Fire kills 3 Indians in UAE: Three Indian workers suffocated to death and a fourth was badly burnt in a blaze on the balcony of a restaurant in the United Arab Emirates capital, a newspaper reported yesterday, AFP reports from Abu Dhabi.

A father and son were among the dead, police told the Gulf News but refused to comment on the cause of Tuesday's fire at Abu Dhabi's Blue Star tourist restaurant pending an inquiry.
Neighbours told the daily faulty wring was the most likely cause of the blaze which took three hours to extinguish.

Int'l kite festival in China: Some 70 kiteflying teams from France, Japan, the United States and 24 other countries and regions have come to Weifang, a major city in east China's Shandong province, to attend the ongoing 16th Weifang International Kite Festival, Xinhua reports from

Jinan. More than 40,000 spectators from both at home and abroad artended the opening ceremony held yesterday evening. During the following two days, the festival, the largest of its kind in China, will present events including an international kite flying competition, a kite-flying exhibition, and a dragon boat

Malaysia to kill stray dogs: Malaysia is to kill stray dogs found infected with a mystery virus, suspected to have led to 98 deaths in an outbreak of encephalitis spread via pigs, reports said yesterday, AFP says from Kuala Lumpur.

Two dogs from an affected district in Negeri Sembilan state tested positive for the virus, veterinary services department director general Mohamad Nordin Mohamad Nor was quoted as saying by The Sun. "The dogs are left to fend for themselves ... and they probably have access to the (pig) carcasses, so there is a high possibility of them contracting the disease," Mohamad Nordin said.

Bomb found in HK shopping mall: A week after a small bomb exploded in a Hong Kong mall, police found another homemade explosive in another busy shopping

centre, AP reports from Hong Kong. The bomb did not explode but more than 200 people were evacuated from the mall in Hong Kong's Mongkok district late Tuesday after police found a brown paper box stuffed with explosives and wires near the first-floor toilets, the South China Morning Post. A police statement confirmed that an explosive had been found and detonated, but did not give details. The case was still under investigation.

UK to provide \$6.4 lakh for demining: Britain said yesterday it would provide 640,000 dollars to aid Cambodian demining efforts in areas being settled by refugees returning from camps in neighbouring Thailand, AFP reports from Phnom Penh.

Britain's Department for International Development has signed an agreement with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, (UNHCR) to fund land mine removal projects, an embassy statement here said. "The British government welcome recent developments that have allowed the closure of the refugee camps in Thailand," the statement said.

Student killed in Nicaragua: Police fired rubber bullets and bursts from automatic rifles on Tuesday, trying to disperse dozens of pro-Sandinista students who stormed the Central Bank demanding increased university budgets, AP reports from Managua.

On student was killed, apparently by a rubber bullet, according to the coroner's office. Following the death, groups that appeared to be students seized and burned police cars, blocked a major highway and attacked the National Police headquarters and the offices of President Arnoldo Aleman's Constitutional Liberal Party.

State of emergency in Argentina: A state of emergency has been declared for Chaco and Formosa provinces of Argentina due to heavy rains, Xinhua reports from Buenos Aires.

Torrential rains flooded Chaco's countryside, leaving rural productive sectors in a critical state. In Formosa province, grave inundation has effected 55 communities, making about 6,000 people flee their homeland.

Russia launches UK's satellite: Russia launched a British research satellite atop a converted hallistic missile Wednesday, the first step in a project to earn much needed cash from its aging rocket arsenal. AP reports

The converted SS-18 Satan, known as the Dnepr-1 booster rocket in its new form, blasted off from a silo at the Baikontu Cosmodrome in Kazakstan at 9:00 am Moscow time (0500 GMT) a spokesman with Russia's Strategic Missile Forces said.

First confee on landmines

# Steps to implement ban tops the agenda

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 21: Reports that land mines are being laid in Kosovo and Angola add new urgency to an upcoming conference to chart the next steps in implementing the world's first universal ban on the deadly devices, organisers said Tuesday, reports AP.

