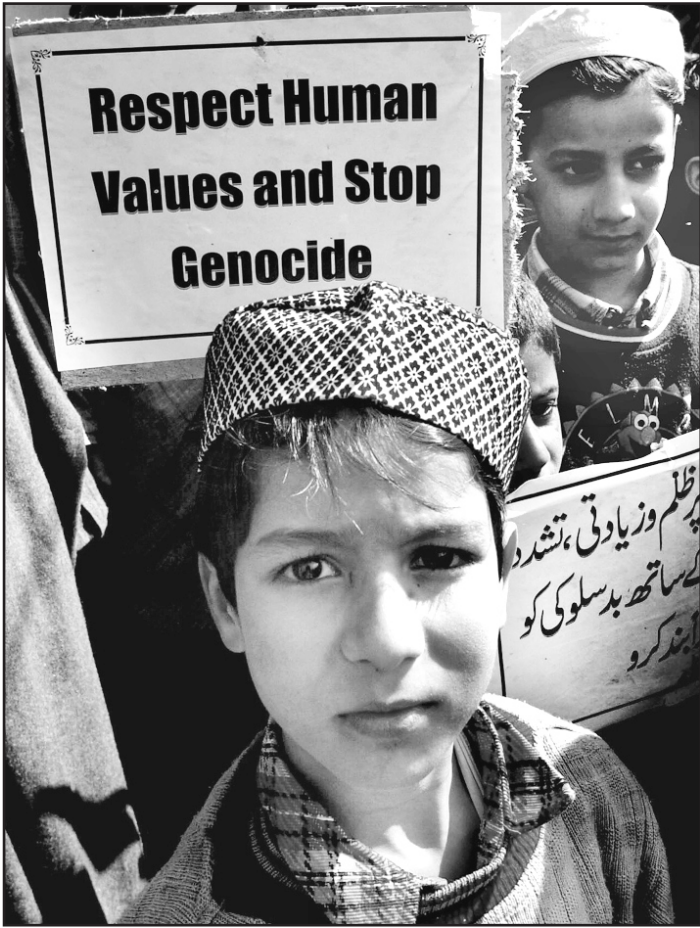


PHOTO: AFP
Indian Kashmiri children carry placards as they take part in a demonstration at Jama Masjid in Srinagar yesterday. The protestors were calling for an end to alleged brutality against people of the state by Indian security forces.

2 die, over 100 go missing as Philippine ferry catches fire

AFP, Manila

As many as 139 people were missing and two people were confirmed dead after rescuers plucked hundreds from a ferry that caught fire off the Philippine capital early yesterday, officials said.

Abotiz Transport, the operator of the ill-fated Superferry 14, said attempts were being made to reconcile figures with the coast guard, amid confusion at the height of rescue operations.

The firm said a total of 898 people were aboard the ferry when a huge explosion triggered a fire that quickly engulfed the vessel.

By noon, a total of 788 were rescued, two were confirmed dead and some 108 were missing, Abotiz said.

The coast guard, however, put the number of missing at 139, and reported 14 people with burn-related injuries.

Abotiz spokeswoman Gina Virtusio said that discrepancies in the list were "something that will be cleared up when we are able to match the names of those rescued and those in the manifest."

'Differences remain at N Korean nuke talks'

US stands firm as talks extended

REUTERS, AFP, Beijing

China's top negotiator at six-party talks on North Korea crisis said yesterday that after three days of negotiations there remained "differences, difficulties and contradictions."

"Precisely because there are some differences, difficulties and contradictions, it is necessary to continue with the talks process," Wang Yi was quoted as saying in a Foreign Ministry statement.

Six-party talks over North Korea's nuclear program have showed conflicting signs after Washington said results were positive but the North accused its old foe of blocking progress with "a hostile policy."

Diplomats say the talks will continue Saturday.

Meanwhile, the United States refused to back down from its hard-line stance on North Korea's nuclear weapons programme yesterday as six-party talks were extended an extra day with top envoys struggling

to find a compromise.

Washington's apparent refusal to give any ground followed a North Korean offer to disarm if the US takes a "corresponding" measure, while in the same breath slamming its foe's intransigence.

The Stalinist regime insists it must be compensated before abandoning its nuclear program while the US insists that North Korea act first.

In developments that could influence the talks, the New York Times reported Friday that Pakistan may have helped North Korea test a plutonium-based nuclear device in 1998.

Citing former and current US intelligence officials, the paper said clues emerged following underground nuclear tests carried out by Pakistan in May 1998, in which Pyongyang possibly provided the plutonium.

If confirmed it would strongly suggest that North Korea can not only produce plutonium but also build a weapon it has claimed it possesses, the daily said.

