

Marcos shipped 320 tons of gold to Switzerland

MANILA, Aug 14: The Chairman of the commission trying to recover Ferdinand Marcos' wealth claimed Wednesday that the late president secretly shipped 320 tons of gold to Switzerland, reports AP.

David Castro, Chairman of the Presidential Commission on Good Government, recommended Wednesday that the government negotiate a settlement with the Marcos family to get at least a share of it.

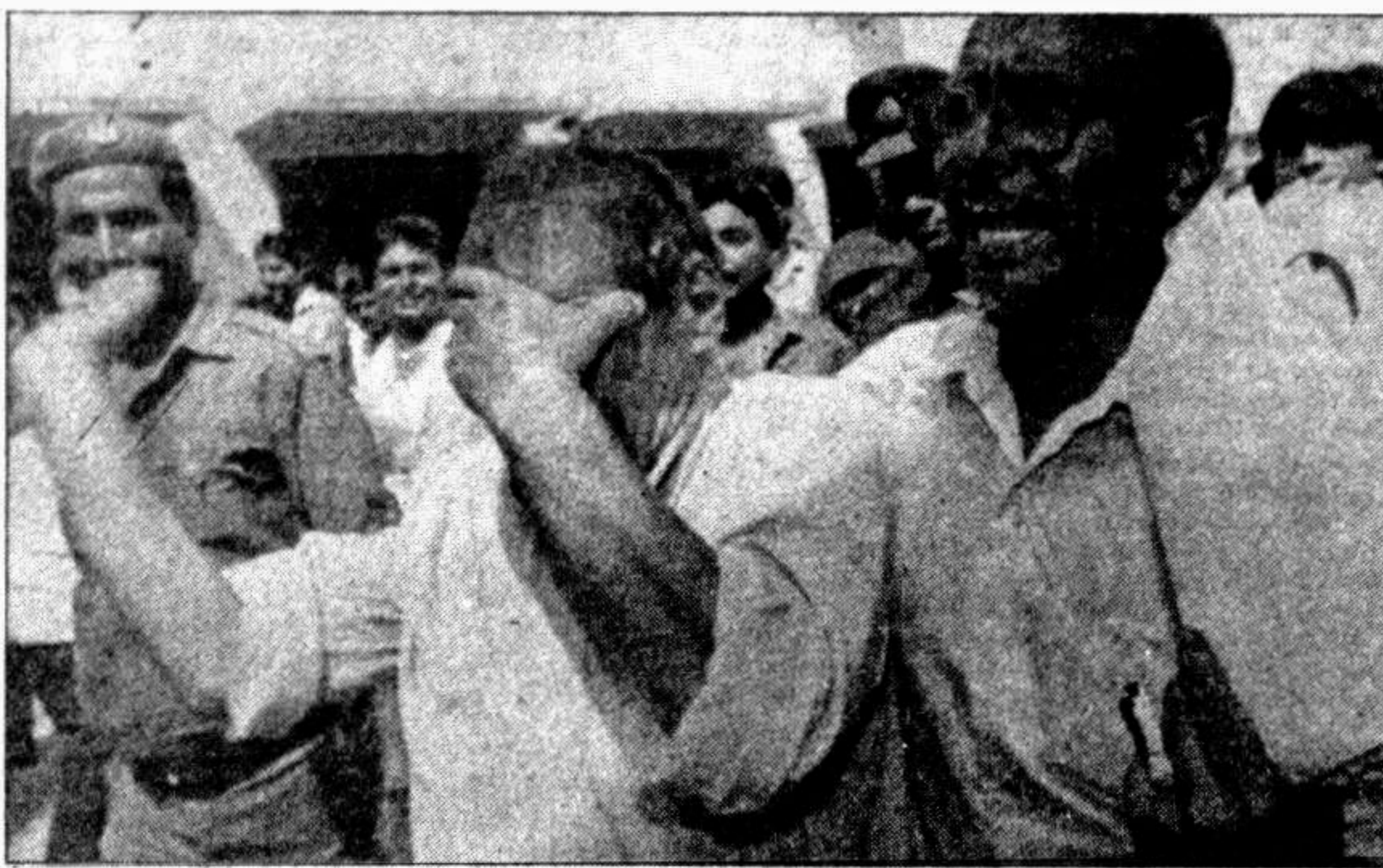
"At this point in time, we cannot go litigate against the holders of these assets," Castro said. "We are just hoping that all those who have a right to claim the assets will be able to come together and agree that we claim this asset together and the holder of the account... will be able to be convinced to release them to the Filipino people and the Philippine republic."

