

Hong Kong no longer a 'watermelon' for West: People's Daily

BEIJING, Feb 19: The recovery of Hong Kong was a "sacred duty" for China which was no longer a "watermelon" for the West to slice at will, the People's Daily said today, reports AFP.

Over one lakh Indonesians to perform Hajj

JAKARTA, Feb 19: Authorities here believe that a record 110,000 Indonesian will perform the Muslim Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia this year, an official of the Ministry of Religious Affairs said Friday, reports AFP.

A total of 105,874 Indonesians had so registered to take part in this year's Hajj by closing of the registration period Monday, Director General for Guidance of Muslims and Hajj Affairs Amidhan said.

Amidhan said, however, that experience showed that when full return from other parts of the country were in, the final number of participants might increase by about 5,000.

The Indonesian government organizes the pilgrimage, which this year falls on March 10. A total of 104,000 Indonesian Muslims took part last year. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-populated nation with nearly 90 per cent of its 184 million people following the faith.

Ghali orders UNHCR to resume aid in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 19: The UN chief has ordered the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to promptly resume humanitarian aid in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the UN Security Council president said Thursday, reports AFP.

Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sent his order in writing to UNHCR, Sadako Ogata, who on Wednesday decided to stop distributing relief supplies in the war-torn former Yugoslav republic to

protest a blockade of UN convoys.

"The Secretary General has been writing a letter to her to resume the aid very quickly," said Ahmed Snissi.

UN officials said that before making her controversial decision Ogata did not consult with Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who has been visiting Japan.

Humanitarian aid for famine-stricken eastern Bosnia has been held up by local Serb militias, and Bosnian author-

ties recently decided to bar relief supplies from entering Sarajevo in solidarity with the inhabitants of eastern Bosnia.

The 15-member Security Council on Wednesday called on all warring parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina to lift their blockades of UN convoys.

Reuter from Paris says: The 27-nation council of Europe on Thursday said the use of rape as means of "ethnic cleansing" in former Yugoslavia was a crime against humanity and it

urged the international community to ensure the practice is stopped.

Disputes over the number of victims would not hide the gravity of the crime and those responsible should be brought before national or international courts, the council's committee of ministers said in a statement.

"The use of rape as instrument of warfare and within the context of a strategy of ethnic cleansing — as is the case in former Yugoslavia — is a war crime and should be regarded as a crime against humanity," the statement said.

