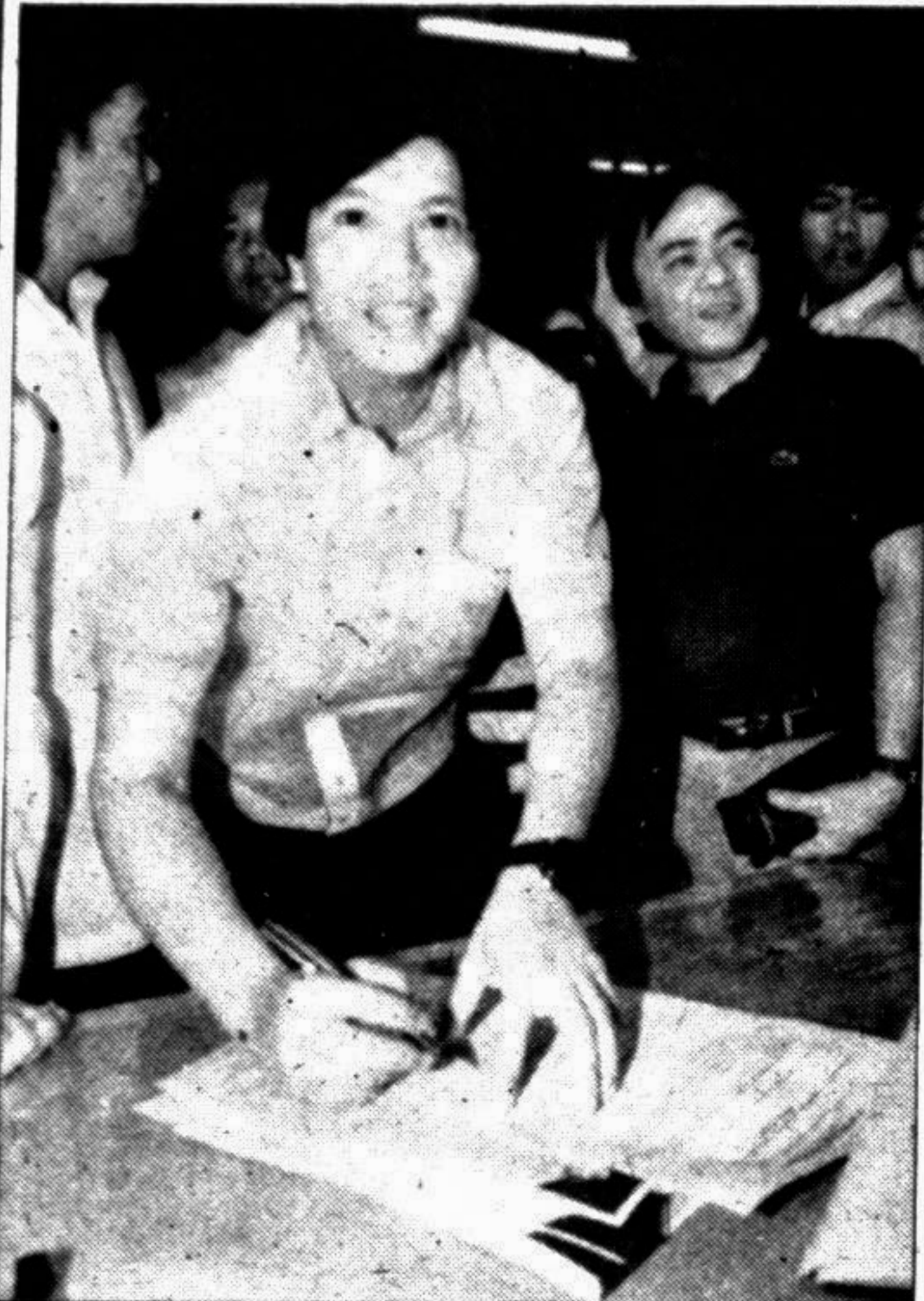


BRIEFLY



Ferdinand Marcos Junior, the son of the late Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos, signs his certificate of candidacy at the official Commission on Elections in Manila on Wednesday. Marcos is running for senator on May 8 national elections. — AFP photo

Clinton's approval rating up: US President Bill Clinton's approval rating has jumped nine points in three weeks to 54 per cent, according to an opinion survey conducted after his state of the union address a week ago. AFP reports from Washington.