Philippines to Switzerland between October 1983 and 1985, one year before he was ousted in the popular uprising that propelled Corason Aquino to power. Marcos died in exile in Hawaii in September 1989.

Castro claimed the gold is held by the Union Bank of Switzerland in Zurich under account number 72570367-D.

He produced certificates from a Manila firm, Tamaraw Security Services Inc., saying it assisted in the transfer and from an unnamed Philippine Airlines pilot who Castro claims flew the gold to Zurich.

Castro had no estimate of the gold's value but said it probably far exceeds the \$1.35 billion in allegedly illegal Marcos accounts which the government is attempting to retrieve with the help of Swiss authorities.



NEW DELHI: 70-year-old Yahya Al-Sagish of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, swipes at press photographers as he covers his face August 13 outside court house where he is facing charges of marrying a 10-year-old Indian Muslim girl. Detectives believe the case could be part of an organised wedding racket involving Indian girls and Sheikhs from the Gulf.

Iraq to pay \$2,500 for each war dead

NEW YORK (United Nations), Aug 14: Those who lost spouses or immediate family members during Iraq's occupation of Kuwait will be eligible for 2,500 dollars compensation from Baghdad for each death, the UN Compensation Commission said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The commission in its letter to the Security Council said it had set a ceiling of 100,000 dollars that an individual could claim for compensation in any of several categories.

No claims will be entertained from Iraqis unless they can prove they are citizens of another country, the commission said.

Compensation can accumulate if someone falls into several of those categories and can prove it but it cannot surpass 100,000 dollars.

Off the Record

Bush invited to play golf in Australia

BRISBANE (Australia): US President Bush has been invited to play golf with British Open champion Ian Baker-Finch when he visits Australia in November, reports AP.

Baker-Finch has invited Bush and Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke to join him for a round on his home course at Sanctuary Cove, 60 miles (80 kilometers) south of Brisbane in Queensland state.

Baker-Finch has lived at the resort community of Sanctuary Cove since 1987 and is the touring professional for the course.

Bush, an avid amateur golfer, will be visiting Australia for the first time as president.



Man admits stealing women's underwear

COEUR D'ALENE (Idaho): A Hayden Lake man accused of ransacking northern Idaho summer homes and stealing women's underwear has pleaded guilty to two counts of burglary, reports AP.

Steven D. Burris, 26, changed his plea to guilty Monday in 1st District Court in Kootenai County. He had earlier pleaded innocent to the charges.

Under terms of a plea agreement, prosecutors in Bonner County, where Burris is also charged with two counts of burglary, have agreed to abide by the sentence handed down in the Kootenai County trial.

Kootenai County sheriff's deputies arrested Burris on Feb 21 for allegedly breaking into summer cabins on Lake Coeur d'Alene.

Investigators said they found enough women's lingerie in Burris' pickup truck to fill three plastic garbage bags.

Burris could be sentenced to a combined 10 years in prison and fined \$10,000 for both burglary counts. But under terms of the plea bargain, prosecutors will recommend a suspended sentence, supervised probation and counseling.



JOHNSON SPACE CENTRE: In this photo released by NASA August 13, space shuttle Atlantis crew member Mike Baker takes a bite from a sandwich floating weightless during the recent STS 43 orbital mission.

