



Kosovo Serbs may be allowed to vote

BY MERITA DHIMGJOKA
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PRISTINA, YUGOSLAVIA — Caught between the United States and European powers, Kosovo's chief U.N. administrator consulted with Western diplomats Thursday on President Slobodan Milosevic's surprise plans to allow Kosovo Serbs to vote in Yugoslav elections.

Milosevic's plans added a new element of volatility to already high political tensions and security concerns in the province.

Washington opposes including Kosovo in the Sept. 24 elections, while European governments are not as adamant, pointing out that Kosovo formally remains part of Yugoslavia, even if presently run by NATO and the United Nations, said the officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The officials did not specify why the Americans were opposed, but security concerns were one possible reason — the province remains a violent place, more than a year after Milosevic's forces

pulled out and NATO and the United Nations moved in, with politically and ethnically motivated killings a daily occurrence.

With Kosovo Albanians rejecting any association with Yugoslavia, any plans to include the province in the Yugoslav parliamentary and presidential elections is a sure recipe for violence against Serbs and voting facilities.

Additionally, the move by Milosevic could be an attempt to gain popularity by showing Serbs outside the province that Kosovo remains part of their republic, which makes up Yugoslavia along with Montenegro. Many Serbs blame the Yugoslav president for losing Kosovo to the United Nations and NATO.

Despite widespread opposition to Milosevic among Kosovo Serbs, it is feared that — in the absence of independent monitors — he could manipulate results in his favor.

The plan would open about 500 polling stations in the troubled southern province for the Sept. 24 elections. The United Nations is preparing to hold local elections in Kosovo on Oct. 28.

In a further attempt to show Kosovo remains part of Serbia, and Yugoslavia, a top aide to Milosevic said the president planned to visit Kosovo. Milosevic, who is wanted on war crimes charges, would face immediate arrest if he were to travel to the province. The aide, Nikola Sainovic, declined to tell reporters when Milosevic planned to go.

The loss of Kosovo is believed to be one of the reasons for the reported decline in Milosevic's popularity. He faces a strong challenge in the presidential race from an opposition candidate, Vojislav Kostunica, who has a strong lead in opinion polls. Commenting on the Yugoslav election plan Wednesday, U.N. administrator Bernard Kouchner said he had not received any notice from Belgrade. And he suggested that any vote would have to be Kosovo-wide, including majority ethnic Albanians, all Milosevic opponents.

"Do they want to have elections only in Serb enclaves? That is impossible," he said.

Thousands of Serbs fled the province when Yugoslav troops and police withdrew in June 1999 af-

ter NATO's 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia.

The Serbs who stayed have been attacked by armed ethnic Albanians seeking to drive the remaining 100,000 Serbs from the province.

A visiting top European Union diplomat said on Thursday that in principle, the elections could be held, but also expressed concern about security.

"The principle of elections is a principle we defend," Javier Solana, Secretary General of the European Union Council, told reporters in Pristina. "Everybody has the right to vote, and of course we are not going to oppose anybody to vote."

U.N. spokeswoman Susan Manuel said Kouchner was expected to announce a decision Friday. Both Kosovo Albanian politicians and moderate Kosovo Serbs opposed to Milosevic denounced the election plans.

"We are not going to support these elections because we think that they are going to be manipulated by Milosevic's regime," Sava Janjic, an Orthodox monk and moderate leader of Kosovo Serbs told a reporter.

Tapes reveal Putin lashing out in public

BY VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOSCOW — In a rare public display of anger, President Vladimir Putin accused business tycoons and independent media of ruining the country's military and sought to distance himself from the legacy of his predecessors.

Putin's remarks, made at last week's closed meeting with relatives of 118 seamen who died when the nuclear submarine Kursk sank, were his strongest criticism yet of the so-called oligarchs — the magnates who acquired their fortunes thanks in part to close links with the Kremlin during Boris Yeltsin's rule.

"They have embezzled enough, bought up the media, and are now manipulating public opinion," Putin said, according to the Vlast weekly.

The magazine belongs to the most politically aggressive of all Russia's tycoons: Boris Berezovsky. Putin's government has been harshly criticized in Russia and abroad for its initial reluctance to accept foreign aid, which was offered immediately after the Kursk exploded and sank in the Barents Sea on Aug. 12. Russia's own rescue efforts were bungled by the lack of deep-sea divers, but the authorities agreed to invite British and Norwegian rescue teams only after a four-day delay.

Facing tears and angry shouts at the Aug. 22 meeting at the Vidyayev submarine base, Putin defended himself and the military, saying the authorities had done all they could. He quickly blamed the failure of the salvage efforts on the economic turmoil that resulted from the chaotic reforms of his predecessors — Mikhail Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

"I'm ready to account for the 100 days that I have been president. As for the previous 15 years, I'm ready to sit on the same bench with you and pose these questions to others."

The president's statements appeared aimed at deflecting criticism rather than signaling a new attack on the oligarchs or an attempt to sever his links with Yeltsin's era.