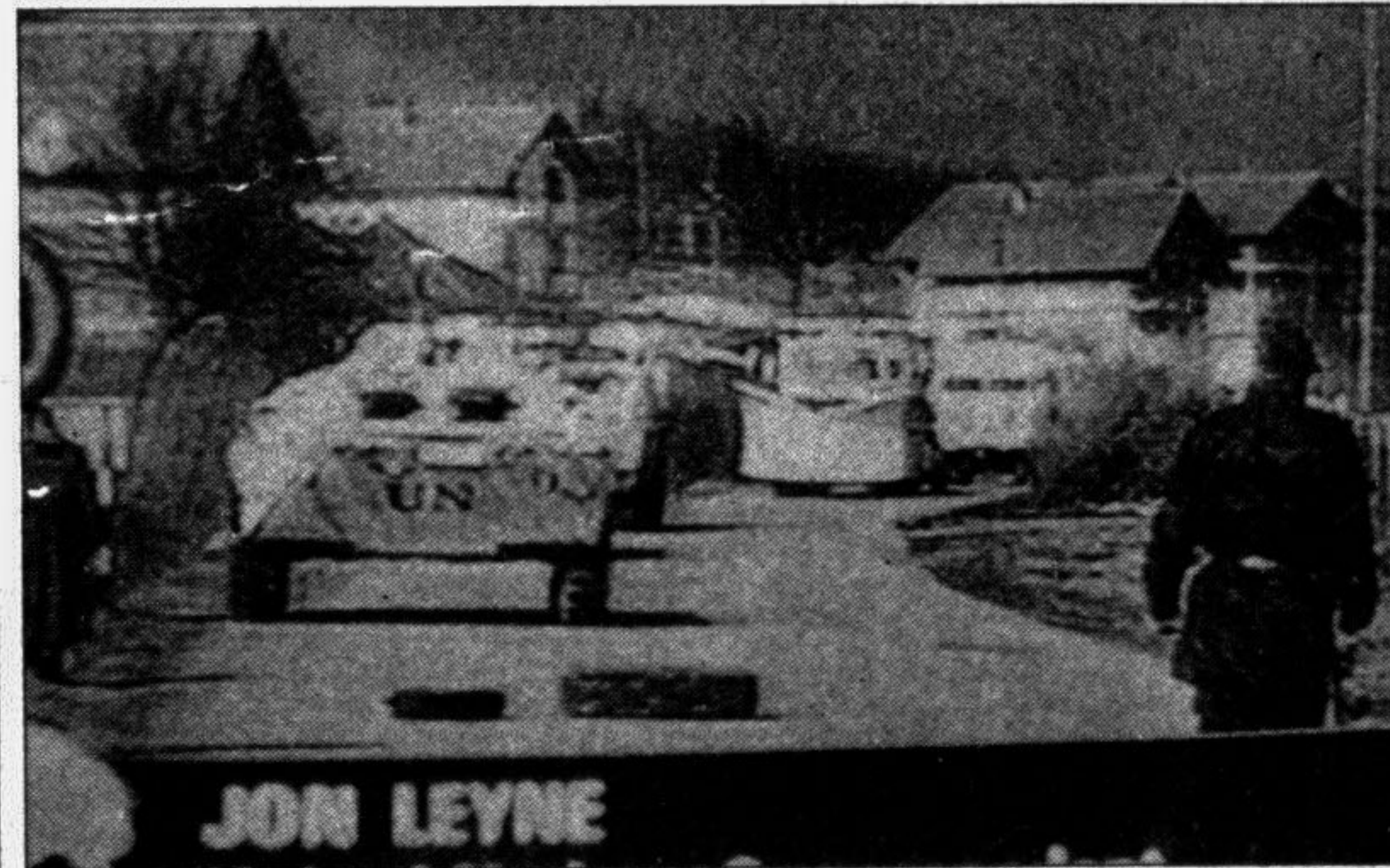
France, with British and US support, is preparing a resolution in the United Nations Security Council to establish an international tribunal to try war criminals in the former Yugoslavia.

The committee of ministers said rapes were mostly directed against Muslim women and children in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Serbs have rejected accusation by several human rights groups that Serb soldiers systematically raped Muslim women to frighten Muslim residents out of Serb-held areas.

The committee said controversy over the scale of rapes and number of victims had been deliberately encouraged.

"Such controversy can in no event detract from the gravity of these violations of human rights," it said.



UN food convoys which are not allowed by the Serbs to reach the Muslims in eastern Bosnia. — Star TV photo

Off the Record

Jackson, you can try the Dead Sea

JERUSALEM: Israel has invited pop megastar Michael Jackson to try the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on earth, in a bid to cure his rare skin disease, reports AFP.

Tourism Commissioner Raphael Farber issued the open invitation Thursday after Jackson revealed he suffers a disorder that destroys the pigment of his skin.

Thousands of people are treated each year for ailments ranging from psoriasis to allergies and asthma with the unique water and climate of the Dead Sea, which is 386 metres (1,300 ft) below sea level and Farber added that if the dry heat of the Dead Sea put Jackson off, Israel offered him one other chance of a cure.

"Israel is a land of miracles and he is welcome to try power of prayer at any of the holy places throughout Israel," the Commissioner said.

She kept her blindness secret for 70 years

LONDON: A British woman kept her blindness secret for 70 years and hid it even from her family, the Daily Mirror newspaper reported Thursday, says Reuter.

The husband of Rose Northmore, who is 72, finally discovered her secret last week when she asked him to buy her a "talking book."

