

Charges of genocide in Kosovo

By George Jahn
The Associated Press

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia — Ordering up more firepower, NATO raced against time Sunday to smash Serb military units and head off what it called "genocide" against Kosovo Albanians.

Thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees, accusing Serbs of systematic brutality, fled into neighboring Albania and Macedonia. Officials in both countries pleaded for international help to prevent a humanitarian crisis, and Albania called for NATO ground troops to enter Kosovo — something NATO says it has no plans to do.

Violence in Kosovo has escalated sharply since foreign observers left the province and NATO began its airstrikes against Yugoslavia, which is dominated by Serbs. NATO spokesman Jamie Shea said in Brussels that the airstrikes were no excuse for Serbs to slaughter Kosovo Albanians.

"Genocide is starting," German Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping said in a television interview with station ZDF.

For its part, Yugoslavia's government-controlled news media said Sunday that Serb security forces and civilians were under attack by Kosovo Albanians.

Bratislava Morina, Serbia's commissioner for refugees, denied Serbs were behind the exodus and said ethnic Albanians were leaving because of the NATO attacks. Ethnic Albanians far outnumber Serbs in Kosovo, a province in Serbia, Yugoslavia's

dominant republic.

"There is no humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo whatsoever," she said on state-run Serbian television. "Those manipulations with the number of refugees, carried out by foreign agencies and media, are used to intensify (NATO) attacks on Yugoslavia."

NATO promised to broaden attacks on Serb ground forces in Kosovo, despite the downing of a U.S. stealth bomber Saturday night.

The fifth straight night of airstrikes began late Sunday, with about 50 warplanes taking off from the NATO air base in Aviano, Italy. The Pentagon said the attacking planes included six F-117A warplanes.

The strikes would also include cruise missiles fired from B-52 bombers, U.S. officials said.

The Tanjug state news agency reported seven missiles hit Sunday night near Pristina, close enough to break windows at the central hotel that houses the Serbian Media Center. It also said two explosions shook the northern town of Sombor.

"We have to recognize that we are now on the brink of a major humanitarian disaster ... the likes of which we have not seen in Europe since the closing days of World War II," said NATO spokesman Jamie Shea.

Shea said more than 500,000 ethnic Albanians, a quarter of the population of Kosovo, have been driven from their homes, 50,000 of them in just the past few days.

"It seems as if [Yugoslav Presi-

dent Slobodan] Milosevic is trying to create a new situation on the ground, in his view irreversible," Shea said, adding that there seemed to be a deliberate campaign aimed at ethnic Albanian leaders. He said both Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova and newspaper publisher Vetton Surroi had gone underground, among others.

In Belgrade, thousands of defiant Serbs attended an anti-NATO outdoor concert despite air raid sirens that signaled continuing missile attacks. It was the 10th anniversary of the day Milosevic, then Serbian Communist Party chief, stripped Kosovo of much of its autonomy, sowing the seeds of the conflict.

Earlier missiles fired at a military airport at Podgorica, capital of the Yugoslav republic of Montenegro, hit a MiG-21 jet fighter and an army vehicle, a Yugoslav army source said.

Calls for peace talks continue. In his Palm Sunday address, Pope John Paul II said, "It is never too late to meet and negotiate."

Protests against the airstrikes also continued, with 7,000 demonstrators in Sydney, Australia, marching on the U.S. consulate. Some marchers damaged buildings and clashed with police, and one protester tore down the U.S. flag and the crowd set it on fire.

There were also demonstrations in several European cities, and a small Communist party in Italy threatened to pull out of the governing alliance.

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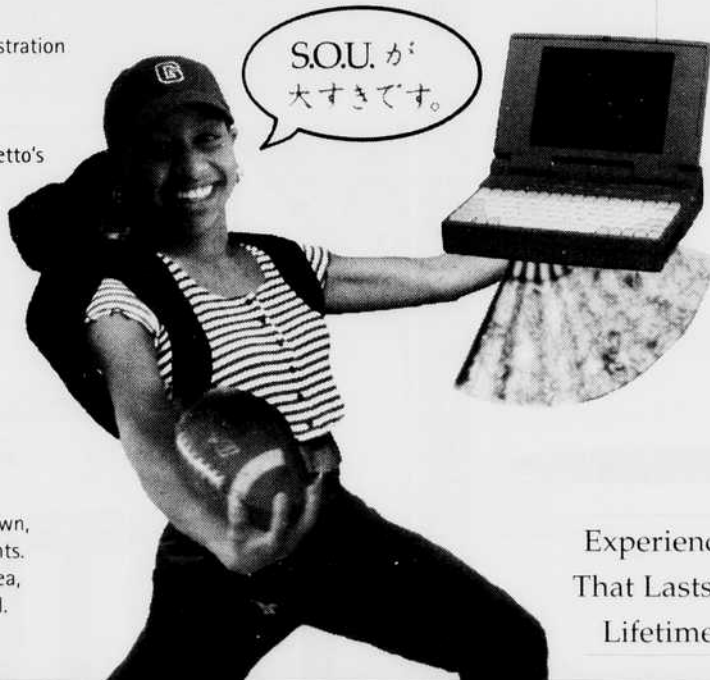
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