

Lankan to head diplomatic team accompanying arms inspectors

UNSC still working on resolution to back accord with Baghdad

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 26: While the Security Council wrangles over a resolution to back an accord opening Iraqi sites to UN inspectors, the UN chief has begun fulfilling a key element of the agreement, reports AP.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Wednesday named the United Nations' top disarmament official, Jayantha Dhanapala, to lead the team of diplomats being specially created to accompany UN weapons inspectors into the disputed presidential palaces.

The team is a key part of the agreement reached Sunday between Annan and Iraqi leaders that has so far averted US-led military strikes on Iraq.

The United States and Britain, meanwhile, were pushing for a resolution to back the deal — with the consequences of Iraqi violation clearly spelled out.

Council members met informally for more than 90 minutes Wednesday afternoon after their scheduled consultations but produced no draft. Consultations would resume Thursday, said Britain's UN ambassador, John Western.

"We just had an extremely good and reassuring discussion," Western said after Wednesday's meeting.

"I am confident that there will be a draft resolution and that there will be cosponsorship for it," he had said earlier in the day.

Any explicit threat of force, however, was unlikely to be supported by the other three permanent Security Council members, Russia, France and China, which all resisted US and British threats of a military strike before the agreement was brokered.

The five permanent members can veto council decisions.

The wording of the resolution was going to be key to getting it passed, a British diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The diplomat said Britain was taking the lead in drafting

the accord because it is important to codify "that very serious consequences should follow." If Iraqi President Saddam Hussein doesn't comply.

Annan negotiated the accord over the weekend with Saddam. It would open eight presidential sites that Baghdad had declared off-limits to UN inspectors, provided the inspectors were

tional weapons. He had been considered a top candidate to replace Boutros Boutros-Ghali as UN Secretary-General in 1996 — a position that eventually went to Annan. He also served as Sri Lanka's ambassador to the United States from January 1995 until April 1997.

Annan met Wednesday with chief UN weapons inspector

he told Annan the diplomats and inspectors should be able to search one-third of a square mile a day.

Butler indicated in a radio interview Thursday that the inspections could be completed within a year.

"If they follow what is in Kofi Annan's document, and really cooperate with us, we are not talking years as we have been in the past, we are talking about a relatively short time," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corp from New York.

UN officials in New York said it "would not be prudent" to estimate how quickly the work could be done and noted that there were no time limits listed in the accord.

America's UN ambassador, Bill Richardson defended the agreement Wednesday against criticism from the majority leader of the US Senate, Trent Lott, who called it a sellout to Saddam.

"We believe this is a good agreement," Richardson said, adding it needs to be tested to see if it holds. "We see the British initiative as a good way to enforce the agreement."

Formal council approval of Anna's accord isn't legally required. But a resolution would give the agreement political clout, and — if the United States and Britain are successful — would codify any response if Saddam reneged.

A resolution should uphold the idea that a violation could prompt air strikes by US and allied forces, Richardson said on ABC television.

Russia's UN Ambassador, Sergey Lavrov, said any such threat was "not appropriate."

France wouldn't accept any resolution that went beyond warning of consequences, a French diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

And China's UN ambassador, Qin Huausun, said he believed a resolution wasn't necessary and the agreement was enough. "For China, it's OK," he said.



Though plans for an immediate attack against Saddam Hussein are now on hold, American forces continue to arrive in the Persian Gulf region like this LCAC hovercraft from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit being guided ashore in Kuwait City, Wednesday. President Clinton will continue the American military vigil in the Persian Gulf awaiting Iraq's compliance with new diplomatic agreements to allow open inspections for weapons of mass destruction. — AP/UNB photo

accompanied by a team of diplomats chosen by Annan.

UN officials confirmed Dhanapala's appointment as head of the team Wednesday, it was to be formally announced Thursday. They refused further comment.

Dhanapala, 59, was appointed the UN undersecretary-general for disarmament affairs just last month, overseeing UN efforts to reduce the number of nuclear and conven-

Richard Butler and Anna's legal counsel, Hans Corell, who helped draft the agreement, to work out some procedural details for the new UN team.

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz suggested Wednesday that the teams could finish searches of the palaces within 25 days.

