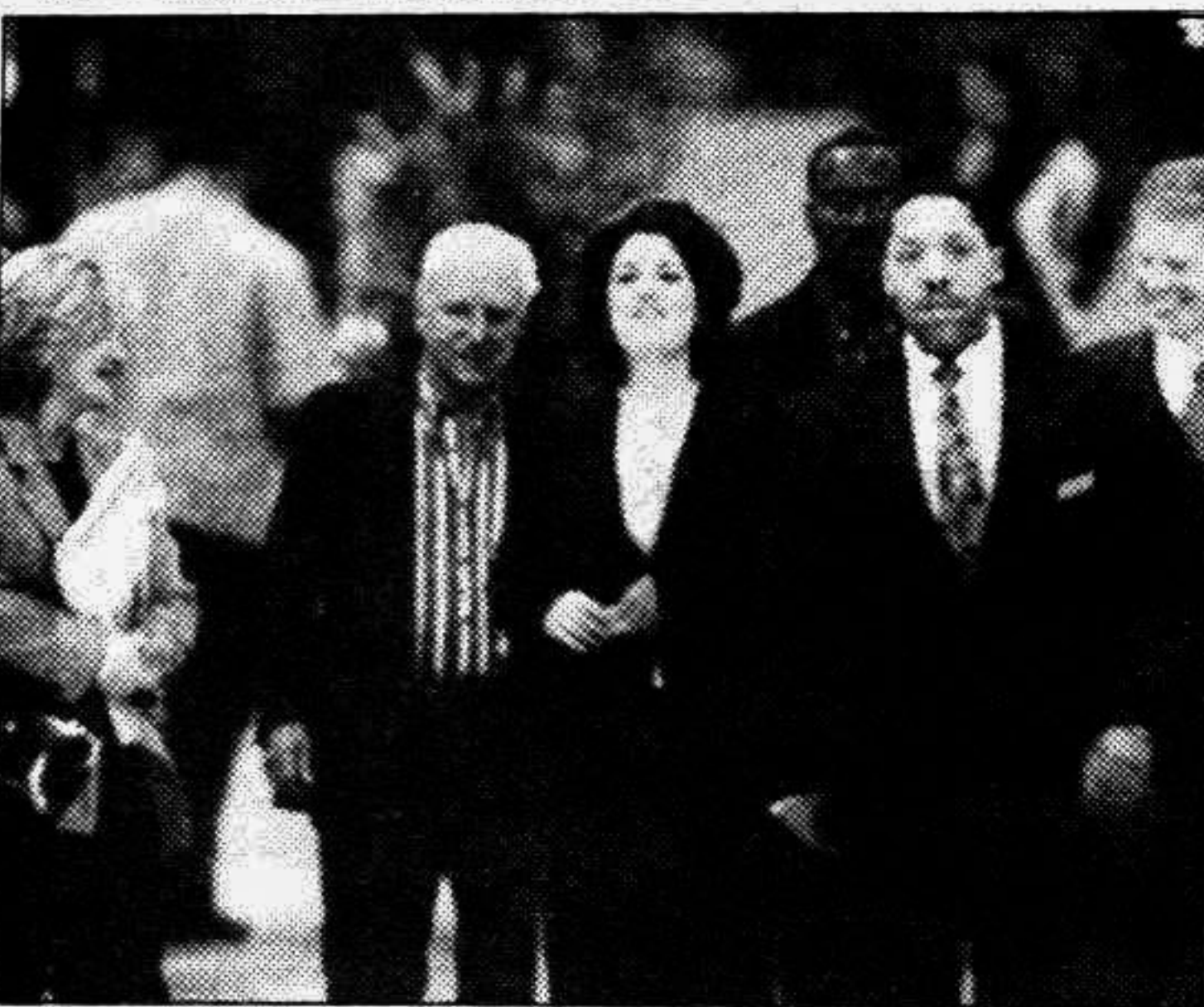


BRIEFLY



Former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, centre, walks through the lobby of a Washington hotel Sunday morning. Lewinsky arrived in Washington Saturday, to submit to an interview sought by House prosecutors in President Clinton's impeachment trial or "forfeit her protections" under her immunity deal with independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. — UNB/AP photo

Blast kills 35 in China: A gas explosion at a privately run coal mine in China's southwestern province of Guizhou has killed 35 people and injured eight, the official newspaper Worker's Daily said yesterday. AP reports from Beijing.