He took her to a doctor, who said she had only one and a half per cent of normal vision.

"I was stunned," Norman Northmore, 75, said. "We had been married 48 years and I had no idea. She never told anyone."

"I didn't want to bother anyone," she explained.

Red wine helps check fat

LONDON: Red wine contains compounds that help prevent the buildup of fat in the arteries, according to a study published yesterday by the British medical journal the Lancet, reports AFP.

"The alcohol content of wine may not be the sole explanation" for the fact that the French are able to enjoy a high-fat diet and still show a low incidence of arteriosclerosis, the US-Israeli research team wrote.

The benefits of red wine, well known to the French, may derive from its phenolic compounds, which contain "potent antioxidant properties" that help prevent fat buildup in the arteries, the study said.

"The results of in-vitro studies of Californian red wines provide a plausible explanation for the French paradox," they said, adding however that further research was necessary.

Slimming powder affects kidney

Brussels: At least 53 Belgian women suffered serious kidney disorders after taking slimming powders containing Chinese herbs, a Belgian researcher said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Jean-Louis Vanherweghem, head of the nephrology division of Brussels' Erasmus Hospital, said 19 of the 53 women had suffered complete kidney failure and needed dialysis.

Another woman who took the slimming her had a kidney transplant, while others were on the waiting list for transplants, the researcher said.

Ex-US Attorney Gen says

UN sanctions killing 2000 Iraqis a week

NEW YORK, Feb 19: Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, just back from a fact-finding mission to Baghdad, called on the United Nations on Thursday to end its sanctions against Iraq, reports Reuter.

"The UN sanctions without question are killing more than 2,000 per week," Clark said, adding the majority are children, the elderly and the chronically ill.

The UN Security Council has imposed full economic sanctions on Iraq since the 1991 Gulf War.

Hussein, Clark has made previous calls for an end to the sanctions.

Hussein has been signalling a more conciliatory stance towards the United States following the election of President Bill Clinton.

"He wants dialogue. He wants to see what can be agreed upon," Clark said. But he added that Hussein would not compromise on any issues of Iraqi sovereignty.

He discussed these issues during a 90-minute meeting with the Iraqi leader.

Two former Red Army men to die

TOKYO, Feb 19: Japan's Supreme Court today sentenced two former members of the radical red army political group to death and another to a 20-year prison term for killing 17 people more than 20 years ago, reports AFP.

The court upheld lower court rulings of 1982 and 1986 that ordered death penalties on Hiroko Nagata, a 48-year-old former nurse, and her former lover Hiroshi Sakaguchi, 46. Yasuhiro Yasuhiro Uedaki, 44, is to stay behind bars.

Clark, who was a strong opponent of the 1991 Gulf War that drove Iraq from Kuwait, was Attorney General during the Johnson administration from 1967-1969. He returned from his nine-day trip on Monday.

While in Iraq he toured hospitals and met with President Saddam Hussein and other senior officials.

"If the members of the Security Council went to those hospitals and saw those conditions they would not dare continue those sanctions for a minute," Clark said.

He said it was unacceptable for the world body to "hold the children of Iraq" hostage in order to win concessions from

"Without any reason, Russia turned over 51,000 square kilometers of water area to the United States," Ilyukin was quoted by interfax as saying.

He also described as "criminal activity" the signing by Gorbachev of the Soviet-American INF treaty calling for the destruction of the former Soviet Union's SS-23 missiles.

"Hogg informed the Charge that this was an outrageous infringement of Rushdie's rights and a violation of international law," the statement said.

ANC to endorse coalition govt after multiparty elections

SOWETO, South Africa, Feb 19: The ANC decided Thursday to endorse a coalition government of national unity for up to five years after South Africa's first multiparty elections, reports AFP.

The decision, taken unanimously by the organisation's 96-strong National Executive Committee and announced in a press conference in Soweto, Johannesburg's black township, marks the end of six days of intense speculation about a "power-sharing" deal between

the African National Congress and the ruling National Party.

