

US lawmakers apologise for slavery

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers Tuesday offered the federal government's first formal apology for the "fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity" of slavery and the legal segregation of African-Americans.

The resolution, passed in the House of Representatives by voice vote, "apologises to African-Americans on behalf of the people of the United States, for the wrongs committed against them and their ancestors who suffered under slavery" formal segregation laws known as "Jim Crow".

Lawmakers also said they were committed to rectifying "the lingering consequences" of slavery and segregation.

Congressman Steve Cohen, who introduced the resolution in early 2007, praised the move.

"This is a historic moment in the ongoing struggle for civil rights in this country, and I hope that this legislation can serve to open the dialogue on race and equality for all," he said in a statement.

"Apologies are not empty gestures, but are a necessary first step towards any sort of reconciliation between people," said Cohen, who represents the area of Memphis, Tennessee.

US media reported that Cohen, who is white, is facing a tough primary challenge from an African-American candidate and represents a majority black district.

Nato Soldier killed in Afghanistan

AP, Kabul

A Nato soldier died after being wounded in a militant attack in southern Afghanistan, and insurgents and a roadside blast killed five Afghan policemen elsewhere in the country, officials said yesterday.

The NATO soldier was wounded after insurgents attacked his convoy in southern Helmand province on Tuesday, the military alliance said Wednesday. It did not release the soldier's nationality.

Later Wednesday, Britain's Ministry of Defence said a British soldier was killed in Helmand the day before. The soldier is 114th British serviceman to be killed in Afghanistan since operations began there in November 2001.

Also Tuesday, a roadside blast that apparently targeted an Afghan senator mediating a land dispute in eastern Paktia province killed three policemen and wounded three others, said Ruhollah Samoon, spokesman for the provincial governor.



Chinese performers leave the National Stadium which is also known as the "Bird's Nest" for a rehearsal of the Olympic opening ceremony in Beijing yesterday. More than 10,000 performers have been working on the blockbuster 50-minute show for three years but they have all been sworn to secrecy.

Karadzic sent to UN war crimes tribunal

Butcher of Bosnia to appear before the court today

AFP, The Hague

Serbia handed over former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic to the UN war crimes court in The Hague yesterday to face genocide charges after more than a decade on the run.

UN prosecutors hailed Serbia for detaining the so-called "Butcher of Bosnia" who will face a trial over the two most notorious events of Bosnia's 1992-1995 war -- the 44-month siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre in which thousands died.

Chief prosecutor Serge Brammertz called Karadzic's capture a "major achievement" in Serbia's cooperation with the international community.

But he said more must be done to capture Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb military commander, and Goran Hadzic, who is wanted for war crimes in Croatia.

Karadzic, who arrested in Belgrade on July 21, was put on a special flight to the Netherlands in the early hours of Wednesday, shortly after Serbian police clashed with his supporters in the capital.

Serbia's justice ministry said it had authorised Karadzic's transfer to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

(ICTY) after a Belgrade court had ruled "that all conditions have been met for the turnover of Radovan Karadzic to the ICTY."

The plane landed at Rotterdam airport amid tight security. A convoy of vehicles then sped from the airport to the UN detention unit about 25 kilometres away, followed by two police helicopters minutes later.

"Radovan Karadzic was today transferred into the Tribunal's custody, after having been at large for more than 13 years," the ICTY said in a statement yesterday.

Karadzic, 63, will make his first appearance before the court today, when he will be asked to enter a plea, the ICTY said.

UN prosecutor Brammertz stressed that Mladic and Hadzic are still at large and stressed that the extent of Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY is a key condition for sealing closer ties with the European Union.

"Without these arrests we cannot complete our mandate," the chief prosecutor added.

The European Union welcomed Karadzic's transfer to a UN tribunal, but also urged Serbia to bring other suspects to justice.

"The Serbian authorities' arrest of Radovan Karadzic and subsequent transfer constitute an important stage in the process of reconciliation in the Western Balkans and Serbia's rapprochement with the European Union," the EU's French presidency said.

Iraq arrests 35 al-Qaeda suspects

AFP, Baquba

Iraq forces supported by US troops said yesterday they had arrested 35 suspects as a major crackdown on fighters in the al-Qaeda bastion of Diyala province entered its second day.

"Up to midway our forces detained 35 wanted for terrorism and others involved in crime, murder and setting of explosions," defence ministry spokesman Mohammed al-Askari told AFP.

The operation involves Iraqi police and soldiers, backed by US troops, conducting searches for militants and illegal weapons in Diyala, which remains one of the most dangerous places in Iraq.

Thousands of soldiers moved in on Tuesday, setting up a perimeter around the provincial capital city of Baquba, erecting extra police checkpoints to prevent non-residents from entering or leaving the area.

