

BRIEFLY

UN criticises HR abuses in Cuba:

The UN General Assembly's Human Rights Committee expressed regret Wednesday about abuses of civil liberties in Cuba and called on the government to ensure freedom of expression and assembly. AP reports from United Nations.

The resolution, which will be forwarded to the full, 185-member General Assembly, also called on President Fidel Castro's government to release "numerous persons detained for activities of a political nature." The vote in the committee was 59-26 with 71 abstentions. The United States, Britain, Spain, France, Germany and most Western countries supported the non-binding resolution. China voted against it and Russia abstained.

Chinese student gets life-term:

A Chinese visa student has been sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 15 years for straggling a fellow Chinese student who rebuffed his romantic advances, AP reports from Kingston.

Guoxi Wang, 34, pleaded guilty Wednesday to second-degree murder for killing Xiaoting Liu, 33, in a house where both boarded in August 1995. "A child has lost her mother forever, a husband has lost his wife, they have lost a sister," Justice Helen MacLeod said after reading victim impact statements from Liu's husband and sister in China.

UK-UAE to sign defence pact:

Britain and the United Arab Emirates are due to sign a defence cooperation pact yesterday. That British arms manufacturers hope will pave the way for more business in the Gulf. Reuters reports from Abu Dhabi.

British Defence Secretary Michael Portillo will hold talks in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi with senior Sheikhs of the oil-rich Emirate, one of the richest states in the volatile region. He is due to meet the UAE's armed forces Chief of Staff, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zaid al-Nahayan, and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamdan bin Zaid.

Mudslide kills 4 miners in S Africa:

A mudslide at a diamond mine killed four people, injured two and left an undetermined number of miners trapped underground, mine officials said Thursday. AP reports from Johannesburg. The accident happened midday Wednesday when mud rushed through a mining shaft into the main part of Rorich Diamond Mine at Boshoff, 300 miles (500 kilometers) southwest of Johannesburg, said Peter Smith, manager of the Canadian-owned mine. "Rescue operations are taking place," Smith said. There had been up to 38 miners trapped underground, but most of them had been rescued, Smith said early Thursday. Four bodies had been recovered, and at least two people were injured, he said.

HK repatriates 199 Vietnamese:

Hong Kong yesterday flew back 199 Vietnamese boatpeople in a forced repatriation to help clear the territory of all illegal migrants by the July 1 handover, a government statement said, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Almost all the 69 men, 53 women, 45 boys and 32 girls are from southern and central Vietnam. Only four are from northern Vietnam, it said. Most of the migrants arrived in 1990. The repatriation left 8,273 boatpeople in Hong Kong detention camps, a spokesman said.

Drugs worth \$ 8.2m seized in India:

Indian drug-enforcement officers arrested four people after seizing heroin worth 8.2 million dollars, newspapers said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

The drugs, made up of 29 one-kilogramme (2.2 pound) packets, were recovered after police opened fire on a truck in the northwest of New Delhi. The Hindustan Times said the brown heroine had been smuggled into the north western state of Punjab from Pakistan.

3 tortured to death in India:

