

War resumes in Sarajevo amid fears of Serb infiltration

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Serbs masqueraded as peacekeepers in a new show of audacity Wednesday, driving through government-held portions of Sarajevo in stolen uniforms and U.N. vehicles. The Serbs refused the Red Cross immediate access to some 370 U.N. soldiers they are holding hostage.

But with Western nations increasingly ready to send more soldiers to aid the United Nations, Bosnia's Serbs also appeared ready to keep bargaining.

They offered the West new talks on an old offer: releasing the hostages in exchange for a promise of no more NATO attacks. The United States sent an envoy back to Belgrade to try to bridge differences with Serbia's president over recognition of Bosnia, and President Clinton said the United States would consider dispatching soldiers to help redeploy, not just remove, U.N. peacekeepers.

The diplomatic maneuvering appeared to help keep tensions

from rising further on the sixth day of a crisis that began when NATO launched airstrikes on Serb ammunition dumps.

However, Sarajevans were kept on edge by an outburst of new fighting between Serbs and government forces, as well as by the reports of Serb fighters disguised as peacekeepers.

U.N. officials said Serbs in French uniforms had infiltrated the city in a U.N. armored personnel carrier. Along with their hostages, the Serbs have seized 36 white, U.N.-marked armored vehicles, including six light tanks.

They also have dozens of other vehicles with U.N. markings.

U.N. spokesman Alexander Ivanko reported additional sightings of stolen armored vehicles in the city. Hasan Muratovic, the Bosnian official in charge of U.N. relations, said army and police were keeping a "close watch on all U.N. vehicles and personnel."

"I am definitely not going to hitchhike in any U.N. vehicles," said Sarajevo resident Sabina Kasumovic.

A delegation of the International Red Cross met Wednesday with Serb officials to try to visit the peacekeepers. They were promised an answer within two weeks, said Andreas Pfissner, head of the Red Cross delegation.

Bosnian Serb official Aleksa Buha said the Serbs are following international conventions on war prisoners.

"We are obliged to allow the Red Cross access. But I don't know when this will happen," he said, adding the Serbs will do "everything to keep the correct attitude toward the prisoners."

The Serbs are holding U.N. personnel as airstrikes against further NATO airstrikes like those east of Sarajevo last week.

They have banned all NATO overflights. On Wednesday, NATO said a rocket or missile was fired at a Dutch F-16, but missed.

President Clinton said Wednesday he would make U.S. ground troops available to help reposition U.N. peacekeepers in turbulent former Yugoslavia if asked.

The decision represents a sig-

nificant shift for the administration, which has promised before only to provide U.S. troops to evacuate peacekeepers.

U.S. envoy Robert Frasure, in Belgrade, met with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, hoping he would recognize Bosnia in exchange for a suspension of economic sanctions on Serb-led Yugoslavia. That would damage Bosnian Serb efforts to win statehood.

Sources said 85 percent of the agreement had already been reached but that Milosevic wanted the complete lifting of sanctions or at least additional guarantees that the embargo would not be reimposed.

The U.S. offered the easing of all sanctions except oil imports and Serbia's access to international financial markets, the sources said. All sanctions would be lifted once peace is established in Bosnia and Milosevic recognizes Croatia.

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Wednesday that peacekeepers should not use force. He suggested the 22,000-

member force be replaced by a multinational force authorized to use its firepower.

But he cautioned that a pullout "would be tantamount to abandonment of the people of Bosnia." His proposal came in a report to the Security Council outlining options for reforming the U.N. mission, which only the council can revise.

Trying to reduce their diplomatic isolation, the Bosnian Serbs offered "urgent talks" on a deal to release the hostages in exchange for promises of no more bombing. There was no immediate reaction, but a French Foreign Ministry spokesman earlier had welcomed Serb willingness to talk.

Fighting forces moved closer to the conflict.

A French aircraft carrier took position off the Adriatic coast less than 120 miles southwest of Sarajevo. The Dutch and Czech governments planned to send reinforcements of about 100 troops each. Two thousand U.S. Marines also were deployed to the region.