In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corp's Arabic-language service monitored in Cairo, Egypt, Aziz said

Defector claims

Russia continuing to develop biological arms

NEW YORK, Feb 26: A Russian defector said Wednesday that Russia is continuing to develop biological weapons under the guise of defensive research. A Russian government spokesman denied the claim, reports AP.

Ken Alibek, former deputy director of a branch of the Soviet biological weapons programme, said missiles carrying bacterial weapons were aimed at US cities as late as 1992, the year he defected.

Alibek, formerly known as Kanatjan Alibekov, said the weapon that intrigued the Soviets the most was smallpox. Health officials pronounced the world to be free of the virus in 1979, eliminating the need for vaccines.

The Soviets planned to use smallpox, anthrax and other bacteria against the United States, Alibek said in an interview broadcast Wednesday night on the ABC News programme "PrimeTime Live".

Alibek also was quoted in Wednesday's edition of The New

York Times as saying that he believes parts of Moscow's cold war biological-weapons programme continues in Russia.

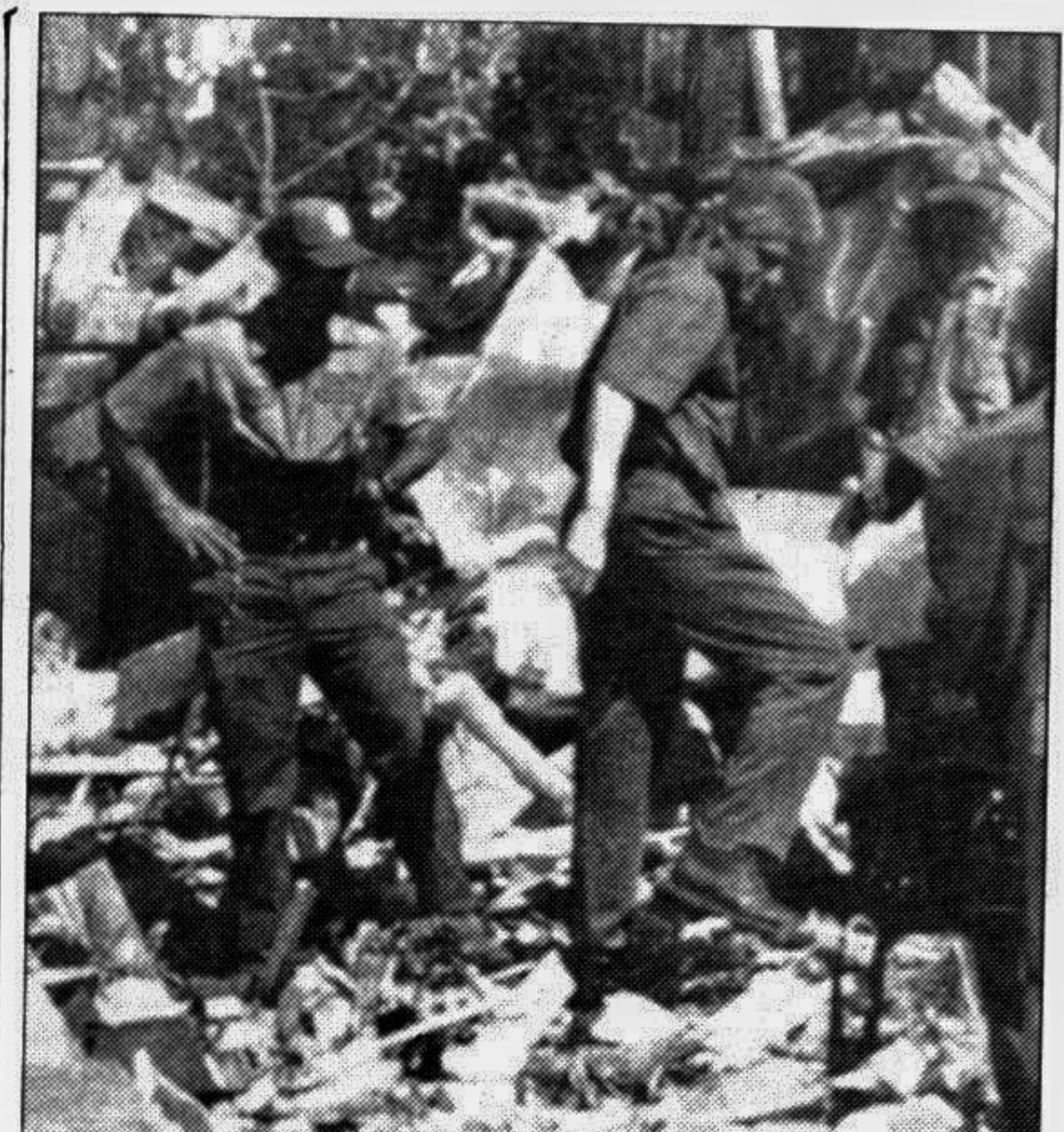
"They conduct research and explain it as being for defensive purposes," he said.