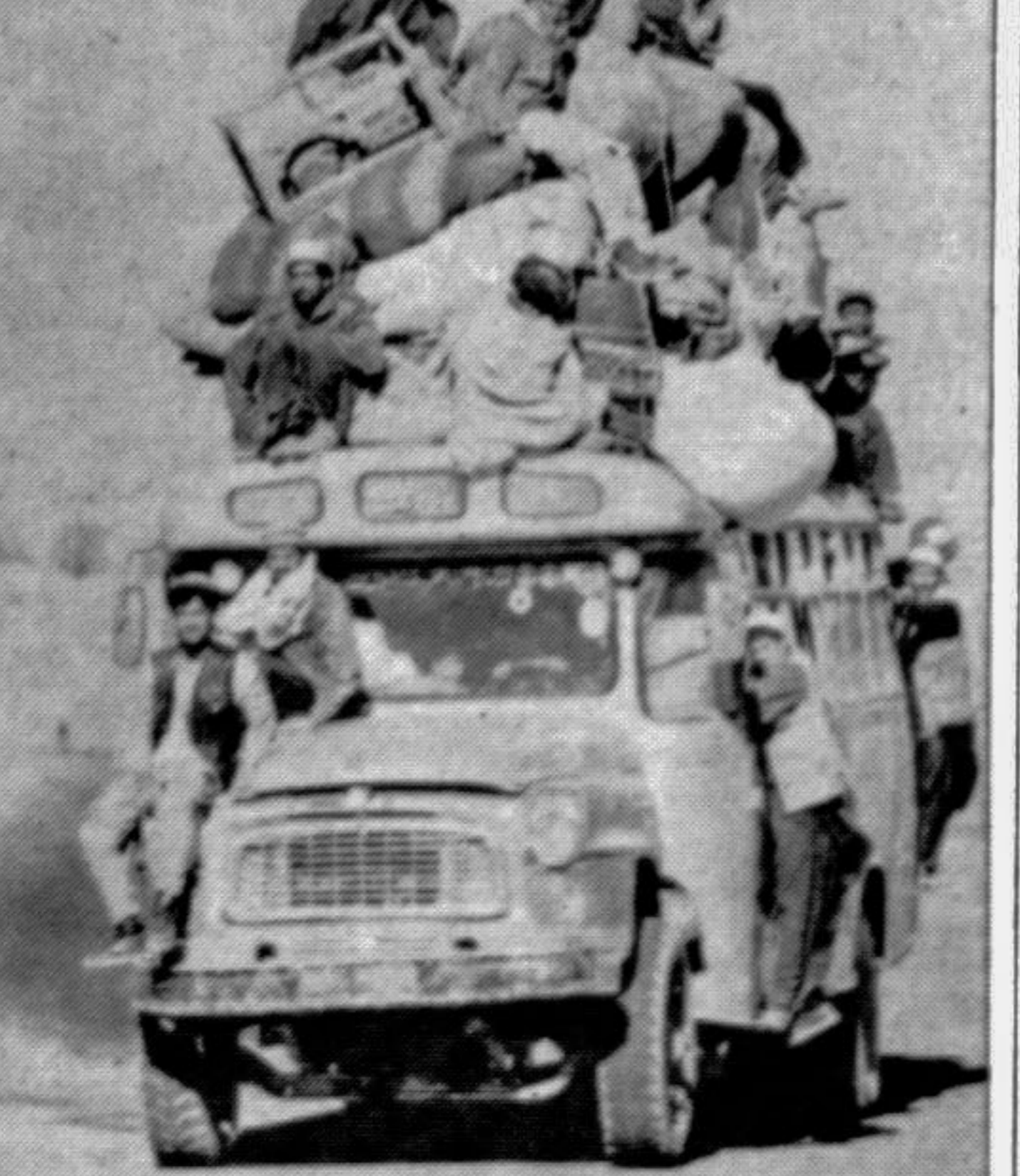
Three men were tortured to death by villagers in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh after being accused of practicing black magic, newspapers said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

The men were tied up in a community hall in the village of Sutaraguda, beaten, stabbed, their skin flayed with scalpels and then covered in acid, the Indian Express reported. Around 50 people were involved in Tuesday's attack, the daily reported, adding eight people had been arrested.

Blast kills 6 in Lima:

A fireworks factory blew up Wednesday in an industrial suburb of Lima, killing six people and leaving 15 others wounded, according to police. AFP reports from Lima.

The victims aged between 16 and 20 worked at the factory.



An Afghan bus overloaded with civilians and household belongings flees the fighting between the Taliban militia and rival factions north of Kabul Wednesday. More than two thousand civilians fled the fighting in the area of Qarabagh about 45 kilometres north of the Afghan capital in the wake of a successful offensive by the fundamentalist militia. — AFP/UNB photo

Deputies barred from entering into Belarus' old parliament

MINSK, Nov 28: Police today barred deputies from entering the main chamber of Belarus' old parliament, only allowing them access to collect their belongings, reports Reuters.

President Alexander Lukashenko wants to shut the parliament following his resounding victory in a controversial referendum last weekend.

"The police are only letting us in to collect our things," Liberal faction leader Stanislav Bogdanovich told Reuters. "This marks the setting up of a junta through the falsification of the referendum results."

500,000 Rwandans in Tanzania may begin move towards home

NGARA, Tanzania, Nov 28: The 500,000 Hutu refugees in Tanzania were among the first to flee the Hutu-inspired genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Now they are bracing for what appears to be an inevitable return home, reports AP.

Fearing retribution by Rwanda's new Tutsi-led government, the refugees have resisted going home. They have built secure lifestyles, and rumors of anti-Hutu violence are common.

But with the return home of 500,000 Rwandans from eastern Zaire, refugees and aid workers think a similar large-scale repatriation is only a matter of time. "It's possible we'll wake up one morning and find the camps are empty," said Mark Richardson of CARE International, a US-based humanitarian aid group. "We keep our ears close to the ground."