Laying new mines is expected to be a major topic at the first conference on the land mine treaty since it went into effect March 1.- Mozambique. which has an estimated 2 million land mines from its civil war, is hosting the May 3-7 meeting in the capital Maputo.

The treaty, which was only drafted in December 1997, has already been signed by 135 countries and ratified by 72 — a near-record number in such a short time.

"In the main the news is good, the figures speak for themselves ... and they are rather dramatic," said Robert Fowler, UN ambassador for Canada, which hosted the conference that drafted the treaty. known as the "Ottawa Convention.

But Fowler cautioned that efforts to de-mine Angola have been "seriously put into question" after the government and rebels reopened a civil war in December, sparking the United Nations to withdraw its peacekeepers.

At a press conference an nouncing the meeting, he voiced concern about reports of mines being laid in Kosovo and fears that renewed fighting in Afghanistan could worsen the already serious mine situation

"While we celebrate the rapid entry into force of the convention, let us be conscious of the fact that the value of convention rests in its accelerated and sustained implementation,' said Mozambique's UN ambas-

sador Carlos dos Santos. The meeting, dos Santos said, would keep momentum going for more signatures and would try to address the main challenges in implementing the agreement, such as mine clearance, destruction and aware-

ness, and care for mine victims. Nations that ratify the treaty pledge to destroy all stockpiles of mines within four years and clear all mines from their territory within 10 years.

Millions of land mines are scattered in more than 60 countries, and they kill or injure an estimated 20,000 people each year, mostly innocent civilians, The mines have also rendered huge swaths of produc-

tive land unusable. The United States and Russia haven't signed the treaty and as of Tuesday hadn't confirmed their attendance.

jets struck a Belgrade high-rise housing offices of Slobodan Milosevic's ruling party Wednesday and the United equipment to neighbouring Albania, where border clashes

raised concern of a wider Balkan conflict, reports AP. Fears were heightened Tuesday, when Croatia charged that Yugoslavia moved up to 300 troops into a UN-controlled demilitarised zone between Croatia and the Yugoslav repub-

BELGRADE, Apr 21: NATO

States rushed more troops and

lic Montenegro. And Macedonia's president warned that his country faces its gravest crisis since independence in 1991 because of the influx of 130,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees and the presence of thousands of NATO

troops. At least three missiles struck the 18-story business centre located across the Sava River from the heart of the capital, which houses several offices of the Yugoslav president's Socialist Party as well as three local television and radio sta-

gaping hole on the first floor and plunged the upper floors into flames that firelighters were still battling hours later. At least 20 people were reported to be in the building at the time, but Belgrade Deputy Mayor Spasoje Krunic said there apparently, were no casualties. Milosevic's daughter Marija

visited the site along with other top officials. She owns Kosava

Radio and TV, and others who are close to authorities control privately owned Pink Radio and TV and BK TV, also located in the building. Kosava and Pink were knocked off the air and BK lost one transmitter.

Despite the action of NATO "criminals," Serbian Prime Minister Mirko Marjanovic declared, "They cannot bend us."

"This is unheard of," Dragan Covic of Belgrade's crisis center told Studio B television. "This was a media building with journalists working there."

Yugoslav media also reported pre-dawn attacks in several areas of northern and central Serbia, including Novi Sad and the town of Valjevo, where six missiles struck an ammunition factory, triggering a huge fire. The Belgrade television station Studio B said one person was seriously injured. In Novi Sad, Yugoslavia's

second-largest city, an oil re-

finery was hit again and the

city's last remaining bridge

over the Danube was struck and

damaged, left impassable except for pedestrians. That strike effectively cut Belgrade's rail The pre-dawn strike left a connection with Budapest and the rest of Europe. NATO had already knocked out two bridges in the city. Allied missiles also hit a TV transmission tower on Mount Fruska Gora outside Novi Sad.

> signals for the northern Vojvodina region. Serbian media also reported attacks in the areas of Kraljevo

in central Serbia and Uzice in

eliminating state TV and radio

western Serbia, both of which have military airfields that have been targeted repeatedly throughout the air campaign. A strike also was reported on Novi Slankamen near Novi

Air-raid sirens sounded the all clear signal in Belgrade at 7:21 am (0521 GMT).

