

BRIEFLY

Singapore's PM arrives in Hanoi:

Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chock Tong arrived in Hanoi on Wednesday for a five-day visit in a bid to strengthen trade and economic relations between the two countries, Xinhua reports from Hanoi.

Shortly after his arrival, Goh and Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet signed an accord on exemption of dual taxation. Goh's delegation, which includes ministers in charge of economic affairs and business, leaders, then held talks with Vietnamese officials.

Before their meeting, Vo Van Kiet stressed that Goh's visit to Vietnam signalled a new development in friendly relations and cooperation between the two countries.

Kozyrev to meet Christopher:

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev will meet with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Vladivostok on March 14, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday, AP reports from Moscow.

The meeting in Russia's Far East comes amid rising tension between Russia and the United States over the CIA spy scandal and differences in the former Yugoslavia.

Russia, a traditional ally of the orthodox Serbs, strongly condemned NATO's threat to bomb Serb positions around Sarajevo and has intensified its diplomatic efforts to seek a peaceful solution to the war in Bosnia.

Russian plane crashes, 1 killed:

A Russian Mig-23 fighter plane crashed Wednesday on two houses in southeastern Russia, killing one inhabitant, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, AFP reports from Moscow.

The aircraft crashed near Kursk while trying to land, the agency said, citing the ministry for civil defence and emergencies, which said the pilot ejected shortly before the crash.

Thailand frees 14 Cambodians:

The Thai navy released on Tuesday 14 Cambodian sailors held after a skirmish in the Gulf of Thailand on February, according to local newspaper The Nation Thursday, Xinhua reports from Bangkok.

The 14 Cambodians including their commander were handed over to Cambodian Vice Admiral Tea Win, a military source said.

The Cambodians were captured after a clash on February 19 when three Thai navy gunboats went to help Thai fishermen who said they being robbed by Cambodian pirates.

CIS summit in Moscow Mar 31:

The next summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States will be held in Moscow on March 31, Uzbek President Islam Karimov said on Wednesday, Reuters reports from Moscow.

Karimov was speaking after a meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

The CIS, a loose grouping of 12 former Soviet Republics, held its last summit in the central Asian republic of Turkmenistan in December.

29 hurt as plane skids off runway at NY airport

NEW YORK, Mar 3: A continental Airlines plane with 116 people aboard skidded off a runway at New York's Laguardia Airport during a snowstorm Wednesday evening, police officials said, reports Reuters.

Twenty-nine people were injured in the aborted takeoff that left two-thirds of the McDonnell Douglas MD-80's cracked fuselage dangling over the frigid waters of the East river.

The airport remained closed on Thursday said a police spokesman for the port authority of New York and New

Jersey, which operates all three of the city's airports.

"We expect it to open around 4 am or 5 am (0900 to 1000 GMT)," said the spokesman.

Investigators from the national transportation safety board were at the airport probing the accident involving continental flight 795 to Denver, Colorado. It was the third in less than five years involving an airliner taking off and the second in two years that happened during blizzards.

The city's ambulance service rushed seven of the injured to area hospitals.

German firms help Libya build N-Plant

BONN, Mar 3: German television said on Wednesday that German firms delivered equipment to Libya to build a big underground plant to produce weapons of mass destruction, reports Reuters.

ZDF television said the alleged biological and chemical weapons plant was under construction or had been completed in an underground tunnel system 65 KM (40 miles) southeast of Tripoli.

"It is probably the biggest underground weapons arsenal of the third world," ZDF said in a press release.

The report said German prosecutors were investigating whether the unidentified firms in Frankfurt, Darmstadt and Stuttgart violated federal export laws in providing Libya with construction equipment and blueprints.

Germany plugged loopholes in its laws on the export of dual-use goods after German companies helped Libya to build a chemical plant at Rabat in 1988 and enabled Iraq to extend the range of Scud missiles in the 1991 Gulf War.

The television report, which could not be confirmed,

said the companies' business contact was the state-owned Libyan construction firm African Engineer Company (AFENCO).