UN move to end expansion of Israeli settlements

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 28: A total of 126 UN member states on Wednesday called for an end to the expansion of Israeli settlements, reports AP.

The move came in the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly the day after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu toured Jewish settlements in the West Bank and voiced support for their continued expansion.

In a vote which went through with 126 in favour, three against and with six abstentions, the Fourth Committee demanded "complete cessation of all illegal Israeli settlement activities."

Those voting against were Israel, Micronesia and the United States.

The committee was endorsing a draft resolution which now goes to a plenary session of the UN General Assembly next month for adoption. The assembly vote invariably reflects that taken in committee.

Netanyahu's rightwing government in June lifted a freeze on settlement expansion imposed by the previous government and has since approved plans for building thousands of homes in the West Bank.

But the policy is drawing mounting criticism. On Sunday, Egyptian Foreign Minister AMR Mussa made a veiled threat that Egypt could block Arab normalisation with Israel to protest its expansion plans.

At the United Nations, where the General Assembly will in the coming days adopt its annual series of resolutions on Middle East issues, Israeli Charge d'Affairs David Peleg said it would be "unfortunate" if the United Nations adopted "one-sided resolutions."

The issues "can only be resolved by direct negotiations between the parties concerned without preconditions," he said in a statement.

Earlier report says, Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara said in London Wednesday that Israel failed to honour the commitments it had made in the past, then it was preparing for war.

If the Israeli government refuses to endorse previous commitments and undertakings then it is preparing for war. Shara told the British television station Channel 4.

He should not miss the opportunity to make a comprehensive peace if he misses this opportunity things will deteriorate and this deterioration is catastrophic in every sense of the world," he added.

Shara, however, refused to speculate on what specific circumstances might lead to war in the region, saying he preferred to put a scenario for peace.

He added that the current situation in the Middle East does not suit Syria.

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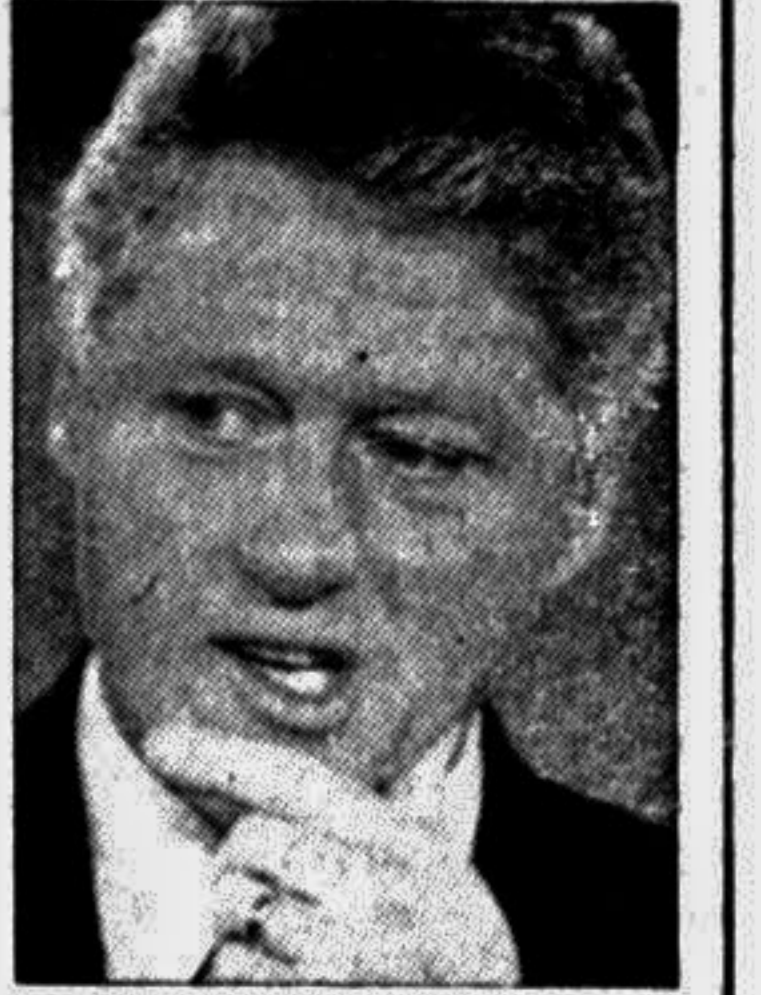
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Off the Record

Clinton prescribed tough medicine to keep quiet

WASHINGTON: President Clinton has to swallow some tough medicine this holiday weekend — keeping quiet, reports AP.

