

Cuban refugees swamp Guantanamo camp

WASHINGTON — Frustrated by a relentless flood of boat people from Cuba, the United States is rushing to expand detention camps at Guantanamo naval base for 40,000 or more refugees. The administration warned refugees Wednesday they have no hope of being allowed in the United States.

"They will absolutely, in no way, have any way of coming to the United States," White House press secretary Dee Dee Myers said as the administration mounted an intense campaign to persuade Cubans to stay home.

Officials said Cubans who flee their country will be held indefinitely at Guantanamo, a U.S.-leased base on Cuba's southeastern tip, or in safe havens in third countries.

Senior administration officials staged a midday news conference at the White House to drive home the message that Cubans should not risk the perilous, 90-mile flight for freedom across the choppy Straits of Florida.

Defense Secretary William Perry conceded the administration had failed to convince Cubans so far.

"We have a flood of boat people on the way to Guantanamo now," the secretary said.

Since the United States halted automatic asylum for Cubans on Friday, 9,000 people have been picked up from rickety boats and rafts and are on their way to Guantanamo or are already there, Perry said.

The Guantanamo base, sprawled over 45 square miles, has the capacity for 23,000 refugees now and will be expanded to handle 30,000 by week's end, Perry said.

The camp already houses 14,000 Haitians who fled their country.

By the end of next week, Guantanamo will be able to accommodate 40,000, Perry said.

"We have significant capacity beyond that and will expand beyond that, if necessary," he added.

The United States rejected Cuba's assertion that the only way to stop the refugee exodus was for Washington to hold direct talks with the Castro government on lifting the economic embargo against Havana.

"We see nothing to be gained" from high-level talks, Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff said. "It should be clear after 35 years to Fidel Castro and his government that the way he has been managing the affairs of the island is a failure."

Perry acknowledged fears Castro might encourage thousands of Cubans to flood through the gates of Guantanamo, risking their lives across a mine-filled no man's land.

He said there are no signs of that happening now, but added, "We would regard this as being an unfriendly act toward the United States and would take appropriate actions."

Attorney General Janet Reno said she wanted to dispel the belief among some Cubans that they will be processed for asylum in the United States if they get to Guantanamo.

"They will not be coming to the United States, and you should urge your family not to make such trips," Reno said.

To people in Cuba, she implored, "Do not risk your lives; it is too dangerous. ... You are going to Guantanamo or to other safe havens and you will not be processed - not be processed - for admission to the United States."

She quashed the idea that Cubans picked up at sea might be brought to camps in the United States, a step closer to their eventual goal.

"There will be no Cubans coming from Guantanamo to the United States, either to federal facilities or any other place," Reno said.

She said Cubans seeking asylum should go through processing channels in Havana.

"We are looking at ways to expand legal migration," Myers said.

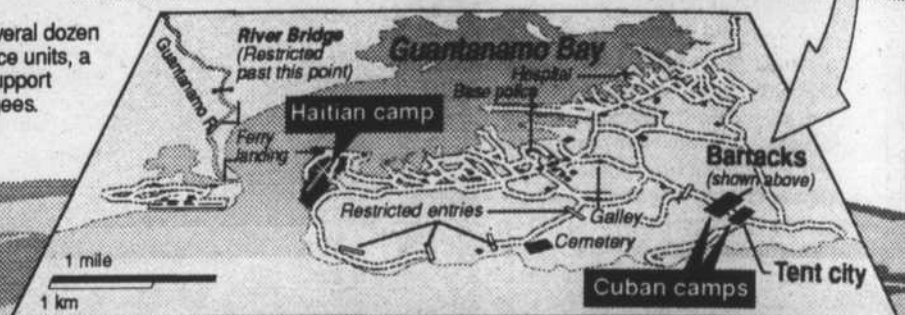
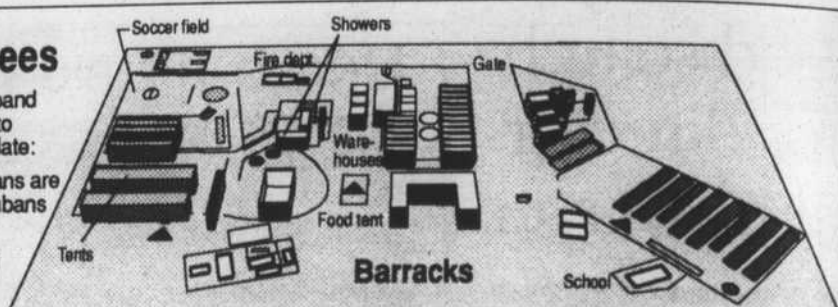
Housing the refugees

The Clinton administration will expand detention camps at Guantanamo to house up to 40,000 refugees. To date:

■ 2,000 Cubans and 14,000 Haitians are at Guantanamo. Another 7,000 Cubans are on their way.

■ Capacity is now 23,000, and will be expanded to 30,000 later this week. The base will reach 40,000 capacity next week.

