

Macedonian President's body recovered

AP, Bitola

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 investment 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 viewed 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.

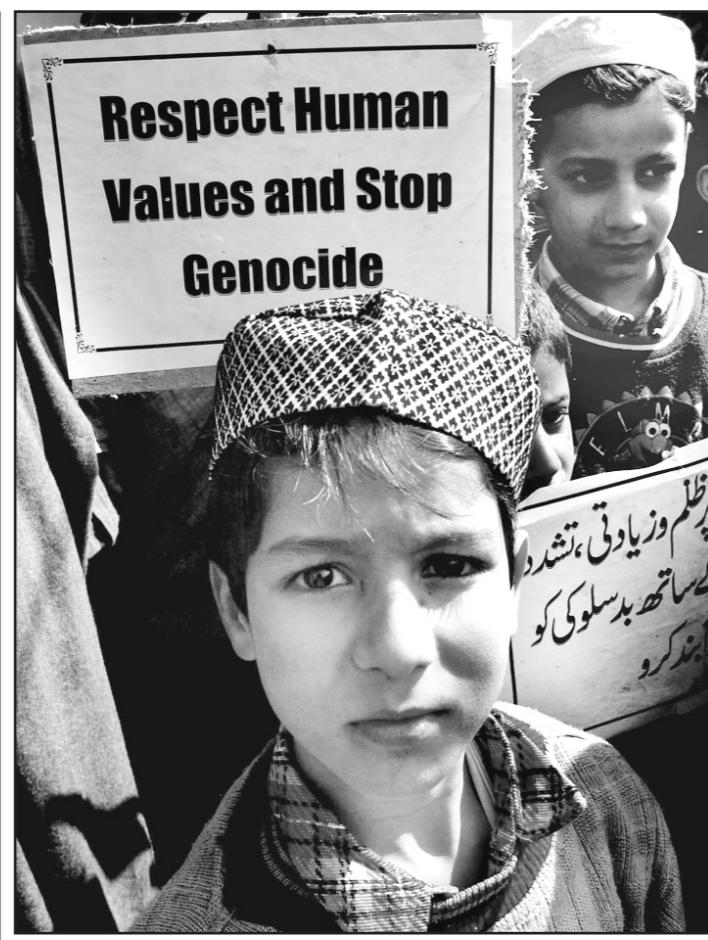


PHOTO: AFP
Indian Kashmiri children carry placards as they take part in a demonstration at Jama Masjid in Srinagar yesterday. The protesters were calling for an end to alleged brutality against people of the state by Indian security forces.

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 bands 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 Ankora 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 Kashtha stations on Mughalsarai-Gaya section and the cabin was locked by the ultras at Pheser 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 Darsa railway stations in Dhanbad division throwing train services out of gear on Barkakana-Garwa Road, Garwa Road-Son Nagar and Garwa 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 Haitien, Haiti's second-largest city.

"Our guys are there and waiting

'Differences remain at N Korean nuke talks'

US stands firm as talks extended

REUTERS, AFP, Beijing

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

were also held on a joint statement.

At the very least, host China wants all sides to issue a joint document setting out what has been achieved so far.

Despite US Secretary of State Colin Powell characterising the first two days of talks as "promising" and moving in the "right direction," the US embassy in Beijing took a tougher line, and insisted no inducements would be offered.

"The US goal remains the complete, irreversible and verifiable dismantling (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear programmes, including both the DPRK's plutonium and uranium program," an embassy spokeswoman told AFP.

"Our objective in the six-party process is to achieve complete verifiable irreversible dismantlement. The US will not provide North Korea with rewards and inducements for complying with its international obligations and commitments."



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 superpower 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

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 Shukri 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

"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



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 said.

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.