

BRIEFLY

Gen Scowcroft honoured: General Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor to former US President George Bush and a key figure in the Gulf War, Wednesday was awarded an honorary Knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II, reports AFP from London.

Scowcroft, who turns 68 on Friday, had a 15-minute audience with Elizabeth II.

Buckingham Palace said he was honoured as a mark of his long-standing friendship towards Britain and for his role in building the allied coalition against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Turkish Kurds announce truce: The leader of the Marxist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey announced Wednesday a unilateral ceasefire in their battle for a separate state, reports AFP from Lebanon.

PKK chief Abdullah Ocalan, known as Apo, told a press conference in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa valley the ceasefire would take effect on March 20 and last until April 15.

"This ceasefire will be a test period which, I hope, will allow the start of political negotiations with the Turkish state," he said.

18,000 Iraqis to perform Hajj: Iraq will permit 18,000 people to make the Mecca pilgrimage this year, a newspaper reported on Wednesday, but travel agents said few Iraqis could afford it, reports Reuters from Baghdad.

The government newspaper Al-Jumhuriyah quoted minister of endowment and religious affairs Abdullah Fadhel as saying that 18,000 Iraqis could make the Hajj "in line with the resolutions of foreign ministers of Islamic countries."

But the ministry set a price of 16,500 Iraqi dinar for the trip to Mecca and back, including food and accommodation while in Saudi Arabia. The amount is equivalent to three years of average civil service wages.

Last year about 10,000 Iraqis journeyed to Mecca, a pilgrimage every Muslim is expected to make at least once. Only 600 Iraqis made the pilgrimage in 1991, the year of the Gulf war.

First Lady of US theatre dead: Helen Hayes, who won the highest honours of stage, screen and television and was dubbed "First Lady of the American Theatre," died Wednesday. She was 92, reports AP from New York.

Miss Hayes was brought to Nyack Hospital, in this New York suburb where she made her home, early last week suffering from congestive heart failure. Her death was announced by hospital spokeswoman Nancy Kriz.

She died at 3.30 pm with her family by her side, Kriz said. Miss Hayes made her professional debut at age 5. Her career spanned eight decades and roles ranged from Little Lord Fauntleroy to Queen Victoria to the cantankerous passenger in "Airport," for which she won an Oscar for best supporting actress in 1970.

She received three Tonys and an Emmy as well as two Oscars, and in 1981 was awarded the Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime achievement.

Largest bacteria discovered: The largest bacteria known to science has been discovered living in fish off the coast of Australia, a study published Thursday said, reports Reuters from London.

A study in the scientific journal Nature said the organism measures half a millimetre (0.02 inch) long and lives inside surgeon fish.

"In terms of cell volume, these surgeon fish symbionts are the largest bacteria yet described," the article, written by scientists from James Cook University in Queensland, Australia and Indian University in the United States, said.

"The bacterium 'Cpulopectum fishelsoni' is as awesome as its name," the journal said in a statement.

JKLF won't allow elections under Indian constitution

ISLAMABAD, Mar 18: A major militant group fighting Indian rule in Kashmir said on Wednesday it would not allow elections to be held there under the Indian constitution, reports Reuters.

Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chairman Amanullah Khan also said in a statement his group had no understanding with pro-India, former Kashmir chief minister, Farooq Abdullah, about the future administrative set-up in the disputed Himalayan region.

India last week re-appointed former army chief KV Krishna Rao as governor in Kashmir, its only Muslim-majority state, in the latest attempt to end a three-year revolt by militants seeking independence or union with Islamic Pakistan.

Kashmiri political sources say General Rao's second term as governor and New Delhi's more conciliatory approach to the conflict could be a prelude to elections there.

Amanullah said the JKLF, one of the most organised militant groups, "will not take part or even allow elections to be held in the state under the Indian constitution, but will continue its freedom struggle until Kashmiris attain their right of self-determination."

