

Thousands flee Kosovo into Albania

■ Executions and refugees mark a humanitarian disaster unprecedented since WWII, NATO officials say.

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — NATO bombs pounded Yugoslavia for a sixth day as thousands of ethnic Albanians fleeing Serb paramilitary forces streamed out of Kosovo on Monday in what may be Europe's worst humanitarian disaster since World War II.

An ethnic Albanian leader, Fehmi Agani, was executed Sunday, NATO officials said. Agani, a close aide to ethnic Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova and one of the negotiators at the failed Rambouillet peace talks, had just attended the funeral of a human rights lawyer.

Four other prominent ethnic Albanians were also reported executed, NATO officials said, in what it called a "scorched earth policy" — including Baton Haxhiu, editor in chief of the Albanian-language newspaper in Kosovo's capital Pristina, Koha Ditore.

The newspaper's publisher, Veton Surroi, and Rugova both have gone into hiding in fear of their lives, the officials reported.

NATO spokesmen said refugees were arriving at the Albanian border

Crisis in Kosovo

at the rate of 4,000 an hour today, straining the already desperate resources of one of Europe's poorest countries.

"We are trying to stop this catastrophe and stop this killing," NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana said after a meeting with the European Union's outgoing commissioner for humanitarian affairs.

The Albanian prime minister appealed Monday to his countrymen to take in the refugees, most of whom were carrying their only possessions by hand and some without even identity documents — taken away, the refugees said, by Serb authorities at the border.

"It's almost as if their identities are being canceled out," NATO spokesman Jamie Shea said Monday at a news briefing in Brussels, Belgium.

Some 80,000-100,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees have arrived in northern Albania, more than double the rate of a few days earlier, U.N. relief workers said Monday. Thousands more headed west to Montenegro and southeast to Macedonia.

Yugoslav officials remained defiant, saying NATO's "shameful"

attacks were only inflaming the crisis in Kosovo, where ethnic Albanian rebels have been fighting for independence the past 13 months from Serbia, the main Yugoslav republic.

Asked Monday whether the NATO mission was succeeding, Shea said: "Yes, we are being effective. Yes, the mission is working."

Rather than restraining the Serbs, however, the attacks appeared only to have intensified their anger at the ethnic Albanians, who made up 90 percent of Kosovo's 2 million people inhabitants before the Serbian crackdown.

Shea said the situation was on the brink of a major humanitarian disaster, unprecedented since World War II. More than a half-million Kosovars have been uprooted by the crisis, NATO said — the biggest population shift in Europe since 1945.

But Bratislava Morina, the Serb refugee commissioner, called such accusations propaganda.

"There is no humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo whatsoever," she said on state-run Serbian television.

Meanwhile, Russia's prime minister, Yevgeny Primakov, announced plans to go to Belgrade today in a new bid to end the crisis. Russia, which has cultural and historic ties to Serbia, has strongly opposed NATO's air campaign against Yugoslavia.

Clinton says airstrikes didn't cause atrocities

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Clinton worked to maintain allied support for the broadening air offensive in the fight to stop atrocities in Kosovo, the White House insisted Monday that NATO airstrikes were not responsible for inflaming ethnic hatred there.

White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said U.S. officials believed Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic would aggressively repress Kosovar Albanians, "based on his past actions and what he was doing," regardless of whether NATO carried out the bombings.

"If you look at what's going on at the borders, you have what appears to be a textbook definition of ethnic cleansing," Lockhart said. "We knew that he was going to do this. ... And we faced a choice between doing something and doing nothing."

At Camp David, Md., Sunday night, Clinton spoke by phone with the pilot of an F-117A stealth fighter that went down outside Belgrade over the weekend, Lockhart said. The president also spoke with a few of the pilot's rescuers.

Pentagon officials said the loss of the stealth fighter would not affect the aerial campaign, and NATO appeared willing to risk the loss of other planes. As daylight strikes got under way today, an A-10 "Warthog" ground-attack plane was spotted taking off from Aviano Air Base, Italy, along with several F-16s. The A-10 is a low- and slow-flying tank-killer aircraft that could be used to strike Serb ground forces operating against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

The A-10 can operate either by day or night, but is visible to enemy radar and vulnerable to ground fire. The increasing use of tactical ground attack planes was visible evidence of what NATO calls the second phase of its air campaign.

Lockhart said Clinton remains opposed to using ground troops to supplement the airstrikes, despite growing calls for him to do so. "We feel we can achieve our military objectives through the NATO air campaign, and we have no intention of introducing ground forces unless and until there is a peaceful political settlement."

World and Nation DATES

■ India

Severe earthquake kills 73 near Himalayan foothills

NEW DELHI (AP) — A severe earthquake struck a seismic hot zone in India's Himalayan foothills Monday, toppling houses, causing landslides and killing at least 73 people, officials said.

The earthquake was the strongest earthquake this century in the quake-prone mountains. Its magnitude of 6.8 lasted nearly 40 seconds, India's seismological department said, according to the Press Trust of India news agency.

■ Great Britain

Top law enforcement official to determine Pinochet's fate

LONDON (AP) — Britain's High Court on Monday put the fate of former Chilean dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet back in the hands of Jack Straw, the government's top law enforcement official.

A three-judge panel gave Straw, Britain's Home Secretary, until April 15 to issue a ruling on whether to allow Spain to seek Pinochet's extradition, following the House of Lords' decision last week to drastically reduce the charges facing the 83-year-old general.

■ Oklahoma

Terry Nichols now charged with murder for bombing

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Terry Nichols, serving a life sentence for his federal conviction as a conspirator in the Oklahoma City bombing, was charged Monday with first-degree murder in state court and could face the death penalty if convicted.

Nichols, 43, is in prison for the deaths of eight law enforcement officers. District Attorney Bob Macy had long promised to file state charges in the deaths of the 160 other people killed when a truck bomb tore through the nine-story office building.

■ Washington, D.C.

Supreme Court will decide what student fees can fund

The Associated Press — The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to decide whether state-run universities can dedicate a portion of the activity fees collected from all students to subsidize groups that pursue political and ideological goals.

The justices said they will review rulings that barred the University of Wisconsin from using a portion of the activity fees it collects from every student to finance such groups. Lower court ruled that the subsidies unlawfully force some students to subsidize views they find objectionable.

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Questions? Comments?
Ask for the appropriate section editor at
(402) 472-2588
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