

Taiwan shelves plan to buy arms from US

TAIPEI, Jan 23: Taiwan's military here has decided to shelve plans to buy 1.05 billion US dollars worth of arms, including tanks and an improved missile system, from Washington due to opposition from legislators and an inadequate budget, Taiwan's Central News Agency (CNA) reported today, says AFP.

The Defence Ministry has told the United States that it has to postpone its procurement plans until they have the budget, CNA said.

This marks the first time in more than four decades Taiwan is delaying the purchase of military items approved for export by the United States, the news agency said.

Members of parliament here have strongly criticised the ministry's 50 million US dollar plan to buy 200 US M60-A3 tanks, which are left over from the Korean war (1950-53), saying they are obsolete and not fit for modern war fare.

The ministry also decided to postpone its purchase of at least two other major military hardware systems that have been approved for sale to Taiwan, including a modified air defence system, believed to be priced at a billion US dollars.

It also postponed a plan to lease two squadrons of T-38 advanced trainer jets, the CNA said.

The shelving, or postponement, of the purchase were due to declining defence budgets and pressure by MPs to scrutinise major procurements, CNA said.

Taiwan has purchased 5.4 billion US dollars worth of 150 F-16 fighter jets from the United States and 60 Mirage jetfighters from France, valued at 3.8 billion US dollars. It has also ordered 16 Lafayette-class

frigates, worth 4.8 billion US dollars, from France.

The ministry has also announced that it is considering opening maintenance work of military planes to the private sector in an attempt to cut expenses and boost the aerospace industry, the leading China Times reported here today.

Economics and defence authorities are evaluating the project which is expected to bring a yearly business of about 740 million US dollars.

Taiwan now has close to 1,000 warplanes, and it would be too much work for the military to do the maintenance alone, the paper said.

Defence Minister Sun Chen was not immediately available for comment.

Six more children killed in Sarajevo

SARAJEVO, Jan 23: Shelling that killed six children in Sarajevo makes a mockery of international pledges to protect the city, the Bosnian prime minister says, reports AP.

"How many times has it been said that the United Nations will not allow Sarajevo to be strangled," asked Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic in a protest letter to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

The children were playing in fresh snow Saturday in the city's Alipasino Polje neighbourhood when the shells slammed down, killing six and wounding at least three children and one adult.

This act humiliates the international community, mocks the dignity of the United Nations and renders senseless all of our efforts to reach peace through negotiations," Silajdzic said in the letter, which was released to journalists in Sarajevo.

Cluster-bomb attack rocks Kabul

KABUL, Jan 23: A cluster-bomb attack by a rebel jet preceded a massive artillery bombardment which rocked Kabul early today, during which infantry clashed on the front lines in the eastern suburbs of the capital, reports AFP.

The multiple explosions of the deadly cluster-bomb riddled through the former diplomatic enclave of Wazir Akbar Khan as the jet struck at heavy weapons based on nearby Bibi Mahru hill.

The jet, belonging to rival faction leader, ex-communist general Abdul Rashid Dostum, missed its target, reported locals, with many of the small bomblets showering civilian houses with shrapnel.

The presidential palace grounds received a hit in a second attack reported guards, at the main gate, but no major damage resulted, and three hours later high-explosive bomb was dropped in the city centre sending up a huge cloud of dark smoke.