The mine's owner, Huang Jinyou, and three other people have been arrested in connection with the Jan. 16 blast at the mine in Hezhang county, 1,800 southwest of Beijing, the report said. Nine days after the explosion, one miner was still missing.

Queen Mum undergoes surgery: Britain's Queen Mother, 98, had a small operation on her nose Sunday to stop it bleeding, the Mirror tabloid reported Monday. AFP says from London.

She underwent a cauterisation of the internet blood vessels on the advice of aides worried at frequent nose bleeds over the past three weeks, the paper said.

The operation comes a year after she had her second hip replacement operation in two years following a fall while visiting the Sandringham stable.

Japan approves sale of Viagra: Japan's Health Ministry has approved the anti-impotence drug Viagra for use in Japan, a ministry official said yesterday. AP reports from Tokyo.

The drug's developer, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, Inc., was given permission to import and produce the drug here, said a ministry official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Viagra will go on sale in Japan in between one and two months, said company spokesman Takaichi Hirota. The price in Japan has not yet been decided, he said.

S'pore PM leaves hospital: Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong was discharged yesterday from Singapore General Hospital after a three-day treatment for urinary tract infection, the government said. AP reports from Singapore.

Goh, 57, has recovered completely, the government said in a press statement. Goh took office in 1990 as Singapore's second prime minister.

US agriculture secy in Russia: US Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman arrived in Moscow on Sunday for a two-day visit focusing on American food supplies to Russia, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported. AP says from Moscow.

Glickman and his Russian counterpart Viktor Semionov will discuss the possible donation of US corn and vegetable seeds, as well as the delivery of new agricultural machinery and technologies to Russia, ITAR-Tass said.

Chinese PM to visit Russia in Feb: Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji will pay an official visit to Russia next month, Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Duguang said yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

Zhu and his Russian counterpart Yevgeny Primakov will hold the fourth regular meeting between Prime Ministers of the two countries, the official Xinhua news agency reported Zhang as saying.

32 hurt in accident in Austria: A bus full of Hungarian students returning from a ski outing went off the road Sunday in Southeastern Austria, killing 18 people and injuring 32 others, Red Cross officials said. AP says from Graz.

Police said the bus skidded, went over an embankment and rolled over several times on the state road between Trautten and Deutschlandsberg, a mountainous region near the border with Slovenia. The cause of the accident was unclear; officials said neither snow nor icy roads was a problem at the time. The Austria Press Agency said most of the passengers were teenagers from an agricultural high school in Koszeg, Hungary, accompanied by about 15 adults.

US applauds call for Baghdad to comply with UN resolutions Iraq storms out of Arab League FM's meeting in Cairo

CAIRO, Jan 25: Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al-Sahhaf stormed out of an Arab League meeting here Sunday to protest a final statement which failed to meet Baghdad's demands, a senior member of the Iraqi delegation said, report agencies.

The final communiqué is a cover up for maintaining forever the UN embargo," Nabil Najm, an undersecretary at the Iraqi foreign ministry, told reporters here.

Baghdad wanted Arab foreign ministers to unilaterally lift the crippling eight-year-old sanctions which were slapped on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"This statement is a mockery," Najm told reporters at the Arab League headquarters where the foreign ministers and other representatives of the 22 member pan Arab organisation met.

According to participants at the closed door meeting called to discuss the Iraqi crisis, Sahhaf and his delegation angrily walked out after hearing a reading of the final statement.

The amendments and strong pressure from the meeting's Egyptian hosts failed to secure the return of Sahhaf who boycotted the adoption of the final statement accusing his Arab counterparts of "plotting."

After the reading of the original text Sahhaf launched a

scathing attack on Arab governments. The document is a plot aimed at covering up new US and British attacks on Iraq, he said.