In a sign that all six sides -- China, the two Koreas, Russia, Japan and the United States -- are at least willing to continue looking for a way out of the impasse, the Beijing talks were extended into Saturday, their fourth day, South Korean delegation spokesman Shin Bong-Kil said.

Delegates yesterday convened to examine the North's nuclear freeze offer and a joint South Korean, Chinese and Russian plan to offer energy aid in exchange.

The aid would most likely involve fuel shipments which were cut in late 2002 after the US said North Korea had admitted having an uranium enrichment program and was trying to build nuclear weapons.

The talks Friday involved a "continuation of the dialogue process", said a Japanese delegation statement, adding that views were exchanged on future six-nation talks and the establishment of working groups.

South Korean officials said talks

Naxals go on rampage in Bihar, Jharkhand

PTI, Patna

Banned Peoples War Group and Maoist Communist Centre ultras triggered blasts damaging government properties and paralysing railway services along the Howrah-New Delhi route in Bihar during their bandh in the state and Jharkhand yesterday against alleged police atrocities.

However, no casualties were reported from either of the two states where security has been beefed up and central paramilitary forces deployed in view of the 24-hour bandh.

Heavily armed ultras struck in Bihar completely disrupting movement of trains on the Mughalsarai-Patna section of East Central Railway, a railway spokesman said.

MCC and PWG ultras set off explosions and badly damaged Ankorha railway station and cabin

on the Mughalsarai-Patna section of East Central Railway early on Friday. They also blew up the tracks near the station and a culvert completely disrupting the movement of trains on the section, he said.

Railway tracks were also blown up between Paraiya and Kashttha stations on Mughalsarai-Gaya section and the cabin was locked by the ultras at Phesar railway station, he said.

Over two dozen trains, including those between Howrah and New Delhi were stranded following the attacks which has also caused cancellation of a number of trains.

In Jharkhand, the ultras attacked Dania and Dasra railway stations in Dhanbad division throwing train services out of gear on Barkakhana-Garwa Road, Garwah Road-Sonnagar and Garwah Road-Chappan, railway sources said.

Rebels warn of imminent attack on Haiti capital

AP, Port-au-Prince

Rebels battling to oust Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide said on Thursday an attack on the capital was imminent and the United States urged Aristide to consider whether he should stay in power.

Rebel boss Guy Philippe, leading a band of ex-soldiers and gang members against the priest-turned-politician, said his men had surrounded Port-au-Prince, and were awaiting orders to move on the city.

"Everyone is killing innocent people so we cannot stand by and watch Aristide do this. So that is why we gave orders to surround Port-au-Prince," Philippe told Reuters in the rebel stronghold in Cap Hatien, Haiti's second-largest city.

"Our guys are there and waiting

for orders to attack," said Philippe, a former police chief who said he wants to be in Port-au-Prince by Sunday to celebrate his 36th birthday.

Aristide has repeatedly vowed to remain in office until his term ends in 2006, setting the stage for a showdown between the motley band of armed rebels and the president, his supporters and ill-trained, 4,000-member national police force.

Secretary of State Colin Powell urged Aristide to "examine" whether he could effectively rule, the first time the United States had questioned his ability to remain in charge.

"I think, as a number of people have commented, whether or not he is able to effectively continue as president is something he will have to examine," said Powell. "I hope he will examine it carefully considering

the interests of the Haitian people."

More than 60 people have died in the Caribbean country in clashes that began on Feb. 5 when the rebels overran the western city of Gonaives. Aristide dissolved Haiti's army, and police have done little to resist rebel attacks.

The UN Security Council declared its readiness to approve an international force to restore order in Haiti, but only if the government and opposition first reach an agreement on sharing power and ending the violence.

President Bush has also said the deteriorating situation in Haiti may require an international security presence, once a political deal is reached.

