

NATO calls emergency meet to review situation

World leaders condemn massacre of 45 Kosovo Albanians

RACAK, Yugoslavia, Jan 17: World leaders voiced outrage and considered urgent responses Sunday to the massacre of 45 ethnic Albanians whose bodies were found in the hills of southern Kosovo after an attack by Serb forces, reports AP.

Verifiers and journalists came across the carnage on Saturday morning in Racak, 25 km south of the provincial capital, Pristina, after having been barred from the site by Serbian police the previous day. The bodies, found shot or mutilated, were heaped together in a muddy ravine.

US State Department spokesman James P. Rubin said ambassadors from the 16 NATO countries would meet today in Brussels "in light of this outrageous situation."

Rubin pointed out that NATO in October developed contingency plans for dealing with Kosovo, the Serbian province

where ethnic Albanian separatists have been fighting with Serb police and troops. The plan includes the possible bombing of Serb installations.

"There should be no doubt of NATO's resolve," Rubin said.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged a swift investigation. Albania called for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council after the "inhuman massacre."

The United Nations' Yugoslav war crimes tribunal opened an investigation, and chief prosecutor Louise Arbour was preparing to go to Kosovo with or without permission from Yugoslav authorities.

"This was a deliberate and indiscriminate act of murder designed to sow fear among the people of Kosovo," said US President Bill Clinton, condemning the atrocity and calling it "a clear violation" of the Serbs' ceasefire agreement.

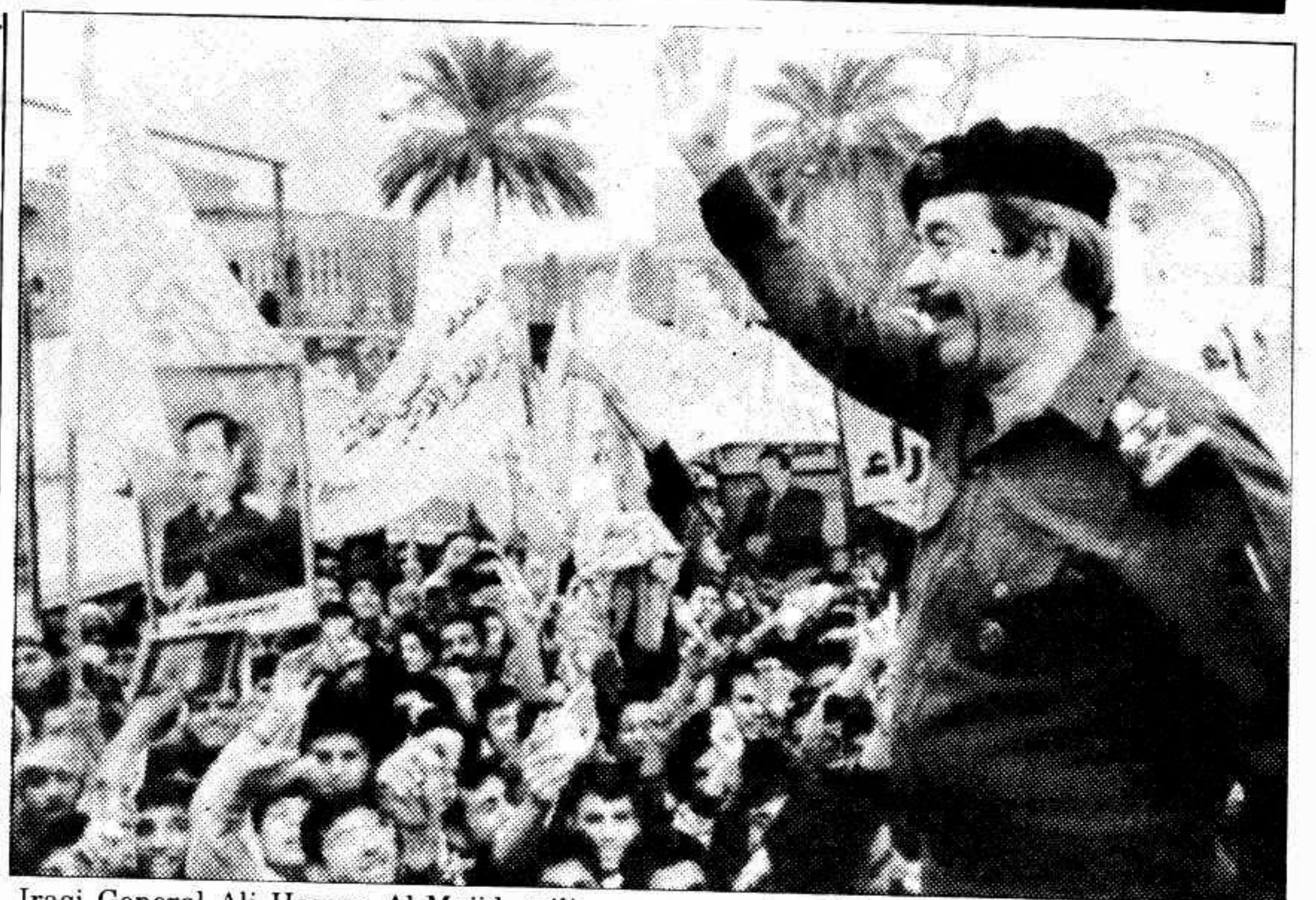
The Kosovo Liberation Army said the death toll from the massacre was 51, including nine of its fighters and a 3-month-old baby, which could not be confirmed.