In Russia, Oleg Ignatyev, an expert on biological weapons with Russia's presidential Committee for Chemical and Biological Disarmament, denied Alibek's allegations in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

"Russia has carried out no research and development of biological weapons since all work in the field was cancelled in 1990," he said. "These allegations are sheer nonsense."

Ignatyev also dismissed as false Alibek's claim that the former Soviet Union had prepared tons of deadly bacteria as part of its war planning effort.

Matthew Meselson, a professor at Harvard University's Molecular and Cellular Biology Department, said most of Alibek's statements did not surprise him.



President Clinton steps carefully through debris and surveys the damage by a tornado at Ponderosa RV Park in Kissimmee, Florida, Wednesday, during a tour of the devastated area. — AP/UNB photo

ANP decides to sever ties with Sharif govt

ISLAMABAD, Feb 26: A Pakistani Pashtun nationalist party has decided to sever its alliance with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a tussle over renaming a province, political sources said today, reports AFP.

The decision ends a nine-year partnership between Awami National Party (ANP), influential in north west frontier province, and Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League, they said.

ANP officials said the party's sole minister in the federal government and three ministers in the province, which borders on Afghanistan, would resign and its legislators would sit in the opposition.

refused to accept ANP's demand to rename the province Pakhtoonkhawa to give an ethnic Pashtun identity to a region largely inhabited by Pashtu-speaking people, the sources said.

"The matter is over," the mass circulation Urdu-language Daily Jang quoted a Pakistan Muslim League (PML) leader, Sardar Mehtar Ahmed Khan, Chief Minister in NWFP, as saying after a final round of talks with ANP here late Wednesday.

The League was ready to accept a new non-controversial name for the province, the chief minister said, but Pakhtoonkhawa was an "assault against the very ideology of the Muslim League."

BJP, UF playing politics of 'division': Sonia

BHOPAL, Feb 26: Sonia Gandhi yesterday hit out at the BJP and the United Front (UF) for playing politics of 'division' saying if any of them came to power, the country's unity would be threatened, reports PTI.

Addressing election meetings at Bhind, Shahdol, Bilaspur and Raigarh, without naming any party, she alleged that they were playing politics in the name of religion, caste and region and if they came to power, the weak and downtrodden would be crushed and the country's unity and integrity endangered.

She said the Congress alone, which had given nine stable governments at the centre in the last 45 years, could provide another stable government which was the need of the hour.

At Bhind, Sonia Gandhi spoke of the contribution of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi to the development of the Chambal region.

In Bilaspur, she recounted the love and affection that the two prime ministers had for the Chhattisgarh region.

In an obvious reference to BJP, Sonia alleged that although Hinduism advocated peace and non-violence, some parties appeared to be in favour of violence and destruction.

At Bilaspur, Shahdol and Raigarh, a large number of women and tribals thronged the meeting venues to hear the star campaigner.

She said Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had special feeling for the tribals and had introduced several welfare schemes for them.

BRRIEFLY

Princess Margaret returns to UK: Queen Elizabeth II's younger sister, Princess Margaret, Thursday arrived in Britain for medical treatment after suffering a minor stroke on vacation in the Caribbean. AP reports from London.

A scheduled British Airways flight carrying the princess landed at Gatwick Airport, south of London, shortly before 7 am (0700 GMT).