A German-Austrian engineering agency based in Frankfurt and owned by one of the best tunnel expert in the world provided Libya with the final blueprints for the project, it said.

It also said laboratory equipment for the production of biological weapons was shipped to Libya via a third country.

The report came as Germany is easing its rules on exporting sensitive goods and technology to make them conform with less strict European union controls being worked out in Brussels.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl's government approved a draft law in January to adapt the federal export agency to future EU controls on the Export of so-called dual use materials.

Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel and Economics Minister Guenter Rexrodt have said Bonn must relax its laws on such exports to conform with EU policies.

Mexican govt, rebels agree on package of reforms

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS (Mexico), Mar 3: Maya Indian rebels and the Mexican government agreed on a package of economic and political reforms Wednesday aimed at ending a two-month-old rebellion in the southern state of Chiapas, reports Reuters.

The 32-point accord, if accepted by rebel supporters in their mountain and jungle strongholds in coming days, will then be signed as a formal peace treaty, government peace commissioner Manuel Camacho Solis said.

The accord would improve social conditions in the impoverished state of Chiapas, boost democracy and provide a new

deal for Mexico's downtrodden indigenous peoples.

"The formula for peace has been defined," Camacho told reporters after 10 days of talks in this colonial city's 16th-century cathedral. "The terms of the peace accords and of the end of hostilities in Chiapas have been made clear."

The new year uprising by the self-styled Zapatista National Liberation Army, which claimed more than 140 lives, has forced a series of concessions from the government of President Carlos Salinas De Gortari.

The tentative accord laid out Wednesday includes huge spending programmes on

health, education, housing and other services in indigenous villages as well as major reforms to the repressive Chiapas justice system and land reform.

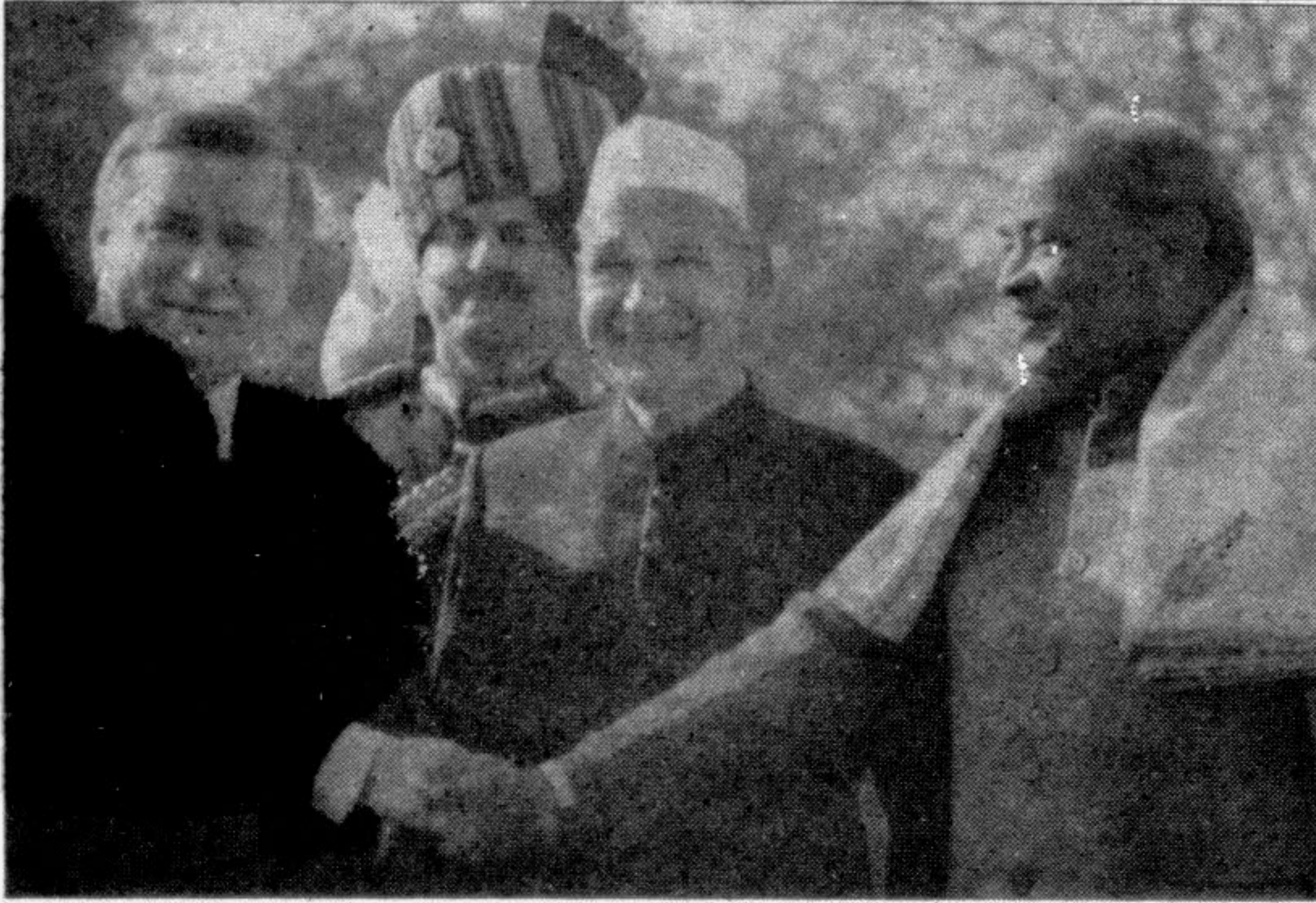
It includes national initiatives giving indigenous peoples a greater say in deciding and implementing policies for their regions. Also agreed were special programmes to boost agricultural production and temper the effects on indigenous communities of competition from the United States and Canada under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The Zapatistas launched their bloody rebellion on New