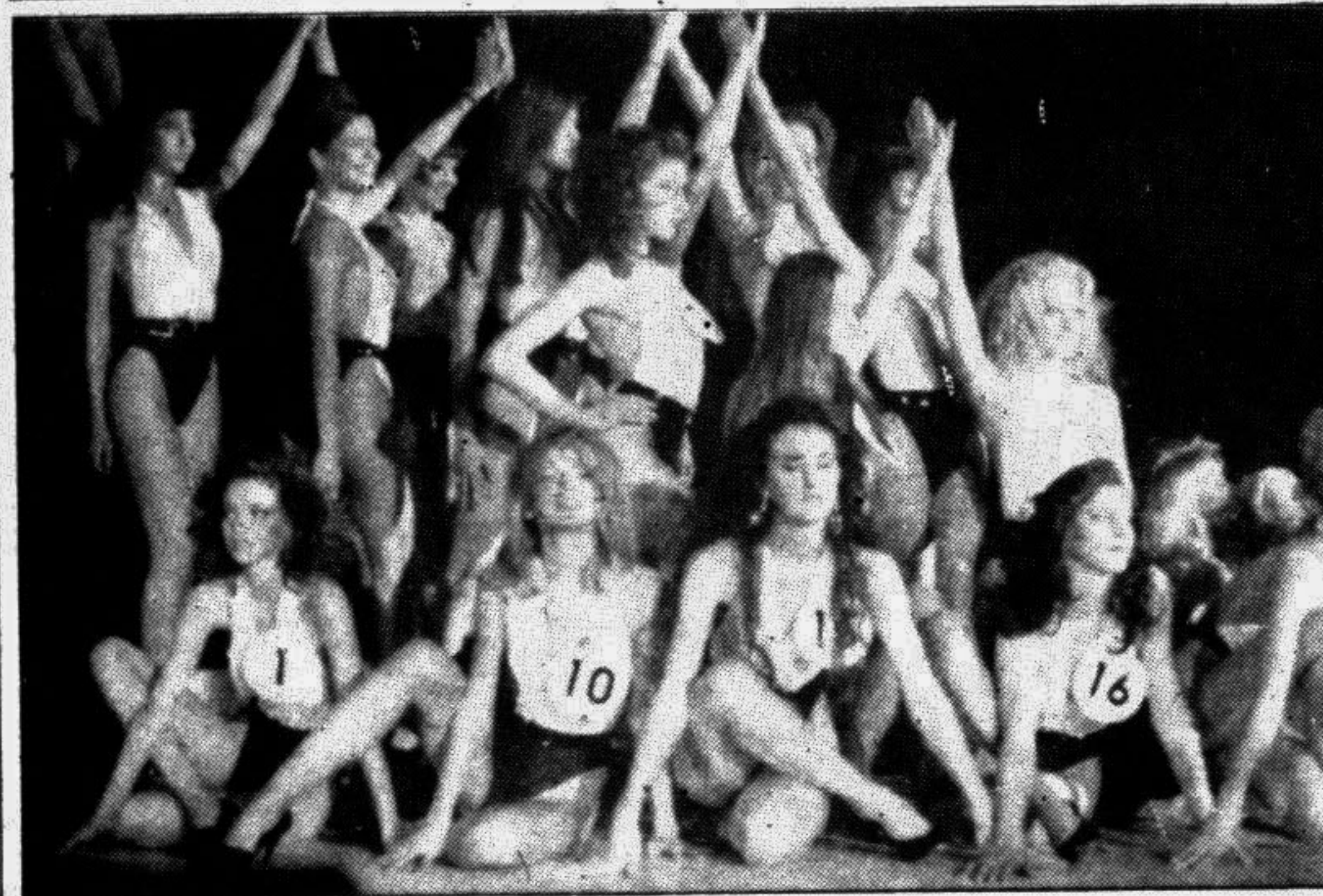
By noon (0730 GMT), hundreds of rockets had been fired into Kabul, most against the strategic, central-city mountain-top containing the Kabul television tower and heavy weapons bases of Defence Ministry troops loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Defence Ministry officials were unavailable to comment

on the factional fighting which is now in its third week in Kabul, but it appeared that Dostum forces launched an infantry attack against state positions.

The sounds of intense small-arms fire — anti-tank rockets, recoilless rifles and Kalashnikovs — were heard in the vicinity of Bala Hissar, one of Dostum's last remaining strongholds in Kabul, as heavy weapons on Bibi Mahru hill thundered against Dostum positions on Maranjani hill.

It is not clear if the Hezb-i-Islami faction of Dostum's ally, Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, have joined the fighting or not.



A group of young Russian women pose during the opening show of the beauty contest "Miss Moscow" on Saturday. At least thirty women aged between 16 and 18 years participate in this contest. — AFP photo

Former beauty queen claims affair with Clinton

LONDON, Jan 23: A former beauty queen has said she had a five-month affair with US President Bill Clinton back in 1983 and was threatened unless she kept quiet about the liaison during the 1992 presidential election campaign, reports AFP.

Sally Miller Perdue, 35, told the British weekly the Sunday Telegraph that she and Clinton were lovers between August and December 1983 when he was governor of Arkansas.

