

News Digest

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Serbs attack, massacre ethnic Albanians

Men, women and children were found with bullet holes through the backs of their heads in a makeshift camp.

OBRJA, Yugoslavia (AP) — They lay scattered on the floor of a pine forest: 15 men, women and children, or what remained of them. Some were carved up with knives, limbs hacked off. All had been shot in the back of the head.

Ethnic Albanians say the victims were slaughtered Sunday after a Serb attack against the Kosovo Liberation Army, which is fighting for independence for this majority Albanian province. Most were killed in a makeshift camp in the woods where they were hiding after Serb troops overran their communities.

The killers slit the throat of a 10-year-old boy, blew out his mother's brains, cut open the stomach of another female relative and shot a pregnant woman in the head. Two days later, the victims remained unburied, sprawled in the forest where they died.

"Serb police executed every-

body," said one trembling elderly man, who identified himself only as Fazli.

As he spoke, the occasional crackle of rifle fire rang through the valley about 25 miles west of Pristina, the provincial capital. The thud of two mortar rounds echoed as a Serb police armored personnel carrier escorted out about a dozen ethnic Albanian women and children on the back of a trailer drawn by a tractor.

Serb police had no comment on the killings. The day before, KLA fighters killed seven Serb policemen in the area.

The bodies were seen Monday by diplomats from the United States and other countries who are members of a permanent international observer mission to Kosovo. They refused to discuss what they saw before reporting to their governments.

But Jack Zetkovic, deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, said Tuesday he and others touring refugee sites in Kosovo were shown "some harrowing photographs" and a report on the alleged massacre from the observer group.

An estimated 275,000 people

have been driven from their houses by the fighting.

Each side has accused the other of killing civilians since President Slobodan Milosevic launched a crackdown on Albanian secessionists seven months ago. Serbs say at least 39 Serbs were tortured, mutilated and killed near Glodjane earlier this month after they were kidnapped by "terrorists."

The U.N. Security Council has demanded an immediate cease-fire, and NATO has threatened airstrikes if the government ignores the order.

According to friends and relatives of the victims, masked Serbs in green and blue uniforms descended on this town, which the Serbs call Obrinje, on the weekend, capturing a man in his 60s.

Wielding a knife from the man's own kitchen, the attackers forced him to take them to where refugees were hiding. The man's body was found at the edge of the camp. The back of his head was blown off, his throat was slit and the butcher knife carefully placed on his chest.

In the camp, the attackers shot a man and a woman, both 65 years old, while they lay in a makeshift tent that had sheltered them since they fled

their home days earlier.

Their bodies were spread on the blankets, surrounded by their blood-spattered clothing, pots and pans. The woman's right foot was partially cut off, and her mouth was gaping open.

According to villagers, six women tried to escape with four children. But the attackers caught up with them in a shallow ditch. Their bodies were lying in the ditch.

The attackers shot women and children in the back of the head at point-blank range. The body of an 18-month-old boy, whom survivors called Valmir, lay half-hidden under that of his 38-year-old mother, who received a bullet in the back of the head.

Valmir's right hand was raised and stiffened in a defensive posture. His pacifier was still dangling from the dried blood on his chin.

In a house leading to the refugee camp lay the charred body of an elderly man, burned with his house and the rest of his belongings.

Two brothers, one 40 years old and the other 55, lay sprawled in the tracks of a tank that plowed through the woods near the refugee camp. Attackers shot both of them in the back of the head.

Plan would push down college student loan rates

WASHINGTON (AP) — The interest rate on college student loans would be lowered for all borrowers, and the maximum student-aid grant would be raised under a bill passed by the Senate on Tuesday. The bipartisan measure goes to President Clinton for his likely signature.

The 96-0 vote followed voice-vote House approval Monday of the compromise bill.

The measure also includes incentives for people to become teachers by offering to forgive part of their student loans if they teach in urban or rural districts with large numbers of poor children. It also includes a grant program for states to improve teacher preparation.

Teacher-preparation colleges would have to provide information to would-be students about what percentage of graduates pass teacher examinations.

The measure is one of the few

education bills to find bipartisan support this election year.

A key provision would change the way interest rates are determined for student loans.

The new formula, based on Treasury bill interest rates and added points, would hold down what students pay by giving a subsidy to lenders. The rate for students would be 7.46 percent for new loans — the lowest rate in 17 years — down from 8.23 percent last year, sponsors say.

