

Parliament okays arrest

Ex-Japanese minister held for corruption

TOKYO, Mar 11: In the first such decision since 1967, Japan's Parliament on Friday approved the arrest of a former cabinet minister whom prosecutors accuse of taking a bribe from a major construction firm, reports AP.

Several hours later, prosecutors arrested Kishiro Nakamura, a former construction minister.

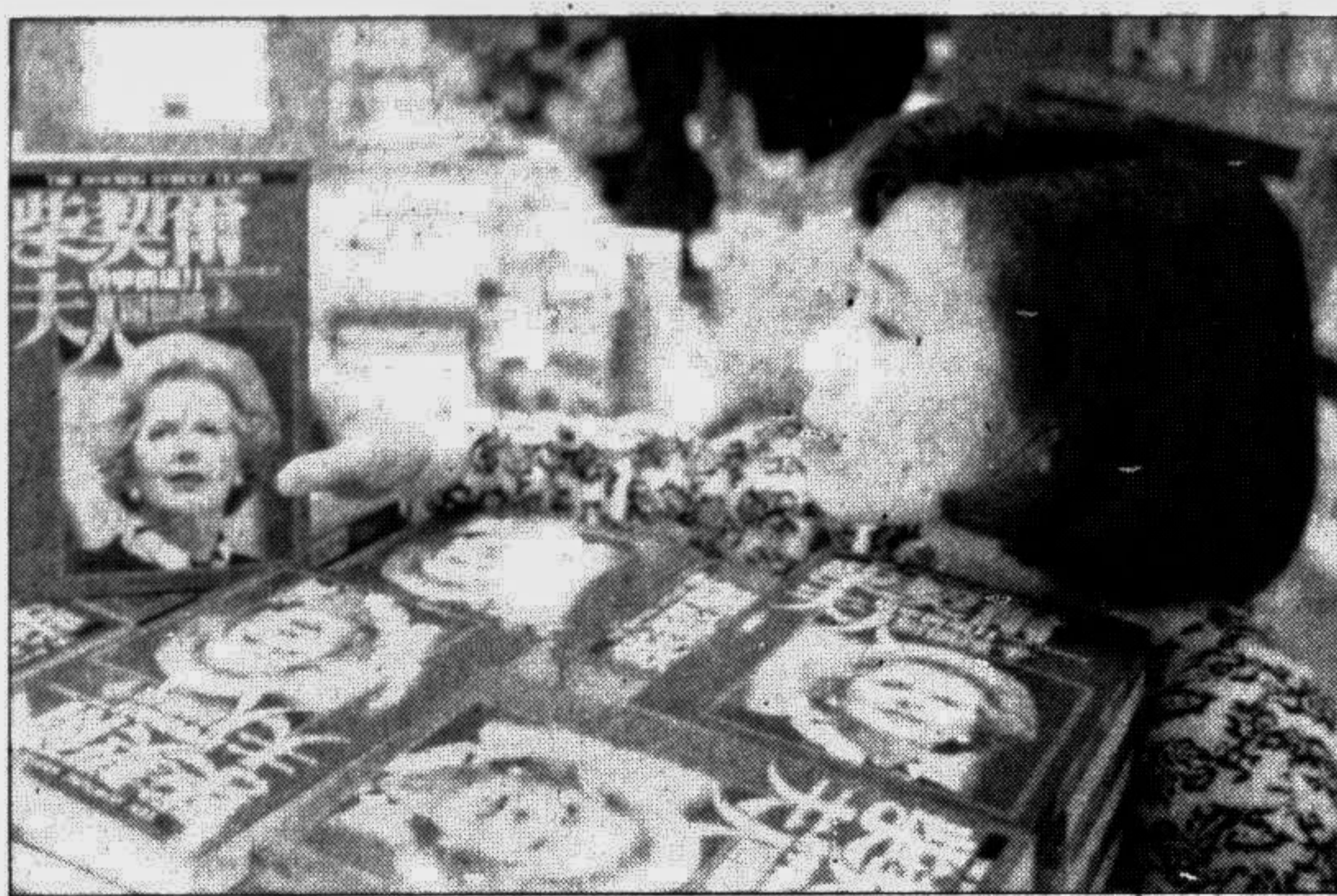
The arrest is the first of a national lawmaker in connection with a scandal surrounding alleged payoffs from construction companies to politicians that helped force the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party from power last summer.