The grisly discovery by international monitors included the bodies of three women, a 12-year-old and many older men, all in civilian clothes.

AFP adds: NATO called an emergency meeting for today to review the situation in Kosovo after the massacre of 45 ethnic Albanians by Serbian security forces in Kosovo, the US State Department said.

"We will urge that the NATO review and update contingency plans for implementation of the October 27 activation orders which remain in effect," a spokesman said.

"There should be no doubt of NATO's resolve to secure a just settlement of the Kosovo crisis," she added.



Iraqi General Ali Hassan Al-Majid, military commander of the southern region of Iraq, a member of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council and a cousin of Saddam Hussein, waves to the crowd at a demonstration in Baghdad on Saturday, to protest United Nations sanctions against Iraq. — AP/UNB photo

2000 killed in battle for control of Freetown Rebels threaten to intensify bloodshed in Sierra Leone

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Jan 17: Rebels battling to oust Sierra Leone's elected government doused hopes and threatened on Saturday to intensify the bloodshed unless their jailed leader is released, reports AP.

A rebel official said his forces will abandon their proposed seven-day ceasefire, set to begin Monday evening, unless Sierra Leone's President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah agrees to release their jailed founder, Foday Sankoh.

"We are hoping that there will be a significant shift on Kabbah's part between today and Monday but if it doesn't, we fight and fight to the bitter end," the rebel official said on condition of anonymity. The official spoke by telephone from an undisclosed location in Sierra Leone.

AFP adds: Fighting between the West African ECOMOG forces and rebels for control of the capital of Sierra Leone, has

claimed more than 2000 lives since January 6, according to converging tolls compiled by AFP on Saturday night.

There had been more than 2,000 dead over the past few days and a large number of people seriously wounded who have not received any medical care, an ECOMOG spokesman with ECOMOG told AFP.

"Three days ago, the streets of the city were littered with decomposing bodies" said the soldier who has French nationality.

Fortunately, since ECOMOG has progressed in Freetown and made several districts safe, families are recovering and burying their dead in the two municipal cemeteries in this zone, he said.

"2,000 dead or perhaps even more" was the estimate of an Irish nun who was evacuated late on Saturday. She described the situation in Freetown as "desperate."

Gul wins Femina Miss India Universe '99 crown

PUNE, Jan 17: Twenty-year-old Delhi girl, Gul, won the Femina Miss India Universe '99 crown at a glittering ceremony here last night, reports PTI.

Yukta and Shivangi, both from Mumbai, won the Miss India world and Miss India Asia-Pacific titles respectively.

Of the 29 girls participated in the contest, nine were selected for the semi-final and the number was then pruned to five for the final round.

Actresses Sri Devi, Urmila Matondkar, Dimple Kapadia, Karishma Kapoor, former captain of West Indies cricket team Vivian Richards, tabla maestro Zakir Husain, industrialist Anil Ambani and journalist Vir Sanghvi were the judges.

Participants not optimistic about outcome DPRK-ROK talks begin in Geneva today

SEOUL, Jan 17: Talks on forging a peace treaty to end the half century old Korean War began in Geneva on Monday, with the tense negotiations for the first time, reports AFP.

Do South Korean officials do not expect any major developments at the talks despite some hopes that Pyongyang's leading role may prompt it to make uncharacteristic concessions.

"It is premature to expect anything from the four party peace talks at this moment," a senior government official told AFP. "There will be many more meetings for many more years and this is only one of them," he said.