The ANC also said it would participate in a multi-party planning conference, which it said would be held on February 25, marking the resumption of multilateral negotiations which stalled in May last year.

The ANC's NEC went into a huddle Tuesday to consider proposals which were thrashed out at a meeting between the country's two main political players, the ANC and

the White minority government of President Frederik De Klerk, in Cape Town last week.

ANC information chief Palo Jordan said the NEC had rejected the concept of power-sharing, because it would "impair the capacity of a government of national unity to function effectively in the process of restructuring."

Cabinet members would be selected according to the proportion of votes their parties had received, he said.

Christopher in Cairo

CAIRO, Feb 19: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, on his first foreign mission, arrived in the Middle East on Thursday aiming to push Arabs and Israelis to revive their stalled peace talks, reports Reuter.

In an arrival statement at Cairo airport, Christopher said: "We have come to the region ready to do our best, and we will be assessing whether the parties are ready to do theirs."

"I'm here to encourage the parties to resume the peace process," he said.

Asked about the 415 Palestinians whose deportation by Israel on December 17 has jeopardised peace talks, Christopher said: "When we (President Clinton's administration) came to office there was no movement at all on the deportees issue. We talked with the leaders of Israel and following those talks they made very important steps to establish a process with respect to the deportees."

US considers moving Sixth Fleet from Italy to Israel

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: US navy is considering moving the base of its Sixth Fleet from Italy to Israel's port in Haifa, Navy sources said Thursday, reports AFP.

Congress requested the Navy to initiate a study of the possibility. It is expected to be completed by the end of April, a Navy spokesman told AFP.

The Sixth fleet base in Gaeta, Italy, often deploys its ships to areas of active conflict, such as the Adriatic where some are currently stationed.

On Wednesday, the Baltimore sun newspaper quoted Navy sources saying pressure from senate committees and pro-Israel interests in Washington had instigated the study.

"Senator Daniel Inouye, Chairman of the Defence Appropriations Committee, told Israeli officials on a visit to Tel Aviv that he will obtain money to make Haifa's port a permanent home for part of the fleet," the paper reported.



ENGLAND: Some of the 200 female students at Somerville College, Oxford who bound and gagged themselves Wednesday, to prevent the college governors from ending the 114-year-old ban on male students. The university's governing body deferred the decision under a peace plan until 1995. — AFP/UNB photo

Iran to send home 3 lakh Afghans

TEHRAN, Feb 19: Iran plans to send home some 300,000 Afghan refugees who lack proper identification papers, the governor of the northeast Khorasan province said Thursday, reports AFP.

Esmail Modifi told a gathering of regional police chiefs that the measure topped the list of priorities for security forces in the province, the Iranian news agency said.

An Interior Ministry regulation adopted several years ago requires Afghan refugees to apply for identity cards, but

300,000 Afghans scattered throughout the province had ignored it, he said.

Modifi did not say how the repatriations would be carried out. A representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Tehran said he was unaware of the plan which at first glance appeared contrary to an Iranian pledge not to carry out force repatriations.

Some 400,000 Afghan refugees have already gone home voluntarily since the fall

of the communist government in Kabul last April, according to official Iranian estimates.

About three million people fled to Iran after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, placing a heavy burden on the country's economy.

On Wednesday, the head of the interior ministry's refugee office said it would be another two years before the remainder of the almost three million Afghan refugees left the country.

BRIEFLY

Ghali ends Japan tour: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali left Japan Friday after a high-profile visit which failed to persuade Tokyo to make a bigger commitment to global peacekeeping operations, reports Reuter from Tokyo.

Japan lavished praise on the veteran Egyptian diplomat's efforts to deal with a string of seemingly intractable regional conflicts.

He in turn paid tribute to his hosts while having to bow to the domestic political realities which prevent Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's government from ordering a wider UN role.