"Putin owes his election victory to Yeltsin's team," said Yevgeny Volk, the director of the Her-

itage Foundation's Moscow office.

"His statement is no more than a public relations effort, an attempt to shift the blame."

Pressed with questions about the Russian Navy's bungled rescue effort, Putin said the answer lies in the pitiful state of the military, which is struggling to survive a drastic funding shortage.

"As for rescue equipment, it has been ruined and there isn't a fig left," he said.

"There isn't a fig left in the country."

He said that the nation could no longer afford a huge army and should drastically cut the number of men and weapons in order to increase military wages and the army's combat effectiveness.

Putin pointed at the tycoons as the culprits for Russia's economic and military decay, saying they had their media "lie" about the disaster in order to blackmail the government.

"The people on television, ... who for 10 years were destroying the army and the navy where people are now dying, are the first among the army's defenders," Putin said.

"Their goal is to discredit and completely ruin the army and navy."

He wouldn't name names, but he was clearly referring to both Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky — the owners of Russia's largest media empires.

"They want to influence the mass audience in order to show the military an political leadership that we need them (the media), that we are on their hook and must fear and obey them and let them further rob the country, the army and the navy," Putin said.

Putin has previously sought to distance himself from the oligarchs, and the authorities earlier this year took action against some of the nation's largest companies, accusing them of tax evasion or illegal privatization.

Gusinsky, whose media outlets have repeatedly criticized the Kremlin, spent several days in jail in June on charges of defrauding the state.

The charges were later dropped — but the case had already provoked international concern about media freedom in Russia.

Postal Offices are safe to work in, report says

BY RANDOLPH E. SCHMID
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Postal workers have gotten a "bad rap" from widespread reports of violence at post offices, says a new report from an independent commission that concludes the agency is actually one of the safest places to work in this country.

"Going postal is a myth, a bad rap, nonsense," commission chairman Joseph Califano said Thursday. "Postal workers are no more likely to physically assault, sexually harass or verbally abuse their co-workers than employees in the national workforce."

And, he added, "postal workers are only a third as likely as those in the national workforce to be victims of homicide" — 0.26 per 100,000 versus 0.77 per 100,000.

Concern about postal violence has risen with a series of 29 incidents dating to 1986 in which 54 people were killed.

"I didn't want to go to one more postal facility and explain why some father or mother was murdered," Postmaster General William Henderson said of his decision to ask the independent commission to analyze the problem.

While Califano's group determined that the rate of violence was actually lower in postal facilities than elsewhere, it did note that the post office has a high rate of grievances and made recommendations for reducing labor-management tension.

"The major findings, we're in absolute agreement with, and will take steps," said Henderson.

He said some of the suggestions, including incentive pay, will be brought up in negotiations with the postal service's major labor unions, and he will take steps to modernize the service's grievance process.

While the instances of violence in recent years included many other businesses, in the vernacular, a violent attack in the workplace

became known as "going postal."

Califano reported that workers at private postal services are twice as likely to be murdered on the job than federal postal workers, and retail clerks are eight times more likely. The highest murder rate, he noted, was for taxi drivers.

Nonetheless, he said the past reports about going postal have caused "unnecessary apprehension and fear among 900,000 postal workers."

Mary Elcano, former general counsel for the post office, agreed, commenting that "what concerned me is the sensationalism that surrounded the coverage of Postal Service events has done violence to Postal Service employees, in their view of the security that they have in the workplace."

The study surveyed 12,000 postal workers and 3,000 employees in other jobs around the country and concluded that there is an unacceptable level of violence in the American workplace. Among the findings:

— One in 20 workers was physically assaulted on the job in the past year, 5 percent each for postal workers and others.

— More than one in six people were sexually harassed at work, 14 percent for postal workers, 16 percent in other jobs.

— About one-third of workers said they were verbally abused on the job, 36 percent of postal workers, 33 percent elsewhere.

— The chance of physical assault by co-workers was 4 percent for postal employees, 3 percent for others.

— But postal workers were less likely to face physical assault from outsiders, 0.4 percent versus 2.3 percent.

POSTAL SEE PAGE 5

Pentagon divulges military readiness

BY ROBERT BURNS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Most U.S. combat forces are ready to perform wartime missions, but if the country had to fight two major conflicts at the same time it would run a high risk of increased casualties because of shortfalls in the ability to move, supply and protect troops, the Pentagon said Thursday.

In an assessment required by Congress every three months, the Pentagon said the military services are facing training problems, personnel shortages and aging equipment. Even so, it concluded that "America's armed forces remain capable of executing" the military strategy of the Clinton administration.

The report comes amid growing debate between the presidential campaigns of Vice President Al Gore and Texas Gov. George W. Bush about whether the Clinton administration has sapped the U.S. military of the strength it needs to maintain the nation's status as the world's lone remaining superpower.

Just last week, Defense Secretary William Cohen disagreed with Bush's assertion that the military is "in decline" and that morale is low.