Clinton's job rating, however, was three percentage points lower than in a similar ABC news-Washington Post poll taken in March 1994.

Estonian defence minister quits: Estonian defence minister Enn Tupp resigned Tuesday amid charges he mishandled a military arms deal with Russia. AP reports from Estonia.

In a statement Tuesday, Tupp said he couldn't do his job effectively anymore because of a "slander campaign" against him.

Dengue fever claims 55 in Timor: An outbreak of dengue fever has killed 55 people, most of them children, in West Timor, the Antara news agency said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Antara quoted local health official Agus Bereh as saying that the victims were from 20 villages in and around the town of Kupang and that they had died last month.

US team in Pyongyang: A delegation from the US State Department arrived in Pyongyang Tuesday to discuss the opening of liaison offices under an agreement with North Korea. The Korean central news agency (KCNA) reported. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The official news agency, monitored in Tokyo, said that "consular issues and most technical issues" on the swap of liaison offices had been resolved in talks last month in Washington.

2 Hamas activists held in WB: Israeli undercover soldiers arrested two armed activists from the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas late on Tuesday close to Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank, military officials said. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

The men were carrying two Kalashnikov assault rifles when they were stopped in Abu Dis, the officials added.

Bosnia frees 100 Dutch UN troops: Bosnian government troops on Tuesday released another 100 Dutch UN troops they had been holding since Saturday in the eastern Srebrenica enclave. The Dutch Defence Ministry said. AFP reports from The Hague.

Negotiations between the commander of the Dutch battalion charged with protecting Srebrenica and the local Bosnian commanders persuaded the Bosnians to release their hostages, officials added.

One dies in UK train collision: One person died and another was seriously injured when two passenger trains crashed after heavy rain caused a landslip on a remote line in Cumbria, northern England, police said. AFP reports from Carlisle.

Police said a further 30 people suffered slight injuries in the collision which happened at about 7:00 pm (1900 GMT) amid torrential rain and gusting winds on the line between the towns of Carlisle and Settle.

Pope's call to release nuns: Pope John Paul II appealed Wednesday for the release of all hostages seized by rebels in Sierra Leone including seven nuns abducted from a mission a week ago. AP reports from Vatican City.

Speaking at his general audience, the pope urged all parties in the conflict to agree to a cease-fire and to begin a dialogue to solve "the grave problems afflicting the country."

Hezbollah rockets N Israel: Guerrillas in South Lebanon fired Soviet-made Katyusha rockets into northern Israel on Tuesday, pro-Israeli militia sources said. Reuters reports from Marjayoun, Lebanon.

The South Lebanon Army (SLA) sources said the rockets slammed into the Nahariya region in western Galilee. It was not immediately known if the barrage caused casualties or damage.

Move to break stalemate in ME peace process Arab-Israeli summit today

JERUSALEM, Feb 1: The leaders of Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinians will meet for an unprecedented summit Thursday to find ways to break the stalemate in Mideast peace talks, reports AP.

The summit was called to rescue the peace process which has been shaken by Muslim militant attacks on Israelis and Israel's continued building of settlements on land claimed by the Palestinians.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Jordan's King Hussein will attend the meeting in Cairo. Israeli and Egyptian officials said.

"The effort will be to promote the peace process, strengthen the chances of success and deal with the problems facing that project," Egyptian Foreign Minister, Amr Moussa told reporters in Cairo after meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to work out a summit agenda.

Peres said the meeting would be "a real attempt to create a coalition for peace and not let the coalition against the peace stop it."

"This is certainly an unprecedented attempt in the annals of the Middle East," Peres said in other remarks broadcast on Israel radio.

The stalled negotiations between Israel and the Syrians will also be on Thursday's agenda, but Moussa said Syrian President Hafez Assad was not invited.