Year's day, the day NAFTA came into effect.

Nationwide democratic reforms were excluded from the talks between the rebels and Camacho. But parallel negotiations between Mexican political parties and the government this week are expected to lead to wide-ranging political changes.

The government, breaking a longstanding taboo, is expected to accept international observers for the first time in August presidential elections and end the long-ruling institution a revolutionary party's control over Mexico's electoral bodies.



Polish President Lech Walesa (L) is greeted by Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao (R) and President Shankar Dayal Sharma (C) yesterday at Rashtrapati Bhavan (President's Palace) in New Delhi. Walesa arrived on a week-long visit aimed at boosting bilateral ties. — AFP photo

Mahathir blasts British press

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 3: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia can not tolerate the kind of lies spread by the British press, reports Xinhua.

He indicated that Malaysia's ban on new contracts to British firms is the only way it can act or fire back at the attacks by the British media.

The Malaysian government announced the ban last Friday, on the ground that British media carried unsubstantiated reports that Malaysian leaders were corrupt when awarding contracts to British firms.

He challenged the reports by saying that proof should be given and the people involved in the corruption should be charged and arrested to prove the allegation.

The accusations hurled against him spread throughout the world and marred his reputation and he had no tougher means to correct all the lies, Mahathir was quoted by the Malaysian national news agency telling reporters here last night.

Final accord on Bosnian fed March 15

SARAJEVO, Mar 3: The final accord creating a Bosnian federation of Croats and Muslims will be signed on March 15 in Washington, Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic said in a television interview here Wednesday, reports AFP.

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic and his Croatian counterpart Franjo Tudjman will sign the documents, following the accord reached Tuesday, Silajdzic said from Washington.

The accord calls for a federation of Bosnian Croats and Muslims comprising a number of cantons.

US move to salvage Mideast peace talks

WASHINGTON, Mar 3: The United States urged Israel Wednesday to move quickly to make Palestinians feel more secure following the Hebron massacre and appealed to Palestinians not to give up on the Middle East peace process, reports Reuters.