South and North Korea, the United States and China will take part in the fourth round of the talks which are aimed at replacing an armistice that technically ended the 1950-53 Korean War with a permanent peace treaty.

US President Bill Clinton and former South Korean leader Kim Young Sam agreed in 1996 — to launch the so called four party talks in a bid to finally stabilise the world's last cold war frontier.

Washington and Beijing take part as the respective battlefield allies of South and North Korea and as the key nations help maintain the tense truce which frequently comes under strain from Pyongyang's spy infiltrations.

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Israel had plans to assassinate Saddam Hussein

LONDON, Jan 17: Israel planned to assassinate Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein last month, but cancelled the operation at the last minute because it coincided with US-British air attacks on Iraq it was reported here today, says AFP.

The Sunday Times said that Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, had devised a plan to kill Saddam with guided missiles during a visit to his mistress in northwestern Iraq.

But after months of training by Israeli commandos which were to have been flown into Iraq, the plan was shelved because of the air attacks and because Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon and Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai refused to give final approval, said the British weekly.

They apparently doubted the accuracy of Mossad's information about Saddam Hussein's whereabouts according to the Sunday Times.

1.8 m Iraqis died since '90 as result of Gulf War, UN ban

BAGHDAD, Jan 17: More than 1.8 million Iraqis have died since 1990 as a result of the Gulf War and UN sanctions, Iraqi Health Minister Umid Medhat Mubarak said on Saturday, reports AFP.

In all 1,873,464 Iraqis have died as a result of a combination of the 1991 Gulf War, subsequent allied military action and the eight and a half year old UN embargo, Mubarak told the official news agency INA.

The dead included 428,920 children under the age of five, he said in a breakthrough issued to mark the eighth anniversary of the start of the Gulf War.

He accused the United States and Britain of making the situation worse by holding up the approval of contracts for food and medicine under the UN oil-for-food programme.

Iraq has taken delivery of only 620 million dollars worth of medicines since the programme was launched in 1996, he said.

"This figure is too low," he said, adding that Iraq had only received five per cent of the contracts from the third round of the programme which ended eight months ago.

The oil-for-food programme allows Iraq to export 5.2 billion dollars worth of oil every six months to pay for basic imports.

But at current depressed prices, the country is struggling to export three billion dollars worth.

Infant mortality rate has almost quadrupled since 1990, Mubarak said, rising from 24 per thousand in 1990 to a current level of 98 per thousand.

Among children over five years old, the monthly death rate has increased to 8,600 from its 1990 level of 1,600.

Mubarak blamed lack of medicines and malnutrition for the reappearance of diseases such as malaria and typhoid, and said the chances of falling ill had tripled.

US, DPRK open talks on suspected N-site

GENEVA, Jan 17: There was no sign of progress Saturday in US efforts to gain access to a suspected North Korean underground nuclear weapons site, which has increased tensions in one of the most volatile parts of the world, reports AP.

North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan told Korean journalists that a first day of talks failed to narrow the "huge gap" between Pyongyang and Washington.

The United States has rejected North Korean demands for \$300 million as an entry fee to the Kumchangni underground site, which Washington presumes to be nuclear related and which was revealed last summer by satellite spy photos.

Pyeongyang wants the payment in compensation as it says it will no longer be able to use the facility once it has been

seen by outsiders. But it denies it is being used for atomic weapons.

US ambassador Charles Kartman brushed aside journalists' questions.

"It was just another day of talking about the underground problems," he said after the meeting at the US diplomatic mission in Geneva. "I don't want to comment now on the content of the talks."

The meeting continues Sunday at the North Korean diplomatic mission.

Two previous sessions failed to make any progress.

In a visit to South Korea on the eve of the Geneva meeting, US Defense Secretary William Cohen said North Korea risked losing financial aid for a huge nuclear energy project agreed in 1994 if it didn't open up to inspection.

Nigerian beaten to death for trying to abduct girl in Maharashtra

BOMBAY, Jan 17: A Nigerian national was beaten to death by an angry mob after he allegedly tried to abduct a girl in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, police said today, reports AFP.

Abolu Olapode Malauo, 33, a "patient suffering from mental illness," tried to abduct a girl student from the state's northern district of Miraroad on Thursday, deputy police chief Ravendra Sengonkar said.

The girl's mother who was waiting to pick her up outside the school, raised an alarm and about 30 people who were around the school premises chased and pounced on him," Sengonkar said.

The police official said Malalou ran towards a nearby police post and tried to snatch a pistol from a constable.

"But before he could manage that, the mob was on him and they beat him up mercilessly. He fell unconscious and was declared dead on arrival at a local hospital," Sengonkar said.