'La Tigress' seeks a Senate seat

LA CONCORDIA: She's known as 'La Tigress' — the Tigress — and her flamboyant style and stinging charges have invigorated the campaign for Mexico's national elections Sunday, reports AP.

Irma Serrano, former film star and close friend of top officials, even one ex-president, is running for the Senate from the southernmost state of Chiapas. She has broken with her powerful friends and now represents the small leftist Cardenista Front Party against the dominant government party.

Serrano, 55, has nothing but contempt for the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, whose leaders once vied for her company.

"They're corrupt worms!" she shouts, leaving the crowd in this rural village applauding, laughing, sometimes gasping. "They're thieves."

Serrano, who appears at rallies wearing tiger-stripe eye makeup covering much of her forehead, would need a miracle to win in Chiapas. The state, along the Guatemalan border, is one of the biggest strongholds of the PRI, which has dominated Mexican politics since 1929.

A joker now Prime Minister of Iceland

REYKJAVIK (Iceland): David Oddsson used to make fun of the government. Now he's the prime minister, reports AP.

"I read... that a radio joker has taken over the post of prime minister," he said in an interview.

"That was 20 years ago, so I am not joking anymore. I know the seriousness of the job."

In law school, Oddsson collaborated with two friends on such radio comedies as "I shall Enrich My Country," a spoof of greedy politicians. On his own, he wrote "Dirty White Collar," about politics, corruption and the press.

JKLF urges Pakistan to follow Chinese, Soviet intervention model in Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, Aug 14: A top militant leader waging an independence from India in Kashmir urged Pakistan on Tuesday to base its role in Kashmir on the model of Chinese and Soviet intervention in Vietnam, reports AFP.

Amanullah Khan, chief of the Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), said he was opposed to a military confrontation between India and Pakistan as it would not resolve

the problem.

"We are opposed to a war" unlike some compatriot groups which, he said, "deceived the Kashmiri nation that tanks would come from Islamabad" to supplement their movement.

"All we expect from Pakistan is the role of a supporting nation like China and the Soviet Union did in Vietnam," he told a news conference here.

He said the two countries did not send their armies to help North Vietnam in its war against the US-backed government in the South. The anti-US struggle succeeded because of "moral and material support" from China and the Soviet Union, he said.

Khan, whose JKLF is one of the major groups spearheading the independence movement, slammed Islamabad's policy on Kashmir.

He called on all groups to do away with differences and "put up a united struggle against usurpers of our right to determine our own future."

Welcoming recent support from some British and American lawmakers for the Kashmiris' right to self-determination, the JKLF chief expressed his optimism that "growing international recognition of the issue will bring the solution closer."

Head of the JKLF's political wing Zahid Amin Kashif, who recently conducted a three-week secret tour of Indian-administered Kashmir, said India should break ground for a settlement.

"Kashmiris are not prepared to wait for another 40 years," he said warning that New Delhi "will have to pay unimaginably high price for perpetrating savagery."

Accusing India of trampling on human rights, he said youths were no longer seen on streets. Fearing torture, they have fled or joined the independence movement, Kashif said.

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Marcos body to be allowed home within Cory's term

MANILA, Aug 14: President Corason Aquino's chief aide said Wednesday that the body of President Ferdinand Marcos will be allowed home from Hawaii for burial before Mrs. Aquino's term ends next June, reports AP.

"This administration has no intention to perpetually ban the return of the remains of the former president," said Executive Secretary Franklin Drlon. "It intends to allow the return of the body of the late president during the term of President Aquino."

"Once the body is brought back to the country," Drlon said, "the former president will be given the respect due his person." Drlon spoke during a joint hearing by the Senate human rights and defense committees on the government's refusal to allow the return of Marcos' remains after lifting the ban on his widow, Imelda, and their children.

32 Noriega associates await trial in prison

PANAMA CITY, Aug 14: Thirty-two military officers remain in prison, still awaiting trial 20 months after a US invasion deposed their commander, Gen Manuel Antonio Noriega, reports AP.