The British Broadcasting Corp said the Princess, 67, would be taken to the King Edward VII Hospital for Officers in central London to undergo further tests. In January, the Princess' 97-year-old mother, the Queen Mother Elizabeth, was given a new hip at the same hospital.

Quakes hit Japan: A pair of moderate earthquakes hit off Japan's eastern coast Thursday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, AP says from Tokyo.

The first quake, with a preliminary magnitude of 4.7 was centred about 30 kilometres below the seabed off the coast of Chiba prefecture, or state, northeast of Tokyo, the Meteorological Agency said. It struck at 02:32 am (1732 GMT Wednesday). The second, with a preliminary magnitude of 4.3 was centred about 30 kilometres below the seabed off the coast of Ibaraki prefecture, also northeast of Tokyo, the agency said. It struck at 10:44 am (0144 GMT). The quakes were centered in close proximity to each other, the agency said.

Violent crime on rise in Greece: Greece saw a steady increase of violent crime with the sharpest rise being murder, the Athens newspaper reported Wednesday. Xinhua reports from Athens.

An 80-page report, which was prepared by an expert commission set up earlier last year by Greece's Public Order Minister George Romeos and released Tuesday, showed a significant increase in four out of five categories of violent crime (armed robbery, theft, murder, rape and drug) in 1997.

Over 140 rapes reported daily in SA: More than 140 rapes and attempted rapes were reported on average every day in South Africa during the first nine months of 1997. South African Press Association (SPA) reported Wednesday. Xinhua reports from Johannesburg.

According to the report, Safety and Security Minister Sydney Mufamadi said in reply to a parliamentary question that a total of 37,905 rapes and attempted rapes had been reported for the period, compared with 36,137 in the same period a year before.

Flu sweepings Greece: A flu is sweeping most parts of Greece with hospital outpatient clinics around the country being swamped in recent days by young and elderly patients suffering from flu, the worst to hit Greece over the past three years, Xinhua reports from Athens.

The virus is extremely contagious and doctors are urging extra care for the patients or those suffering from asthma or other respiratory diseases.

Yeltsin to visit Indonesia in Apr: Russian President Boris Yeltsin will visit Indonesia from April 14 to 17 for what would be his first meeting with president Suharto. The Jakarta Post newspaper reported yesterday. AP says from Jakarta.

The newspaper said Yeltsin would come to Jakarta after a visit to Japan.

"It is true that Yeltsin will visit and it has been planned for a long time," the Jakarta Post quoted Foreign Minister Ali Alatas as saying.

Editor of Congolese daily held: The editor of the Congolese daily newspaper The Potential was arrested Wednesday after it published an article citing the recent arrest and internal exile of a top opposition leader, AP reports from Kinshasa.

National Security Forces arrested Modeste Mutungo Mutishayi in the capital, Kinshasa, said Moïse Musangana, a reporter for the newspaper.

AP photo executive honoured: Horst Faas, a two-time Pulitzer prize winning photographer, received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the British Picture Editors' Guild on Wednesday evening, AP reports from London.

Prime Minister Tony Blair presented the award in a ceremony at London's Guildhall and praised the AP veteran for his outstanding contributions to photo-journalism, including Pulitzer prizes for coverage of Vietnam in 1965 and of Bangladesh independence in 1971.

Premadasa supplied arms to LTTE?

COLOMBO, Feb 26: An enquiry commission has claimed to have unearthed evidence to show that former Sri Lanka president late Premadasa had supplied a large cache of weapons to the LTTE to fight the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF).

The high level judicial commission inquiring into the assassination of popular army commander Lt Gen Denzil Kobakaduwa in 1992, on the basis of the findings, said Premadasa and several bureaucrats and army officials supplied large stocks of weapons and money to the LTTE to fight the IPKF.

The three-judge presidential commission headed by a supreme court judge also said that these weapons included some imported ones.

All this was done at a time when an international agreement (Indo-Lanka accord) was in force, the report of the commission published in the state-run Daily News said yesterday.

Authorities step up security for Sonia

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: Indian authorities have increased security for the widow of assassinated former premier Rajiv Gandhi after suspicious documents were found on a dead body near the venue of one of her election rallies, a report said today, reports AFP.