Saddam denounces UN sanctions on Iraq

BAGHDAD, Jan 17: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein denounced UN sanctions Saturday, saying nothing could compare to their "mischief and damage," reports AP.

In a speech broadcast on Arab News Network, a London-based satellite television channel, Saddam asked "why the evil forces have targeted Iraq alone and focused on it in such a manner and for such a long time."

His speech marked the eighth anniversary of the outbreak of the 1991 Persian Gulf War in which a US-led coalition of forces liberated Kuwait from seven months of Iraqi occupation.

Saddam condemned the Gulf War bombardment of Baghdad in which US missiles destroyed bridges and government buildings and killed civilians.

"On this day (in 1991), some have committed the crime of

striking Baghdad with their missiles," he said.

Earlier, about 6,000 people marched through the center of the city in a government-organized demonstration against a US proposal before the UN Security Council to remove the cap on Iraqi oil exports.

The demonstrators chanted "Down with America!" and tore a US flag to shreds.

Saddam said Iraq would eventually wear down its "enemies" — a reference to the United States and Britain, which have taken the toughest line on the maintenance of the UN trade sanctions imposed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

"Those evil doers will be defeated and driven to despair," he said.

The UN cap on oil sales is part of the oil-for-food programme, begun in 1996, which allows Iraq to export a limited amount of oil to purchase food,

King Hussein announces 'sweeping reforms'

AMMAN, Jan 17: Jordan's King Hussein announced a programme of "sweeping reforms" in an address to the nation from London Saturday ahead of his return to Amman next week, reports AP.

"We must soon launch a programme of sweeping reforms in our national affairs and settle all the problems which are concerning us," he said in the address broadcast on public television. Senior political sources said earlier Saturday that the king, 63, will take "crucial decisions" in the coming weeks concerning the succession to the throne.

The king, 63, who returns to Jordan Tuesday after a six-month absence in the United States for cancer treatment, is expected to revive the "family council," a consultative council on the monarchy written into Jordan's royal family law.

Pinochet resigned to dying in UK if loses bid to back home

LONDON, Jan 17: Chile's former dictator Augusto Pinochet has told his family and close friends that he is resigned to dying in Britain if he loses his bid to return home, a report in the Sunday Telegraph said here, reports AFP.

"I am resigned to my fate," he was quoted as saying by the British newspaper even if that means dying here, "this is part of my sacrifice to the fatherlands."

"If that is the last thing I'll have to do, so be it," Pinochet said to attend the event.

The conference is also co-organised by the Indian ministries of Environment and Forests and Health, the World Health Organisation, Johns Hopkins University (U.S.), and the Friends of Lead-Free Children, U.S.

The Bank says lead occurs naturally in the earth's crust. When ingested, inhaled or absorbed through skin, it is highly toxic to human beings. Lead is not biodegradable, it persists in the soil, in the air, in drinking water and in homes. It never disappears, only accumulates where it is deposited and can poison generations of children and adults unless properly removed.

There is no level of lead in blood which can be considered

page, the first time he has been photographed inside his luxury house seated in an armchair in jovial conversation.

Pinochet who has rejected the authority of the British courts to judge him told his family last week "I am answerable to only two people — God and the Chileans and I can stand honourably in front of both."

Pinochet was arrested on a warrant from Spanish investigating magistrate Baltasar Garçon probing the deaths of Spanish nationals during Pinochet's 1973-1990 rule which saw more than 3,000 people disappeared or murdered.

Meanwhile, the seven law Lords who will rule on the fate of former Chilean strongman Augusto Pinochet are among Britain's most eminent judges.

At the country's court of last resort, they will decide if he should face extradition to Spain on charges of genocide.

BRIEFLY

19 killed in Nepal bus crash: At least 19 people were killed and 25 injured when a passenger bus crashed and fell into a river early Saturday, state-run radio announced, AFP says from Kathmandu.

It said the bus was heading towards Gorkha district from Narayangadh when it ran off the road near Jalbire into the Trishuli River. The radio said 15 died instantly and another four while being treated for injuries at Bharatpur Hospital. Another 25 passengers were being treated for injuries, the radio said.

BBC to announce more cuts: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) plans next month to announce large cuts in the world service, including the closure of its German and Czech operations, the Sunday newspaper, The Observer, said, Reuters reports from London.

It said the cuts were part of a three-year plan to slash 21 million pounds (\$35 million US dollars) from the budget. Broadcasts in Hungarian, Russian, Arabic and Thai are also to be slashed and 100 jobs will go.