Yeltsin says no to relief from Japan

DEDOVSK, Russia (AP) — Despite huge logistics problems faced by rescue workers, President Boris Yeltsin on Wednesday rebuffed Japan's offer of help for earthquake victims.

"Russia itself can heal the wounds inflicted by the earthquake," Yeltsin told reporters. Japan, he said, "will take advantage" of any aid offer. "They will say: Give us back the islands."

Yeltsin was referring to the four southernmost islands of the Kuril chain, which Soviet troops seized at the end of World War II.

Sakhalin Island, hit Sunday by a magnitude 7.5 quake that killed hundreds of people in a remote oil town, is a neighbor of the Kurils.

Tokyo offered Tuesday to send rescuers and doctors to Sakhalin.

But Russia has accepted only emergency supplies. The first batch — mostly blankets, medicine and drinking water — arrived in Sakhalin on Tuesday.

The Japanese are particularly concerned because Sunday's quake occurred on the same geological fault as the quake that ravaged Japan's western port of Kobe four months ago, killing more than 5,500 people.

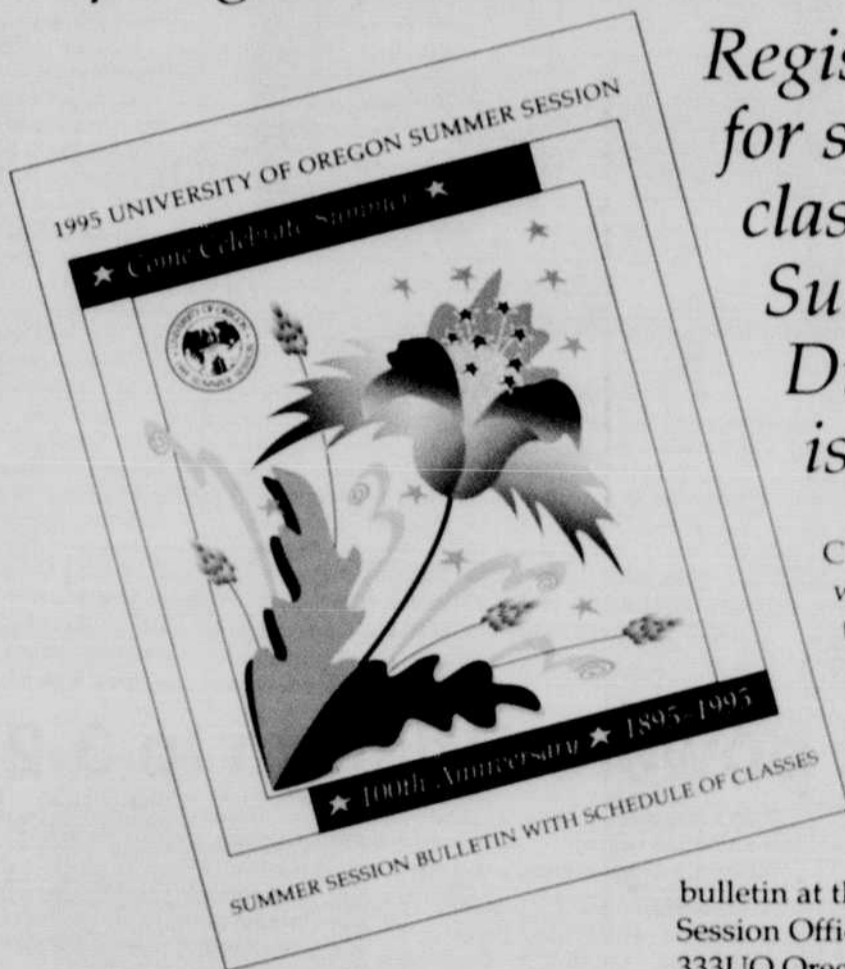
Wednesday was not the first time Russia has snubbed a Japanese aid offer. The same thing happened last year when an earthquake hit the Kurils.

Amid criticism of his handling of the quake aftermath, Yeltsin declared Wednesday to be a national day of mourning for quake victims.

Flags flew at half-staff on government buildings in Moscow and at the U.S. Embassy. Sombre classical musical concerts were broadcast on television instead of regular daytime programs.

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