Police discovered the body in the town of Bilaspur in central India where Sonia Gandhi addressed a meeting Wednesday, the United News of India (UNI) news agency said.

The body was found with a diary, a map of Bilaspur and a sketch of the platform from which she spoke, the news agency said.

The dead man was identified as AR Venkataraju, an engineer from the southern city of Coimbatore.

A string of explosions earlier this month near a Hindu nationalist rally killed 58 people in Coimbatore, in the state of Tamil Nadu.

ROK president proposes meet with opposition

SEOUL, Feb 26: Newly installed President Kim Dae-jung on Thursday proposed a meeting with opposition leaders to break an impasse over the appointment of his prime minister, reports AP.

Only hours after Kim took the oath of office Wednesday, opposition members in Parliament blocked ratification of his choice for the nation's No. 2 job.

The setback threw into question Kim's ability to enact some of the economic and political reforms he has promised to lift the country out of its financial crisis.

"To show his deep concern about the situation, President Kim proposes a meeting with opposition leaders as early as tomorrow," chief presidential spokesman Par Ji-won said.

US rules out early lifting of sanctions against Iraq

WASHINGTON, Feb 26: Fending off Republican criticism of a UN-brokered deal with Iraq, the US government has insisted that military force remained an option and ruled out any swift easing of economic sanctions, reports AP.

We retain the authority, the responsibility, the means and the will to use military force if that is required," Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said of the agreement UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan worked out last Sunday with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

But Senate Republican leader Trent Lott denounced the UN agreement as a cave-in and said accepting it would be the same as buying "peace at any price."

"It is always possible to get a deal if you give enough away," Lott said in a speech on the Senate floor.

"The deal negotiated by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan with Iraq does not adequately address the threat posed by Saddam Hussein," he said.

It was the first clear rejection of the deal by a congressional leader and may make it more difficult for President Bill Clinton to convince Americans that the negotiated settlement was a better alternative to US-led airstrikes against Iraq. Lott portrayed the deal as an abdication of US power to the United Nations.

"The secretary-general is calling the shots," Lott said. "The United States is not."

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright defended the administration's Iraq policy before a House Appropriations subcommittee. "It is real-world policy, not a feel-good policy," she said.

Some in Congress say reject

it," Albright said of the agreement. "We believe the wisest course is to test it."

Touching on some of the fuzzy provisions, Albright said the diplomats who will be added to UN inspection teams will be "observers only," with the monitors conducting the searches.

She also said an arms control specialist — not a technician — will be added to the panel in charge and will head the teams that go to the so-called presidential palaces.

The administration, which has described its acceptance as only tentative, said the deal sets up a "win-win situation" in that either UN monitors will be able to get at suspected hidden biological and chemical weapons or, if Saddam backs out of his promise of unfettered inspections, support for a military attack would be greater than during the latest crisis.

Some in Congress say reject

Mutiny in Albanian prison: 5 killed in another incident

TIRANA, Feb 26: A mutiny broke out in a prison in the Albanian capital Tirana, interior ministry official Sokol Bare said Wednesday night, reports AFP.

Shooting was heard by reporters — including one from AFP — not far from the prison, where access roads were blocked by large numbers of police, including members of special units.

The prisoners broke down the doors of their cells and assembled in one room, Bare said, without giving further details.

There were unconfirmed reports that three prison guards had been taken hostage.

Meanwhile, five people have been killed by a group of armed men in the southern Albanian town of Berat, the local police chief there told AFP on Wednesday.

Vasi Cama said that a group of four or five armed men entered a cafe in the centre of the town, 130 kilometres (80 miles) south of Tirana and opened fire against the clients killing four, two of them brothers.

Off the Record



A model wears a deep blue, sleeveless, velvet dress with gold embroidery from the Autumn/Winter 1998/99 collection of the Ghost label during London Fashion Week Wednesday. — AP/UNB photo

Voyage to see Titanic wreck

LONDON, Feb 26: A tourist firm has said it will launch submarine trips to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean to view the wreck of the Titanic, reports AP.

Wildwings travel firm based in Bristol, western England, said deep-dive submarines will circulate the wreck of the luxury liner, which sank in 1912 with the loss of 1,513 out of the 2,224 people aboard.