Cholera kills 56 in Tanzania: An outbreak of cholera has killed 56 people in southwest Tanzania's Rukwa region, a newspaper said on Saturday, Xinhua reports from Dar es Salaam.

Regional medical officer Langwini Wela was quoted by the African as saying that more than 500 people have been infected with the disease which is spreading "like a bushfire."

Pulitzer prize winner dies: Monroe "Bud" Karmin, winner of a 1967 Pulitzer prize in journalism for stories investigating the influence on gambling of organised crime, has died after a long battle with cancer. He was 69, AP says from Maryland.

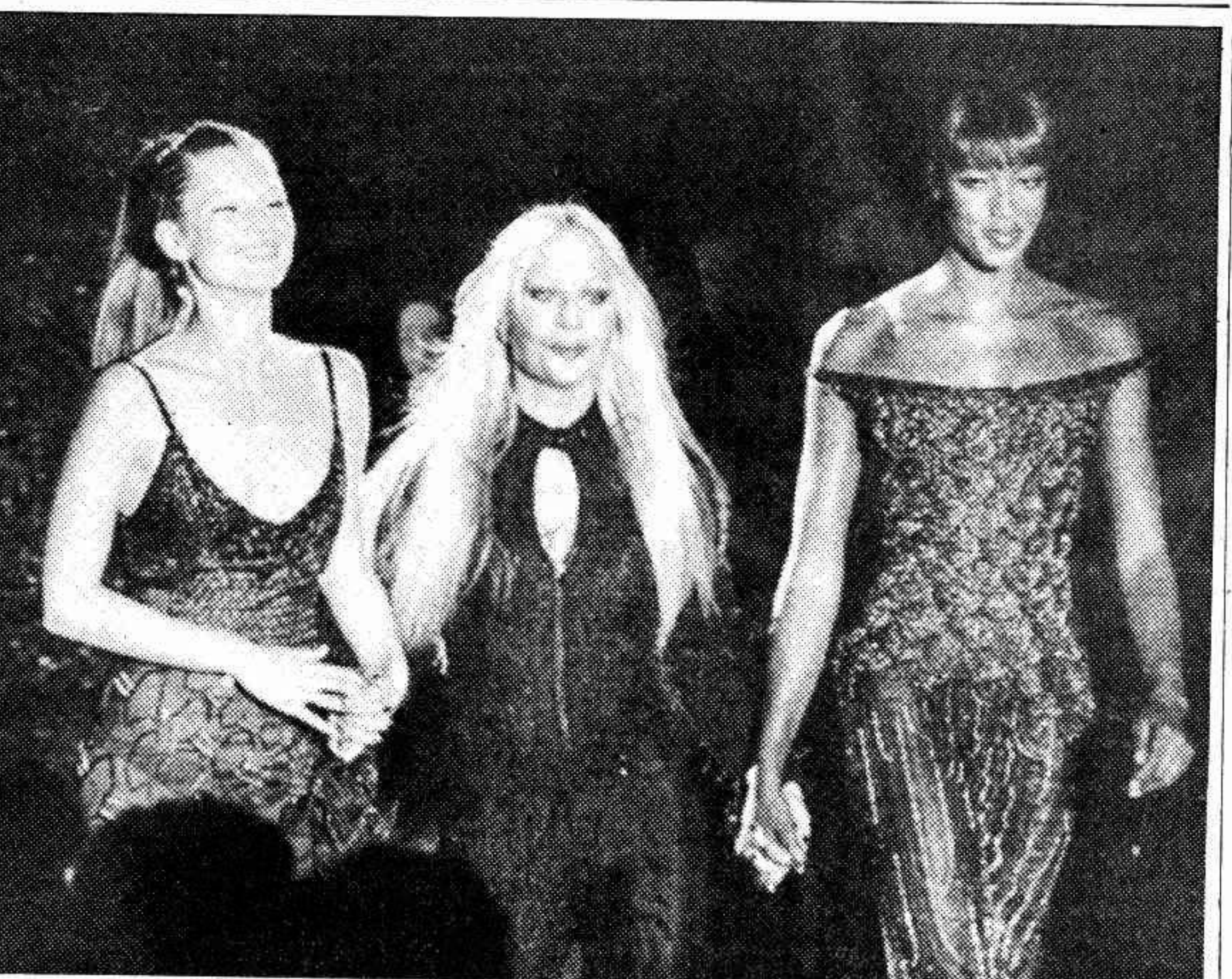
Karmin was born in Mineola, New York, and graduated from the University of Illinois in 1950. After service in the Air Force from 1950 to 1952 and studies at the Columbia University School of Journalism, Karmin joined The Wall Street Journal. He and colleague Stanley Penn won their Pulitzer Prize for an expose of Mafia dominance of gambling in the Bahamas. Karmin left the Journal in 1974 and worked for the Chicago Daily News, Knight Ridder Financial News and US News and World Report before joining Bloomberg News as editor at large.