The talks are stuck because Israel rejects Syrian demands for the return of all of the Golan Heights and Syria re-

fuses to spell out the nature of the peace it is offering.

Palestine Liberation Organisation officials said Arafat would attend. There was no immediate comment from Jordan's King Hussein.

Mubarak has been in touch with Rabin, Hussein and Arafat over the past few days to arrange the summit, Moussa said.

Rabin has met with each of the leaders individually in the past, but they have not come together in a four-way meeting before.

Dudayev accused of treason

MOSCOW, Feb 1: The Russian general prosecutor's office today brought charges against separatist Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev and accused him of treason, an offence which carries the death sentence, reports Reuters.

The official Itar-Tass news agency also said an arrest warrant had been issued for Dudayev, whose forces are fighting Russian troops in Chechnya.

The other charges also included encouraging terrorism and instigating ethnic and religious hatred.

Acting prosecutor general Alesei Ilyushenko said last week that once formal charges had been brought against the Chechen leader, "all troops will be given orders to arrest Dudayev and his people."

The Russian troops have not yet been able to establish the whereabouts of Dudayev. He has threatened that the war could spread to



Two Russian soldiers carry the body of a comrade killed during an attack by Chechen fighters on the Samachski road, about 90 km from Grozny. Russian troops continued to shell rebel positions in the Chechen capital of Grozny on Tuesday. — AFP photo

20 militants held in Srinagar

SRINAGAR, Feb 1: Police in the northern India state of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday arrested 20 Muslim militants in a raid in Srinagar, officials said, reports Reuters.

Police said the special operations group arrested the militants at their hideout at Batmaloo while they were holding a meeting in the state's summer capital.

India's paramilitary Border Security Forces helped the local police in the operation that lasted six hours, police said the militants did not put up a fight as they were unarmed.

The local police had so far disassociated themselves from anti-militancy operations in the disputed state.

Lifting of arms ban will do little for Bosnians: Rose

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 1: Lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia would do little for Bosnian Muslims who would need years to regain territory lost to the Serbs, former UN peacekeeping Commander Michael Rose said Tuesday, reports AFP.

To create an army which is capable of campaigning offensively at the operational level will take years, the British general told reporters at UN headquarters in New York.

Rose, who was meeting with Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali at the end of his year-long mission in Bosnia, was responding to calls from the US Congress to lift the arms embargo against the former Yugoslavia.

New Republican majority leader Bob Dole said that lawmakers still backed and end to the ban on sales of arms to Bosnian Muslims but that no action would be taken in Congress for several months in order to allow time for a negotiated settlement.

Rose who is also expected to visit Washington, said he was still optimistic about a possible political solution to ending the nearly three-year war and asserted that armed efforts by the Bosnians to win back land would be futile.

"It is not just a question of buying equipment. It is a question of a whole understanding of the art of war," he continued.

"I might believe it would take years," he said. "During that time, of course, the other side would not exactly be sitting around watching this happen."

Dole met with Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdic Monday and assured him of continued Congressional support for lifting the arms ban.

"I haven't seen any slippage on either side Democrat or Republican on lifting the embargo," he told reporters.

Dutch flooding leaves one lakh homeless

AMSTERDAM, Feb 1: Flood swollen rivers weakened dikes and endangered a wider swath of the Dutch lowlands Wednesday, driving more people to flee their homes, reports AP.

The flooding — the worst natural disaster to hit the Netherlands in more than 40 years — has uprooted more than a hundred thousand people.

It also threatens to destroy centuries of efforts to create farmland from below sea level marshes and flood plains. The reclaimed land, known as polders, is protected by a network of riverine dikes, massive earthen hums that extend hundreds of kilometers (miles).

Tiel, at the confluence of the flooded Maas and Waal rivers in central Holland was considered the most critical area.

A hundred thousand people have been asked to evacuate the Tiel en-Culemborgward polder area that surrounds the town.

The dikes are soaked and weak," said Wijnand van Buuren, a spokesman for the Tiel Crisis centre.

"At this level the water is pressing against the dike Van Buurman said, but the water is clear — a sign that dike foundations are not yet being eaten away.