Prosecutors say Nakamura took a 10 million yen (dhs 95,000) bribe from construction giant Kajima Corp. in 1992 in exchange for pressuring anti-monopoly officials not to pursue complaints that Kajima and other contractors rigged bids for public works contracts.

Nakamura, who resigned from the Liberal Democratic Party earlier this week, had denied the allegations, speaking through his lawyer. The 44-year-old lawmaker earlier challenged prosecutors to arrest him at the front door of the Parliament building.

After Parliament approved his arrest, however, Nakamura voluntarily appeared for questioning. Arriving in a chauffeured black car, he walked calmly inside the Tokyo district prosecutors office.

As a sitting lawmaker, Nakamura enjoyed immunity from arrest while Parliament was in session.



A Taipei resident picks up a copy of the Chinese version of The Downing Street Years written by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as the work is put on sale in Taipei yesterday. — AFP photo

Israel, France sign defence accord

JERUSALEM, Mar 11: Israel and France on Thursday signed their first defence cooperation accord since 1967 but Palestinians mourning the victims of the Hebron mosque massacre said the timing could not have been worse, reports Reuter.

"The signing of this agreement is not a way to approve the terrorists act in Hebron," French Defence Minister Francois Leotard told reporters in Jerusalem after endorsing the pact on military technology research and development with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Palestinian leader Faisal Al-Husseini earlier told Leotard at a meeting in Arab East Jerusalem it was not the right moment for this type of agreement.

Fresh mortar attack on Heathrow Airport

LONDON, Mar 11: London's Heathrow airport came under mortar attack for the second time in 30 hours early Friday following a warning the IRA wants to break the Northern Ireland "stalemate", AP reports from London.

As in the first attack Wednesday, which the Irish Republican Army said it carried out, the four shells fired Friday failed to explode, no one was hurt and no facilities damaged.

In Belfast, meanwhile, gunmen Thursday night slew a policeman in a bar and the BBC said the IRA was thought responsible.

Heathrow's Terminal Four, the southern runway and nearby roads were closed for a total of seven hours Friday as police searched for clues but the rest of Heathrow remained open throughout.

Terminal Four handles 25,000 passengers a day and British Airways cancelled morning flights from there to San Francisco, Miami, New York, Caracas, Bogota, Bahrain, Paris and Amsterdam.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for Friday's attack. But on Thursday, Gerry Adams, president of the IRA's political ally Sinn Fein, said more IRA spectaculars would follow if Britain did not accommodate IRA-Sinn Fein demands.

Scotland Yard said four unexploded shells were found near Terminal Four following Friday's attack. Police initially reported three shells but later found a fourth.

Police did not immediately know where they were fired from. BBC radio said the attackers may have driven away the vehicle from which the shells are thought to have been fired after the attack.

SC upholds dismissal of 3 BJP govts after mosque demolition

NEW DELHI, Mar 11: India's Supreme Court today endorsed Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's decision to sack three pro-Hindu state governments after the December 1992 demolition of the Babri Mosque, reports AFP.

The ruling was seen as a defeat for the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whose supporters had gone to court protesting the dismissal of its administrations in the northern heartland.

A nine-member constitutional bench headed by Justice S R Pandian rejected petitions challenging the decision. However, new state governments were already elected in those states in November 1993.

Rao imposed direct federal rule in the BJP-run states of Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan after Hindu militants stormed and destroyed the 16th century Babri Mosque in the town of Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh state.

The Uttar Pradesh administration, also controlled by the BJP, was dismissed immediately after the December 6, 1992, demolition, but the party then accepted moral responsibility for its failure to protect the mosque.

The BJP's three remaining state governments were sacked nine days later amid widespread Hindu-Muslim violence, and the pro-Hindu BJP questioned the action in court.

Upholding the decision, the Supreme Court said any act to subvert the constitutional principle of secularism could "give rise to a situation where the government cannot be carried on in accordance with the law."

The BJP led an emotional campaign for a Hindu temple at the site of the Ayodhya Mosque, claiming the Islamic shrine stood on the birthplace of the Hindu warrior-god Rama.

Its failure to carry out a pledge before the Supreme Court to protect the mosque triggered communal riots leaving hundreds dead.

In November 1993 elections, it failed to recapture power in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh but scraped through in Rajasthan.

Another reports says: Britain is to raise human rights abuses in Kashmir with Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao when he comes to the UK on Sunday, Foreign Office Minister of State Baroness Chalker said Thursday.