"Taking part in elections... under the Indian constitution is tantamount to betraying those tens of thousands of Kashmiris who have so far laid down their lives and hundreds of thousands more who face

braving all kinds of trials and tribulations for their national emancipation," he said.

Police and hospitals have reported more than 9,000 deaths since the present revolt erupted in early 1990 in the two-thirds of Kashmir under Indian rule. But the militants say the toll is much higher.

Meanwhile, Pakistan said on Wednesday accusations it engineered last week's Bombay bombings could endanger Muslims living in India.

Pakistan has denied charges by some Indian politicians that its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency was responsible for a series of bomb blasts in India's commercial capital on Friday that killed at least 250 people and injured 1,200.

Some 50 people died in another blast in Calcutta on Wednesday when a huge cache of explosives brought down two apartment blocks in the city centre shortly after midnight.

I would like to say on behalf of the government of Pakistan that we find this kind of Pavlovian reaction from certain quarters in India very regrettable, a Foreign Ministry spokesman told reporters.

Such assertions, which are made on the basis of hatred, could have repercussions on the Indian Muslims who have already been the objects of organised programmes at the hands of fanatic Hindu organisations, he said.

He was referring to religious riots in India in which at least 2,000 people died.

Kuwaiti Emir warns against unlimited freedom

KUWAIT, Mar 18: Kuwait's ruler warned Wednesday that the country could not enjoy unlimited freedom while still suffering the effects of the August 1990 Iraqi invasion, reports AP.

The emir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, speaking on television for his annual message during the holy month of Ramadan, said both members of the newly elected Parliament and the Cabinet had to understand that the country was moving through a difficult period.

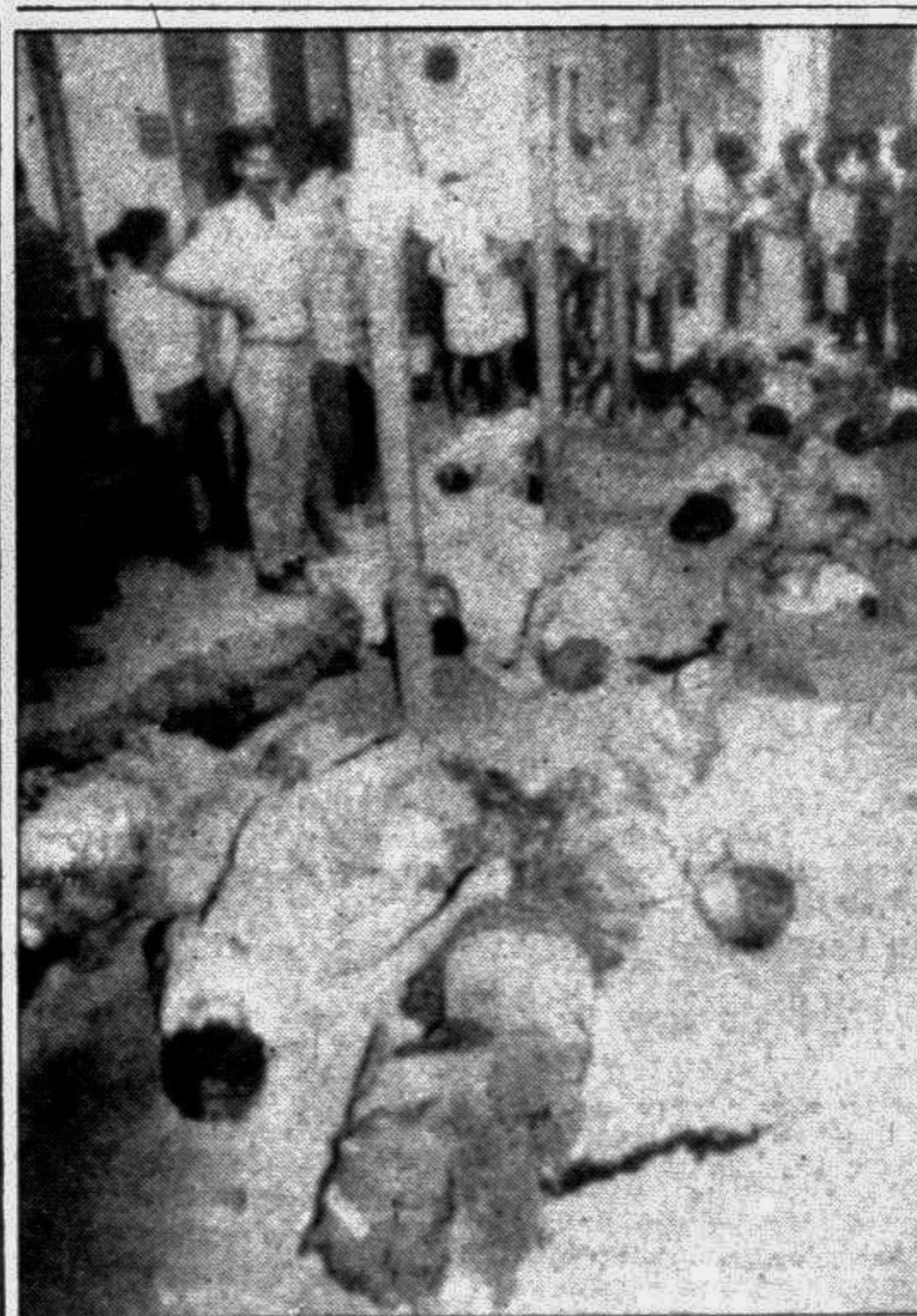
Freedom should adjust to the circumstances in any country," said the 67-old Sheikh Jaber, emir since December 1977. "What may be acceptable in ordinary circumstances may