"The ingredients of (Japan's) success — political will, imagination, technological dynamism, managerial excellence — are much admired, and much studied, around the world," he said in one of several speeches delivered during the five-day visit.

Nine killed in Kashmir: An Indian border guard and six Muslim militants were among nine people slain in violence in Kashmir, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported Thursday, says AFP from New-Delhi.

A border security force trooper died and three of his colleagues were wounded when a landmine exploded late Wednesday at Kangan, about 40 kms (25 miles) from Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir state.

Another border security vehicle was hit Wednesday by a rocket fired by Muslim guerrillas in Srinagar, triggering a major crackdown by Indian security forces, but the report said the fate of its occupants was not known.

7 Palestinians shot at in Gaza: Seven Palestinians were wounded when fired on by Israeli soldiers Thursday evening in the occupied territories, a Palestinian source said, reports AFP from Jerusalem.

Six Palestinians were wounded when the Israeli army broke up a demonstration at the Jabalya Refugee Camp in the Gaza strip. Another Palestinian was wounded when soldiers fired on a group of demonstrators who had thrown stones at them near Tulkarem, on the West Bank, the source said.

Earlier in the day, a 17-year-old Palestinian youth was killed by Israeli soldiers during a demonstration near Tulkarem on the occupied West Bank.

Mount Merapi starts erupting: Mount Merapi on the densely populated plain of central Java has started sending heatclouds and cold lava streams down its slopes, an official of the volcano logical office said today, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Heavy rains in the area have already forced cold lava streams, composed of smouldering rocks, to flow down three river gullies on its southwest slope since Tuesday, the Head of Volcanological Research Sutikno Bronto said on the telephone from Yogyakarta, south of Merapi.

Armenians demand new constitution: Thousands of protesters flooded the capital of Armenia on Thursday demanding a new constitution and government for the war-weary southern former Soviet republic, officials and media reported, says AP from Moscow.

Crowd estimates ranged from 8,000 to 40,000 in the rally that filled central Theater Square in the capital Yerevan. The protest was organized by opposition groups led by the Union of Self-Determination.

At one point, some demonstrators began marching toward Armenia's presidential palace. But their route was blocked by riot police armed with clubs and shield. Witnesses also claimed to see armoured personnel carriers.

Gulf states plan to return to joint arms venture with Egypt

ABU DHABI, Feb 19: Gulf Arab States plan to return to a joint arms venture with Egypt after a boycott of nearly 15 years in protest at Cairo's peace treaty with Israel, and Egyptian official said on Thursday, reports AFP.

"The Arab Organisation for Industrialisation (AOI) is on its way to revival. There have been contacts for the return of Gulf states and you will hear very good news soon," said Mahmud Fahmi, head of an AOI delegation to an international arms show in Abu Dhabi.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) walked out of the Cairo-based AOI in 1978 after Egypt signed the Camp David peace accord,

Yeltsin rejects simultaneous presidential, legislative polls

MOSCOW, Feb 19: Tired and listless Russian President Boris Yeltsin rejected on Thursday simultaneous presidential and legislative elections, as proposed by his arch-rival and critic, parliamentary speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov, reports AFP.

"It is completely inadmissible to organize simultaneous elections," Yeltsin said in a recorded television address from his holiday dacha on the outskirts of Moscow, where he is taking an unscheduled holiday.

The broadcast was a direct appeal to the Russian people, a bid to rally support for Yeltsin's latest proposals for ending the bitter power between himself and parliament.

Khasbulatov had proposed simultaneous elections as a way of resolving the continuing

power struggle.

"The country's political stability should be preserved at all costs by the gradual and flexible transfer of power to a new generation of politicians," Yeltsin said.