It would be one of more than 40 UK complaints to foreign governments in the past year about violations such as the use of torture, she told the lords.

Chalker said reported cases of torture had increased in this century but, following international pressure, we are beginning to see a better situation in some countries.

"We shall most certainly, as we always have done, take this opportunity of the visit to raise issues," she said.

"We will not cease doing so when he happens to be back in India and not here," she added.

Pakistan to send 1700 more troops to Somalia

KARACHI, Mar 11: Pakistan is to send 1,700 more troops to Somalia, raising to 7,000 the size of its contingent to the US peace-keeping force, Foreign Minister Assef Ahmad Ali said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

All was speaking to reporters in Karachi before leaving with Defence Minister Aftab Shaaban Mirani for Mogadishu via Nairobi to celebrate the end of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan with Pakistani soldiers.

"We are beefing up our contingent in Somalia with 1,700 more troops in response to a United Nations request," Ali said. He declined to say when the troops would leave.

Pakistan's 5,300-strong peace-keeping force is the single biggest contingent to the multinational force and was the first to arrive in Somalia in September 1992 under UN command.

The Pakistan contingent suffered 35 killed last year, more than any other country

Off the Record

Disney heirs abandon luxury community

LOS ANGELES: A development group headed by Walt Disney's daughter abandoned plans Thursday to build a gated community in rustic Topanga Canyon and instead will sell the land to a conservancy, reports AP.

The group's surprise announcement was made as the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors heard final testimony on Canyon Oaks Estates.

The partnership said it would sell 662 acres of land for nearly 20 million dollars to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

The partnership is led by Sharon Disney Lund and financed largely by a trust for three of Disney's grandchildren.

"This is such a surprise. It's all our dreams come true," said Susan Nissman, chairwoman of the Topanga Association for a Scenic Community.

Local homeowners had argued that grading for the luxury development would increase flood danger and destroy deer habitat.

A recent protest at Disney Studios in Burbank included a poster of the "Eighth Dwarf" dubbed "Greedy".

Supervisors will decide whether to ratify the deal at their March 29 meeting. April 9 is the deadline for the land closure.

The sale would end a 15-year effort to build homes in the scenic canyon.

Bottle of a rare 1945 wine sold for \$18000

LONDON: A unique-sized bottle of a rare 1945 wine was sold at auction in London on Thursday for 12,000 pounds (dollar 18,000), reports Reuter.

The handmade bottle contained the equivalent of five standard bottles of a Vintage Bordeaux produced by Chateau Petrus, in Southwest France, at the end of World War Two.

"As far as I'm aware it's unique," said Paul Bowker, Director of the wine department of the auctioneers Christie's. "We've never come across this type of wine in anything approaching this bottle size."

The auctioneers submerged the bottle in a tub and measured the water displaced to calculate its volume. They found it was neither a double Magnum, which contains four bottles, nor a Jeroboam, which contains six.

Bowker said the bottle, christened a "Dame-Jeanne" from the French term for a large glass container, was bought by a European collector who planned to drink the wine.

1,000 yrs old graves discovered in Tibet

BEIJING: Archaeologists have discovered a group of ancient graves dating back more than 1,000 years in the Tibet autonomous region, reports Xinhua.

The site is 700 KM east of Lhasa, the regional capital. Occupying more than three million SQM on the southern bank of the Yarlung Zangbo river, the graveyard is believed to have been in continual use for more than 200 years — from the seventh to the ninth centuries — by the Tubo people, the ancestors of modern Tibetans.

According to the scale, structure and shape of the graves, the archaeologists infer that occupants of the graves may have held positions as high as Zanpu, the ancient Tubo regional rulers.

A total of 218 tombs of different sizes have been discovered. The part above the ground of the largest tomb is 63M in circumference and eight M in height.

A dozen ancient Tibetan characters written in ink were found on wooden articles excavated from two tombs, marking the first discovery of Tibetan characters 1,000 years old.

Also discovered was a circular bone seal carved with Tibetan characters and a horse-shaped design which shows great delicacy and vividness.

Most of the tombs had been robbed and damaged.

BRIEFLY

Zhirinovskiy won't meet Nixon: Ultrationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy refused Thursday to meet former US President Richard Nixon, currently visiting Moscow, the Itar-Tass news agency reported, AFP says from Moscow.

