

News Digest

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1998

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News Briefs



Serb premier: Police units to be pulled out of Kosovo

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — Hoping to avert a NATO attack, the Serbian premier on Monday promised to withdraw special police units from Kosovo, declaring that separatists in the province had been defeated.

However, Premier Mirko Marjanovic said the Serb crackdown would resume if the separatists stage new attacks. And Vice Premier Vojislav Seselj said if NATO carries out threatened strikes, Serbia would take hostage pro-Western Serbs who work for independent media, peace and rights groups.

Marjanovic, who made his remarks during a parliamentary session, also said the government would grant amnesty to Kosovo Albanians who have not committed "war crimes," provided they surrender their weapons within 10 days.

NATO has recently stepped up plans for airstrikes against Serb forces after repeated warnings that it would attack unless violence ends in the restive province.

The Kosovo Liberation Army, which is fighting for Kosovo's independence, issued a statement pledging to continue what it called "the holy war" against Serbia and demanding NATO action.

Hundreds of people have been killed, and about 275,000 have fled their homes since February, when Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's forces began cracking down on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Kosovo is part of Serbia, the dominant republic in Yugoslavia. Most of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians — who make up 90 percent of the 2 million inhabitants — favor independence.

Number of Americans without insurance jumps 1.7 million

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans without health insurance rose to 43.4 million last year, up 1.7 million from 1996, the Census Bureau reported Monday.

The annual survey of households found that 16.1 percent of Americans were without insurance for the entire year, up from 15.6 percent in 1996.

The number of uninsured children remained steady at 10.7 million, or 15 percent of all children.

And Hispanics remained the most likely to be uninsured — 34.2 percent had no insurance in 1997.

Overall, adults who were working were more likely to have insurance than adults who did not work. But among the poor, the reverse was true: Nearly half of poor full-time workers did not have insurance in 1997. While nonworking poor Americans may be covered by Medicaid, those who are working generally have low-paying jobs that do not provide insurance, but they make too much to qualify for Medicaid.

Other groups most likely to be uninsured included those with little education, part-time workers and the foreign-born.

Coverage rates fell in five states: Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Meanwhile, rates rose in 16 states: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah and West Virginia.

Hasbro Inc. to introduce Colin Powell doll

NEW YORK (AP) — He helped oversee the Persian Gulf War, headed the Joint Chiefs of Staff and toyed with a run for the White House. Now Colin Powell's achievements are being memorialized in plastic.

Hasbro Inc., the maker of G.I. Joe, plans to introduce an action figure of the retired general as part of its Historic Commanders Assortment, Time magazine reports in this week's issue.

The figure, which is expected to be available within a few weeks, will be in full dress uniform.

The doll may be able to pal around in playrooms with G.I. Bob, a Bob Hope doll Hasbro plans to release as its first Hollywood Hero, according to Time.

Israel, Palestine reach deal

■ Netanyahu seems optimistic about the peace proceedings between the two groups, which will meet again next week.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israel will turn over more West Bank territory to Palestinians under a breakthrough deal reached Monday between the country's two leaders.

President Clinton asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to return next month to iron out a final deal.

"I believe that we all agreed that we have made progress on the path to peace," Clinton told reporters after an hourlong session with the two leaders in the Oval Office.

He described "a significant narrowing of the gaps between the two parties across a wide range of issues."

Secretary of State Madeleine

Albright steered clear of claiming a breakthrough on any of the tough issues, including how much land Israel would relinquish and what the Palestinians would do to curb terrorism.

"This process needs to be speeded up," Albright said.

She and U.S. mediator Dennis Ross will go to the Middle East for more talks with the two leaders around Oct. 6, and about a week later Arafat and Netanyahu will return to the White House to see Clinton again.

The two Middle East leaders flew to Washington on Monday following talks that lasted late into Sunday night with Albright in New York. After their three-way session in the Oval Office, Netanyahu and Clinton held a one-on-one meeting, and Clinton is to meet Arafat separately today.

"I think we're getting close to finalizing an agreement, and it's time for the leaders to meet," Netanyahu said on NBC's "Today" show before

the White House meeting.

In his remarks to reporters, Clinton did not mention details. Earlier, Israeli diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there was agreement that Israel would withdraw from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank.

Three percent would be turned into a nature preserve and kept under Israeli military control, with Israeli and Palestinian construction prohibited.

"There is still a substantial amount of work to be done until a comprehensive agreement can be reached," Clinton said.