The one day meeting which had already been postponed from last month, was called to consider Yemeni requests for a full Arab summit to consider the December 16-20 US and British air strikes on Iraq.

Baghdad pressed fellow Arab governments to issue a clear condemnation of the air strikes and to agree to defy the UN sanctions that have crippled Iraq since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

But Sahhaf charged that "the Hurgada group, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia conspired to draw up a communiqué which instead of condemning the aggression on Iraq placed the responsibility on Iraq."

The foreign ministers of Egypt, Yemen, Oman, Syria and Saudi Arabia met twice this month in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Hurgada to map out Sunday's meeting.

The useless and very negative statement was written under pressure from the United States because it did not call for an immediate lifting of the sanctions and did not condemn outright the US-British strikes," Sahhaf said.

Some of the stronger criticism of Iraq included in the ear-

lier draft was excised from the final text.

References to Baghdad provoking "its neighbours and demands that it recognise that its occupation of Kuwait was a mistake were dropped as was a clause saying that such an Iraqi recognition is an essential condition for reaching real Arab solidarity."

A section which originally urged Iraq to "put an immediate end to its provocations" was changed to read "out an immediate end to these positions," according to the official text read to reporters here.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were adamant that Baghdad should apologise for its 1990 invasion and respect the UN demarcated border with Kuwait. In recent weeks Iraq has threatened repeatedly to scrap the border.

The Arab foreign ministers also urged Baghdad to cooperate with the security council in implementing resolutions concerning Iraq.

The final statement also established a follow-up committee to oversee the efforts to end the sanctions and in response to Iraqi complaints that all its members were governments "hostile" to Baghdad, added Bahrain to the list originally announced.

Riot death toll rises to 50 Troops patrol Indonesian island after mob murders soldier

AMBON, Indonesia, Jan 25: Thousands of troops and police patrolled the debris-strewn streets of Ambon island Monday after a soldier was murdered by rioters who refused to hand over their weapons, reports AP.

Days of rioting among rival Christians and Muslims left at least 50 people dead, police said. Baileo, a non-governmental organisation in Ambon, claimed witnesses accounts indicated that the death toll could be more than double that.

Police said civilians were helping security personnel search the ruins of dozens of burned out buildings for the bodies of any more victims.

The Jakarta Post newspaper quoted a local politician, Mohammad Kasubah, as saying a mob, armed with machetes and knives, attacked a 28-year-old army private on Saturday.

They slashed his face and stabbed him in the stomach. Earlier that day another mob dragged five Muslims from a car and burned them to death. Residents contacted by The Associated Press by telephone

said the island's main city, also named Ambon, was quiet but tense Monday.

The rioting was the latest in a series of violent outbreaks that have wracked crisis-ridden Indonesia for more than a year.

On Sunday night, Indonesian military commander Gen Wiranto and prominent opposition leaders met in Jakarta and called for an end to the fighting.

"No one will benefit from the division of the nation," the newspaper Kompas quoted Wiranto as saying.

The military has threatened to shoot rioters on sight. "Ambon is calm now," said local police chief Col. Karyono S.

Fighting between the two religious groups has flared on Ambon and two other islands in eastern Indonesia since last Tuesday.

The area, in Maluku province about 2,300 kilometers (1,400 miles) northeast of Jakarta, was known as the Spice Islands in Dutch colonial times.

Police said at least 48 people have been seriously injured in

the clashes. An estimated 470 homes and buildings were burned along with seven mosques and nine churches.

At the height of the violence, an estimated 20,000 people sheltered at military bases, police stations, mosques and schools.

Karyono said many of those evacuees who had not lost their houses to arson had returned to their homes.

Local religious leaders have called for calm and reconciliation.

Security forces patrolled past shuttered houses guarded by wary residents with knives and clubs. Officers with loudspeakers urged people to go back to work Monday.

Despite this, most shops and offices remained closed.

Military transport planes ferried in rice, food and other essential commodities after several markets were reduced to ashes.

More than 100 foreigners — including Americans, Britons, Australians and Dutch — have been evacuated from the islands.