The report, citing the Liberal Democratic Party leader's press secretary Grigory Serebiakov, came after Nixon declined to rule out a meeting with Zhirinovskiy during his trip.

Nixon has already upset Russian President Boris Yeltsin by meeting former Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi, a leader of the failed October parliamentary revolt against Yeltsin.

LTTE kills 9 Lankan troops: Nine members of Sri Lanka's security forces were killed and 23 wounded in three Tamil rebel attacks on Thursday in the country's north, a military spokesman said yesterday, Reuter reports from Colombo.

Four soldiers died in a mine blast on Thursday night while returning to camp by bus from leave on the military-controlled Kayts island off the Jaffna peninsula, he said.

Eleven men, including two officers, were wounded. Four police were killed and 12 wounded in a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) raid on a police post in northwestern Mannar district, the spokesman said.

Police closes Siberian airport: Police closed the airport Friday at the Siberian city of Irkutsk after an unidentified person called authorities and said the airport terminal had been mined, the Itar-Tass news agency reported, AP says from Moscow.

All passengers and airport personnel were evacuated from the terminal after the caller telephoned police about 1 pm (0500 GMT). A search for the explosives was underway the agency said.

Finland to send troops to Croatia: Finland will send a team of 39 soldiers as UN peacekeepers to the former Yugoslav Republic of Croatia at the request of the United Nations, Finland announced late Thursday, Xinhua reports from Helsinki.

The Finnish peacekeepers, who are leaving for Croatia on March 15, will be placed on patrols at the Pleso supply base and airport near the Croatian capital of Zagreb.

Finland has already sent 230 soldiers as peacekeepers to the northern border of Macedonia to monitor the situation there and prevent the Bosnia conflict from spreading to the former Yugoslav Republic.

Russian PM arrives in Finland: Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin arrived in Finland yesterday for a two-day visit expected to focus largely on economic relations between the two neighbours, Reuter reports from Helsinki.

Chernomyrdin, who postponed a visit last month because he had a cold, was met by Prime Minister Esko Aho at the airport at Vantaa outside Helsinki, the Finnish capital.

10m face threat of famine in E Africa: About 10 million people face the threat of famine in East Africa if rains due in the coming weeks are insufficient, a State Department spokesman said Thursday, AFP reports from Washington.

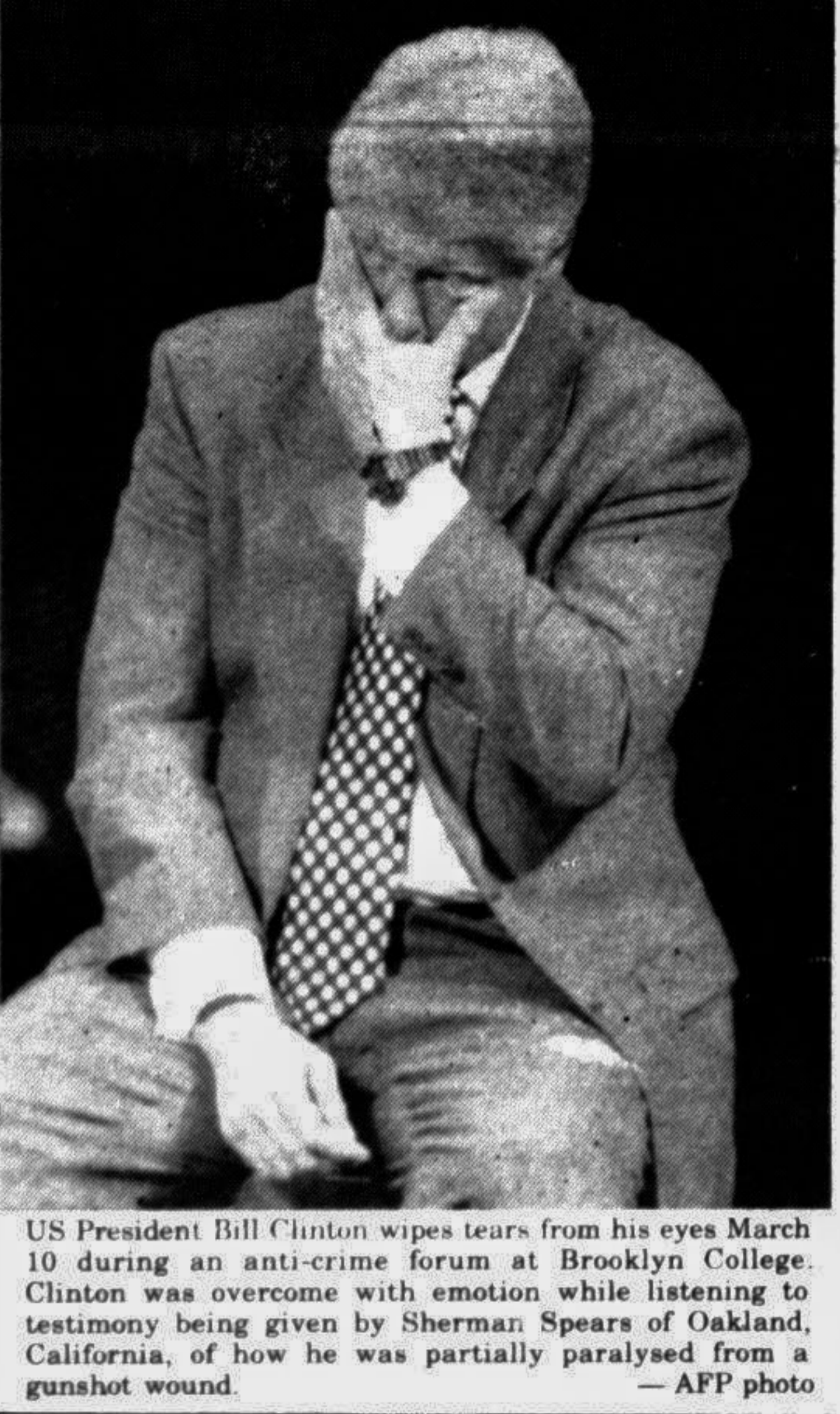
"We are, indeed, very much concerned about the possibility of a serious food emergency throughout Eastern Africa, extending all the way from Ethiopia as far down as Tanzania," said George Moose at a news conference.

