

Progress made in Kosovo talks

By Barry Schweid
The Associated Press

RAMBOUILLET, France — Serbs agreed in principle Tuesday to give limited self-rule to majority ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, but the two sides failed after 17 days of intense negotiations to conclude a deal for ending their year-long conflict. More talks were scheduled for March as a new round of violence shook the province.

The partial settlement puts on hold, at least temporarily, NATO's threats to bomb Serb targets if they don't adopt the complex plan that would force them to withdraw troops from Kosovo and accept NATO peacekeepers.

After four days of strenuous personal diplomacy, shuttling between the two sides and even enlisting the help of 1996 GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright accepted less than she had insisted on.

There was no agreement on deploying NATO peacekeepers in the tense province to enforce the settlement, and the Serbs refused to give their consent to major elements of the self-rule sought by

the ethnic Albanians.

According to senior U.S. officials, the Serbs still insist on Serbian courts for Serbs accused of crimes, 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 the war that has claimed some 2,000 lives.

"But we have broken the stalemate that hung over Kosovo for so long," Albright said.

The Albanians also hedged. They were given two weeks for "consultations" with people in the province, and still are insisting 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 settlement also calls for a restoration of the cease-fire that was arranged by U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke last October and for the staged removal of Serbian troops and special police units — but only after a NATO force is deployed to enforce the agreement.

In order to put a halt to the protracted negotiations, which ran through two deadlines, the ethnic Albanians and Serbs agreed to another round of talks in France, beginning March 15.

In Washington, President Clinton noted that NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana still "has the authority in his pocket now" to order airstrikes. "That depends upon the actions of the Serbs," he said. "What we need is continued restraint."

"I believe that the Kosovar Albanian people will strongly support what their negotiators have done, because the agreement represents the opportunity for a better life after years of repression and fear," Clinton said in a statement issued by the White House later.

At the same time, he warned, "the Serbs should be prepared to return to the negotiations on March 15 with a commitment to sign the full agreement."

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who co-chaired the talks with French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, said: "We have done a lot here even if we have not done enough."

U.N. recommends marijuana research

By Nicole Winfield
The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — In-depth and impartial scientific studies should be conducted into marijuana's possible medical benefits, a U.N. report recommended Tuesday.

Only scientific evidence from the public and private sector can end the emotion-charged political debate over using cannabis for patients, said Herbert S. Okun, a member of the International Drug Control Board.

He stressed, however, that the board wasn't recommending easing controls on marijuana. The Vienna-based board is a 13-member, quasi-judicial organization overseeing implementation of U.N. drug treaties.

Among the other findings, the

board's annual report said Europeans are the world's top users of stress-reducing drugs, while Americans hold the record for consuming the most performance-enhancing substances.

While the reasons for such a disparity weren't known, Okun told a news conference Monday that it may lie in culture, lifestyle and other forces.

The aging European population has access to more extensive health care systems, which may be more willing to prescribe drugs to reduce aches and pains, he noted.

The high use of performance-enhancing drugs in the Americas may be at least partly explained by the prevalent sense of competition there, the report indicated.

In particular, Okun said the board was concerned about over-

prescription in the United States of methylphenidate, sold as the drug Ritalin, to treat children with attention deficit disorder.

American patients are consuming 330 million daily doses of the substance compared to 65 million for patients in the rest of the world, the report found.

The agency also warned that more and more North Americans are smoking heroin and said Europe has emerged as a producer of cannabis and synthetic drugs. Cannabis continues to be the most commonly abused illegal drug in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

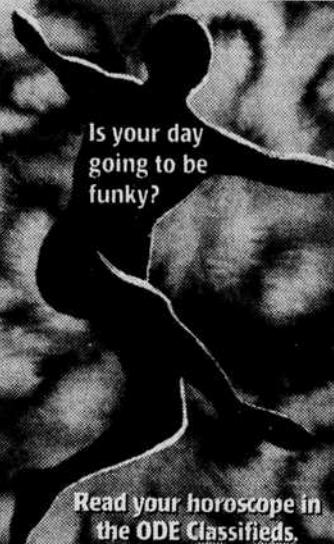
The report expressed concern about the prevalence of do-it-yourself guides on the Internet, which teach users how to prepare certain illegal substances.

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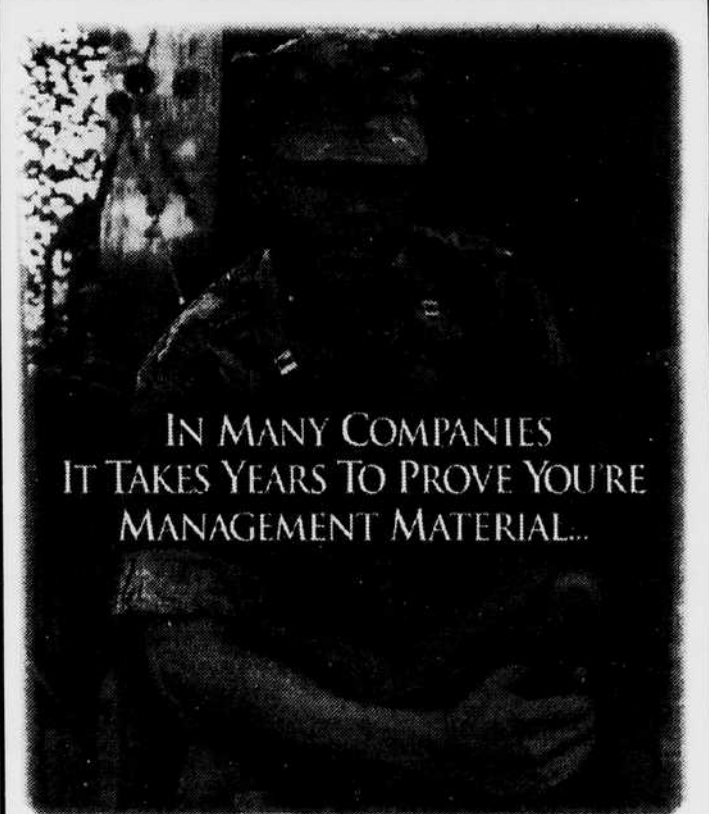
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