In neighbouring Albania, US cargo planes 'ferried in more soldiers and equipment to support 24 Apache attack helicopters which were expected in the country later Wednesday.

The Apaches will be used to attack Yugoslav tanks and armoured vehicles which have been used in Milosevic's campaign to drive ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, a province of Yugoslavia's main republic

In Washington, US Defence Secretary William Cohen announced that 11 additional Apache helicopter crews were being dispatched. The total Apache-related force assembling in Albania will be about 3,300 soldiers, or several hundred more than envisioned just

planned to use the three-day NATO summit beginning Friday to press allies for agreement on an oil embargo and other economic sanctions to weaken Yugoslavia's resis-

Although NATO leaders have yet to embrace any sanctions, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has vigorously lobbied Allied foreign

ministers. "They all see the problem of oil coming into the area and are looking at ways to achieve what we need to do," she

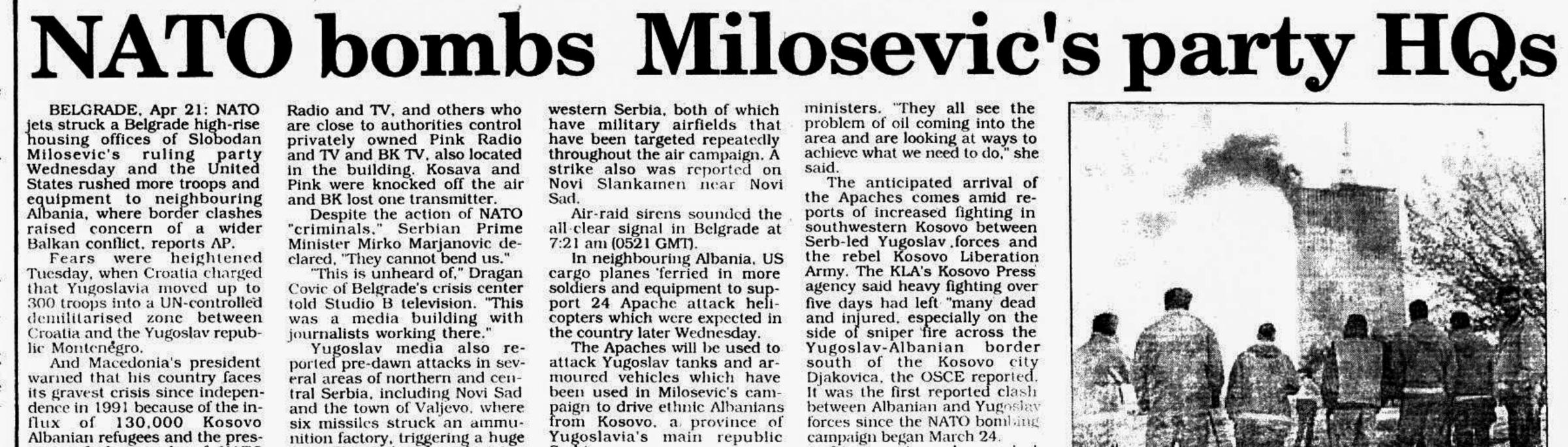
US pressing allies to impose sanctions on Y'slavia

The anticipated arrival of the Apaches comes amid reports of increased fighting in southwestern Kosovo between Serb-led Yugoslav forces and the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army. The KLA's Kosovo Press agency said heavy fighting over five days had left "many dead and injured, especially on the side of sniper fire across the Yugoslav-Albanian border south of the Kosovo city Djakovica, the OSCE reported. It was the first reported clash between Albanian and Yugoslav forces since the NATO bombing

campaign began March 24. Simonovic demanded Yugoslavia "immediately withdraw its forces from the demilitarised zone." The area around Prevlaka, Croatia's southernmost peninsula, has been demilitarised and is controlled by a 28-man UN monitoring mis

The zone reaches a few kilometers into the Yugoslav The Clinton administration republic of Montenegro, around Sutorina village. The incident threatens to spark another conflict between the Croatian and Yugoslav armies, who fought hard during the 1991 Serbo-Croat war.