The current estimates are that as many as ten million people might be affected by this, but I would hasten to add that this all very premature, he said.

Actor James Caan arrested: Movie star James Caan was arrested after apparently drawing a weapon during an argument, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Caan was taken into custody late Thursday outside a North Hollywood apartment complex by officers responding to a call of a man with a gun, said police spokeswoman Sandra Castello.

"When they arrived, a citizen had placed Caan under citizens' arrest for brandishing a pistol at him," Castello said. Castello said she did not know the identity of the man, the nature of his dispute with Caan, or whether either lived at the apartment complex.



US President Bill Clinton wipes tears from his eyes March 10 during an anti-crime forum at Brooklyn College. Clinton was overcome with emotion while listening to testimony being given by Sherman Spears of Oakland, California, of how he was partially paralysed from a gunshot wound. — AFP photo

Tajik Vice Premier assassinated

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Mar 11: The vice premier of the troubled Central Asian country of Tajikistan was shot and killed outside his apartment by unidentified assassins in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, the Foreign Ministry said Friday, reports AP.

Moensho Nazarshoyev, 65, was walking in the courtyard of his apartment building at about 10 pm (1800 GMT) Thursday, when gunmen sprayed him with bullets from a car, killing him on the spot, the Tajik Foreign Ministry said.

There was no immediate word as to the identity of Nazarshoyev's killers, but the government said it believed the murder was an attempt to sabotage upcoming talks between the government and the Tajik opposition.

The parliament and the government issued a statement calling the assassination a "bestial action of the enemies of our homeland" and promised to do everything possible to find and punish the killers.

The Tajik government has mobilized the Interior Ministry, the Security Ministry and the prosecutor to hunt for Nazarshoyev's assassins.

The Soviet collapse of 1991 plunged Tajikistan into political turmoil, with rival clans vying for power and Islamic fundamentalist seeking to infiltrate from neighbouring Afghanistan.

Located on the border with Afghanistan and China as well as the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan is an impoverished country of rugged mountains and poor communications.

Another Chinese dissident held

SHANGHAI, Mar 11: Shanghai police detained a prominent dissident today, hours before the arrival in China of US Secretary of State Warren Christopher on a mission to confront Chinese leaders on human rights, reports Reuters.

Wang Fuchen, 39, was picked up by police on this morning as he returned to his home, a family source said.

"They said they were going to take him to a guest house for several days," the source told Reuters after Wang, Secretary General of the Shanghai-based association for human rights, became the latest local activist rounded up ahead of Christopher's visit. All the others have since been released.

