

NATO calls Milosevic's cease-fire offer a sham

By George Jahn
The Associated Press

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia — Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic declared a unilateral cease-fire Tuesday in his campaign to crush rebels in Kosovo, saying he wanted to honor the Orthodox Easter holiday this weekend. Western leaders called the move a sham and pledged to press ahead with airstrikes.

Moments after the cease-fire took effect at 8 p.m. (2 p.m. EDT), air-raid sirens wailed in Belgrade, heralding new NATO attacks.

At least six explosions could be heard late Tuesday in the direction of the Batajnica military airport just north of Belgrade and tracer rounds from anti-aircraft were seen in the night sky.

Yugoslav television stations reported further attacks Tuesday night around the Kosovo capital of Pristina; at Uzice, 75 miles southwest of Belgrade; near Kraljevo, 75 miles south of Belgrade; and at Pancevo and Cacak, two industrial towns. U.S. officials say a munitions plant is located at Cacak.

Another missile struck a residential district in Podgorica, capital of the tiny Yugoslav republic Montenegro. There were no injuries, but several buildings were damaged, according to Associated

Press reporters on the scene.

The Yugoslav cease-fire declaration was clearly aimed at staving off further NATO attacks and at presenting Milosevic's government as a champion of peace.

President Clinton and NATO insisted that half-measures would not end the NATO air campaign that began March 24, and British Prime Minister Tony Blair's office said Milosevic's announced truce "doesn't go nearly far enough."

A rebel spokesman also rejected the cease-fire, which was announced on Belgrade television stations, and said the only way the group would agree to a truce would be if NATO troops enforced it.

The statement also pledged the government would work for the return of ethnic Albanian refugees. However, it wasn't clear if that meant an immediate halt to the military actions forcing them to flee.

Russia alone welcomed the cease-fire. "Any peace initiative must be useful," spokesman Dmitry Yakushkin quoted President Boris Yeltsin as saying.

On the refugee front, NATO nations and others rushed in tons of aid Tuesday for the 400,000 ethnic Albanians who have been driven out of Kosovo and into poor neighboring states.

Armies of aid workers and sol-

diers set up row upon row of military tents and latrines for the refugees, while aid flights clogged nearby airports, including the one at Tirana, the capital of Albania. Some doctors were on hand, but the squalid conditions and lack of sanitation left many refugees sick with diarrhea.

Conditions were most desperate at frontier enclave at Blace on the Macedonian border, where some refugees have died.

In order to relieve the refugee pressure on Macedonia, Western countries began an airlift to evacuate thousands of refugees from the former Yugoslav republic. Several thousand left on flights late Monday and Tuesday for Norway and Turkey.

Meanwhile, the Clinton administration announced that its naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, would be a temporary "safe haven" for up to 20,000 Kosovar refugees in the coming days.

In its statement, the Yugoslav leadership said the cessation of hostilities against the ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army in advance of Sunday's Orthodox Easter was a "gesture of good will."

Neither the cease-fire declaration nor statements from Yugoslav officials said anything about holding fire against NATO forces,

which mounted their most intensive strikes of the two-week-old air campaign late Monday and early Tuesday, and promised heavier firepower to come.

The allies demand that Milosevic withdraw military and paramilitary troops from Kosovo and accept an international military force to police a settlement that grants autonomy to Kosovo, a province of the main Yugoslav republic of Serbia.

But in a sign of deteriorating relations, unknown assailants hurled a hand grenade at Belgrade's only mosque Tuesday. The blast injured no one, but shattered windows and slightly damaged the building, Beta news agency reported.

In Washington, Defense Secretary William Cohen said the Serb cease-fire offer is "not only completely unacceptable, but it's absurd." He said accepting a cease-fire now would be an "abdication of responsibility" by NATO.

Visar Reka, a rebel spokesman in Albania, agreed. "We do not trust Milosevic's cease-fire," he told The Associated Press. "We will not accept any cease-fire without NATO presence in Kosovo."