not be acceptable in extraordinary circumstances."

The Al-Sabah family has repeatedly stressed since the February 1991 liberation from the seven-month occupation that divisive public issues would only undermine attempts to rebuild the country and would encourage Iraq to maintain its claim to the emirate.

An opposition-dominated Parliament was elected in October, six years after Sheikh Jaber suspended the body in 1986 for its sharp criticism of the ruling family.

The new Parliament has not shied away from controversial subjects. It is investigating the mess surrounding the invasion



CALCUTTA: Bodies of the victims lie in a corridor of the Islamic Hospital yesterday after blasts in the central Bow Bazar here. —APP/UNB photo

Two indicted for World Trade Centre bombing

NEW YORK, Mar 18: Two jailed suspects were indicted Wednesday in connection with the bombing of the World Trade Centre that killed six people and injured more than 1,000 authorities said, reports AP.

Mohammed Salameh and Nidal Ayyad, both 25, were charged in the single-paragraph indictment of damaging the twin towers "by using an explosive device, causing the death of six persons."

The charge involves a federal law against using explosives to damage a building used in interstate commerce.

The indictment was unsealed in US District Court in Manhattan. A third man, Ibrahim Elgabrowni, was indicted for obstruction of justice and fraud the latter charge stemming from five phony passports found in his Brooklyn apartment.

The indictments were handed up shortly after a judge ordered the deportation of Muslim fundamentalist preacher Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman. Salameh and Elgabrowni are alleged followers of the cleric who preached at a Jersey City, NJ, mosque.

The FBI did not return a telephone message asking whether authorities investigating the bombing might seek to postpone the deportation.

The US Immigration and Naturalisation Service said Abdel-Rahman did not disclose in 1991 that he is a polygamist and that he was convicted of falsifying a check in Egypt in 1987. Both are grounds for exclusion from the United States.

In Manhattan, the indictments echoed the earlier charges filed against Salameh and Ayyad. The fraud charge against Elgabrowni was the only new count returned by the federal grand jury.

All three suspects remain jailed without bail.

Three other men suspected of involvement in the bombing have fled the United States, according to newspaper reports Wednesday. FBI spokesman Joe Valiquette would not comment on the reports.

Within 48 hours of Salameh's arrest, the three Arab men went to John F. Kennedy International Airport with false passports and took the first available flight out of the country, the Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday.

The men first sought a flight to Europe but it was filled.