President Clinton telephoned Jordan's King Hussein Wednesday, the latest in a series of calls to regional leaders in an effort to keep negotiations from dying in the fall-out over an Israeli extremist's killing of about 40 Palestinians last Friday in a mosque in the occupied West Bank town of Hebron.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher left open the possibility of a temporary international presence in the Israeli-occupied lands to make Palestinians feel more secure.

He said he plans to meet Palestine Liberation Organisation negotiator Nabil Shaath in Washington Friday in the latest effort to salvage Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Testifying to a Senate subcommittee, Christopher praised a speech by Israeli

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin Monday but urged him to follow through quickly on his promise.

Rabin had said he would restrict the movement of 18 Jewish settlers and take other steps in an attempt to defuse tension.

"What I would hope and expect would be done there is to have an aggressive implementation of the steps that were outlined..." Christopher said.

The PLO has dismissed Rabin's attempts to rein in Jewish militants as inadequate. PLO chairman Yasser Arafat told Christopher Tuesday he wants a multinational force to protect the two million Arabs in the Israeli-occupied lands and the disarming of the 120,000 settlers who live among them.

Christopher told reporters the Israeli-Palestinian peace accord signed at the White House last September permits a temporary international presence in Gaza and in Jericho and that this provision "could provide an opening for a discussion of that subject."



Palestinian girls shout and wave black flags during a demonstration in Jericho that left two dead and some 20 injured Mar 2, during the sixth straight day of rioting. — AFP photo

360 children die everyday in Uganda

KAMPALA, Mar 3: An estimated 360 children die everyday in Uganda, the director of the country's medical services, Dr Kihumuroapuli has said, reports Xinhua.

Speaking at a quality assurance workshop for the ministry of health here recently, he said 40 per cent of Uganda's children are malnourished while 23 per cent stunted in growth.

Earlier, Dr Frank Omaswa from the ministry of health, had disclosed over 100 out of every 1,000 children born in Uganda die below the age of five years while 85 or every 1,000 mothers die soon after delivery.

Muslim-Croat pact creates a chance for peace in Bosnia

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, Mar 3: Building a federation between Croats and Muslims creates a chance for peace in Bosnia but doesn't solve the central problem in the former Yugoslavia: Serb-Croat relations, reports AP.

It actually may encourage a de facto division of Bosnia by Croats and Serbs. And it could send those two groups, combatants in a 1991 war, back to the battlefield — this time with even more at stake.

Under a US brokered plan signed Tuesday, Muslims and Croats, former allies who have fought bitterly for months are to establish a federation in Bosnia with close ties to neighbouring Croatia.

Any such arrangement would see the Bosnian Croats and Muslims gravitate toward Croatia because of economic ties, the bonds with Bosnia's Croatian minority, and each group's history of troubled relations with the Serbs.

Croatia, economically stronger before the war and relatively less devastated than Bosnia, would dominate.

Although the United States hopes to entice Serbs into the deal as well, the plan actually provides them an opportunity to reach their war's final goal: creation of a Balkan land uniting all Serbs.

That would include the 70 per cent of Bosnia and 30 per cent of Croatia that the Serbs now hold.

Serb politicians insist they have nothing against the Muslim-Croat union as long as Serbs keep their war-won territories. For Muslims and Croats, losers on the battlefield, the return of Serb-held lands or Serb participation in the agreement is key.

"With numerous unresolved territorial and political disputes, the Serbs and Croats are bound to square off on the battlefield again," said Radivoj Cvetkovic, an analyst for the independent Belgrade daily Borba.

Serbs and Croats were the biggest groups in the former Yugoslavia, and their relations have always been pivotal in the region's turbulent history. The

bloody breakup of Yugoslavia started when Serbia and Croatia failed to resolve their disputes.

Serbia's nationalist President Slobodan Milosevic, however, has worked closely with his Croatian counterpart Franjo Tudjman, on the division of Bosnia, hoping to build on it to settle their disputes over Croatian territory.

But under the threat of sanctions against Croatia for meddling in the Bosnian war, Tudjman reluctantly agreed to the Muslim-Croat union. This left Milosevic with and unexpected and much desired present: Greater Serbia.

