

News Digest

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Russia speaks against NATO strikes Milosevic says Serbian situation is 'improving daily'

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — Sharply opposed to NATO airstrikes on Yugoslavia, Russia sent its foreign and defense ministers Sunday to call on President Slobodan Milosevic, whose generals were preparing to defend the country against an assault.

NATO is threatening attacks to end seven months of bloodshed in Kosovo — despite signs Serbs may be ready for a compromise on how the rebellious Serb province should be governed.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Defense Minister Igor Sergeev met with Milosevic, Serbian President Milan Milutinovic and Yugoslavia's top defense officials.

Kosovo is in southern Serbia, the dominant of two republics remaining in Yugoslavia.

A statement from Milosevic's office issued after the meeting said any NATO strike would be an "act of aggression" and asserted that in Kosovo the overall situation is "improving daily."

Russia is the Serbs' main ally, sharing bonds of religion and joint Slavic roots.

Serbian police and the Yugoslav army have routed separatist Kosovo Albanian rebels during the seven-month crackdown. The conflict has killed hundreds — most of them ethnic Albanian civilians — and driven hundreds of thousands of villagers from their homes.

A Yugoslav statement said the leadership wanted the Kosovo dispute solved peacefully, "but in case we are attacked, we shall defend our country with all means."

Preparing for an attack, Yugoslav generals put the nation's air defense on high alert, even as Serbs indicated they were ready for compromise by installing an interim government Saturday in Kosovo.

Speaking in Denmark, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said Friday the NATO intervention clock "is at one minute to 12." Although Kinkel stressed that "no ultimatum, no date has been set," he added, "Mr. Milosevic must know that we are serious."

London's Sunday Telegraph reported that Britain is preparing ground troops and armored units for Kosovo to be deployed as peacekeepers after a possible airstrike. The defense ministry refused to confirm the report.

The Yugoslav government said

Friday the fighting had ended and blamed continuing violence on ethnic Albanian rebels. The Serb side reported no fighting Sunday, besides two minor attacks on civilian cars by Albanian "terrorists" about 25 miles south of Pristina, Kosovo's capital.

But the Kosovo Information Center, which reports for the Albanian side, said there was heavy fighting between government forces and the guerrillas, 25 miles southwest of Pristina.

Ethnic Albanian political leaders have rejected the new interim government, which was drawn up without their participation. The council is composed of seven Serbs, five ethnic Albanians and the rest Turks and Muslims. It was part of a last-ditch effort to show that Serbs intend to end the conflict.



Pope calls for help in Kosovo, Croatia

SPLIT, Croatia (AP) — On a seaside beach packed with pilgrims, Pope John Paul II sought Sunday to heal the wounds left by war and totalitarian rule in Croatia, and urged the international community to provide "timely help" to end the Kosovo conflict.

An estimated 500,000 Roman Catholics jammed a beach outside this Adriatic coastal city for the final Mass of John Paul's three-day trip to Croatia.

"Croats are today called to give a new face to their country, above all by committing themselves to the renewal in society of the ethical and moral values undermined by past totalitarianism and by the recent violence of war," the pope said.

"It is an urgent task, for without values there can be no true freedom or democracy."

Reconciliation and the renewal of values were high on the pope's agenda during his stay. The breakup of Yugoslavia sparked a civil war in 1991 that left over 10,000 dead and thousands missing before the 1995 Dayton Accords ended the fighting.

The pope made no mention of threats by NATO to stage airstrikes if the Serbs continue their aggression against the ethnic Albanians.

Gay candidate runs for legislature in Utah

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — To Jackie Biskupski, her run for the Utah Legislature is about taxes, crime and growth in the sprawling suburban district she wants to represent.

For almost everyone else, it's about her sexuality.

Biskupski, 32, is the first openly gay candidate to run for Utah's staunchly conservative, overwhelmingly Mormon Legislature. Her candidacy has drawn fire from both the far right, which accuses her of living an "immoral and illegal lifestyle," and some homosexual activists who feel she's turned her back on her own.

"I want to talk about the issues and everybody else wants to talk about this," said Biskupski, a Democrat and insurance adjuster who once wanted to be a police officer. "I'm not trying to hide anything. I just want people to see me as something other than a gay candidate."

That's unlikely.

Her Republican opponent talks about "hidden agendas." The conservative Utah Eagle Forum, which helped "out" Biskupski during her unsuccessful race for a seat on the Salt Lake City Council last year, plans a similar campaign in coming weeks.

"Once we found out about it, we helped get the word out she was living a homosexual lifestyle," said Eagle Forum president Gayle Ruzicka. "Why wouldn't we? It is certainly our business when a candidate is committing sodomy and living a blatantly immoral lifestyle."