5 Maoist rebels killed in Bihar: At least five extremists of the banned Maoist communist centre were killed in a fierce encounter with the police in Dindin forest in Bihar's Aurangabad district on Saturday night, PTI reports from Gaya.

The police said that it had so far recovered only one body, the others probably having been taken away by their colleagues under cover of darkness. One regular double barrel gun was recovered from the spot.

Blast outside US embassy in Moscow: A car exploded outside the US Embassy in Moscow yesterday, the private NTV Television Station reported, AFP says from Moscow.

There were no immediate details on any damage caused but one person in the car at the time of the blast is thought to have survived the explosion, the station cited police on the scene as saying. Police sealed off the area around the embassy in downtown Moscow. It was not immediately clear what had caused the explosion, which occurred outside a police checkpoint.



British top model Naomi Campbell, right, and Kate Moss hold the hand of Italian fashion designer Donatella Versace, centre, after Versace's 1999 spring/summer haute couture collection presented in Paris on Saturday. — AP/UNB photo

WHO's goal to eradicate polio from India by 2000 appears distant

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: His withered legs curled under him in an old but sturdy wheelchair, a polio victim spends his days on the sidewalk outside a Hindu temple, surviving on alms, reports AP.

It is such scenes, repeated on thousands of street corners throughout India, that the World Health Organisation hoped to erase when it set 2000 as the deadline for wiping out polio. But with 2000 around the corner, WHO's goal appears distant in India, where weak infrastructure and a huge number of cases — more than in any other country — have slowed progress.

"We have to catch up," said R K Saboo, former president of

Rotary International, the Chicago-based service group that has made the polio campaign its own.

For the last three years, Rotary has given money and, perhaps more importantly, galvanised thousands of volunteers to educate the public, transport supplies and staff makeshift clinics during annual, India-wide vaccination drives. With Rotary's help, nearly 125 million children were given oral vaccines across India on December 6 and follow-up doses were scheduled for Sunday and in March.

The vaccination campaign is an extraordinary achievement in a country with bad roads and few clinics. Everything from

helicopters to camels are mobilised to deliver vaccines to remote areas.

The highly infectious polio virus spreads to the spinal cord and brain, causing paralysis and sometimes death. Poor sanitation — a hallmark of India's overcrowded cities — contributes to the virus' spread.

Thanks to the Rotary drives, the number of reported new polio cases in India dropped from 4,791 in 1994 to 2,489 in 1997. Still, cases are reported from almost every district in the country and an estimated 10 million children have not been immunised.

Some illiterate villagers fear the vaccine will make their

children sterile. Reluctant parents often take their children with them to work to keep them away from health workers on vaccination days, or they say that the child is sick or too small to be treated.

In the past, 60 per cent of the world's polio cases were in India, said O P Vaish, chairman of Rotary's India polio campaign. Vaish said India still has more cases than any other country, though it is difficult to give an exact figure because the situation is changing quickly.

India's immunisation drive began in 1995, years after many other countries. It was delayed in part because the federal government initially was uncertain it could overcome the or-

ganisational difficulties.

Despite the hurdles, India so far has immunised 92 per cent of children younger than 5, giving them an oral vaccine twice within six weeks in a year. And once a new polio case turns up in a hospital or clinic, a house-to-house immunisation drive is launched in the area.

"This is most extraordinary to see the level of surveillance developed by India in just one year. China took four years to have that kind of surveillance," said Jon Kim Andrus, WHO's regional adviser for polio eradication.

Still, YN Chaturvedi, the top bureaucrat in the federal Health Ministry, said India won't record its last polio case before

2002.

WHO declares a country polio-free three years after the last polio case is reported. Even after no new cases are reported, India will have to continue immunisation for three to four years.

Polio has been wiped out in 155 nations, including all of North and South America and western Europe, as well as China and Australia. But even children in polio-free countries must be vaccinated until the virus is eradicated worldwide because infected travelers can easily spread polio.

The disease is endemic in 116 countries, mainly in Africa and Asia.