UNSC condemns air raid on eastern Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 18: The Security Council on Wednesday condemned the air raid by small planes that bombed eastern Bosnian villages and fled toward Serb-ruled Yugoslavia, and asked the UN chief to investigate them, reports AP.

The council, in a unanimously adopted presidential statement, also demanded from the Bosnian Serbs an explanation of that raid and the takeoff by Bosnian Serb jets from the airfield at Banja Luka on March 12.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and other Balkan leaders are in New York for peace talks that began Wednesday, and can be summoned to provide explanations.

Yugoslavia's foreign minister, Vlastimir Jovanovic, denied that his country had anything to do with last Saturday's air raid in which three bombs were dropped on eastern Bosnian Muslim villages about 5 miles (8 kilometers) south-east of Srebrenica. The planes then flew back toward Yugoslavia.

UN monitors in Bosnia reported the flight path. "It is not true, it cannot be true," Jovanovic told reporters.

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"We don't want confrontation, but the present problem is clear to all... The British side created new obstacles when negotiations were about to start. This shows they don't have sincerity at all," said Li, cited by Xinhua news agency.

He accused Britain of "deliberate sabotage" and said "They shall be held responsible for all consequences arising therefrom."

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Newspapers in Hong Kong today called on London and Beijing to resume talks for the sake of the territory's stability and prosperity.

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North Korea may reverse decision on NPT if US stops jt exercises

BEIJING, Mar 18: A North Korean official says his country may reconsider its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty if the United States stops military exercises with South Korea, an official Chinese report said Thursday, reports AP.

But in the report from Amman, the Xinhua News Agency also quoted North Korea's ambassador to Jordan, Kung Sok Ung, as saying his country would never allow international inspection of its military

sites, which are suspected of being part of Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

North Korea on Friday abruptly announced plans to withdraw from the treaty, blocking inspections of its nuclear sites and reinforcing suspicion it was intent on hiding an advanced nuclear weapons programme.

South Korea and its Western allies have been trying diplomacy to persuade the Stalinist regime in Pyongyang to reconsider.

On Wednesday, at US request, the political counselors of the US and North Korean embassies in Beijing met in the Chinese capital so that Washington could express its concerns about the planned withdrawal.

North Korea's announcement came after Pyongyang declared a semi-state of war in response to joint military exercises between its rival South Korea and the United States.

Those exercises are to formally end Friday, but it was unclear from the Xinhua report whether Kung was suggesting a reversal of its decision to withdraw from the treaty may be imminent.