But Biskupski faces an additional burden. She's being criticized from within the homosexual community, which fractured when Biskupski defeated lesbian activist Claudia O'Grady in a 1997 city council primary. For O'Grady's supporters, Biskupski seemed reluctant to address the issue in public and simply wasn't "gay enough."

Hyde says majority for impeachment not met

Clinton under fire

WASHINGTON (AP) — On the eve of House Judiciary hearings into possible impeachment proceedings against President Clinton, chairman Henry Hyde said Sunday the Senate so far does not have the two-third majority necessary to remove the president from office.

Hyde also said he hopes to finish his impeachment inquiry by year's end but won't accept Democratic demands for limits on the investigation.

"You know how New Year's resolutions sometimes get broken, but it's my hope and prayer that we could finish by New Year's," the Illinois Republican said.

Hyde's committee will meet today to take up a GOP resolution recommending an open-ended inquiry into whether Clinton's behavior merits impeachment. The Democrats will

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offer a separate version that would put a deadline on the inquiry and limit it to the Monica Lewinsky affair, but it is likely to be defeated.

On Sunday Hyde again rejected the Democratic demands. He even said he might if necessary be willing to expand the inquiry beyond Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's report to Congress on the president's relationship with Lewinsky, a White House intern.

The Judiciary Committee anticipates no more material from Starr, Hyde said, and "we are not seeking that

We're not out trolling for additional issues. But if they come to our attention we will deal with them."

Hyde mentioned as possible extensions Whitewater, Filegate, Travelgate and Clinton's relationship with former White House volunteer Kathleen Willey and said his committee will look at a report being put out this week by a different House committee on alleged White House campaign fund-raising violations. "We don't want to shut our eyes or use tunnel vision," he said.

At the same time, Hyde admitted that if the House votes to impeach, or

indict, the president, the 67 votes required in the Senate to remove him from office are not there. "They won't do that until the American people move, and they have to move from where they apparently are if the polls are true," Hyde said.

The ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, John Conyers of Michigan, said on NBC the Democrats want a Thanksgiving deadline on the probe, but he was receptive to Hyde's year-end proposal. "We may be able to work that out," Conyers said.

Democrats generally were skeptical the inquiry could end this year so long as Republicans can introduce additional issues damaging to the president.

House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt of Missouri indicated he will vote against the GOP inquiry resolution when it gets to the floor this week. "I don't want to authorize a two-year, open-ended fishing expedition into everything under the sun," Gephardt said.

IMF spars over plans for crisis

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bickering broke out Sunday between the United States and its rich allies even before the ink was dry on their action plan for combating a widening economic crisis that has already pushed one-third of the world into recession.

The disagreements underscored that despite a major Clinton administration effort to project unity and calm turbulent markets, the world's economic powers still disagree strongly over just what they should be doing to restore stability.

The administration still played down the disagreements and pushed ahead to demonstrate U.S. leadership by assembling a multibillion-dollar bailout plan for Brazil, the latest country threatened by panicked investors seeking to pull their money out.

Brazilian Finance Minister Pedro Malan expressed satisfaction over progress of the loan negotiations Sunday, saying, "I take heart in the words of support" expressed by the United States and other countries.

It was expected that perhaps a \$30 billion emergency credit line for Brazil could be announced soon after results of Sunday's presidential elections are known.

More than \$100 billion in IMF bailout packages have been put together since the start of the Asian crisis. They provided help only after a country's economy was decimated and its

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Treasury secretary

resources depleted by investors seeking to flee.

The currency crises started in Thailand 15 months ago, then struck Indonesia and South Korea. In August, similar conditions triggered a disastrous free fall of the Russian economy, and that, in turn, raised anxieties that Latin America will be next.

But several nations said Sunday the U.S. proposal would be dead on arrival unless the United States provides \$18 billion to replenish depleted IMF resources before Congress' scheduled adjournment this week.

British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown told reporters the Group of Seven nations had agreed only to explore the Americans' quick-response proposal. He said a new "IMF facility is dependent on the IMF having the funds, and that is dependent on House approval" of the \$18 billion.

All the wrangling was over a five-page communique the world's seven richest countries — the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — issued Saturday night. The aim for the document is to serve as a blueprint for discussions in the next five days at the annual meetings of the 182-nation IMF and its sister lending agency, the World Bank.

Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin told his colleagues Sunday that continued support in developing countries for the free market system, which has meant so much to the growth of the world economy in recent decades, could hang in the balance.

"The global economy cannot continue to thrive with the kinds of vast and systemic disruptions that have occurred over the last year," Rubin said in remarks to the IMF's policy-setting interim committee.

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