The measure also would raise the maximum authorized amount for Pell Grants to \$4,500 a year in 1999-2000, up from \$3,000. The amount would gradually rise to \$5,800 in 2003-2004.

An added provision would require the Department of Education to gather and publish information on college costs, including yearly increases in tuition and fees.

Palestine accepts offer of West Bank pullback

Yasser Arafat has accepted Israel's withdrawal plans and said he will work to prevent further terrorist attacks.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat accepted Israel's formula for turning over more land on the West Bank on Tuesday and voiced hope that an agreement could be concluded at a White House summit in mid-October.

"Peace is a Palestinian need, Israeli need, Arab need, international need," Arafat said after an hourlong meeting with President Clinton.

The Palestinian leader assured Clinton that he would try to counter terrorism against Israel.

"He will exert every possible effort," Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said.

The pullback would cover 13 percent of the West Bank, on top of the 27 percent Israel promised earlier to hand over to Arafat's Palestinian Authority.

It was proposed by the Clinton administration last winter to prod Israel to give up more of the West Bank. Arafat, who had claimed virtually all of the territory, agreed to settle for the 13 percent.

Israel, meanwhile, proposed what its diplomats called "refinements."

These included setting aside 3 percent of the land for a nature preserve, with Israel having a hand in maintaining security over the undeveloped area.

"We agreed to it to facilitate the negotiations" for an overall West Bank settlement, Arafat told reporters in the White House driveway after his meeting with Clinton.

Asked if an accord would be signed at the summit Clinton plans

"*Peace is a Palestinian need, Israeli need, Arab need, international need.*"

YASSER ARAFAT
Palestinian leader

to hold here in mid-October, the Palestinian leader said, "We hope so."

Clinton proposed the summit meeting and negotiating schedule during a three-way session with Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday.

The schedule will send Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to the Middle East next week.

With the territorial issue basically resolved, the focus of U.S. mediation has shifted to whether Arafat can satisfy Netanyahu's demands to disrupt terrorist cells on Palestinian-held land, confiscate weapons from militant groups and have the Palestine Liberation Organization strike all anti-Israeli references from its covenant.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry said before the meeting that Israel's concern for security was "justified" and that "the president is determined to see an agreement arise."

On the contested West Bank, meanwhile, a car rigged with explosives blew up Tuesday in an industrial area, killing an activist in the Hamas organization and wounding two other supporters of the Islamic militant group that claims responsibility for bloody attacks in Israel, Palestinian police said.



Federal Reserve reduces short-term interest rates

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve policy-makers Tuesday cut short-term interest rates by a quarter-percentage point, the first reduction in nearly three years, in hope of cushioning the U.S. economy from global financial turmoil.

The central bank's monetary policy panel voted to move the benchmark federal funds rate, which banks charge each other on overnight loans, to 5.25 percent from 5.5 percent.

The Fed left its discount rate unchanged at 5 percent.

Many traders had been hoping for a half-point rather than quarter-point rate reduction. Monday, in anticipation of lower rates, the Dow rose 80 points on top of last week's 133-point gain.

The federal funds rate reduction, the first since January 1996, should be reflected within days in most banks' prime rate for their best business customers. As a result, rates on a wide range of consumer and business loans, from credit cards to auto loans to home-equity lines, should move down as well.

Lott: 'Bad conduct' worth impeachment process

WASHINGTON (AP) — "Bad conduct" that brings the presidency into disrepute is enough for impeachment, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott said Tuesday. He refused to say whether President Clinton's affair with a former intern meets that standard.

"I don't want to pass judgment on that or answer that question," Lott replied, saying the decision would depend on additional facts. But, he allowed, "It may be."

The Senate Republican leader said that perjury and obstruction of justice — two of the principal allegations against Clinton by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr — would be grounds for impeachment.

Democrats say defining impeachable offenses before the House launches an inquiry into Clinton's conduct is vital to fair proceedings.

Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee are aiming for a show of good will with Democrats in advance of next week's vote on an impeachment inquiry.

Presidential supporters planning ad campaign

WASHINGTON (AP) — Causing concern among Democrats, Clinton's supporters are trying to raise as much as \$5 million for an election-season TV ad campaign that attacks Republicans handling of impeachment proceedings.

Some Democratic operatives fear the money will come from donors who would otherwise help cash-strapped candidates in Nov. 3 election campaigns. They suspect the effort is to help the president, not his party.

"If this is true, it is disappointing that the president has put his own well-being ahead of Democrats facing difficult elections in November," said Dan Sallick, spokesman for the Democratic National Campaign Committee.

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