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UN offer to lift Serb ban if fighting ends

An opportunity for reconciliation was offered to moderate factions in Belgrade before last night's United Nations General Assembly vote to suspend the rump Yugoslavia from the UN.

Britain and the other four permanent members of the Security Council outlined a plan for re-admission to Mr Milan Panic, the Californian businessman who became Prime Minister of Yugoslavia two months ago.

At a meeting in New York, Mr Hurd, Foreign Secretary, explained to Mr Panic that if he succeeded in halting the Serbian killings and persecution in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the suspension would be reconsidered.

Mr Panic was also allowed

By Ian Givens
in New York

to address the General Assembly to argue against suspension before the vote, due to take place early today.

But in advance of the vote, there was overwhelming pressure for the old Yugoslavia — now reduced to the republics of Serbia and Montenegro — to be stripped of UN voting rights in retaliation for acts of aggression.

Mr Panic was born in Yugoslavia, emigrated and made a fortune in America, and then agreed to return to Belgrade to try to rescue his homeland from disintegration.

Although ridiculed at first, Mr Panic has won respect for his courageous efforts to me-

diate between warring factions, despite stiff resistance from President Slobodan Milosevic and other Serbian nationalist hardliners.

Mr Panic is clearly engaged in a power struggle in Belgrade, the Serbian and federal capitals, and his chances of success are considered doubtful.

British officials said his perseverance merited respect and encouragement. One official said: "There is no doubt where he is coming from. He is a man of peace."

The British were anxious to assure Mr Panic and his adherents that they still had support at the UN even as they were being suspended from the world body.

Mr Panic appeared to understand. He predicted that Serbia and Montenegro would be readmitted within three months, but British officials said no timetable had been agreed.

Mr Hurd gave warning yesterday that constant demands for peacekeeping troops would lead to the UN becoming overburdened.

In an address to the General Assembly in New York, Mr Hurd said: "We should not wander down this road without serious thought."

There were risks of stretching resources if the world propelled the UN into crisis intervention whenever there was a feeling of frustration that "something must be done", he said.

The international airlift of humanitarian aid to Sarajevo may be suspended for some time because the participating countries want stronger guarantees from the factions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, diplomats in Geneva said yesterday. — AFP