"Things are on the upswing," Cohen said Aug. 21, noting recent improvements in the ser-

vices' ability to recruit and retain troops. "While there's always room for improvement, we've got the best in the world."

Thursday's Pentagon report to Congress was a summary of a classified report and covered the period April-June 2000. It includes an assessment of the Pentagon's ability to execute a notional scenario in the context of U.S. military commitments as of March 15, which included peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, plus Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps air patrols over northern and southern Iraq.

The scenario postulated that war broke out between North and South Korea, followed by war in the Persian Gulf.

The conclusion drawn was that "most major combat and support forces are ready to meet assigned taskings under this scenario, although there are force readiness and capability shortfalls that increase risk in executing operations."

The term "risk" in this context means the risk of not meeting field commanders' timetables for moving forces to a theater of war and executing the war plan. It does not mean the risk of failing to win the war, but rather the risk that longer timelines for starting combat operations would mean higher U.S. casualties.

The assessment said there was a "moderate" risk associated with responding to the first war —

'While there's always room for improvement, we've got the best in the world.'

William Cohen
Defense Secretary

in Korea, under the scenario — and a "high" risk for the second war, in the Gulf. The report offered no more precise definition of these ratings.

Congress was given more detailed assessments in the classified version of the report.

The non-classified report cited several areas of "strategic concern," all related to the military's ability to build up forces where war had broken out and to initiate a counteroffensive. These include shortfalls in mobility and logistics; deficiencies in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; limits in dealing with threats from terrorists and weapons of mass destruction, and the vulnerability to cyberattacks.

The report included specific assessments for each service, including:

— Army personnel readiness is a concern. It has shortfalls in some critical enlisted skills and at the rank of captain, but it has shown recent improve-

ment in retaining soldiers and finding new recruits. — The Navy's limited aviation equipment is a concern. It would experience shortfalls if its air wings and carriers had to support the second of two nearly simultaneous major theater wars.

Also of concern is the availability in sufficient numbers of the EA-6B Prowler electronic warfare planes that jam enemy radars.

— The Marines are meeting their recruiting goals. Its land warfare equipment is ready for operation, but there are questions about its ability to sustain that equipment in the longer term because of aging and corrosion.

— The Air Force faces shortages in many critical job skills. Shortages of spare parts and skill-level mismatches in many personnel areas are creating problems that hurt the Air Force's ability to train.

NEWS BRIEFS

Albright calls on Myanmar to free opposition leader

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Madeleine Albright urged Myanmar's military government Thursday to immediately allow opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to travel outside the capital on a political organizing trip.

"I am appalled at the actions of the Burmese regime in denying Suu Kyi the freedom to travel in her own country," Albright said in a statement. "Freedom of movement and freedom of speech are fundamental, internationally recognized human rights."

Suu Kyi, 55, the winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize for her pro-democracy campaign in Myanmar — also known as Burma — was stopped along with 14 members of her party on Aug. 24 as they attempted to travel outside the capital, Yangon, to carry out political organizing.

Diana anniversary marked quietly

LONDON (AP) — On the third anniversary of Princess Diana's death, her sons remembered her in private, far from the gates of Kensington Palace, where a devoted core of admirers gathered Thursday with flowers, candles and an impromptu religious service.

"We come each year because she was human," said Dotie O'Connell, 63, from Buckinghamshire in southern England.

"She touched people and made them feel special. She sat with children who were dying and held their hands."

There were prayers at Westminster Abbey, where Diana's funeral service took place a week after her death. Memorial displays were arranged at Harrods, the London department store owned by Mohamed Al Fayed, whose son Dodi, died with Diana. And in Paris, admirers stopped at the Flame of Liberty, the unofficial shrine above the traffic tunnel where Diana died in a car crash on Aug. 31, 1997.

French fishermen end protests

PARIS (AP) — French fishermen on Thursday called an end to a nationwide wave of protests, including an hours-long traffic blockade of the Channel Tunnel, after the Agriculture Ministry promised to offset the costs of rising fuel prices. Earlier Thursday, fishermen had lined up cars to form a picket line at the Channel Tunnel terminal at Coquelles, near the northern port city of Calais, leaving hundreds of tourist buses and other vehicles unable to board the trains that pass under the English Channel.

German state official fired

ERFURT, GERMANY (AP) — The head of a state office for monitoring neo-Nazis has been fired following criticism over the revelation that he paid \$11,500 to a known neo-Nazi for information on radical rightists, the Thuringia state interior minister said Friday.

Interior Minister Christian Koeckert said at a news conference that he had relieved Helmut Roewer, head of the state Office for Protection of the Constitution, of his job.

The minister did not give his reasons for firing the interior intelligence chief because a report on an investigation of Roewer still has to be presented to the Thuringia state's parliamentary security committee.

Ukraine region declared disaster

KIEV, UKRAINE (AP) — President Leonid Kuchma on Thursday declared four southern Ukrainian villages an ecological disaster zone, following an outbreak of a mysterious illness some have blamed on leaks of Soviet-era rocket fuel.