Two weeks spent traveling have left the president's voice hoarse.



He joked about his condition at a Rose Garden ceremony Wednesday where the president traditionally pardons a Thanksgiving Turkey.

"If you will bear with me, I'll do my best to talk," Clinton told the crowd. The president spoke briefly at the ceremony, his voice raspy as sometimes disappearing for a few seconds.

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Fergie injured her best-known toe

LONDON: The Duchess of York has injured her best-known toe, reports AP.

The former Sarah Ferguson stubbed the toe made infamous by a close encounter with her financial adviser's mouth, a British news agency reported Wednesday.

"She is hobbling a bit in private," Press Association quoted an unidentified friend of the duchess as saying. Nevertheless, she will continue the publicity rounds for her just-published autobiography, "My Life," PA said. In her book, the duchess says that the 1994 photos of John Bryan's bobbing over her head in the south of France — which eventually led to her divorce this year from Prince Andrew, Queen Elizabeth's second son — were misunderstood.

Bryan was playing a "Cinderella" game, she said, without elaborating. For his part, Bryan told his friend Allan Starkie that he was mortified at reports he was sucking the duchess' toe. He was licking it, Starkie recounts in his own just-published "Fergie: Her Secret Life."

Clinics taking sperm from dead men!

LONDON: US fertility clinics are routinely taking sperm from dead men at the request of their families, a survey revealed on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Two bioethicists concluded that the practice was much more widespread than they expected after sending out a questionnaire to 300 fertility clinics across the country.

"People speak of this procedure as if it's hypothetical or extremely rare," said Arthur Caplan, Director of the Bioethics Centre at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. "But we found that it's happening in many places," he told the new scientist magazine.

He and Susan Kerr, from the University of Texas Health Centre in Houston, said they were amazed by the results of their survey.

They said "more than a dozen" clinics have already admitted harvesting sperm from bodies and storing it for future use. Three times as many said they had been asked to do so.

The bioethicists said US law was unclear and suggested that specific controls should be introduced as they were in Britain.



Singer Chrissie Hynde of the Pretenders poses during a press conference in Brussels Wednesday promoting the world's largest petition against animal testing by the cosmetic industry, with over four million signatures, which was presented to the European Commission. — AFP/UNB photo

Gas cylinder explosion in India: 8 killed

NEW DELHI, India, Nov 28: Two houses collapsed when cooking gas cylinders exploded in a crowded New Delhi suburb Thursday, and eight people were feared buried in the rubble, a local news agency reported, reports AP.

Details of the blast in the Mongolpuri neighborhood were not immediately available. United News of India news agency quoted unnamed fire service officials as saying that at least 23 people were living in the buildings.

Fifteen people were hospitalized, UNI said. Three of them were in critical condition.

Murtaza's party won't form alliance with Benazir

KARACHI, Nov 28: The party of the slain brother of deposed Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has rejected forming any electoral alliance with her in forthcoming national elections, a spokesman said today, reports AP.

But the party of Murtaza Bhutto, who was killed in Karachi in September in a police shootout may align with other groups, said the spokesman, Rao Rasheed.

Rasheed is Secretary General of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP-SB), which was founded by Murtaza in opposition to Bhutto's mainstream PPP because of political differences between the sib-

lings. "Except for (Benazir's) PPP we can form an alliance with any other political party," the spokesman said.

Murtaza's party is seen as a potential rival to Benazir's PPP in their southern home province of Sindh, where native Sindhi speaking people are in the majority with Urdu-speaking settlers forming the second, largest group.

The settlers, descendants of immigrants from India after the partition of the sub continent in 1947, have extended overwhelming support in previous elections to the ethnic Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM).

Muslim, Croat members walk out of parliament

Mladic steps down, agrees to hand over power to deputy

MOUNT JAHORINA, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nov 28: Gen Ratko Mladic on Wednesday agreed to stop resisting his ouster as head of the Bosnian Serb military, saying he would hand over power to a deputy, reports AP.

But it was unclear whether that would end the civilian-military dispute that was damaging Bosnian Serb unity. The Bosnian Serb president, Biljana Plavsic, also had fired the man named as successor, Gen Manojlo Milovanovic.

Plavsic fired Mladic on Nov 9 saying he was a liability because of two indictments by the Hague war crimes tribunal but Mladic initially resisted the firing.

Mladic's announcement came at the end of a day in which the Bosnian Serb assembly under Plavsic's control demanded he and other top army officers be prosecuted for disobeying civil authority by defying their ouster.