Farther east, in the polders of the Bommelewaard, Wamel, Druuten and Oijpolder, thousands of hectares (acres) of eastern farmland were under water. Some 85,000 people fled their homes Monday and Tuesday.

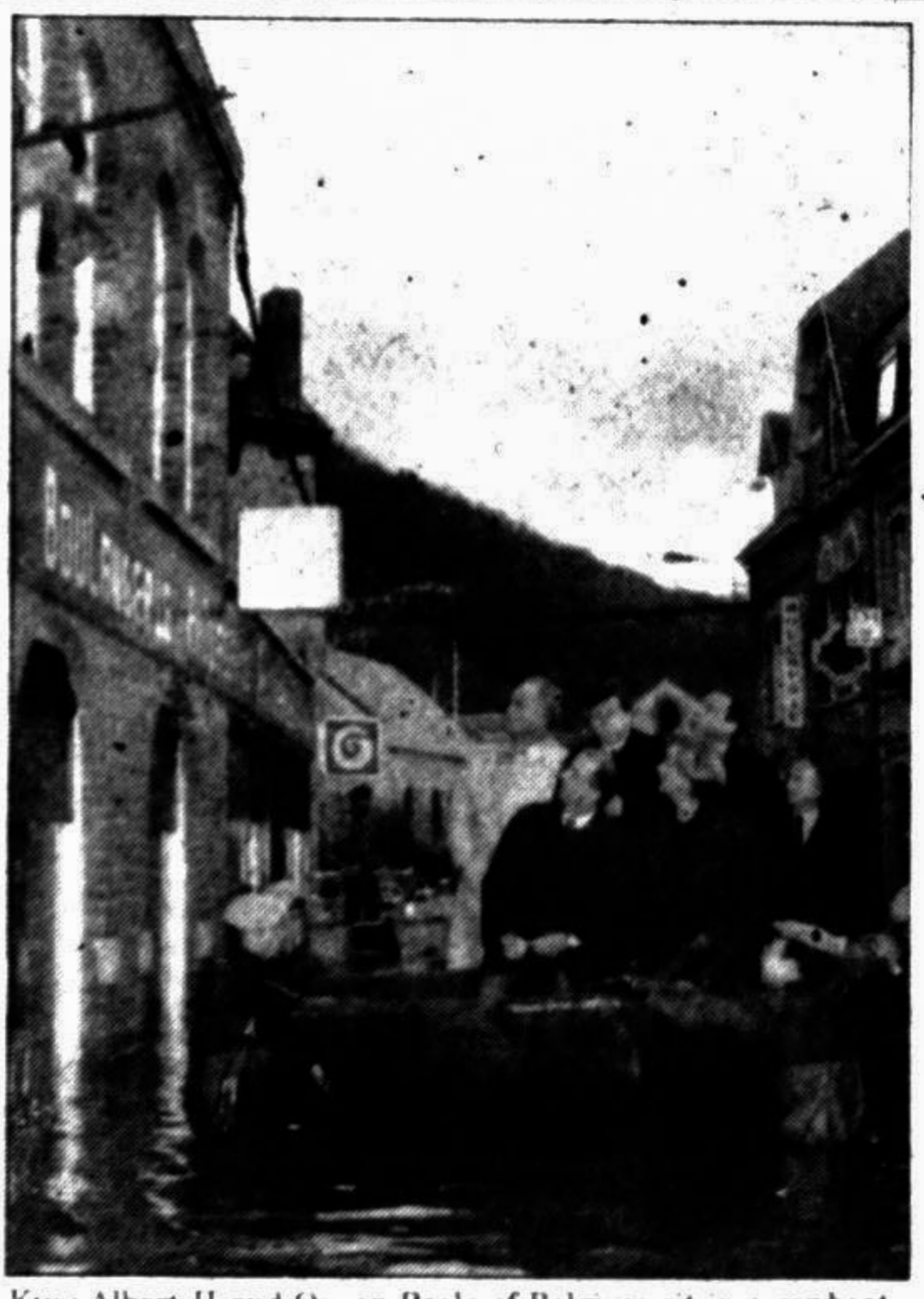
In the eastern provinces of Gelderland and Limburg, residents fled in vehicles with their livestock leaving behind farmland surreally empty of people and animals.