The Muslim-Croat agreement could cement the cur-

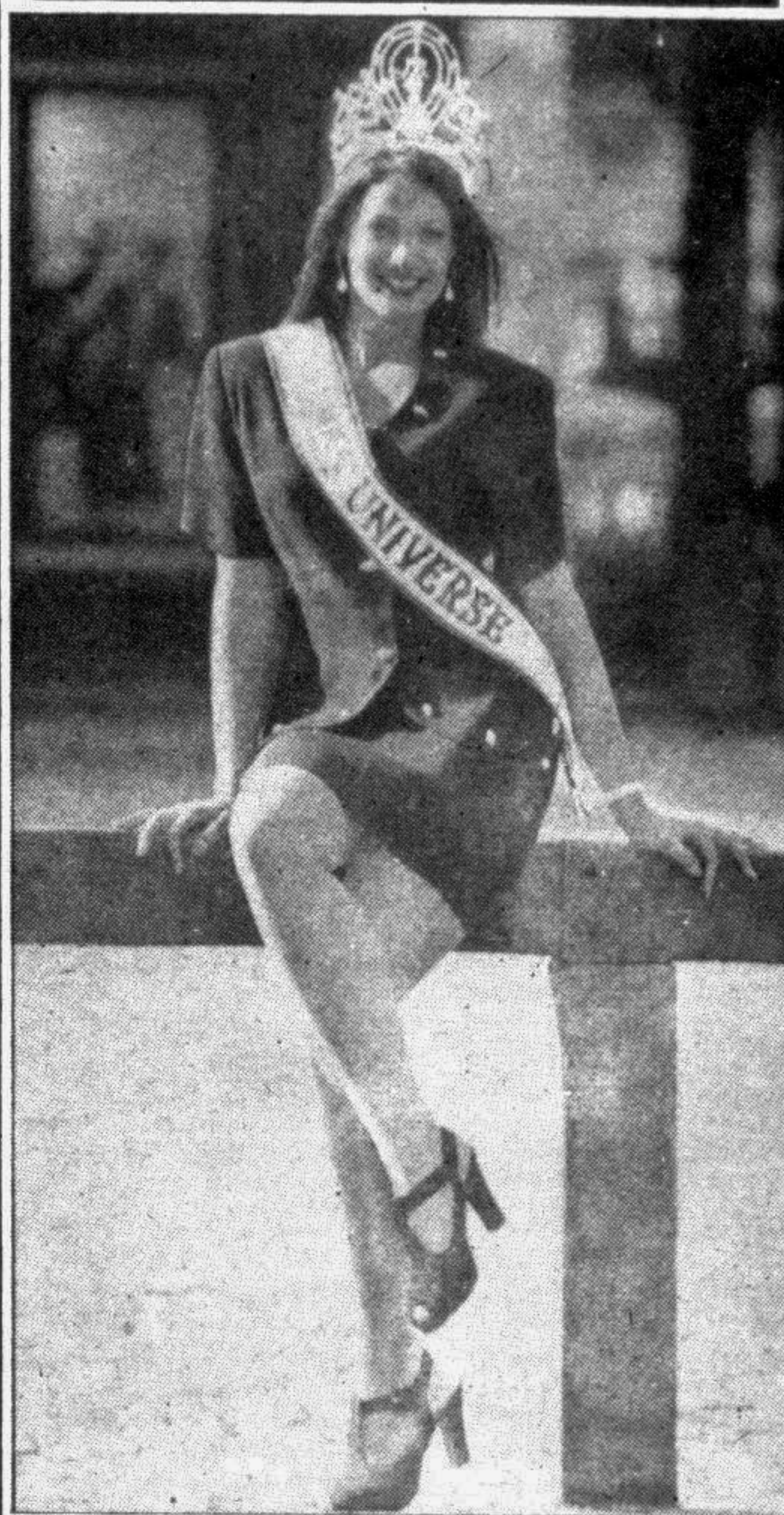
rent situation in Bosnia by creating a treacherous peace without a final political solution.

