

Yerevan's military strategy leads to an 'annexation' of neighbouring Azeri territory

# 40,000 flee Armenian tank offensive

THE LAST of more than 40,000 exhausted Azeri refugees limped down the snow-bound flanks of the Morvan mountain, leaving no doubt about the impact of Armenia's latest land-grab that has left it in control of nearly one-tenth of Azerbaijan.

Armenian claims that the last offensive was a one-off retaliatory action by irregulars in the Armenian-populated Azeri enclave, Nagorny Karabakh, were rejected by fleeing Azeris, among them Kurdish shepherds, village policemen and haggard militia survivors.

"Fire came from Armenia to the west and Karabakh to the east. Their soldiers scaled down the cliffs to the west. We hardly knew what happened, we just got out of there," said Jafar Jafarov, one of many soldiers of the young and ill-disciplined Azeri army smarting from public rebukes administered by the Azeri President, Abulfaz Elchibey.

From a military perspective, Armenia's capture of the Kelbadzhar district last week was not a second corridor between Armenia proper and Nagorny Karabakh. It amounts to a virtual annexation of the mountainous enclave to Armenia by a 60-mile wide belt of Azeri hill country, easily defended by the new front line along the 9,000-foot high ridges of the Moro mountain range to the north and the Lachin valley to the south.

Steady Armenian advances since the war started in 1988 were only briefly set back by Azeri successes in mid-1992. Now Azeris worry that recent heavy Armenian shelling of the Fizuli district may signal an attack to capture a wide tongue of Azeri land that would link southern Karabakh to the border with Iran.

"What's the difference between here and what the Serbs are doing in Bosnia?" said one staff officer at the Azeri northern headquarters near Ganja. "When will the world realise that what the Armenians want is a greater Armenia? We do not believe they will stop even with what they have got now."

Azerbaijan's main ally, Turkey, has so far managed only to give moral support and raise international awareness. But there are signs that it will only take a small push to bring Turk-

HUGH POPE  
in Ganja, Azerbaijan

ish military intervention. "The situation here is medieval, the Armenians are not playing by the rules. There could be a very ugly war in the Caucasus," said a diplomat in the Azeri capital, Baku.

There is certainly not much hope the Azeri government can do much in the way of a counter-attack, due to divisions in its leadership, the hostility of Russia and the weakness of its militia organisation.

Ten days after the Armenians started their offensive, Azeri tank units finally arrived on Monday at the main mountain pass to block any Armenian attempt to cross. But the young reinforcements had mostly had just two months' training and some of their inherited Soviet equipment was not in the best working order.

Refugees who had spent several days and nights on the road herded flocks of sheep, cattle and donkeys down past exhausted groups of their former defenders who had fled with them. They cursed the Azeri government for "selling them out" as much as the Armenians.

Some of the refugees gathered near the front, hoping to get news of relatives left behind in the Kelbadzhar region, once home to about 65,000 Azeris. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said yesterday an estimated 18,000 Azeris had braved treacherous mountain paths to escape the Armenian advance and a further 27,000 were trapped. A UNHCR statement said about 700 civilians, many suffering from severe frost-bite, were arriving daily in northern Azerbaijan from the Kelbadzhar region.

The government says at least 40,000 refugees have been registered, although local officials said the number could be as high as 55,000. After years of practice in a war that has displaced at least half a million of their people, Azeri officials quickly dispersed the new arrivals by bus and truck to at least 40 destinations to live in schools, collective farms and other public buildings.

"The one good thing about this wave is that there appear to be few



Armenian tanks and soldiers fight their way into the western Azeri region of Kelbadzhar, which they now control

Photograph: AP

casualties here. But we still don't know what happened to the thousands stuck on the other side," said a member of a rehousing committee.

The chief district doctor said he had registered 42 deaths and 42 people wounded. About 100 people had

been treated for frost-bite and there are fears that hundreds may have frozen to death while trying to cross remote mountain passes.

Officials were dismissive of international assistance, demanding to know why Azeri refugees counted for

nothing compared to an outcry over suffering in the past winter in Armenia. Azeris also fail to understand how the Armenian lobby in the US managed to block aid to Azerbaijan while the republic is losing the war.

"You ask what we need, but I tell you that the main problem is when a country takes a [piece] of your country," said another rehousing committee member. "Rather than food, blankets or anything else, the most important thing is for the Armenian attacks to stop."