The problem is moving the cattle," Van Buurman said. "They're being moved by train."

At least 140,000 head of cattle and pigs are at risk.

In 1953, a North Sea storm surge burst the dikes and flooded vast areas of the province of Zeeland drowning more than 1,800 people.

The Netherlands flood waters are being fed by the drainage of the storms and floods that have been blamed for at least 27 deaths across northwestern Europe that flooding, triggered by the early melting of Alpine snows combined with heavy rains, has begun to subside.



King Albert II and Queen Paola of Belgium sit in a rowboat, talking with people on the first floor of their flooded house, during their visit to flood-hit Hastiere on Monday. — AFP photo

35000 flee fighting in Sierra Leone

CONAKRY, Feb 1: More than 35,000 people fleeing fighting between government and rebels in Sierra Leone have crossed the border into neighbouring Guinea, the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said here Tuesday, reports AFP.

Assane Samb said after returning from a visit to the border area that relief groups would have to act quickly to prevent the spread of cholera among the flood of refugees.

Already one cholera case has been identified by the Guinean health services.

The figures for the number of refugees fleeing Sierra Leone "come from what we saw on site and facts provided by the authorities in Freetown," and area some 100 kilometres south of Conakry, Samb said.

On Monday, the UNHCR estimated the numbers who had crossed the border at "more than 17,000."

Guinean health officials said Tuesday they were to start an emergency vaccination programme to try to prevent outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever.

Samb on Tuesday chaired a meeting with representatives of the government, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the French medical aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres (doctors without borders).

The WFP has said it will send emergency food supplies for the refugees for a month.

Guinea already shelters some 500,000 refugees from fighting in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone, the rebel leader Foday Sankoh on Tuesday called for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to broker peace talks between his forces and the military government.

In a two-way radio communication with defence department officials, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader said the ICRC can open a corridor which will be used as a neutral zone for us to talks peace.

Off the Record

Birth control on 'soap operas'?

SANTA MONICA, California: Daytime television serial executives met on Friday to ponder how to make love in the afternoon, responsibly, reports AP.

The two-day "soap opera summit," which features talks by Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders and Jane Fonda, is sponsored by Population Communications International, a group concerned about overpopulation.

PCI chairman Sonny Fox, a former vice president of children's programming at the NBC television network, said he hopes to persuade the executives to think about population control when writing story lines.

He contends the daytime series are more influential than other shows because they're on every day and viewers identify heavily with the characters.

The teen-age viewers are, in particular, watching the soaps to develop their expectations of what their sex lives might be like," Fox said.

The often melodramatic serials are known as "soap operas" in the United States because they were originally aimed at housewives and featured commercials for dish soap and other household products. "Love in the afternoon" was the slogan one TV network used to promote its serials.

Just how steamy are the stories that dominate midday TV? This year, soap opera programming showed 6.64 incidents of sexual activity or references to sex per episode, said Michigan State University Professor Bradley Greenberg. The incidents and references range from sex out of wedlock to prostitution and artificial insemination.

Greenberg opened the summit with the release of his daytime drama study.

At a news conference, Greenberg said sex is usually portrayed as something desirable, though rarely in a light-hearted manner.

"Sex on the soaps is serious," he said, adding, "Except for rape, people are happy about what they are doing."

Nine days on leaves!

BANGKOK: A Singaporean tourist lost in a Thai national park said Monday he survived the nine-day ordeal by eating leaves as leeches and ticks fed on his blood, reports AP.

Koh Kim Ho, a 26-year-old painter, was hiking with seven friends in Hat Yai when he decided January 14 to climb to a higher level of a waterfall alone.

His friends agreed to wait for him at the bottom, but Koh lost his way in the thick forest 930 kilometres south of Bangkok. The friends alerted authorities when Koh failed to show up, sparking an exhaustive search with dogs and helicopters.