While the slow wheels of Panamanian justice turn, they pass the time at Renacer Prison, a special jungle camp near the Panama Canal, playing soccer and baseball or making handicrafts. Visits are normally restricted to lawyers and close relatives.

The prisoners ranged in rank from sergeant to colonel in Noriega's Panamanian Defence Forces, now disbanded. They were captured or surrendered during the invasion of December 1989 and later turned over to Panamanian authorities.

Noriega was taken to the United States, where he awaits trial on charges of drug trafficking and money laundering. Hundreds responded when the government asked people with complaints against the

prisoners to come forward. Newspapers printed unconfirmed reports of crimes ranging from embezzlement to murder.

Many complaints were dismissed and there is little evidence for some of the others. According to the Attorney General's Office, the trials have been delayed because the charges still are being investigated.

Ramiro Fonseca, a defence lawyer, said the government doesn't want to prosecute because the cases are weak, but cannot free the men for fear of adverse public reaction.

"They don't have Noriega," he said, "so they have to take it out on those who worked under him. The military know they have to pay for Noriega."

Public sentiment against the military and Noriega is so strong that, for more than a year, Panama would not allow associates of the former dictator to leave the embassies of Mexico, Cuba and Peru, where they had taken refuge.

'Friendly fire' by US troops killed 35 Americans in Gulf

WASHINGTON, Aug 14: Accidental "friendly fire" by US forces in the Gulf war killed 35 Americans and wounded 72 others, largely because of the high speed of desert and nighttime warfare, the Defence Department said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Officers said the high number of "friendly fire" casualties was due mainly to the speed of the allied advance, which in some cases put US tanks in the midst of Iraqi armour just as US planes arrived to fire on the enemy.

"A combination of featureless desert terrain; large, complex and fast-moving formations; fighting in rain, darkness or low visibility; and the ability to engage targets from long distances were contributing factors," the Pentagon said in a summary of its investigation of the incidents.

It said the 35 killed by "friendly fire" — US forces accidentally firing on each other — were among the 148 Americans killed in the war in all, and the 72 were among a total of 467 injured.

In one of the worst accidents, six US soldiers were killed and 25 wounded when their five tanks and five Bradley fighting vehicles were misidentified and shelled by other US tanks on February 27 during a night battle.

Seven marines were killed and two wounded on January 29 when an air force A-10 "tank killer" plane fired a Maverick missile that malfunctioned and hit their armoured vehicle.

It said 24 Americans were killed and 57 wounded by US ground forces firing on each other, and 11 were killed and 15 wounded by US planes firing on ground forces.

The 17 per cent rate of accidental casualties was probably far higher for the United States than reported in any other war, marine Lieutenant-General Martin Brandtner said.

BRIEFLY

Fire at London underground station: A fire at a busy London underground railway station trapped about 2,000 commuters for two hours on Tuesday night, reports Reuter from London.

Hospital sources said a number of people were suffering from heat exhaustion after the rush-hour fire at Bank Station in the heart of London's financial district.

There were no serious injuries. Commuters were trapped when the electric current was cut off as firefighters tackled a blaze which started in a storage container.

In 1987, 31 people were killed in a fire which swept King's Cross underground station.

Police, Albanians clash in Italy: Fresh incidents broke out late Tuesday at the sports stadium in Bari between Italian police and Albanian would-be immigrants who have refused to be repatriated, reports AFP from Italy.

Hurling discs and weights taken from the stadium the Albanians, a few hundred diehards left after thousands were returned home, tried to break through police barriers.

The police finally managed to restore order.

Iraqi call to remove Turkish troops: Iraq on Tuesday demanded the immediate withdrawal of Turkish troops from northern Iraqi territory and rejected the creation of a buffer zone along the Turkish-Iraqi border, reports AFP from Baghdad.

"An immediate withdrawal of Turkish forces from northern Iraq, abstention from any act that violates the sovereignty of Iraq and the security of its national territory and non-intervention in its internal affairs are the only means to ensure good relations between the two countries," the official Iraqi news agency INA said.