Wang fled Shanghai last week, just before police detained at least six dissidents ahead of a visit to the city by the top US human rights diplomat, John Shattuck.

Suharto won't step down before '98

JAKARTA, Mar 11: Indonesia's ageing President Suharto has firmly quashed speculation he will step down before his mandate expires in 1998, but indicated he might not seek a seventh five-year term, reports Reuter.

Suharto, a 72-year-old retired general in power since 1967, was re-elected a year ago by the 1,000-seat People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), which has 600 appointed members.

The question of who will succeed Suharto is the most important issue facing mainly Muslim Indonesia.

Some officials and others believe Suharto might be tempted, even implored, to seek a fresh mandate in 1998 in Indonesia. The multi-ethnic country has bitter memories of carnage in the mid-1960s after what the government said was a communist plot.

"I will remain in office until 1998. I must not step down on the way."

Orders forbade shooting settlers, police commander tells probe

TEL AVIV, Mar 11: Israeli troops were under orders not to open fire on Jewish settlers, even if the civilians shot at Palestinians, a police commander told a hearing into the Hebron massacre Thursday, reports AP.

"The order was that if a settler, a Jewish settler, shoots his gun, even in the street... toward locals... it's forbidden to shoot at him," said Chief Superintendent Meir Tayar, commander of the paramilitary border police in Hebron.

"You take cover and wait for the clip to finish, then stop him in some other way, not by shooting," Tayar told a commission of inquiry investigating the massacre.

His men, operating under army orders, help guard the Tomb of the Patriarchs where a Jewish settler, Bruch Goldstein, killed 53 Muslim worshippers on February 25. Troops arrived after the massacre was over.

The army spokesman's office would not comment on the regulations.

Other officers confirmed such orders were in effect during routine street unrest, but maintained they were not meant to prevent security forces from foiling an out-and-out attack such as Goldstein's.

Brig. Gen. Shaul Muhfaz, the military's West Bank commander, said soldiers were discouraged from firing at Jews because of the assumption that any Jews shooting a weapon would be doing so in self-defence.

Lt. Col. Yemini Canaan, head of the army's Operations Branch in the West Bank, said other scenarios were never discussed by military planners.

During the hearing, the commission's head, Chief Supreme Court Justice Meir Shamgar, pressed Tayar on whether a blanket ban on shooting Jews seemed logical. "Not so much. I was not 100 per cent comfortable with it," he said, adding other officers felt the same.

The testimony was likely to spark charges of military negligence in facing down settler violence in the occupied lands.

Weeks before the country was shocked by scenes of settlers firing their weapons down a Hebron street while soldiers looked on.

"It is the duty of whoever is in charge of law and order to act against anyone shooting, Jew or Arab," said Ori Orr, a legislator and reserve general, calling the standing orders "stupid and improper."

During the six-year Palestinian uprising against occupation, more than 1,270 Palestinians have been killed, most by army gunfire.

Testimony also revealed lax security at the massacre site. Maj. Daniel Ben Shoshan, an operations officer, admitted surveillance TV cameras malfunctioned February 25.

Witnesses have said only half the 10-member guard detail showed up for duty that day, and that when the first officer arrived at the scene, the shooting was already over.

Tayar said three border policemen were late, apparently because they were not awakened by the duty commander at their base.



This partial view of the Hebron mosque dated Feb 25 shows shoes that belonged to victims piled up among bloody carpets after the massacre inside Abraham's mosque in Hebron Feb 25. Major General Danny Yatom, the West Bank military commander, announced to the opening of the official inquiry March 9 that the army had reached the figure of 29 victims after interviewing families. — AFP photo

India asks Dalai Lama to stay away from Tibet confce

NEW DELHI, Mar 11: India has asked the Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibet, to stay away from a conference next week on Tibet organised by Indian parliament members, reports AP.

Tibetan officials confirmed Friday the Dalai Lama will not attend the meeting, sponsored by more than 100 members of India's parliament to urge China to negotiate a solution on Tibet.

Mohan Singh, an organiser of the event, said Indian embassies were delaying visas for delegates who planned to attend the two-day meeting in New Delhi, according to the Economic Times.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman declined to comment on Singh's statement.

Last year, the Tibetan leader and Nobel Peace prize laureate addressed a similar, though smaller, seminar in Dharmasala, the headquarters of his government-in-exile.