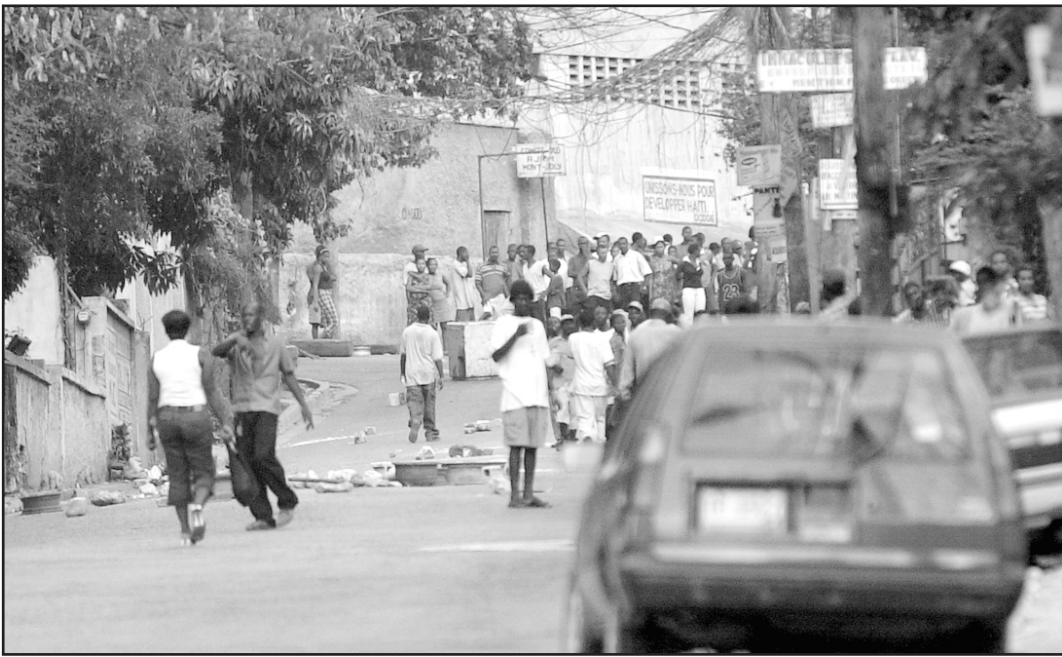


PHOTO: AFP

A crowd of men gather in the middle of a street in an area north of downtown Port-au-Prince in the late Thursday afternoon. Fearing imminent attack, gangs loyal to the Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide searched cars and their occupants around Port-au-Prince at makeshift barricades of trucks, shipping containers, abandoned household appliances and burning tires.

'Vote for NDA to make India a superpower'

PTI, Vijayawada

Appealing to nationalistic sentiments of the electorate, Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani yesterday sought a renewed mandate for the BJP-led coalition at the Centre to enable India to become a super-power and complete unfinished tasks.

Launching the party's poll campaign south of Vindhyas here, Advani claimed that the NDA government had fulfilled most of its promises to the voters and it would enter the poll fray seeking a fresh mandate for fulfilling unfinished tasks and making the country a

superpower in the next 20 years.

He said that both President APJ Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee envisioned India emerging as a developed country in the coming days.

"India has the capacity to achieve it, but for that it is essential that the present leadership and ruling alliance are voted back to power," he said.

The NDA was committed not only to place India in the category of developed countries by 2020 but was also making efforts to make the 21st century India's century, he said and added, "and we will achieve it."

Maoists call off strike in Nepal

PTI, Kathmandu

The students' wing of the Maoist rebels has withdrawn its five-day general strike aimed at disrupting college union elections in Nepal, after first two days of the strike saw many people defying the call.

In a statement on Thursday, the All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary) said it was calling off the strike after two days, keeping public sentiment in view.

Life has returned to normal from Friday as all the markets and educational institutions have started opening and vehicles plied smoothly across the country.

US eases sanctions on Libya

REUTERS, Washington

The United States took major steps toward normalizing ties with Libya on Thursday, including allowing US firms to start negotiating their return, in order to reward Tripoli for efforts to get rid of banned weapons.

The Bush administration also said it would let Libya set up a diplomatic presence in Washington and lifted a travel ban, reflecting the US determination to keep pace with Libya's moves on illicit arms.

Libya was eager to bring back US companies, especially in the oil industry, its main source of foreign

earnings. Opec member Libya produces around 1.4 million barrels of oil daily.

Tripoli has retracted statements by Prime Minister Shokri Ghanem on Tuesday denying Libya's guilt in the 1988 Lockerbie airliner bombing, which killed 270 people. His statement prompted a two-day delay in lifting the travel ban.

But the retraction did little to soothe family members of the Lockerbie victims, some of whom angrily accuse Washington of being too easy on Libya because it wants access to its oil.

Nato chief sees alliance role if Iraqis ask for it

AFP, Lisbon

Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said yesterday he believes the military alliance is likely to approve the deployment of its forces to Iraq if the move is requested by a sovereign Iraqi government.

De Hoop Scheffer, in Lisbon for talks with Prime Minister Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, added in an interview with daily newspaper Diario de Noticias that the tensions over the US-led war in Iraq which split the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation were over.

"If a sovereign government of Iraq were to ask Nato to play a larger role in the country, I think we would have a very serious debate and the reply would certainly be 'yes'," he said.

"Everyone understands that, regardless of what they thought about the war, the international community cannot sit by and watch Iraq return to instability," he told the paper.