Milovanovic, a member of the assembly, said the vote might be "the first step towards extradition of Gen Mladic to the Hague court."

The statement from Mladic said: "Bearing in mind the overall international situation and the decisions of the national assembly and for preserving the continuity of the army, Gen Mladic decided to hand over his authority to Gen

Milovanovic." The decision was to take effect immediately.

There was no immediate reaction from Plavsic's office. Plavsic earlier told deputies that Mladic and his aides lack "professionalism and understanding of the position and role of the state."

Although Milovanovic also was fired, he remained in contact with political leaders and reportedly tried to persuade Mladic to give up the power struggle.

Mladic ordered Milovanovic to protect his supporters from prosecution, guarantee the continuity of the Bosnian Serb army, and ensure that politi-

cians don't neglect problems of army members and their families.

The UN tribunal in the Hague has twice indicted Mladic for genocide and crimes against humanity during the 3-and-a-half-year Bosnian war.

In weeks of standoff, Mladic and his aides blocked communications towers, set up road blocks.

Reuters adds from Pale: Muslim and Croat members walked out of the Bosnian Serb parliament on Wednesday when their Serb colleagues elected to deny them voting rights, the Yugoslav state news agency Tanjug reported.

23 die as cargo plane crashes in Russia

MOSCOW, Nov 28: A Russian air force Ilyushin Il-76 cargo plane crashed in Siberia on Wednesday night, killing all 23 people on board, the Emergency Services Ministry said today, reports Reuters.

Earlier the ministry had put the total number of people aboard at 19.

A ministry spokesman told Reuters all 10 crew members and the 13 passengers had been

killed. Only 10 bodies had been recovered so far, he said.

The plane, which was also carrying 30 tonnes of commercial freight, took off from Abakan in southern Siberia on a flight to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on the far eastern Kamchatka peninsula.

Officials said the plane lost contact with ground control just seven minutes after take off.

Men went about their daily routines. Some work in illegal plots around the camps. Others make beer from the corn distributed by aid workers, and many work for Tanzanians on coffee, tea or banana plantations.

"We've done everything we could so that the refugees would not suffer, but no live an organised and comfortable life either," CARE's Richardson said. "If the settlement becomes permanent, then we've failed."

Getting refugees to budget from the Zairian camps was not easy. It took attacks by Zairian Tutsi rebels against armed former Hutu government soldiers and militiamen operating out of the camps.

In Tanzania, the story is different. The government has never allowed former soldiers

US endorses Canadian proposal on Zaire crisis

WASHINGTON, Nov 28: The United States endorsed Wednesday a Canadian proposal to speed delivery of assistance to Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire and to encourage their return to their homeland, reports AP.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns gave no indication of the size of the US commitment. The US deployment, which already includes about 400 troops sent to the region on a contingency basis, will provide airlift, air control and other support services for the mission, Burns said.

The Canadian proposal includes the establishment of a multinational headquarters for a humanitarian mission to be based either in Uganda or Rwanda.

Burns said details of the mission will be finalised with the Canadian government over the next several days. He added that the United States also is seeking significant African participation in the multinational force.



Models for Italian fashion designers house 'Roccoborocco' show black evening dress proposals during a presentation of the designers' collection at Moscow's "Russia" Concert Hall, Wednesday, within the presentation of the "Week of high fashion" festival in the Russian capital. — AFP/UNB photo

Tibet monasteries expel 150 monks

BEIJING, Nov 28: At least 150 monks have been expelled from their monasteries in Tibet in the government's campaign to discredit the Dalai Lama, a Tibet monitoring group reported Thursday, reports AP.

Authorities have been holding political study sessions in monasteries since May. Monks at major monasteries in central Tibet have been asked to make written statements about their political beliefs and denounce the Dalai Lama, the Tibet Information Network said in a statement.

Twenty monks have been arrested, and one allegedly died while in custody, the London-based group said, citing reports from sources in Tibet whom it did not name.

Some refugees already are selling their bicycles, while others working for aid agencies are scouting around for jobs in Rwanda.

Rwandan Minister for Rehabilitation and Social Integration Patrick Mazimbaka said during a visit to Tanzania on Tuesday that the refugees were being held hostage by intimidators.

"They are held against their will," he said.

A UN spokesman in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Tanzanian authorities had promised no violence would be used to send the people home.

"If we go, we'll go en masse," 41-year-old Anastasi said. "I'm not happy to be a refugee. With peaceful conditions, I'll go back to Rwanda."