The former Miss Arkansas told the paper that during Clinton's presidential campaign she was threatened by a man — who claimed to be

speaking on behalf of Democrats in high places — not to talk about their affair.

She alleged that if she agreed to behave as a "good little girl" she would be set up for life with a federal job and a regular monthly pay check.

"If I didn't take the offer, then they knew that I went jogging by myself and couldn't guarantee what would happen to my pretty little legs. Things just wouldn't be so much fun for me any more. Life would get hard," she was quoted as saying in the Sunday Telegraph.

A Clinton aide stressed during the presidential campaign that Clinton has denied know-

ing Perdue. The paper said the White House last week would not reply to requests for comment.

After Perdue — a divorcee — turned down the offer she lost her job at Lindenwood College in Missouri, had her ear damaged and received anonymous telephone calls and hate mail, the paper reported.

The Sunday Telegraph said the allegations had been reported to the FBI, which said it could not comment on an "ongoing investigation."

She said they became lovers. "He had this little boy quality that I found very attractive."

US actor Telly Savalas dead

Los Angeles, Jan 23: 8 Telly Savalas, the gruff actor who became a television favourite as the lollipop-loving New York detective in the 1970s series "Kojak," died Saturday of prostate cancer. He was 70, reports AP.

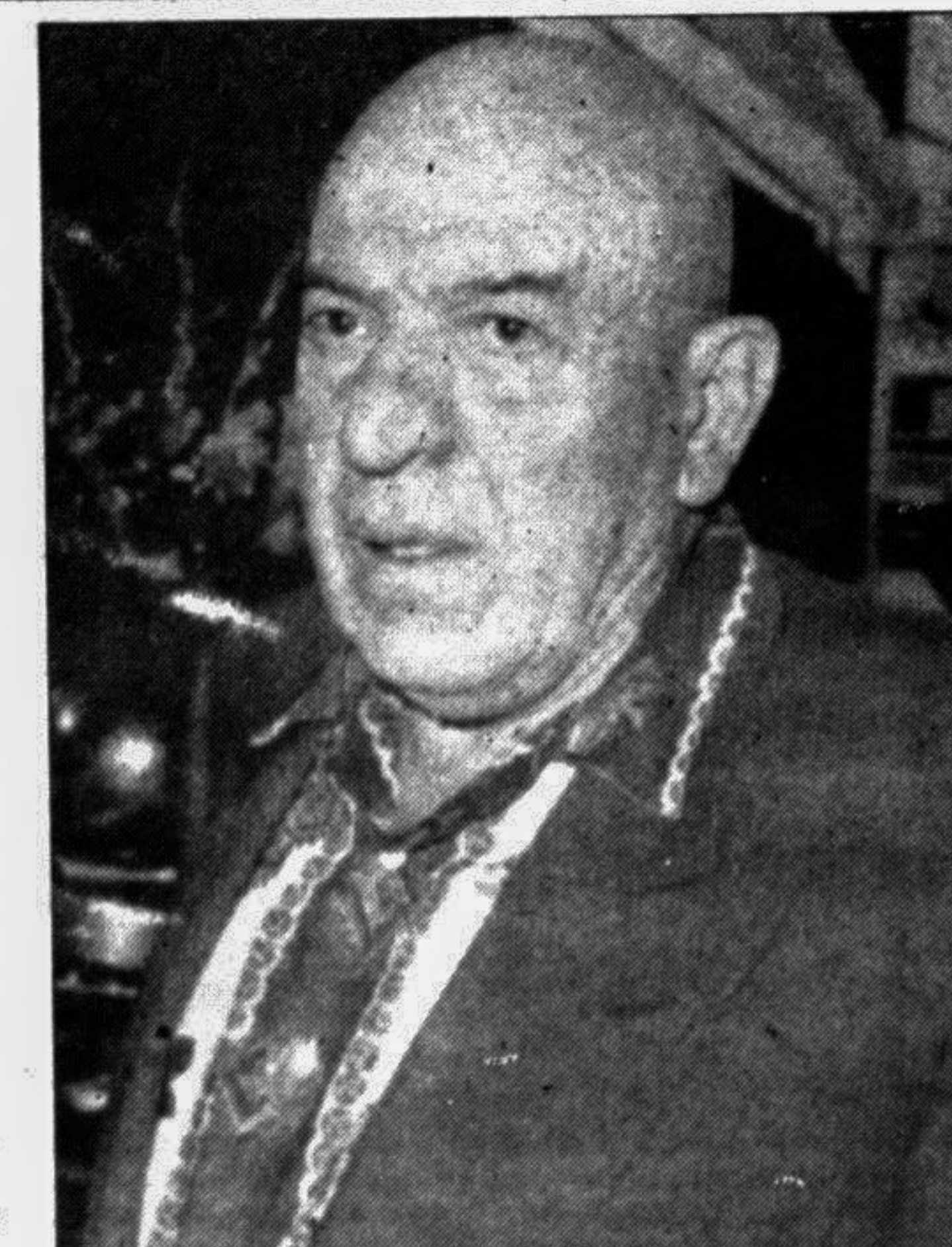
Savalas died in his suite at the Sheraton-Universal Hotel in Universal City, said his Mike Mamakos, a spokesman. "Who loves ya, baby?" which Kojak muttered to fellow cops and assorted hoodlums, grew into the detective's signature and a national catch phrase.