## IN BRIEF

### Egypt trial for exiled cleric

Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, exiled spiritual guide of Egypt's militant el-Gamaat el-Islamiya, went on trial in absentia as police said they foiled a bomb attack after a shoot-out at Cairo University, AFP reports from Faiyum.

The trial of the 55-year-old blind cleric, who has lived in self-exile in the US since 1990, opened under tight security in Faiyum, 60 miles from Cairo. But it was adjourned until 8 June, at the request of the defence and prosecution, to allow time to call the Sheikh to court.

### Radioactive blast

A tank of radioactive waste exploded yesterday at a weapons plant in the secret Siberian city of Tomsk-7, contaminating a vast area and exposing firefighters to dangerous levels of radiation, AP reports from Moscow.

The accident could be the worst in the former Soviet Union since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Interfax news agency said 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) were contaminated with radiation. It was unclear how much radiation was released or how many people might be affected.

### Crisis grows

Another Pakistani minister resigned over what he said was government failure to combat terrorism, fuelling a crisis that threatens to topple Nawaz Sharif's government, Reuter reports from Islamabad. "Nothing has been done about the presence of terrorists on Pakistani soil," said Sardar Assef Ahmad Ali, Economics Minister.

### Kenyan arrests

Police arrested five Kenyan opposition figures and baton-charged their supporters who marched through Nairobi and held a prayer meeting to call for an end to tribal fighting, opposition sources said, AFP reports from Nairobi. Among the five were two members of parliament.

### Shuttle failure

For the second time in two weeks, a space shuttle countdown came unglued in the final few seconds before launch yesterday, probably because of a computer glitch, AP reports from Cape Canaveral. If this diagnosis is correct, Discovery could be repaired and taking off tomorrow.

### Cancer verdict

A Spanish court ordered the AUS multinational General Electric to pay compensation to the families of 20 people killed by faulty cancer treatment equipment in 1990, and a company technician was sentenced to six months in prison for criminal negligence, Reuter reports from Zaragoza.

### Mahdi released

Sudanese authorities released the former prime minister and opposition figure Sadiq al-Mahdi after 24 hours following a speech he gave calling for democratic reforms, Reuter reports from Khartoum. "I was not arrested, they just took me in for questions," Mr Sadiq said at his home in Khartoum yesterday.

### Kremlin calls

Russian security officials have summoned a US reporter for questioning about a story he wrote on Russia's chemical weapons program, AP reports from Moscow. Will England of the Baltimore Sun said he was told to appear at Lefortovo Prison today to discuss the story, which was based partly on information from a Russian journalist who has been charged with disclosing state secrets.

### King evidence

Prosecutors in the federal trial over the Rodney King beating have won the right to show the videotaped testimony of one of the accused policemen who said he saw a colleague hit Mr King on the head with a baton, AP reports from Los Angeles. The judge refused to delay the trial to review whether the tape was admissible. Judge John Davies said he would order closing arguments to continue through Saturday if necessary.

### Fair drinkum

The image of Australians as beer swillers is not entirely accurate — they also like wine and spirits, Reuter reports from Melbourne. The average Australian family — grandfather, mother, father and two teenagers — downs 936 cans of beer, 61 bottles of wine and 20 bottles of spirits each year, the Australian Drug Foundation said.

'Dennis Skinner of the Orient' defends his record

## Patten hopes for sincerity from China

MICHAEL FATHERS

CHRIS PATTEN, the Governor of Hong Kong, said yesterday he hoped talks with China on the future of the territory would begin soon "in a spirit of sincerity on both sides", adding that Britain was ready to start negotiations immediately. In a vigorous defence of his position, despite what he described as "millions of words of abuse from the north [Peking]", the Governor said he knew the negotiations would be no pushover.

"They will be extremely difficult as clearly we will be discussing issues on which both sides feel strongly," he told a packed meeting of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. Mr Patten has returned to London for two weeks for talks with the Foreign Office and Downing Street on British proposals, which China has vigorously rejected, to expand the franchise in the colony ahead of elections next year and in 1995. China has accused London of breaking the spirit, though not the letter, of formal agreements.

Mr Patten emphasised, presumably for the sake of his Chinese listeners, that the proposed changes were not his alone but carried the authority of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. He made clear that if Peking continued to refuse to negotiate, the British election proposals would be put to the colony's legislative council for its consideration.