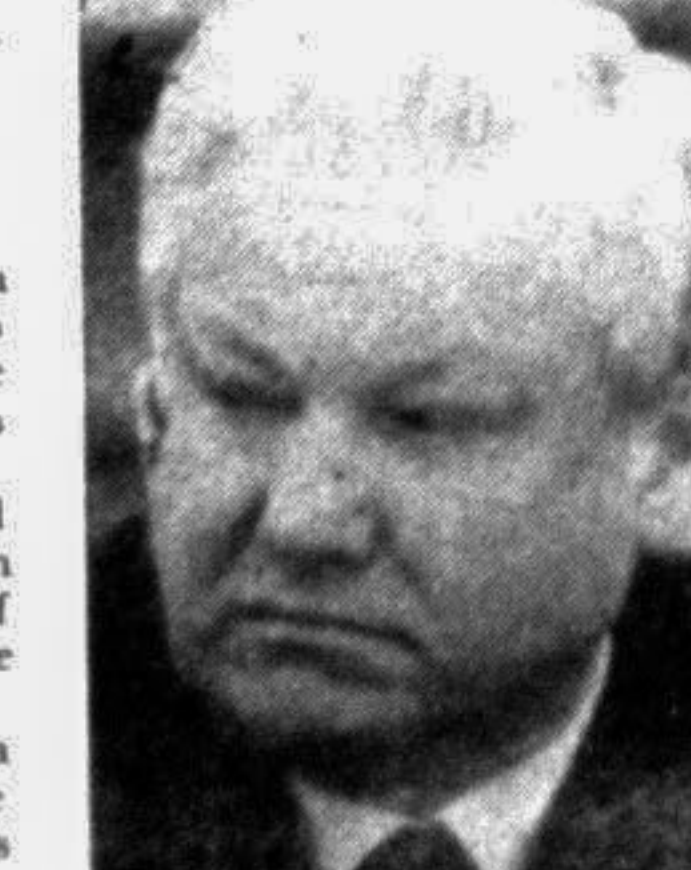
He said Russia, "like everyone," was tired of tension and confrontation and needed a break from it. "We have too much to do to waste our time and our strength in a useless battle."

1993, Yeltsin said, should be a year for concentrating on the economy, a year of "conciliation and creative work."

The President, who spent a full 20 minutes detailing the process of compromise he is engaged in, reaffirmed that he wants to see legislative elections held in spring 1994 and presidential elections in 1995,

a year earlier than previously scheduled.

He said agreement between



himself and the parliament could, and must be achieved. Yeltsin and Khasbulatov had

decided in December to hold a constitutional referendum in April. But Yeltsin backed away from the plan, fearing a debacle at the hands of Russian voters and a possible boycott from independence-seeking republics within Russia.

In his speech, however, Yeltsin again said he would press for a referendum if two working groups formed Wednesday by the presidency and parliament could not come up with an acceptable compromise on the division of powers between the two branches of government.

"Only the threat of a referendum has forced the two sides to the negotiating table to draw up an agreement on strengthening the constitutional system," he said.

"If the ongoing negotiations fail, there will remain only one

constitutional possibility for resolving the power crisis. I will call on you directly to cast your votes," he said.

Yeltsin has been weakened by incessant attacks by the conservative-dominated parliament which has moved to block his attempts at radical reform, forcing him to sack his reformist Premier Yegor Gaidar.

In a bid to present himself as a unifying force for Russia, Yeltsin added, "We live in the same country, we want to safeguard it, and we have only one enemy — the economic crisis."

Meanwhile, hardliners from the extremist National Salvation Front on Thursday began a trial by a "people's tribunal" of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, news agencies reported.

Britain protests Iranians' call to execute Rushdie

LONDON, Feb 19: The foreign office sharply protested to Iran's Charge d'Affaires here Thursday over renewed calls by Iranian officials for the execution of British writer Salman Rushdie, reports AFP.

"The British government was deeply disturbed by recent statement by a number of figures in Iran reiterating the Fatwa," or death sentence against Rushdie, the foreign office said in a statement issued after the meeting between Gholamreza Ansari and junior minister Douglas Hogg.

"Hogg informed the Charge that this was an outrageous infringement of Rushdie's rights and a violation of international law," the statement said.