"Iraqi security forces are controlling the entry routes into Diyala to stop terrorists from escaping to other provinces," Askari said.

The US military said earlier this month that a force of 30,000 Iraqi soldiers and police would take part in the offensive, although Iraqi newspapers have said 56,000 are involved.

There has been no confirmation of the number from Iraqi officials.

The offensive follows similar Iraqi military operations in the southern provinces of Basra and Maysan, and the northern province of Nineveh, as Iraq forces try to shore-up recent security gains in the war-torn country.

Syria tries 12 over call for democracy

AFP, Damascus

Twelve opposition activists who signed a declaration calling for democracy in Syria went on trial yesterday and rejected all prosecution charges, a human rights group said.

"The 12 Damascus Declaration opposition members have appeared before the Criminal court," the National Organisation for Human Rights in Syria said.

"They rejected all accusations made against them and stressed that the Damascus Declaration was not an undertaking (carried out in a secret manner and that its aim was to defend the homeland)," it said in a statement.

The court adjourned the hearing until August 26.

The accused are charged with "spreading false information which weakens the morale of the nation and national sentiment, joining a secret organisation with the aim of modifying the nation's political and economic status, inciting racial and sectarian dissent and harming the state," according to Syrian non-governmental organisations.

Iran will not retreat, says Khamenei

Its time for the Iranian nation to move forward, says spiritual leader

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said yesterday that the country will not retreat in the face of demands by world powers for Tehran to halt sensitive nuclear work.

"Taking one step back against arrogant (powers) will lead them to take one step forward," Khamenei was quoted as saying by state television in a sermon.

His comments come ahead of a Saturday deadline for Iran to respond to a package of incentives aimed at persuading it to freeze uranium enrichment, a process that makes nuclear fuel but also the core of an atomic bomb.

"The idea that any retreat or backing down from righteous positions would change the policies of arrogant world powers is completely wrong and baseless," said Khamenei, who has the final say on all key policy issues.

Iran has been slapped with three sets of UN Security Council sanctions over its refusal to halt enrichment. It insists it has the right to nuclear technology as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and denies Western claims it is seeking to build atomic weapons.

"Today it is time for the Iranian nation to move ahead with awareness and add to its knowledge and capabilities," Khamenei said.

"The horizon is bright for us and we know what we are doing and where we are going... the way to reach that point is not to stand but to go."

Iran on July 19 held talks with representatives of major powers including EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and for the first time an official from Tehran's arch-foe the United States, William Burns.

Iran was given until Saturday to give its final answer.

But Iran has rejected any deadline, saying it was agreed in Geneva that it would during a two-week period examine the proposal put forward by permanent UN Security Council members Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany.

6 million N Koreans need food assistance: WFP

UN says N Korea hunger worst since 1990s

AFP, Beijing

Hunger in North Korea is at its worst since the 1990s, the United Nations said yesterday, prompting the resumption of emergency UN food shipments after a two-year hiatus.

Devastating floods last year wrought havoc on the impoverished country, forcing millions to resort to eating grasses and roots to stay alive, according to the UN's World Food Programme.

"I won't say that we are seeing an impending famine, (but) hunger levels are at their worst since the late 1990s," said Jean-Pierre de Margerie, WFP country director for North Korea.

"Between five and six million Koreans are in need of food assistance right now," he told reporters in Beijing.