Meanwhile, Macedonia's president. Kiro Gligorov, warned in a television interview Tuesday that his country could be destabilised by the Kosovo conflict.



Street cleaners look at the building of the headquarters of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party, still in flames after being hit during an early morning NATO air attack on Belgrade Wednesday.

The influx of Kosovo Albanians into Macedonia threatens to upset the ethnic balance in the former Yugoslav republic. Between 23 per cent and 33 per cent of Macedonia's 2 million people are ethnic Albanians and the rest mostly

"I believe dangers for Macedonia are growing." Gligorov said, warning that up to 400,000 refugees could end up there. "Macedonia's state interest is to preserve internal stability and external security." Months before NATO's air

Macedonia to go into Kosovo if a peace deal for the Serb province is signed. Gligorov said 16,500 NATO troops are in the country and 4,000 more ex-"Macedonia has said it

campaign against Yugoslavia

began, the alliance has sta-

tioned thousands of troops in

- AFP photo

would never allow its territory be used for an attack against a neighbouring country." said Gligorov, adding NATO had assured him the alliance so far has no plans for such a move.



Indien Hindu Nationalist Members of Parliament shout anti-Sonia Gandhi slogans during a protest inside the parliament complex Wednesday. A dozen MPs from outgoing Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP Party picketed the main entrance, saying that Italian-born Congress (I) Party President Sonia Gandhi should be barred from running for the premiership.

# Jakarta to relinquish control of E Timor if it chooses independence

SYDNEY, Apr 21: Indonesian President B J Habibie has renewed his pledge to relinquish control of East Timor if it chooses independence, and said he wants the transition to be peaceful, reports in Australia said Wednesday, reports AP.

"If the people of East Timor decide for separation, we will do everything to make it happen in peace," Habibie was quoted as saying by two newspapers. "We will separate in peace, in

honour, as friends, and we will leave as neighbours and we will assist within our capabilities. It is moral, it's no problem, okay." The comments were sourced to a briefing Habibie gave to edi-

tors of several Australian newspaper in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta on Tuescay. Indonesia invaded Past Timor in 1975, unleashing a separatist rebel war and human rights abuses.

Violence between supporters and opponents of independence in the former Portuguese colony has escalated since Indonesia reversed policy earlier this year and said it would let go of East Timor if its people reject an autonomy offer.

UN-sponsored talks between Indonesia and Portugal were scheduled later this week in New York to wrap up details of the autonomy proposal ahead of a scheduled vote on the offer in July.

However, violence has jeopardised the vote and pro-Indonesian militiamen have demanded that it be cancelled.

This past weekend, militiamen attacked separatist symapthisers in East Timor's capital of Dili with little inter-

### El Nino may help slow global warming

WASHINGTON, Apr 21: New study suggests that El Nino may help slow the global warming, though it has been blamed for many climate disorders such as floods and droughts, according to a report published in the Washington Post, says Xinhua.

The report said Richard A Feely and his colleagues at the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have found that from 1991 to 1994, when El Nino was said to contribute to the warming of the Pacific, the carbondioxide the ocean released was in fact 30 per cent to 80 per cent less than usual.

The study believed that because carbondioxide is one of the primary greenhouse gases contributing to the warming of the planet, the decrease of this greenhouse gas may therefore help slow the global warming.

vention from security forces. Pro-independence groups have accused the military of arming and training militia groups in a bid to derail a UN peace process. The army has said it has trained some civilians so they can act as neutral

auxiliaries to the police force. Habibie assured the Australian editors that he would not let the security situation in East Timor stand in the way of the "sovereignty of the people," The Australian newspaper reported.

Asked about sentiment in East Timor on self-determination, the paper quoted him as saying: "I believe only in one thing. They should get the chance to make their self-determination for their future. have one belief. I don't care. only have one care, they should not be tortured or suffer any

Habibie was quoted as saying that: "I have no problem with the military; they are professional people and they un-

But "retired ones and some politicians" were a problem, The Australia said.

