

International

NATO bomb threat remains: Next talks Mar 15

All sides fail to reach full agreement on Kosovo

RAMBOUILLET, France, Feb 24: The United States and five European nations decided Tuesday to suspend the Kosovo peace talks until March 15, saying that despite "major progress" they have not been able to get either Serbs or Kosovo Albanians to sign a deal, reports AP.

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine and British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, co-chairmen of the conference, warned both sides to respect a ceasefire in the meantime, and to "abstain from any action which would undermine" the peace effort.

After more than two weeks of negotiations, Cook said "we do not have the signatures" either on political aspects of the peace accord or the military annex that the six-nation Contact Group says is necessary to enforce it.

He insisted the force would be led by NATO, something the Serbs have rejected all along — a major obstacle to reaching agreement.

Speaking later, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said "We have not reached full agreement today."

But she added: "We have decisively broken the stalemate that hung over Kosovo for so long."

Albright made it clear that although the ethnic Albanians have agreed in principle to sign the political accord in two weeks, the Serbs have not agreed to the political deal — nor to the military annex.

"Unfortunately, (Yugoslav) President Milosevic and his delegation failed to seize the opportunity for progress," she said.

The Serbs "have not engaged at all" on the military aspect, she said.

The prospect of NATO bomb attacks appeared unlikely for at least the next few weeks. Albright, however, said that NATO Secretary-General Javier



French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine (C), US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (R) and British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook conduct a press conference in Ramboillet on Tuesday at the end of the Kosovo peace talks. The parties agreed to meet again on March 15.

— AFP Photo

Solana retains authority to attack Serb targets if the Serbs violate a ceasefire or refuse, in the end, to agree to NATO peacekeepers.

There was no agreement for a planned NATO force so far, and fighting continued in the Serb province as talks fizzled, with five policemen wounded Tuesday.

The negotiations, in which the two warring parties never talked directly to each other, were to resume March 15.

In addition to rejecting peacekeepers, the Serbs refused to give their consent to major elements of the self-rule the ethnic Albanian Kosovars demanded. Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic nullified plan for self-rule in Kosovo in 1989.

According to senior US officials, the Serbs still insist on Serbian courts for Serbs ac-

cused of crimes in Kosovo, refuse to permit the ethnic Albanians to have a president and are unwilling to cooperate with a war crimes tribunal looking into atrocities against civilians committed during a year-long war that claimed some 2,000 lives.

The Albanians hedged, as well. They were given two weeks for "consultations" with people in the province, and are insisting still on a referendum to vote for independence and secession from Serbia at the end of the three-year autonomy trial period envisioned by the accord formulated by the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Russia.

The accord also calls for a restoration of the ceasefire that was arranged by US envoy Richard Holbrooke last October and for the staged removal of

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