Missile attack on Iraq again: civilians killed

BAGHDAD, Jan 25: Iraq said a number of civilians were killed and wounded in a US and British missile attack on a town near the southern city of Basra today, reports AFP.

The official news agency INA said the missile crashed into a "densely populated" area of Al-Jumhuriya, some 500 kilometers from the Iraqi capital. According to first estimates, a certain number of citizens were killed and a number injured, mostly women and children," it said.

In a said "residential apartments were destroyed" and that civil defence teams were evacuating the area.

"Eyewitnesses said the missile came from the west, from Saudi Arabia," according to INA.

Trial of Anwar Ibrahim resumes today

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 25: The highly-charged trial of sacked deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim resumes Tuesday with the defence demanding that the case be dismissed, a defence lawyer said Monday, reports AP.

The trial adjourned on Jan. 14 for Muslim festivities at the end of Ramadan after the prosecution, in closing its case, took the sex out of the sex-related charges against Anwar.

That threw Anwar's lawyers into disarray. They asked the judge for a long adjournment to reformulate their arguments.

Tamil leader shot dead in Jaffna

VAVUNIYA, Sri Lanka, Jan 25: Suspected Tamil Tiger rebels shot and killed a former Tamil rebel-turned-politician in the streets of northern Jaffna, local officials said Monday, reports AP.

Thilanyanathan Chandirmohan, 31-year-old leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam was targeted when he was going home on his bicycle Sunday, said M. Kiruparajah, a member of the Jaffna Municipality.

Chandirmohan died instantly and one of his supporters, also on a bicycle, was critically wounded in the attack, said Kiruparajah.

The Sri Lanka army recaptured Jaffna Peninsula from Tamil Tiger rebels in 1995.

Scientists close to creating life form from genes?

ANAHEIM, Calif., Jan 25: Scientists busy trying to map all the genes in creatures ranging from bacteria to humans think they are on the verge of figuring out how to build an artificial life form from genes, reports Reuters.

Just as Mary Shelley's Dr Frankenstein used bits of corpses to make a monster Dr Craig Venter hopes to salvage DNA from dead bacteria to construct his artificial bug.

"Shelley would have loved this," Venter laughed when asked about the comparison.

Their guinea pig is a tiny bacterium called mycoplasma genitalium it lives in the human genital tract and lungs, causing a known disease, but has the distinction of having fewer genes than any other organism mapped so far.

While humans, have about 80,000 genes this bug gets along fine with just 470.

That makes it a good model for figuring out precisely which genes are essential for life and which ones code for extra value such as having blue eyes or the ability to resist heat.

"We are attempting to understand what the definition of life is," Venter of Rockville Maryland based Celera Genomics

Corporation told a news conference. "We are trying to understand what the minimum set of genes is."

Not only is mycoplasma genitalium small and easy to study, but it has a close relative mycoplasma pneumoniae, and while M genitalium has 470 genes, M pneumoniae has the same 470 genes plus 200 extra ones.

"So we decided these genes were not essential to life. Venter who will explain the project to the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science said.

Venter's team started working backward cutting out some genes to see if the organism would still function, they did this using transposons which are genes that act specifically to cut up other genes.

Nonetheless, they got M genitalium down to about 300 essential genes.

Before he goes any further Venter said he wants advice from experts on ethics and religion. "We are asking whether it is ethical to synthetically make life," Venter told reporters.

We think this discussion is totally worthwhile because it gets down to the definition of what life is, he said.

Off the Record

The pied-piper of Hanoi

HANOI: Farmer Nguyen Huu Van is known among his fellow villagers as the "King Rat-killer" for slaying 30,000 of the vermin last year, an official said yesterday, reports AP.

Dinh Van Hoa, deputy director of the Thai Binh provincial department for plant protection, said his office has hired Van for 1 million dong (dls 70) a month to pass on his rat-killing skills and experiences. He's lectured in 17 villages in 17 days.

The pay is a substantial amount in a country where the average monthly salary is under dls 30. Then again, rats are a growing problem, and no one has been more efficient in getting rid of them than Van.

Three years ago, he invented simple traps to protect his rice fields.