Habibie said he wants an

immediate ceasefire between the pro-Indonesian militias and separatists, but said it was impossible for the Indonesian military to disarm the militias.

## Benazir wishes good luck to Sonia

LONDON, Apr 21: Pakistan's former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, facing trial on corruption charges, wished good luck to Sonia Gandhi in her bid to become head of government of neighbouring India, reports

"I wish her luck because she needs it, in our countries there is a real battle between the past and the future, however she has got a lot of courage and I'm sure she'll do a good job," Benazir said in an interview with the British Press Association news

India's main opposition Congress Party said Tuesday that Sonia would be the next prime minister, but problems persisted in efforts to install a new viable government to succeed the Hindu nationalist-led coalition that collapsed Satur-The people of India will vote

for her because they feel that here is a lady who has shared our triumphs and our tragedies and whose family has given so much," Benazir said. Benazir, currently in Lon

don, has denied any wrongdoing and described her conviction as politically motivated

### Russia to back Palestinian state any time

CAIRO, Apr 21: Russia will support an independent Palestinian state whenever the Palestinians choose to declare it. Russia's ambassador to Egypt was quoted as saying late Tuesday, reports AP.

The statement represents a significant shift by Russia, which had urged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to delay a planned declaration of statehood on May 4.

Ambassador Vladimir Gougev told Egypt's Middle East News Agency that Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov had promised such support in a letter to the head of the Arab League, Esmat Abdel-Meguid. "There is no choice but to declare a Palestinian state,

Gougev quoted Ivanov as saying in the letter, which was delivered Tuesday. "Russia will strongly support the declaration of a Palestinian state at any time the Pales-

tinian Authority chooses, Ivanov wrote. In April, Ivanov held talks

with Arafat in Moscow and said he had urged him to delay proclaiming a state on May 4 - the deadline for the end of negotiations of the final status of the Palestinian territories. Ivanov then suggested that the deadline could be extended

to accommodate a renewal of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. His comments were seen as reflecting Russia's increased interest in ties with Israel.

### PPP urges CEC to delay decision on ousting Benazir from parliament ISLAMABAD, Apr 21: The not been filed in that duration," Alisan said.

main opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) today urged the Chief Election Commissioner to delay a decision on ousting its leader Benazir Bhutto from parliament after she was found guilty of graft. reports AFP.

The leader of the opposition in the upper house. Senate Aitzaz Ahsan, urged CEC Chaudhury Abdul Ghafoor in a letter not to give his decision as both Benazir and her husband Asif Ali Zardari intend to file appeals in the Supreme Court. "The respondents have given

definite and express instructions in this behalf," Ahsan, who is a top lawyer, told the Chief Election Commissioner. His letter followed speculation the couple could be stripped of their parliamentary membership in the next 24 hours af-

ter being convicted by a twojudge Lahore High Court bench. "I request you to withhold your decision until the period of limitation has expired and you are informed that an appeal has Under the rules a defendant

can appeal within 30 days of receiving a copy of the judgement. "So far the copy of the judgement has not been received so as to enable counsel to prepare and finalise the ap-

peal," he said. Ahsan also asked the commissioner not to give his decision until the final verdict of the Supreme Court.

"Any other course of action may lead to a grave miscarriage of justice," the letter said.

#### Heavy rain causes flash flood in Lanka: 2 killed

COLOMBO, Apr 21: Heavy rain has claimed two lives in mudslides in central Sri Lanka and flooded several areas of the capital Colombo, forcing the closure of schools, officials said today, reports AFP.

# Off the Record

#### Faux pas

HAHOE VILLAGE, South Korea: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II fell foul of Korean social etiquette during a visit to a dignitary's home here today and had to be asked to go outside and remove her shoes, reports AFP.