■ The U.S. may commit several dozen more Marines, military police units, a 50-bed hospital and 125 support personnel to feed the refugees.



The blockade

Coast Guard cutters patrol outside a 12-mile limit. Refugees are picked up, then transferred to Navy ships for the trip to Guantanamo.

Ten Coast Guard ships, summoned from the West Coast and the Great Lakes, have joined the original fleet of 20. Also, 280 Marines are on board the Coast Guard and Navy ships to help with security and crowd control.

Refugees who slip by the patrols are taken to a federal detention center west of Miami.

Not a free ride

Under optimum wind and current conditions, a raft leaving the Cuba coast would reach Florida in about three days. But the path is treacherous, and refugees are hampered by their primitive crafts and Gulf weather. In a computer model made by University of Miami scientists, after four days only two out of 500 rafts had reached land. The trip is more likely to take six to eight days, but few people can survive that long at sea.

Source: AP research

AP

SAT scores closer

WASHINGTON — Girls are narrowing the gap with boys on the SAT college entrance exam, but they're still far behind in math. Neither sex is gaining much ground in reading, possibly because so many young people prefer TV to books.

The nation's average score on the verbal part of the Scholastic Assessment Test dropped one point this

year, to 423, despite a slight gain in girls' verbal scores, test officials announced Wednesday.

"Young people just don't read much anymore," laments English teacher Shirley Rau.

In math, the average score improved one point from last year, to 479, propelled by girls' improvement.

"Women, happily, are closing the score gap with men," said Donald M. Stewart, president of the College Board, the nonprofit group that sponsors the tests.

Stewart called the overall trend favorable, noting that the percentage of high school seniors who take the test is growing. As the pool of test-takers grows, scores would be expected to drop, he said.

Boys' scores did drop this year in both sections of the SAT, which was taken by more than a million college-bound high school seniors. It is scored on a scale of 200 to 800.

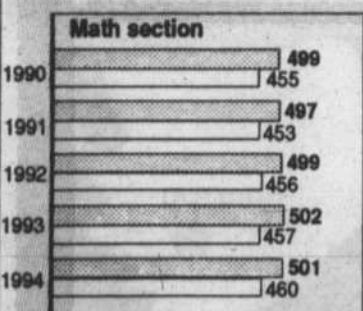
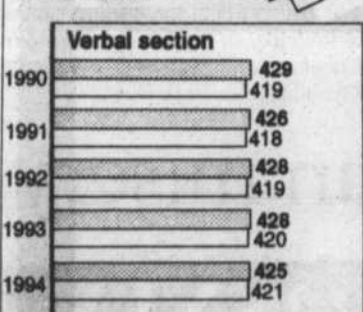
The gap between girls and boys also narrowed this year on the other major admissions test, the American College Testing assessment. In general, students taking the ACT made slight gains in math and science, while English and reading scores stayed the same as last year, according to results released Tuesday.

There was little change among minority scores on either test. Minority SAT scores have been gradually improving since the College Board began tracking them in 1976, officials said.

SAT averages

1990-1994

men
women



Source: College Board, 1994

AP

GOP ready to block crime bill

WASHINGTON — Senate leaders searched Wednesday for a way to end the stalemate over crime legislation as President Clinton exhorted lawmakers to "put away the excuses" for inaction. But even as Democrat George Mitchell and Republican Bob Dole bandied about ways to end an impasse that has kept the Senate in an extraordinary late-summer session, several senators vowed to fight on.

"We're going to win or we're going to go down with our colors flying," said Republican Sen. Trent Lott of Mississippi. "We're not going to get rolled."

Republicans have complained that a House-Senate compromise bill now before the Senate bears little resemblance to a form of the legislation that passed the chamber 94-4 last November. They have threatened to use a procedural maneuver to thwart the

measure.

Democrats have said that GOP charges of "pork" spending are disingenuous and have said the measure contains the very kinds of crime-fighting programs that law enforcement officers want.

For his part, President Clinton kept up the pressure from the White House. "This bill is centrist and bipartisan to its very bone," he told members of the International Convention of B'nai B'rith in Chicago via satellite. "It's time to put away the excuses, the blame and the politics and join forces and pass this crime bill now."

But on the Senate floor, and in the cloakrooms, offices and corridors, the principal question was which party, Democrat or Republican, had the votes to work its will. The existing crime bill was passed by the House 235-195 on Sunday, with 46 Republicans support-

ing it.

Mitchell, D-Maine, told colleagues, "It's clear a substantial majority of the Senate would support the bill."

But he also said he did not know if enough Republicans would join the Democrats to block a GOP procedural move. The so-called "point of order" on a budgetary question relating to the bill would, if successful, undo the package that had been painstakingly negotiated in the House.

But Republicans, too, were hedging their bets.

When Dole was asked if he had the 41 votes needed to uphold the procedural challenge, he said, "I hope I have. I think I have."

Supporters of the bill would need to muster 60 votes to turn back the challenge.

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