The series grew out of an acclaimed TV movie, "The Marcus-Nelson Murders," based on the real-life brutal murders of two young career women in New York City.

"Kojak" broke into the top 10 rated shows in its first season, 1973-74, and Savalas won the Emmy as best actor in a dramatic series. The series lasted until 1978, setting the standard for gritty, realistic police shows such as "Hill Street Blues," and "NYPD Blue."

Savalas and his shaved head became indelibly identified as Lt. Theo Kojak, and he remained grateful for the recognition.

"I made 60 movies before 'Kojak' with some of the biggest names in the business,



File picture dated September 1993 of Greek-born actor Telly Savalas, who played the tough-talking television detective "Kojak". Savalas died in Los Angeles late January 22 one day after his 70th birthday, of prostate cancer. — AFP Photo

Hinduism forbids women to recite Vedas?

A humiliated Roy Chowdhury, who had been reading the Vedas at similar gatherings for many years, walked off the stage calling it an insult to all women.

The pioneer newspaper brought the incident reported by a local Calcutta daily to national attention, making it a cause celebre for feminists and setting off a religious debate.

Nischalananda's predecessor Swami Niranjan Dev Teerth had in the past attracted feminists wrath by justifying the ancient practice of Sati, which committed a widow to suicide by burning on the funeral pyre of her husband.

This time, the Guru said the Vedas forbade women from

reciting them. He told Calcutta reporters he had rescued Roy Chowdhury from the "fires of hell" by preventing her from reading the Sanskrit-language Vedas.

Enraged feminists exchanged heated words with the Swami, disrupted in press conference Wednesday by shouting slogans and demanded he "go back" and not return to the city.

Swami Agnivesh, a social activist and reformer, said here that the holy man was following a narrow medieval and obscurantist interpretation of the Vedas, the repositories of the supreme knowledge.

In the medieval times, men feared that women were becoming more learned than

they themselves were and laid down that the Vedas should not be read by women," Agnivesh said.

The Vedas themselves do not say this and there are now hundreds of woman scholars of the Vedas. He (Nischalananda) has delivered an affront to womanhood, the Vedas and Hindu culture. He should apologise.

Agnivesh challenged the Swami to a public debate on the issue.

Sushma Swaraj, the high-profile spokeswoman for the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party, rose up on behalf of her sex as did the leader of the women's wing of the ruling Congress (I) party, Girija Vyas.

"Anything attributed to

Fahd to visit Iran

DUBAI, Jan 23: Saudi Arabia's King Fahd has accepted an invitation to visit Iran, the Qatar News Agency (QNA) quoted Iran's Interior Minister as saying on Saturday, reports Reuters.

It said Ali Mohammed Besharati was speaking at a news conference during a visit to Qatar.

"The minister said his country had extended an invitation to King Fahd (to visit Iran) and he accepted," QNA said. It was not clear when the visit would take place.

The Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia and Iran, both Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members, agreed last October that King Fahd and Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani should meet.

Golden Globe Award winners

BEVERLY HILLS, California, Jan 23: Winners of the 51st Golden Globe Awards presented Saturday night, reports AP.