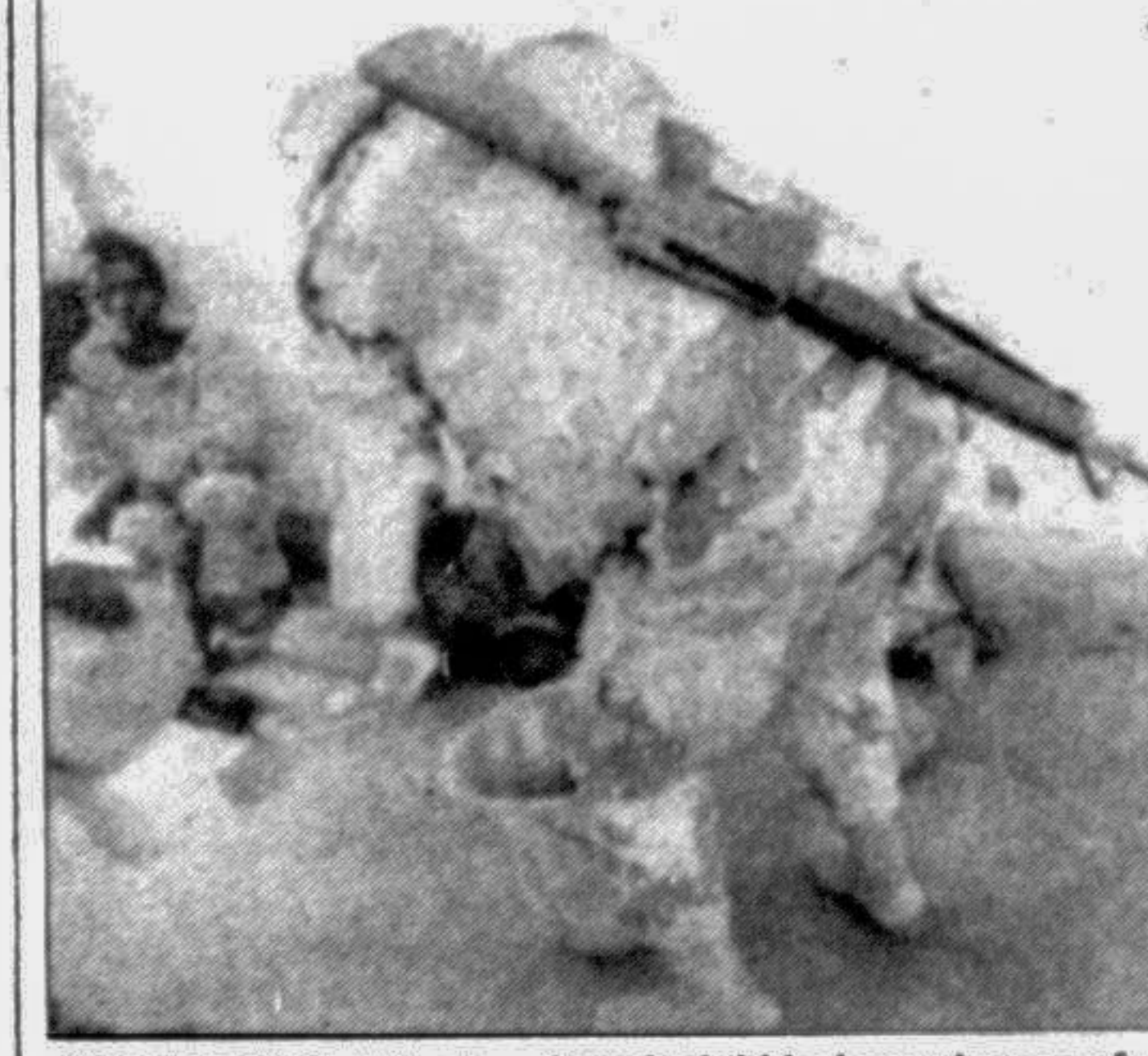
Xinhua quoted Kung as saying North Korea announced it would withdraw "in protests against US-led efforts to force open its military sites and the ongoing US-South Korean joint military exercises."

Xinhua reported that the diplomat said his government would reconsider the move "if Washington stops its military exercises with South Korea, which were viewed by Pyongyang as a declaration of war on the North."

Since announcing its planned withdrawal, North Korea has charged that the United States was behind the International Atomic Energy Agency's demand to inspect two northern nuclear sites. The Vienna-based United Nations agency is responsible for inspections under the nuclear-control accord.

The North allowed six inspections of its facilities last year. But this year it balked at the IAEA demand to inspect the two sites, which it described as military facilities with no ties to its nuclear programme.

Kung's reported statement suggests the sites in question will remain off-limits even if North Korea reverses its decision to withdraw from the treaty.



MOGADISHU: A fearless Somali child looks at the gun of a US marine in a feeding centre in Mogadishu March 17. —APP/UNB photo

Brother killed in fight over N-tension

SEOUL: One South Korean brother said he wouldn't care if tensions over North Korea's nuclear stance led to war, and the other beat him to death, police said Thursday, reports AP.

Officers said they arrested Kim Il-nam, 29, in the fatal beating of his 27-year-old brother, Il-bong, on Wednesday. The argument erupted when the brothers were watching a television news reports on the nuclear issue, they added.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have grown following North Korea's decision to pull out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The decision means the Communist North will not accept inspections of its nuclear facilities, and has reinforced suspicions that it is developing nuclear weapons — a charge it denies.