In his remarks to NBC on Monday, Netanyahu spoke of the West Bank withdrawal.

"That's basically the concept we're trying to nail down here, and that's where we've made a breakthrough," Netanyahu said.

He said he expected additional talks, "possibly in the near future, and yes, I would perk up your ears."

Review board releases JFK details

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government for decades "needlessly and wastefully" withheld millions of records about the assassination of President Kennedy, causing Americans to mistrust their government, a federal review panel concluded.

The Assassination Records Review Board closes shop this week after gathering and releasing a mountain of detail — tantalizing and mundane — about the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination of Kennedy in Dallas.

The documents it has collected over the past four years include new information about events in Dallas, the alleged assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, the presidential autopsy, photographs and reactions of government agencies to the assassination. It provides new fodder to be debated by historians and conspiracy theorists alike.

"The review board's experience leaves little doubt that the federal government needlessly and wastefully classified and then withheld from public access countless important records that did not require such treatment," the board said in a 208-page report to be released today.

Such secrecy "led the American public to believe that the government had something to hide," the report says.

"Change is long overdue, and the review board's experience amply demonstrates the value of sharing important information with the

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DAVID LIFTON
author

American public," the board said.

The board was created by Congress in response to public frustration that the government was withholding information about the assassination. Disagreement over the Warren Commission's conclusion in 1964 that a lone gunman killed Kennedy and government conspiracy claims in Oliver Stone's 1991 movie "JFK" led to a consensus that it was time to open assassination records for public inspection.

But the board was not charged with reopening the investigation, and while it added to the millions of documents at the National Archives touching on the assassination, it did not address the question: Who killed Kennedy?

"Although the review board intended to search for any 'smoking gun' document that might still exist, the board knew that its greatest contribution

would likely be to provide to the public those records that would frame the tragic event," the board's final report says.

The board spent more than \$8 million to gather and release records. It got more than 60,000 documents from the FBI, CIA, other federal entities and private collections, some which gave them up reluctantly.

David Lifton, author of "Best Evidence," a 1981 book concerning medical evidence about the assassination, said the new material released by the board will forever change the debate.

"These documents give us new dots to connect in all key areas — the medical evidence, Oswald's trips to Mexico and Russia," Lifton says.

"No one working on the Kennedy assassination today can ignore what the review board did. The true debate now begins."

Georges downgraded to tropical storm

PASCAGOULA, Miss. (AP) — Hurricane Georges plowed into the Gulf Coast on Monday and then parked there, weakening to a tropical storm but pouring rain at an inch-an-hour pace for what could be a long and ruinous stay.

Winds dropped to just over 69 mph, 6 mph below hurricane strength and down from a high of 110. New Orleans was spared the catastrophic direct hit that many in the Big Easy had feared.

But that was little comfort to the thousands who huddled in shelters from Florida to Louisiana and were expected to remain there for days. Outside, all was chaos — trees ripped from the ground, windows sucked from their frames, floods roaring down roads.

"In some areas, there's water to rooftops and 4 to 5 feet of water in many other homes. I've never seen anything

like it in more than 50 years," said Jackson County administrator George Touart, after a tour of Pascagoula, Miss., where 15 inches of rain fell overnight.

Forecasters said up to 30 inches could fall by the time the storm clears out sometime in the middle of the week.

National Guardsmen waded through chest-deep water to carry children and lead adults to safety from a flooded housing project near downtown Mobile, Ala. In the Florida Panhandle, Guardsmen had to rescue about 200 people from their flooded homes.

A man in a wheelchair was rescued in Moss Point, Miss., by emergency workers who found him trapped in his home with floodwater up to his lap.

In New Orleans, where authorities had feared the worst — a sopping rain

and huge storm surge that would put the entire city under water — there was a collective sigh of relief. Instead of hitting the Big Easy head on, Georges struck at Ocean Springs, Miss., between Biloxi, Miss., and Pascagoula, dealing New Orleans rain and wind but no catastrophe.

"We, by taking the brunt at Ocean Springs, saved the city of New Orleans," Mississippi Gov. Kirk Fordice said. "It was spared from the untellable misery that would have occurred."

Two storm-related deaths were reported. A man died Monday in a New Orleans fire started by candles being used for light after the hurricane knocked out electricity. An 86-year-old woman died while she and 250 other nursing home residents waited for beds in a Baton Rouge shelter.

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$55 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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THE DAILY NEBRASKAN