There will be no physical contact and no attempt will be made to remove souvenirs or anything like that. We will respect the vessel as a grave at all times," the firm's managing director John Broadie-Good said Wednesday.

Broadie-Good said the trips, which will cost 19,000 pounds (30,000 dollars) would start in early August and will use two mini-submarines, which can take two tourists and a pilot each.

"The subs will spend about 2-3 hours around the wreck. The purpose is solely to see, photograph and video the ship," he said.

The round trip from Britain would last about five days, Broadie-Good said, involving air flights to Canada and a sea journey to a docking ship in the area of the Atlantic above the ill-fated White Star liner, which lies at an average depth of 12,460 ft (3,800 metres) on the sea bed.

US seeks data from China on trafficking in human organs

WASHINGTON, Feb 26: The US State Department said Wednesday it has raised with Chinese authorities allegations that organs of executed Chinese prisoners have been used for transplants, reports AP.

"These are very serious allegations. This is abhorrent behaviour if true," spokesman James P. Rubin said.

Rubin was responding to news reports about the arrest in New York of two Chinese men charged with attempting to traffic in the body parts of executed Chinese prisoners.

He said the overall issue has been brought up repeatedly with Chinese officials but he had no information on any response.

Cheng Young Wang, 41, and Xingqi Fu, 35, were arrested Friday on charges of trying to sell corneas, kidneys, skin, livers, pancreases and lungs for transplant. Cheng claimed to be a former criminal prosecutor in China.

Students march for political reform in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Feb 26: More than 1,000 students marched Thursday in a rally for political reform ahead of a special assembly expected to re-elect President Suharto to a seventh five-year term, reports AP.

Students wearing yellow jackets and chanting "Reform" gathered at a campus of the University of Indonesia on the outskirts of Jakarta. One banner read: "We want a clean government." The police did not interfere.

It was the second day in a row that student protesters have criticized Suharto, who has ruled the country for 32 years. On Wednesday, hundreds of demonstrators rallied at a campus in central Jakarta.

UP govt faces confidence vote

LUCKNOW, Feb 26: Amid fears of violence, microphones were removed and cellular phones and briefs cases banned from the legislature in India's largest state Thursday for a confidence vote to decide who controls the state government, reports AP.

Speaker Kesrinhath Tripathi, who presides over the Uttar Pradesh state legislature, said Wednesday that some opposition members statements indicated possible violence. Also, the confidence vote will be decided for the first time by an open ballot and not by raising hands and counting heads.

The fears of violence were not unfounded. On Oct. 21, several legislators in the 425-member assembly were injured in a brawl among members just ahead of a confidence vote. Members wrenched out microphones from their sockets and

hurled them and threw name plates at one another.

Thursday's vote stemmed from state Governor Romesh Bhandari's dismissal of the state government, led by India's biggest Hindu nationalist group, the Bharatiya Janata Party. The state High Court overturned Bhandari's decision, and the Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the vote.

Bhandari's decision Saturday came a day ahead of parliamentary voting in Uttar Pradesh. The BJP alleged it was aimed at allowing the anti-BJP parties to influence voters.

Bhandari did not give the BJP a chance to show its strength in the legislature as suggested by India's president. He accepted the word of the Lock Tantrick Congress that it had a majority and installed Jagadambika Pal as Uttar

Pradesh's chief minister, replacing Kalyan Singh.

Pal is supported by socialists, the Congress Party and a low-caste group.

Kalyan Singh had bundled loyal lawmakers into a safe-house outside state capital Lucknow, the Times of India newspaper said Thursday.

Armed guards patrolled the Shivgarh Resort, a large motel 35 kilometres away, to prevent opposition leaders from luring away the legislators whose support for Singh has wavered, the daily said.

At the legislature, technicians removed all but four microphones to prevent lawmakers from hurling them at opponents. Carpenters nailed nameplates onto the desks and plainclothes policemen stood near the house marshals, news agencies reported.



Party workers garland BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee (second from right), and Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray (second from left), at an election campaign rally in Mumbai Wednesday. Both the right wing Hindu parties are alliance partners for the general elections. — AP/UNB photo