It was the first Iraqi reaction to statement Monday by Turkish Defence Minister Barlas Dogu that the establishment of the buffer zone would depend on a decision by the Turkish government, which is to meet today.

Chinese decision to sign NPT hailed: South Korea welcomed China's decision to join the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) Wednesday and expressed hope the move would strengthen the treaty's universality, reports AP from Seoul.

Seoul welcomes the expressed intention of the People's Republic of China to join the NPT, following the example of France, a Foreign Ministry statement said.

"The Korean government expects that the accession to the NPT by China, one of the five nuclear-weapon states, will further enhance the universality of the treaty and strengthen the effectiveness of the non-proliferation regime," it said.

Chinese Premier Li Peng said in a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu in Beijing last week that Beijing would sign the treaty.

Arab summit talks in Libya likely: Arab leaders may hold summit talks in Libya this month when they gather for the inauguration of the world's biggest man-made river, a Gulf newspaper reported today, reports AFP from Dubai.

The Dubai-based Arabic-language daily Al-Bayan quoted senior Libyan official Ahmad Kadhafuddam as saying Tripoli had invited all Arab leaders for the August 28 ceremony.

"An Arab summit could be held on the sidelines of the ceremony," Al-Bayan quoted him as saying in its front-page report from Cairo.

But it did not say where Kadhafuddam, who is in charge of Libya's ties with Egypt, made the comments in which he also said the summit would cover current peace efforts in the Middle East.

Castro still wears bulletproof vest on his chest

HAVANA, Aug 14: Fidel Castro, popping up everywhere at the Pan American games, gave no hint that he would comply with Cuba's mandatory retirement age as he turned 65 Tuesday amid small celebrations, reports AP.

Thirty-two years after leading Cuba's revolution, Castro remains a vital figure firmly in control of his country, despite the twin pressures of the US economic embargo and the cutback in aid and oil by the Soviet Union. The Cuban president, one of the world's last strident socialists, has pulled off a

public relations tour de force with his own people and the outside world at these Pan American Games. After rallying his economically depressed nation to make sacrifices and spend more than 100 million dollars to stage the games, he is on the scene of nearly all the sports to share with his people the success of their athletes.

He is presenting to the United States and the rest of the hemisphere, via unrestricted television and newspaper coverage, an image of a popular leader who is neither threatening nor

threatened. He is at women's basketball doing "the wave" with the crowd, although apparently unable to lift his arms fully because of the bulletproof vest on his chest. He was at the track stadium, presenting medals and kissing athletes. He flew across the island to Santiago, where weightlifting and gymnastics were held, to give away more medals.

As is typical, little celebrations were held in his honour all over the country as neighbourhood organisations, called Committees for the Defence of the Revolution,

saluted him with songs and toasts. A band played Latin dance music at a small party in front of the Museum of the Revolution, the former presidential palace of the now-despised Fulgencio Batista, who was supported by the United States. The music drifted across the harbour from Old Havana as several hundred people danced in the afternoon sunshine.

Although Castro's portrait adorns some posters, his presence on the walls of Havana is far less prominent than the image of

revolutionary martyr Che Guevara, whose in tense, inspirational gaze over looks the court at the basketball arena.

The foreign ministry spokeswoman said that as far as she knew, Castro is "in splendid health" and remains active in sports, especially scuba diving. Cuban men are allowed to retire and collect social security benefits at 60, five years later than women, but are permitted to remain in their jobs until mandatory retirement at 65, said the foreign ministry spokeswoman.

"But there are exceptions made for the leadership," she said, adding that Castro has made no serious comments about wishing to step aside.

Castro has said from time to time that it would be nice to go off and relax, and about a year ago he told Nobel Prize-winning author Gabriel Garcia Marquez that he'd like to "just hang out on the corner" like ordinary men.

But with Cuba facing its most severe economic crunch since the revolution, Castro appears unlikely to yield control soon.