With 300 traps, which cost 2,200 dong (15 cents) each, Van killed 30,000 rats in his and his neighbours' fields last year, leaving almost none of the pests in his village. The rest of the province's farmers killed only 13,000 rats combined.

Wedding night behind bars

NEW DELHI: Crime doesn't pay. Or so a bridegroom in Delhi found out when he spent his wedding night behind bars with his father instead of at home with his new bride, reports IANS.

Pawan and his father Kalka Prasad landed in prison soon after the former's wedding as their printing press was found to be producing inlay cards for covers of pirated audio cassettes. Police, in a raid, recovered 25,664 inlay cards for pirated cassettes of the soundtracks of several Hindi films, including the hit 'Raja Hindustani', from their printing press. The Indian Express newspaper reported.

Police reportedly arrested press employee Ajay Kumar during the raid. Kumar, who confessed that inlay cards for pirated cassettes were printed at night, told them that Pawan had just got married. Police arrested the father-son duo despite pleas from relatives and friends to spare them as it was Pawan's wedding day. All three were later released on bail.

Golden Globe Awards '99 Where Shakespeare and Elizabeth reigned

BEVERLY HILLS, California, Jan 25: And the big winner going into the Oscars is — Queen Elizabeth.

She ruled during the time of the Golden Globe-winner "Shakespeare in Love" and was played in "Elizabeth" by Cate Blanchett, who also won a Globe on Sunday night, reports AP.

Otherwise, the ceremony that often serves as a predictor for the Academy Awards left the Oscar race pretty much where it was before the Golden Globes: a battle between "Saving Private Ryan" and "Shakespeare in Love," with "The Truman Show" still holding an outside shot for best picture.

"Saving Private Ryan" was named best dramatic movie and its director, Steven Spielberg, was also honoured at the 56th Golden Globes, while "Shakespeare in Love" won best musical or comedy film, best film comedy actress, Gwyneth Paltrow, and for screenplay.

"The Truman Show" earned Jim Carrey an unusual award for best dramatic actor while co-star Ed Harris was named best motion picture supporting actor. The film's score also won a Globe.

Spielberg, whose film is a major contender for an Oscar, extended his thanks to "all the veterans that are out there that saved Western Civilisation and stopped the Holocaust in 1945."

Carrey is better known for comedy than the serious role he played in "The Truman Show" — a man who realises his whole life has been a TV show.

Blanchett's portrayal of the title role in "Elizabeth" won best dramatic film actress over Susan Sarandon in "Stepmom," Meryl Streep in "One True Thing," Fernanda Montenegro in "Central Station" and Emily Watson in "Hilary and Jackie."

and Lynn Redgrave of "Gods and Monsters" won the movie supporting actress trophy.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association voted "The Practice," aired on the American ABC network, as best television drama series, and the Fox network's "Ally McBeal" won as best television comedy series.

"Spin City" star Michael J. Fox, who has been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, was a funny but poignant winner for TV comedy actor. He thanked his doctors, including one who he said had opened up his brain. "We're so lucky to do what we do... and just take every day and enjoy it," Fox said.

Brazil's "Central Station" captured the foreign language film award.

The Golden Globes, selected by reporters from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, are awarded for film and television in what can be a more colourful affair than the stuffy Academy Awards.

Albright in Moscow on 3-day visit

MOSCOW, Jan 25: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrived here early this morning on what could be a mission impossible, seeking to soothe Kremlin fury over Washington's military might and check on Boris Yeltsin's health, reports AFP.

On her three-day visit, Albright will also hold talks on Iraq, Yugoslavia and conventional weapons try to offer balm to Russia's economy and meet a string of the ailing Yeltsin's would-be successors.

But she will only speak by telephone with the 67-year-old Russian President.

Millions of children risk deadly diseases in developing nations

ANAHEIM, California, Jan 25: Millions of children risk disease and death because they live in badly polluted cities, a report issued on Sunday finds, reports Reuters.

The report, by the Washington-based World Resources Institute, lists the 10 cities in the world with the worst air pollution and finds nine out of 10 of them in China. The fifth-worst city is in India.