The US has vowed to hand over to an Iraqi government by June 30 this year.

Nato already provides support to the division of troops led by Poland in south-central Iraq, and 18 of the

26 current and future members of the alliance have a military presence in the country.

Washington has suggested that the military alliance should take on a greater role in the stabilisation of Iraq, a move which would help ease the burden on the mainly US forces in the country.

Nato took charge of the 6,100-troop International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan last year, the first major attempt by the military alliance to expand its scope of action beyond the Cold War European borders that it was set up to defend.

Gaddafi calls on US to abandon 'colonialist mentality'

AFP, Sirte, Libya

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi called on the United States yesterday to abandon its "colonialist mentality" towards Africa and follow the example of the Europeans on the continent instead.

Gaddafi was speaking at the opening of a summit of the African Union (AU) he had called, which will be devoted to the issues of a common defence policy for Africa.

"Africa is making great strides to show that it is a liberated continent and not a continent of slaves," Gaddafi told more 40 heads of state and government gathered in the Mediterranean coastal town of Sirte.

"The Europeans have learned the lessons of the bitter experience of their colonialist past. The United States is called upon to abandon a colonialist mentality and take the road already chosen by the Europeans on the continent."

Gaddafi said that Africa possessed great potential and was "seeking new ways to enable it to face the challenge of the future."

Gaddafi opened the summit after driving along a red carpet into the conference hall in a small electric car, which was also carrying the Ghanaian, Egyptian and Tunisian presidents and Ethiopia's prime minister.



PHOTO: AFP

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi officially opens the second extraordinary summit of the African Union (AU) yesterday at the Ouagadougou international conference centre in Sirte, southern Libya. The summit will be devoted to the issues of a common defence policy for the continent and water supplies.

Pakistan, N Korea may have jointly tested nukes

AFP, Washington

Pakistan may have helped North Korea test a plutonium-based nuclear device in 1998, The New York Times said yesterday, quoting former and current US intelligence officials.

The report could influence the ongoing six-party talks in Beijing over North Korea's alleged nuclear weapons programme.

Clues to the possible joint nuclear test followed underground nuclear tests carried out by Pakistan in May 1998, the paper said.

According to the sources, a US military jet sent to sample the air over Baluchistan, Pakistan, after the final nuclear test found traces of plutonium, which surprised US experts since Pakistan had openly stated that it was testing bombs fueled by highly enriched uranium.

The explanations for the plutonium included the possibility that North Korea could have given Pakistan some of its plutonium to conduct a joint test of an atomic weapon, the sources said.

The matter was debated but never settled and was mostly forgotten until Pakistani scientist and architect of the country's atomic bomb, Abdul Qadeer Khan, confessed last month that he passed nuclear technology on to North Korea, Libya and Iran.

The daily said the plutonium North Korea may have provided Pakistan for the joint test could have been a form of compensation for Khan's assistance.

If the joint Pakistani-North Korean nuclear test in 1998 is confirmed, it would strongly suggest that North Korea can not only produce plutonium but also build a weapon it has claimed it possesses, the daily said.

AP adds: Although President George W Bush's administration reacted with surprise to Pakistan's nuclear assistance to Iran, the Islamabad government warned the United States that such technology transfers might occur as long as 14 years ago, two former Pentagon officials say.

The threat was conveyed in January 1990 from Pakistan's top general to the administration of Bush's father, but the information doesn't appear to have made its way to President Bill Clinton's administration when it took office three years later, according to interviews by The Associated Press.

In recent weeks, evidence has emerged that Pakistani nuclear aid to Iran began in the mid-1980s but accelerated after 1990 and included transfer of some of Pakistan's most advanced nuclear technology.

US says no to total land mines ban

REUTERS, Washington

The Bush administration plans to ban certain land mines after 2010 but would allow the military to keep using more sophisticated mines, abandoning a sweeping land mine ban envisioned by former President Bill Clinton, The Washington Post reported yesterday.

The new policy would allow use of "smart" land mines which have timing devices to automatically defuse the explosives within hours or days and pose little threat to civilians, the newspaper reported, citing unidentified officials.

The officials were cited as saying the ban would apply only to "dumb" mines which have no self-destruct features and can remain hidden long after battlefields return to peaceful use.

A senior State Department official, who disclosed President Bush's decision on condition of anonymity, said the new policy aims to strike a balance between the Pentagon's desire to retain effective weapons and humanitarian concerns about civilian casualties caused by land mines, according to the Post.

The new policy would be a departure from the previous US goal, established by Clinton, of banning all land mines designed to kill troops, the Post said. That plan set a target of 2006 for giving up antipersonnel mines if the Pentagon was able to develop alternatives.