Mr Patten sought to explain how a "one-time wet from the consensual end of British politics" had become after nearly a year in Hong Kong the "Dennis Skinner of the Orient". When he arrived in the colony he and the British government firmly believed that the Joint Declaration between London and Peking which set out in 1984 the terms on which Hong Kong would be returned to China in 1997 was "for real". The declaration, he said, described Hong Kong's way of life and guaranteed its stability, freedoms and prosperity for the next 50 years. Prosperity was not, as Peking imagined, something you could separate from the others and especially not from the rule of law.

Mr Patten said whenever China was asked to explain how the proposals on widening the franchise in Hong Kong breached the Joint Declaration or the Basic Law — the document China drew up for the governance of Hong Kong — there was no answer.

## Real-life 'Miami Vice' alarms Florida tourists

RUPERT CORNWELL  
in Washington

THE FLORIDA authorities are taking emergency measures after the murder last weekend of a sixth foreign visitor in four months, endangering not only the Sunshine State's international reputation but, more important, the future of its \$28bn (£18.4bn)-a-year tourism industry.

Florida's *dolce vita* image has long been spoiled by a dash of Miami Vice. But the robbery and murder of Barbara Meller from Germany on Friday has turned television glamour into something akin to panic among visitors to America's most popular tourist destination.

Like thousands of people every year, Mrs Meller and her family were heading in a rented car from the airport to the oceanside resort of Miami Beach. But after losing her way she found herself in an inner city neighbourhood. Another car bumped into her. When she got out to inspect the damage, she was robbed, beaten and finally crushed to death as her assailants drove over her body to make their escape.

As the Miami authorities prepared special measures to protect tourists, the Florida Governor, Lawton Chiles, yesterday summoned a first meeting of a Governor's Task

force on Crime and Tourism, and appealed for federal assistance to help tackle the violence.

Among the first moves, almost certainly, will be an end to Florida's system of special number plates on rented cars, which make potential targets so easy for criminals to identify. The Miami municipality, meanwhile, is installing new road signs to direct tourists to the city's main attractions, and setting up scores of information centres in fast food outlets and elsewhere.

Since early December three Germans, two Canadians and a Venezuelan had been killed while visiting Florida, before Mrs Meller's murder. Klaus Sommer, the German Consul in Miami, said that of the 300,000 German tourists to Florida in the last year, 1,200 reported being victim of some form of crime. Despite the latest alarms, there is not much sign of an end to the violence. Hours after Mr Chiles's appeal, three Danish women in a hired car were robbed, although the alleged attacker was speedily arrested.

Courtesy call to shore up sagging 'special relationship' with Britain

## Hurd on flying visit to Tokyo

TERRY MCCARTHY  
in Tokyo

REMEMBER Japan, the country Margaret Thatcher lionised as embodying the economic future of the world? The British government does not. Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary, who arrived in Japan yesterday, will have trouble even remembering the names of his Japanese hosts. In an age when Cabinet ministers commute regularly to Washington and European capitals, Britain's senior diplomat has not been in Tokyo for nearly three years.

It is not just the Foreign Office that ignores the world's second largest economy and one of the most dynamic investors in the United Kingdom: the last British prime minister to visit was Mrs Thatcher in September 1989. John Major has said he wants to make Britain a "paradise" for Japanese investors, but has shown little interest in anything Japanese beyond the country's money.

Britain's much-touted "special relationship" with Japan is looking decidedly thin. The two island nations with royal families, a parallel sense of decorum and fierce feelings of independence, have been called natural partners, but the relationship is not coming easily at the moment. The British Embassy in Tokyo is embar-

rassed by London's lack of interest in Japan but, faced with the power of the China lobby in the Foreign Office, it has little choice but to suffer in a state of bureaucratic oblivion.

Even Mr Hurd's visit is only semi-serious. It is built around a trip to Indonesia, where he is to see the temple of Borobudur near Jogjakarta, and South Korea, where his wife has been invited by a private company to launch a ship. Japan has been squeezed in between these two venues almost as an afterthought, and the Foreign Secretary will spend only one night in Tokyo.

This casual treatment of a country with a gross national product three times larger than Britain's contrasts sharply with the ideas expressed in an interview in London given by Mr Hurd to the Japanese news agency Kyodo, before he left for Asia. He called for Japanese involvement in a whole range of international issues. "Japan is playing almost month by month an increasing role in international affairs," he said, adding "the world needs Japan."