The worst is Lanzhou, in Gansu province in northwestern China. The region has a large petrochemical industry and oil refineries. "As a consequence of the emissions from these industries, the city rarely experiences a clear day," the report, released at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, says.

The study, funded by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the US Environmental Protection Agency and other groups, looked at three measurements of air pollution — Total Suspended Particulates

(TSPs), Sulphur Dioxide and Nitrogen Dioxide.

These are taken to be good indicators of pollution caused by the burning of fossil fuels.

WHO guidelines say the maximum permissible amount of TSPs is 90 micrograms per cubic litre of air, according to the report. Lanzhou has more than 700. The next worst city, Jilin, has close to that, while Taiyuan has nearly 600.

The effects on health are devastating. Devra Lee Davis, an epidemiologist who led the study, told a news conference.

"Most children who live in large cities in the developing world breathe air that is the equivalent of smoking two packs of cigarette a day," Davis said.

The problem is that these cities have rapidly growing economies but old-fashioned technology.

"While development is welcome, the fact that it occurs in areas with technology... that is 30 or 40 years old... places all the populations of these cities

at risk," she said.

"Cars in Beijing meet 1970 US standards."

But she said the Chinese government had recognised the problem and was moving to upgrade buses, cars and trucks to cleaner standards. "Improving energy efficiency will have a major effect," she said.

The report says developing countries should be helped to clean up their cars, factories and other polluters before it is too late. Developed countries, although many are still polluted, have benefitted from cleaner technology.

"If these pollution-reduction technologies are made more readily available to developing countries, these could help them avoid the high risks to public health that result from current patterns of growth in their industrial and urban sectors," the report says.

"Since most of the transportation and power generating plants of developing countries will be acquired during the next few decades, the health of chil-

dren and of all urban residents can be markedly protected if these newly acquired systems employ more efficient and less polluting technologies."

Children are more at risk because they breathe faster and because their lungs are still developing and thus more susceptible, the report says, citing several studies.

Pollution has been shown to damage the cilia in the airways — the tiny hairs that sweep out pollutants and invaders.

Without the cilia, harmful chemicals can get deep into lung tissue and cause permanent damage, Davis said.

To make matters worse, leaded gasoline is still used in many countries, and several studies have shown that lead from fuel emissions ends up in children's bodies. Lead can cause brain damage, retard growth and, in extreme cases, kill.

The 10 cities listed in the report, in descending order of TSP levels, are Lanzhou, Jilin, Taiyuan, Jiaozuo and Rajkot.

US sends envoy to Kosovo to try defuse tension in Serbia

BELGRADE, Jan 25: US envoy Chris Hill was due in Kosovo today as part of fresh diplomatic efforts to defuse tension in the Serbian province and avoid threatened NATO strikes, reports Reuters.

Diplomatic sources said Hill trying to forge a political solution to the crisis would visit the western verification mission and then brief ethnic Albanians including the main political leader Ibrahim Rugova on a meeting of the Balkan contact group in London last Friday.

The six nation contact group agreed to launch a fresh drive for a political settlement in Kosovo and demanded that Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic admit United Nations war crimes prosecutors to probe an alleged massacre.

A Finnish forensic team in Kosovo capital Pristina on Sunday dissociated itself from a statement by a Serbian expert that their joint investigation

into the killing of 45 Kosovo Albanians had shown no evidence of a massacre.

The Finns were responding to remarks by the head of Pristina's Forensic Institute Dr Slavisa Dobricinovic, who told Reuters and Yugoslav media that after conducting some 20 autopsies there was no evidence to support western assertions that the villagers were massacred by Yugoslav security forces.

A spokesman for the Finnish team said "they do not associate themselves with this statement adding that they would not make any comment on their work" before it was completed which was likely to take several more days.

The past mortems could provide more evidence of whether the victims were ethnic Albanian civilians shot at close range by the security forces or armed separatist guerrillas killed in the heat of battle as the Serbian authorities insist.



A model for Yumi Katsura presents a silk evening dress embroidered with floral motifs at Rome's high fashion show, Sunday. — UNB/AP photo