The queen, on an historic first visit to South Korea by a British head of state, made the gaffe when she was invited into the ladies' living room at the home of village patriarch Ryu Yong-Ha in this ancient hamlet, witnesses said. Moments after entering the

white-papered room, members of the aristocratic household and officials told the queen's aides she had, broken the Asian rule that people should take off their footwear before going inside. "The message was passed

on and she then stepped back outside the room and took off her shoes before going back inside to sit down," a photographer on the scene

The monarch, wearing a blue suit and light-coloured hat, left her white pumps on the wooden step outside the

her host. ladies' living quarters of the 400-year-old house where earlier. in line with tradition, she was barred from entering the men-

only living room. At the house, the queen was shown how to make Korea's pungent national dish of kimchi — a spicy mixture of fermented cabbage, garlic and chillies - but declined to try the mixture in the flower-filled courtyard of the house.

She was also offered green tea and a selection of fruit in the Ryu family home, but declined the refreshment

# Vitamin C in fruits lowers cancer risk

CHICAGO, Apr 21: US researchers calling fora doubling or tripling in the governmentrecommended intake of Vitamin C reiterated the oft-heard advice on Tuesday to eat more fruits and vegetables, reports

Reuters. Diets rich in Vitamin C contained in fruits and vegetables can lower the risk of contracting several types of cancer, the researchers from the US National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, wrote in a report published in the Journal of the American Medical Asso-

ciation. "The evidence is that five fruits and vegetables daily decreased risk of cancer in the gastrointestinal tract, intestinal tract and the respiratory tract," Mark Levine, who authored the report, told Reuters. "Is it because of the Vitamin C. or Vitamin C plus other components, or components in the fruits and vegetables independent of the Vitamin C? .. This we don't know", he said.

The reduced cancer risk was one of the criteria behind the researchers' proposal to double or triple the recommended daily ingestion of Vitamin C to 100-200 milligrams (mg) per

day from 60. Since the last government review of the subject in 1989, a lot of research has become available to serve as a basis for a higher recommended dosage of Vitamin C. Levine said.

In the report, Levine and his colleagues said diets with 200 mg of Vitamin C from fruits and vegetables have been associated with lower cancer risk, especially cancers of the oral cavity. oesophagus, stomach, colon

#### Russia-NATO ties at low ebb spread a deep — and perhaps MOSCOW, Apr 21: Awkward

from the very start, relations between NATO and Russia are at their lowest ebb since the Cold War ended a decade ago and could still sink further, reports Reuters.

Russia, angry about NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, looks set to be the most prominent absentee when world leaders gather in Washington this week for the alliance's 50th anniversary summit. "Russia will not attend the

events in Washington," Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said today after meeting President Boris Yeltsin. Officials and media have moderated anti-NATO rhetoric this week. Some government

sources even hint a representative - possibly special envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin, who looks set to visit Belgrade could still pitch up in Washing-Yet even if that happened, re-

lations would remain in limbo.

"The bombing of Serbia has

long-lasting - chill over NA-TO's relations with Russia," said Britain's Economist magazine in an editorial.

For Russia's military, NA-TO's campaign against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic for rejecting a deal for Serbia's Kosovo province simply confirms deep-seated suspicious. "The era of confrontation

between two socio-economic systems, the Cold War era, has been replaced by an era of NATO domination," Major-General Vagif Guseinov wrote in the military weekly Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye.

Gusseinov and other Russian military analysts see a twintrack approach, a trend that began 10 years ago when NATO "won" the Cold War but lost its First, NATO has been seek-

ing a new role and new mem-

bers. Second, the analysts say,

the Alliance has been keen to

capitalise on Russia's weak-

ness, a stark contrast to the day

when it faced huge Soviet forces across the Iron Curtain.

"The military adventure in Yugoslavia is a direct result of the efforts of NATO strategists over the past decade to find a role for the Alliance after the end of the Cold War," wrote Alexander Golts in the weekly magazine Itogi. US experts assume Russia

nancial reserves for a new Cold War," he added. "Whoever comes to power in Russia, it will take decades to revive Soviet military might." Soon after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and Yelisin had taken over in the Kremlin,

NATO." Jaws dropped at NATO headquarters. The Kremlin soon said it was a misunderstanding — a typist had omitted the word "not".

Exuberance or error, it was a sign of things to come.



Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan is meeting with the guests at the Bangladesh National Day reception in New York on March 26 accompanied by the host Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the