Japan itself is keen to get away from the stereotype of cheque-book diplomacy and play a more active role in world affairs. Its ultimate foreign policy goal is to win a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. The most tangible step so far was the decision last year to send peace-keeping troops to Cambodia, the first overseas dispatch of Japanese military personnel since the Second World War.

But while many constraints to a more open Japanese role come from within the country's own political and bureaucratic system, it does not help that foreign countries refuse to take Tokyo more seriously.

Mr Hurd is to meet Kiichi Miyazawa, the Prime Minister, today. Yesterday a planned meeting with the Foreign Minister, Michio Watanabe, was cancelled, and hours later it was announced that Mr Watanabe was resigning his post for medical reasons.

Mr Watanabe has been commuting to work from hospital for some time. He is widely believed to be suffering from cancer, although no official announcement has been made in a country where mention of the disease is taboo. Kabun Muto, 66, a former farm and trade minister, is to take over as foreign minister.

## Clinton blinks too often for White House owls

### OUT OF AMERICA

RUPERT CORNWELL

PORTLAND — By his own standards of garrulous micro-management, Bill Clinton was pretty subdued at the great Save The Spotted Owl environmental conference here the other day. Interventions from the chair were few. Connoisseurs of the polymath President like myself, who were expecting scholarly asides on the cyclical problems of the logging industry and breeding patterns of owls and Pacific salmon, were disappointed.

One possibility is that his mind was already on Boris Yeltsin, the Russian President, he was to meet at the weekend summit in Vancouver. More likely though, he was simply too embarrassed to hold forth. After 12 years of Republican neglect, this was supposed to have been the Green Administration. Instead, twice in the past week, he has caved in on a couple of issues dear to the environmentalist hearts. In doing so, the President has sent a suspicious signal that for all its rousing language, the Clinton administration may be a pushover.

Individually, the white flags can be justified. If President Clinton overruled Al Gore, the Vice-President and self-appointed keeper of the Environmental Covenant, and gave the go-ahead for a toxic waste incinerator in Ohio, one must assume he did so for wretched reasons than a desire to soften up a key swing state in 1996. Ditto the abrupt decision to drop his plans to increase grazing and mining fees on federal

lands ravaged by over-exploitation. After all, a posse of Democratic senators in the West was threatening to pull the plug on his entire economic package if he did not. A similar recognition of the facts of life doubtlessly explains those abandoned campaign promises to Haitian refugees and Bosnian Muslims.

And there's another reason not to jump to conclusions. Since he took office, voguish opinion about Mr Clinton has bobbed around like a cork in a tempest. Blundering Bill of Zoë Baird and homosexuals-in-the-military fame quickly became Brilliant Bill after his State of the Union address, and the quickfire congressional approval he won for his five-year deficit-cutting package.

Now (pardon the alliterative stretch) it's a case of Blinking Bill, who gives way at the first hint of showdown. These gyrations will certainly continue. Bill Clinton in the White House remains an enigma, populist yet secretive, as affable as he is calculating. Who exactly is Bill Clinton? There has not yet been one of those "defining moments" to tell us.

But look back to the President's days in Ar-

kansas, and what is happening now is uncomfortably familiar — shades of Slick Willie of old, whose silky gifts of compromise could lead everyone up the garden path. Take the outburst here by Jay Hair, the president of the National Wildlife Federation. He was understandably livid about the abandonment of the higher fees. "What started like a love affair," lamented Mr Hair to anyone at the forest summit who would listen, "looks like it may turn out to be more like date rape."

Yet even his supporters worry over the grazing and mining climbdown. Give in to one group, they argue, and every other one will expect special treatment. A few more such blinks, and the economic package that is the centrepiece of his presidency will unravel. Such behaviour may be unavoidable. Nowhere more than in America is politics the art of the possible, of reconciling the claims of competing interests. In that skill, Bill Clinton is peerless. But he won the election by promising to stand up to the lobbyists. Can he? Once I asked Betsy Wright, the President's chief of staff for much of his time in the Little Rock State House, to