38 Myanmar students arrested in Thailand

BANGKOK, Mar 18: Thai police have arrested 38 dissident Myanmar students on charges of illegal entry, a police chief said here today, reports AP.

The group were picked up over recent weeks by police and immigration officials and detained at a police training school in the capital Bangkok.

The immigration department is expected to decide whether the students will be sent to a special 'safe-area' camp set up by Thai authorities near the border with Myanmar in Ratchaburi province southwest of Bangkok, Police Major General Prayuth Suptharuyawatt said.

Thailand has refused to grant them refugee status senior government officials have said dissident students will not be sent back to their country against their will.

Thousands of Myanmar students and dissidents fled to Thailand following the bloody suppression of a pro-democracy uprising in Myanmar towns and cities in 1988.

While Thailand has refused to grant them refugee status senior government officials have said dissident students will not be sent back to their country against their will.

ROK students block Kim from visiting martyr's cemetery

SEOUL, Mar 18: About 400 radical students armed with steel pipes and rocks blocked President Kim Young-sam from visiting a martyr's cemetery in provincial Kwangju city Thursday, witnesses said, reports AP.

It was the first protest directed at the president, an opposition and dissident leader for 30 years, since the took office last month. Student protests against past military-backed regimes were common.

Advisers urge Yeltsin to declare 'presidential rule'

MOSCOW, Mar 18: Boris Yeltsin's political advisers urged him Wednesday to declare "presidential rule" and override opposition to his reforms from the Russian Congress, his spokesman said, reports AP.

Yeltsin gave no sign he was ready to take that drastic step, which could involve dissolving the parliament and calling new elections. But the advice from his Presidential Council was certain to raise political tensions and alarm his opponents.

The advice was not unexpected however, since the purely advisory council is made up of leading reformers, including Yegor Gaidar, the former acting prime minister who was forced from office by hard-liners in December.

Yeltsin still is weighing how to respond to his pummeling last week by the Congress of People's Deputies, the highest legislative body in Russia. It regained the power to veto Yeltsin's decrees and canceled his plans for a referendum on whether the president or parliament should have supreme power.

Many council members leaned toward the opinion that the president has the moral and constitutional right to introduce presidential rule, presidential spokesman Vyacheslav Kostikov told reporters after the closed-door meeting.

Imposing presidential rule and dissolving parliament would be risky for Yeltsin. During the Congress, many lawmakers said he lacked the political and military support to enforce such measures.

Defence Minister Pavel Grachev reiterated Wednesday that the army would abide by the constitution, the Interfax news agency reported.

Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, speaking in Finland, sought to allay fears of a potentially violent confrontation. He said Yeltsin would find "a peaceful way out" of the impasse.

On Tuesday, Yeltsin accused the Congress of trying to "restore the Communist regime." The 1,033-member parliament is dominated by career Communists, factory managers and collective farmers opposed to Yeltsin's free market reforms.

Yeltsin reportedly asked German Chancellor Helmut Kohl last week how the West would react if he dissolved the Congress, but President Clinton and other Western leaders have not answered publicly.

Yeltsin aides suggested last week that he should demonstrate clear public support by holding a non-binding national vote on whether Russia should have a "presidential republic."

"More than 2,000 pro-Communist protesters, meanwhile, flooded a central Moscow square in an evening drizzle to demand restoration of the Soviet Union. The rally marked the anniversary of a March 17, 1991, referendum in which a majority of Soviet voters said they wanted to preserve the now-fractured superpower."

Lanka gets 3 Mi-8 choppers from Russia

COLOMBO, Mar 18: Sri Lanka Monday received three new Mi-8 military helicopters along with spare-parts, ammunition and other equipment from Russia, reports Xinhua.

The Sri Lanka government last year decided to acquire Russian helicopters to bolster air operations against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighting to set up a separate state of minority Tamils in the north-east of the country.

According to Defence sources here today, the Mi-8 helicopters could be mounted with rockets, machine guns and anti-tank guns.