Cvetkovic cautioned that a new conflict could be especially dangerous now that the United States and Russia are actively engaged.

"The stakes, with Americans possibly supporting Muslims and Croats, and Russians the Serbs, could be much, much higher," he said.

Russia, a traditional Orthodox Serb ally, and the United States recently became involved in efforts to end the two-year Bosnian war that has killed more than 2,00,000 people.

Actions by the two powers

Off the Record

Miss Universe, 18-year-old Dayanara Torres from Puerto Rico poses for the cameras during her three-day visit to London Mar 2 to promote the Miss British Isles 1994 contest, the official preliminary to the Miss Universe Pageant, held here Mar 24. — AFP photo

In search of estranged wife

BOONVILLE: An armed, drunken ex-convict walked into a military school's cafeteria in search of his estranged wife, said he was "going to kill everyone" and fatally shot two people, police and witnesses said, reports AP.

Then he held two teenagers hostage in a nearby apartment before surrendering peacefully to police Tuesday evening.

Dante D Hayes, 33, was held without bond, charged with first-degree murder in the deaths of his wife's boss and a co-worker, and armed criminal action against the hostages.

Hayes and his wife, Anna, had a fight the night before, according to Sgt Ron Hedrick of the Missouri State Highway patrol.

"I think he was going to look for her and they just got in the way," Hedrick said.

Early form of humans lived in China 2 lakh years ago

NEW YORK: An early form of humans was living in China 200,000 years ago or longer, perhaps co-existing with another forerunner of modern humans, a new study suggests, reports AP.

Scientists estimated the age of a homo sapiens skull found in Liaoning Province by analysing animal teeth found with it.

The so-called Jinniushan skull is among the oldest homo sapiens material found in China, almost as old as some Chinese finds representing Homo erectus, scientists at Peking university in Beijing said.

That raises the possibility that the two species co-existed in China, the scientists said in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature.

While modern humans are called Homo sapiens, the Chinese skull was from an archaic form. Such primitive forms are believed to have lived even longer ago in Europe and Africa.

Mother kills son to save him from 'hell of drugs'

AIX-EN-PROVENCE, France: A prosecutor asked for a five-year suspended sentence at the trial Wednesday of a woman who said she shot her son to death to deliver him from "the hell of drugs," reports AP.

If Anne-Marie Siano were acquitted, "She could never assume the weight of her won guilt, of her responsibility," prosecutor Yves Le Baut told the court.

Le Baut said he asked for the symbolic sentence so as "not to negate a gesture... of love."

Mrs Siano, 52, shot her 27-year-old only son Dominique, June 17, 1990. She recounted to the court during the opening day of the trial Tuesday how for years she tried to help her son break his heroin addiction, but unwittingly became an accomplice.

She said she borrowed 300,000 francs (dfrs 52,000) over four years to meet her son's demands for money to buy drugs. She hid bruises from his beatings when she refused money, telling her invalid husband Nicolas that she had fallen. "I didn't want my little one to suffer, be unhappy, end up in the streets," she testified, adding that she begged him on bended knees to get treatment.

"When I saw Dominique completely crazy, his eyes popping out, drooling, hunched up on his bed, insulting me horribly, streaming, 'I won't be hospitalised just to piss you off. I understood that I could not root out the evil of the drug.'"

"I took a gun of my husband's hidden under his bed and I fired three times without looking," Mrs. Siano said.

Aristide rejects UN-brokered deal

GENEVA, Mar 3: Exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on Wednesday called for restoration of democracy in Haiti and ruled out any UN brokered deal that failed to set a date for his return, reports Reuters.

He also urged the UN Security Council to reject a new US draft resolution aimed at breaking a deadlock with the military rulers who overthrew him in a bloody coup in September 1991.

In an earlier speech to the UN Human Rights Commission, Aristide demanded the departure of Haiti's army and police chiefs, blaming them for 5,000 civilian deaths since his ouster.