MOTION PICTURE—DRAMA: "Schindler's List," MUSICAL-COMEDY: "Mrs Doubtfire."

ACTRESS, DRAMA: Holly Hunter, "The Piano."

ACTRESS, DRAMA: Tom Hanks, "Philadelphia."

ACTRESS, MUSICAL-COMEDY: Angela Bassett, "What's Love Got To Do With It."

ACTRESS, MUSICAL-COMEDY: Robin Williams, "Mrs Doubtfire."

SUPPORTING ACTRESS: Winona Ryder, "The Age of Innocence."

SUPPORTING ACTOR: Tommy Lee Jones, "The Fugitive."

DIRECTOR: Steven



Holly Hunter, best actress (Drama)

Spielberg, "Schindler's List."

SCREENPLAY: Steven Zaillian, "Schindler's List."

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM: "Farewell My Concubine."

ORIGINAL SCORE: Kitaro, "Heaven and Earth."

ORIGINAL SONG: "Streets of Philadelphia," from "Philadelphia," Bruce Springsteen.

CECIL B DE MILLE AWARD FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT: "Robert Redford."

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: "Short Cuts."

TELEVISION—SERIES, DRAMA: "NYPD Blue."

ACTRESS, DRAMA: Kathy Baker, "Picket Fences."

ACTRESS, DRAMA: David Caruso, "NYPD Blue."

SERIES, MUSICAL-COMEDY: "Seinfeld."

ACTRESS, MUSICAL-COMEDY: Helen Hunt, "Mad About You."

ACTRESS, MUSICAL-COMEDY: Jerry Seinfeld, "Seinfeld."

MINI-SERIES OR MOVIE MADE FOR TELEVISION: "Barbarians At the Gate."

ACTRESS, MINI-SERIES OR MOVIE MADE FOR TELEVISION: Bette Midler, "Gypsy."

ACTRESS, MINI-SERIES OR MOVIE MADE MORE TELEVISION: James Garner, "Barbarians At the Gate."

SUPPORTING ACTRESS, MINI-SERIES OR MOVIE MADE FOR TELEVISION: Julia Louis-Dreyfus, "Seinfeld."

SUPPORTING ACTOR, MINI-SERIES OR MOVIE MADE FOR TELEVISION: Beau Bridges, "The Positively True Adventures of the Alleged Texas Cheerleader Murdering Mom."

Off the Record

One in ten Britons don't think Jesus came back to life

LONDON: A quarter of regular churchgoers in Britain do not believe in the virgin birth, one in 10 don't think Jesus came back to life and a third think the devil and hell are fiction, a survey published in the Sunday Express said, reports Reuters.

The nationwide poll into Christian beliefs by the respected Mori institute was one of the most extensive carried out, questioning 534 Anglicans, Catholics and other Christians who attended church at least twice a month.

Before Christmas the church of England's bishop of Durham, Rev David Jenkins, enraged fellow clergymen when he expressed similar doubts.

Royal tours have little attraction nowadays

SYDNEY: Prince Charles arrives for a 12-day, official tour Monday but monarchists and republicans doubt he'll influence debate over whether Australia should sever links with the British crown, reports AP.

"We're happy about Charles coming. He's really just another English tourist," said Andrew Johnson, executive director of the Australian Republican Movement.

Although thousands lined the streets to catch a glimpse of visiting members of Britain's ruling family in the 1950s and 60s, royal tours attract few spectators nowadays.

"It's become a bit of a yawn," Johnson said Sunday. Loloyd Waddy, convener of the pro-royalist Australians for Constitutional Monarchy group, is also nonplussed.

He said the prince's tour will not have "particular significance one way or the other" on the republican issue.

Neither side plans demonstrations during the visit. Australia is an independent nation, but like some other former British colonies including Canada and New Zealand, retains Queen Elizabeth as head of state.

If the queen dies or steps aside, Charles as her heir will become King of Australia when he is crowned King of England.

Prime Minister Paul Keating, who will welcome the prince on arrival at Sydney Airport, wants to declare a republic and replace the British monarch as head of state with an Australian president by 2001.

Stray dog delays hundreds of passengers

LONDON: A stray dog delayed hundreds of passengers at a central London underground railway station Saturday when it leapt from the platform and ran into a tunnel, reports Reuters.