Yugoslav deputy prime minister Vuk Draskovic said if NATO pressed ahead with airstrikes now, "it would be very clear ... NATO is

against peace."

The declaration followed a night of intense attacks in which NATO planes and missiles blasted fuel depots, oil refineries, roads and bridges across Yugoslavia.

The bombings Tuesday included a midmorning strike in Pristina. Yugoslavia's Tanjug news agency reported raids near the western Kosovo city of Pec.

A NATO missile late Monday struck a residential neighborhood in Aleksinac, a mining town of 17,000 people about 100 miles southeast of Belgrade. Yugoslav officials said at least 12 people were killed and dozens hurt.

NATO said its weapons had targeted a nearby military post. NATO Air Commodore David Wilby of Britain said it was possible that one of the weapons "fell short" due to a guidance system fault, incoming fire or another cause and that "any unintended damage" is "very much regretted."

In Aleksinac, two bodies, along with pools of blood and human body parts, could be seen in the wreckage of the apartment building. Bricks and roof tiles were strewn about, some hundreds of feet from the blast.

The number of casualties in the central Serbian town could not be independently confirmed.

Russian tycoon to be arrested for money laundering

By Angela Charlton
The Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian prosecutors issued an arrest warrant Tuesday for tycoon Boris Berezovsky on charges of money laundering, the latest blow to one of the country's most controversial figures.

Berezovsky, with his close ties to the family of President Boris Yeltsin, has become a symbol of the wealthy oligarchs seen by many as dominating the economy and influencing government, amid frequent charges of corruption.

The warrant against him — which he denounced — is likely to fuel opposition calls to probe alleged corruption in Yeltsin's government.

His arrest was ordered by the office of the prosecutor general, Yuri Skuratov, who is already locked in a bitter feud with Yeltsin over his investigations into alleged bribetaking by Kremlin officials.

Skuratov submitted his resignation Tuesday for the second time in two months, but he added that he would continue work if Parliament backs him after Yeltsin's attempts to oust him.

The Kremlin has been trying to fight off allegations of corruption, including recent charges of kickbacks for huge contracts to renovate government property. Yeltsin, weakened by repeated ill health and widespread unpopularity for his poor performance, faces an impeachment vote in the

lower chamber of parliament on April 15.

Berezovsky, who was in France Tuesday, said he would not seek asylum abroad and that he would return to Russia, although he didn't specify when.

"I know that there are many shameless and not very bright people in the prosecutor's office," Berezovsky said in a telephone interview from France carried by Interfax. "They don't have a single chance for success."

Investigators suspect Berezovsky of setting up a Swiss company to hide hard currency earnings of Russia's largest airline, Aeroflot, the Interfax news agency reported. Russian media say Berezovsky has a stake in Aeroflot,

whose general director is Yeltsin's son-in-law, Valery Okulov.

Berezovsky has denied wrongdoing around Aeroflot and other reports of corruption against him in the past.

Prosecutors also issued an arrest warrant Tuesday for former Aeroflot commercial director Nikolai Glushkov on money laundering charges.

A billionaire whose empire reportedly includes oil, airlines and media, Berezovsky has suffered a string of defeats in a battle with Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov this year. The latest was Berezovsky's formal ouster last Friday as the executive secretary of an alliance of former Soviet republics. Yeltsin, distancing him-

self from Berezovsky, had barred him from the post last month.

Prosecutors recently searched offices of companies where Berezovsky is believed to have holdings, including Aeroflot, and are investigating charges he set up a bugging network to eavesdrop on government officials.

Berezovsky says the charges are trumped up by Russian secret services with Primakov's blessing.

"Even Communists today are less dangerous than Primakov," Berezovsky said in an interview with the weekly Moscow News published Tuesday. "He poses a greater danger — he wants to again build the (Soviet) empire."

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