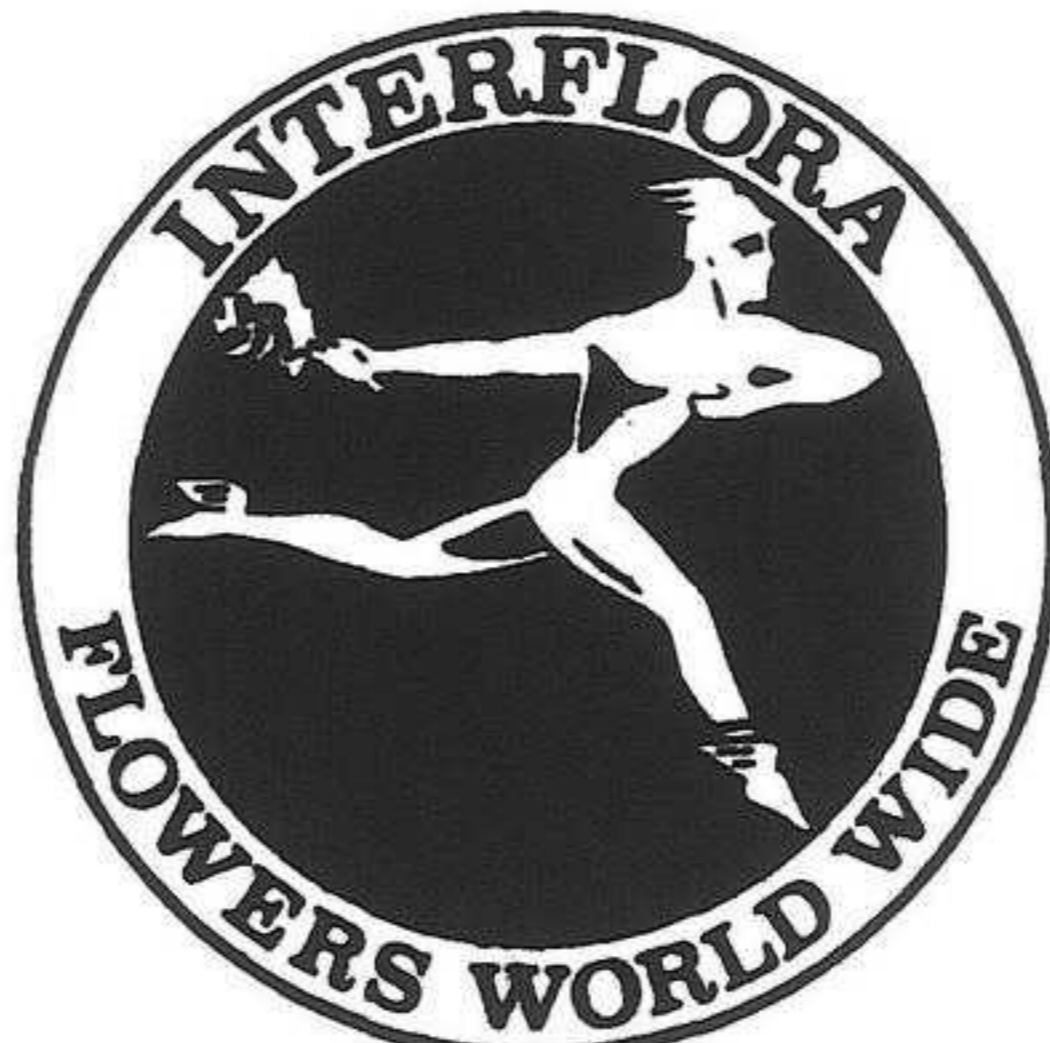
list occasions when he had drawn the line. She was pressed to come up with a single one.

In Vancouver, of course, there was no need to draw any lines. If he is a novice in foreign affairs there was no sign of it — at least in the public part of the summit. President Clinton handled his meeting with President Yeltsin with consummate skill. In his fluent mastery of a hideously complicated brief, he sounded like a Russian Studies professor. He mixed support and prudence in just the right measure. But after the two leaders had left town, one small Freudian glitch came to light.

A local television reporter got hold of some notes forgotten by a Yeltsin aide who attended the working dinner on Saturday evening. Among other things, the scribbled jottings contained a presidential aside on the likelihood of Japan signing on to the Group of Seven leading industrial nations' aid package for Russia currently in the works: "When the Japanese say 'yes' to us, they often mean 'no.'" The White House brushed off the incident, though Warren Christopher, the Secretary of State, was instantly on the phone to Tokyo, smoothing ruffled feathers.

That, however, was not the point. Russians, environmentalists, and everyone else dealing with Bill Clinton these days, are fervently hoping the President wasn't subconsciously describing his own *modus operandi*.

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