"It was a lucky dog—usually when this happens they are either run over or electrocuted, but this one lived to see another day, said a London underground spokesman who reported that a staff member had managed to capture the stray.

'Gays are real people'

MANILA: The crowd hooted and cheered Saturday as five winners were chosen from among 24 finalists in the fifth annual "Miss Gay Philippines—Five Prettiest" beauty pageant, reports AP.

More than 1,000 spectators, mostly from Manila's homosexual community, packed an auditorium at the Philippine International Convention Center for the four-hour spectacle, which had all the glitz and hoopla of a conventional beauty contest.

"What you see before you is an apparition," said the master of ceremonies, a comedian at a local gay bar. "We are real people."

With that, the 24 youthful contestants, clad in body-hugging, short, bright red dresses, paraded down the catwalk to the cheers and whistles of the enthusiastic audience, about a third of whom were in drag.

The contestants, proudly showing off their silicon breasts and wearing heavy make-up, appeared in the traditional swimsuits and evening gowns and answered questions on such issues as AIDS prevention, drug abuse, and the role of gays in Philippine society.

"Mike" Aldana, one of five winners, drew a standing ovation when he answered with a courtesy that he was certain "homosexuals will go to Heaven, not because we are gays but because of what we do in this world."

Another contestant told the audience that his ambition in life was to become a "full-fledged woman."

Sino-Indian talks on troops cut from Feb 2

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: India and China will open talks on reduction of troop levels on both sides of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) early next month, official sources said, reports PTI.

The meeting, to be held from February two to five, will be the first of an experts group of diplomats and military personnel in pursuance of an agreement signed during the Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's visit to Beijing last September.

The group, with about ten members from either side, was set up as part of the agreement on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the LAC.

The experts group will be led by joint secretaries in the External Affairs ministries of the two countries.

The Chinese ambassador here, Cheng Ruisheng, in an interview with PTI earlier this month had said that both sides might have already reduced some troops.

The experts group would tackle the issue relating to redeployment of forces along the LAC and advise the foreign secretary-level Joint Working Group (JWG) on resolution of

differences over the LAC alignment.

The JWG is scheduled to hold its next meeting in the first half of this year.

India and China have already achieved a breakthrough in exchanges in the defence field.

The visit by the Chinese Vice-Chief of Army Staff to India in November came after a gap of over 30 years. Likewise, Chinese naval ships visited Bombay after nearly 40 years.

According to the agreement on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the LAC, neither side shall use or threaten to use force against the other to settle the boundary question.

Article Two of the agreement emphasises that each side will keep its military forces in the areas along the LAC to a minimum level compatible with the friendly and good neighbourly relations between the two countries.

The Joint Working Group (JWG) on the boundary question was set up during the then prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in 1988.

56 newsmen killed last year

NEW YORK, Jan 23: Fifty-six journalists died in the line of duty in 1993, with more killed in Algeria and the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan, than in any other country, the Committee to Protect Journalists said, reports AP.

"What is striking about both Algeria and Tajikistan is that the attacks on journalists are symptoms of enormous political upheavals which have been largely ignored by the Western Press," William Orme, the committee's executive director, said in a statement released Sunday.

The committee compiled a list of those killed in each country, totaling 56, plus a list of 16 others whose deaths are being investigated.

Filipino reds stick to demands

MANILA, Jan 23: Amid growing signs that the Philippine government was fast losing its patience, hard-line communist guerrilla leaders today refused to back down on demands which would draw them to peace negotiations, reports AFP.

The Netherlands-based communist leaders said in a statement to news agencies that they were "willing to resume exploratory talks," but stuck to several demands that the Philippine constitution not be used as a basis for any settlement, and that a preliminary meeting be held in Europe.

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: The right of a woman to recite from the ancient scriptures of Hinduism has been called into question by a prominent holy man, touching off angry protests by Indian feminists and religious reformers, reports AFP.

Swami Nischalananda, who presides over one of the highest seats of the faith in the eastern Indian city of Puri, which is no stranger to controversy, has been dubbed the Ayatollah Khomeini of Hinduism by critics and cartoonists.

The Puri seer on January 16 stopped a woman, Arundhati Roy Chowdhury, from reciting from the Vedas, the most sacred writings of Hinduism, at a religious function in the eastern Indian metropolis of Calcutta.