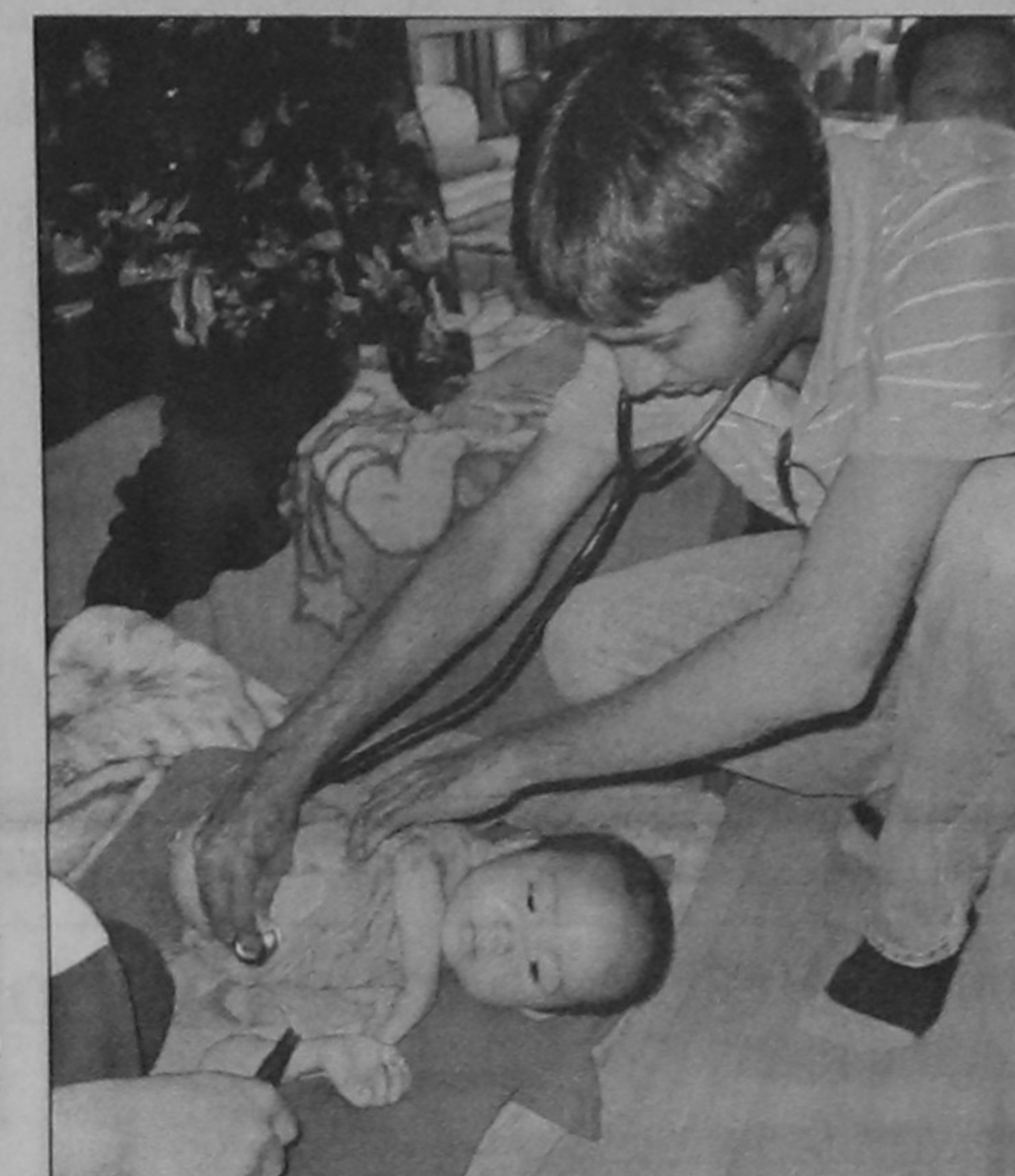
In a just completed survey, the WFP found that up to half the country was having to forage for foods and resorting to eating edible grasses and roots, he said.

Food prices at tightly-controlled markets had in some instances quadrupled over the last three months, while the state-run government food distribution system had cut daily rations by nearly 70 percent, he said.

The WFP began shipping emergency food to North Korea in June, and it will make an international appeal next month for up to 500 million dollars in aid to begin flowing in September, de Margerie said.

The nation of about 23 million will face critical food shortages until the autumn harvest is completely in at the end of October.

The worst flooding on record, which swept over parts of the



This handout photo from the World Food Programme (WFP) shows a nutritional expert assessing the health of a malnourished boy in an orphanage in Chongjin City, in North Korea's North Hamgyong Province on 20 June 2008. Hunger in North Korea is at its worst since the 1990s, the United Nations said yesterday, prompting the resumption of emergency UN food shipments after a two-year hiatus.

Stalinist nation and destroyed much of last year's crop, prompted Pyongyang to seek the resumption of WFP emergency food deliveries that stopped in 2006, de Margerie said.

From 1995 to 2005, North Korea

was the biggest recipient of WFP aid in the world.

But Pyongyang cut off deliveries amid dissatisfaction over the activities of UN and other aid organisations that it considered "intrusive."

Advertisement for International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Bangladesh Delegation. Includes logo, contact information, and a detailed 'TENDER NOTICE' for structural joinery timber. The notice specifies the quantity (16360.00 ft³), items (seasoned timber), and terms of the tender, including a deadline of 13th August 2008.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Government (গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার) regarding a tender for 'দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি' (Tender Notice). It details the process for providing quotations for a project, including contact information for the Bangladesh National Institute of Standards and Metrology (BNIS) and a deadline of August 13, 2008.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Airline (বাংলাদেশ বেসামরিক বিমান চলাচল কর্তৃপক্ষ). It includes the airline logo, contact information, and a 'দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি' (Tender Notice) for the procurement of aircraft maintenance services. It lists various services and the deadline for submissions.