"Everyday I heard many people call my name, dogs barking and helicopters," Koh said from his hospital bed. "But I could not find a way to reach them."

France Boonyang, his Thai friend, said Koh was bathing in a waterfall when three men spotted him and called authorities. Koh was rescued Sunday in torn shorts, his body covered in scratches and leeches and ticks feeding on his legs, she said.

A nurse at Hat Yai hospital, who demanded anonymity, said Koh was weak and had suffered a seizure because he had been without medicine he takes regularly to control them. But the nurse said he was otherwise recovering well.

Israel still against signing NPT

JERUSALEM, Feb 1: Israel remains firmly set against signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said on Tuesday, reports AFP.

"There has been no change in our basic position on the question," Peres said, a day before he was due to meet in Cairo with President Hosni Mubarak.

The Egyptian leader has threatened to pull out of the treaty in April-May when it comes up for extension unless Israel offers to join up, even at a later date.

"No one's putting pressure on us," Peres told army radio. "Neither the Egyptians nor the United States."

Rift in Congress (I) casts shadow on the future of Rao

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: An unending tug of war in India's ruling party is threatening to break up the country's oldest political entity, casting a shadow on the future of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, reports AP.

The 73-year-old Rao, who has a Machiavellian reputation, appears set to throw out his arch foe, former minister Arjun Singh, from the Congress (I) Party to quell an unprecedented rebellion against his leadership.

But political pundits warn that the move might recoil on Rao if the ruling party fails to win crucial state elections in February and March, which are seen as a referendum on the embattled premier.

It was the Congress rout in elections in two southern states in December that sparked Arjun Singh's dramatic resignation from the cabinet and his revolt against Rao, who until then had seemed unassailable.

Arjun Singh, who is known to have prime ministerial ambitions, has quickly garnered varying degrees of support in the faction-riven Congress, stunning Rao, who is also the party president.

Newspapers say Arjun Singh's sacking would split the 109-year-old Congress, which spearheaded India's freedom campaign and has ruled the country almost uninterrupted since independence in 1947.

"The fact of the matter is that a split has already taken place (in the Congress)," the Asian Age daily said in an editorial. The legalities are being worked out now.

Although Rao still commands the support of an overwhelming majority of Congress MPs, he has been rattled by the 64-year-old Arjun Singh's challenge as well as continued defiance.

Congress sources say if the party is drubbed in elections in the four major of six states that go to the hustings, Arjun Singh will launch a determined bid to unseat Rao — at least as Congress president.

"Whatever Rao does is risky," one Congress official said. "If he does not oust Arjun Singh, a parallel power centre will continue to plague him. If he sacks him, Arjun Singh is bound to become more determined, more dangerous."

After wavering for a month, Rao ordered the suspension of Arjun Singh, his former de facto number two in the government, on January 24, and is waiting for the latter to reply to charges of indiscipline.

Congress sources said all this was only a formality.

The PM has made up his mind, a party leader said. "It is only a matter of time before Arjun Singh is shown the door."

A K Antony, a top Congress leader, said in candid remarks that the ruling party was facing a major crisis, having already lost its traditional support base in parts of the country.

"I am hoping against hope that there can be an amicable solution to the (Arjun Singh) problem," he said. "I will oppose Arjun Singh's expulsion because the party workers are against a split."

"If we continue to fight, we (Congress) will be finished," he added.

Arjun Singh however, continues a subtle nationwide anti-Rao campaign, accusing the prime minister of promoting corruption and failing to build up the Congress.

The Congress has split twice in the past — first in 1969 when then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gave a radical economic agenda to the party and in 1978 when, while out of power, she again revolted against the old guard.

Both times, Indira Gandhi, who was assassinated in 1984, had the last laugh.

Arjun Singh is not Indira Gandhi," dismissed Bhajan Lal, a Rao loyalist and chief minister of the northern state of Haryana. But the Telegraph daily warned that a third split might sound the death knell for the Congress.

Peru still sending troops to border

QUITO, Feb 1: Peru and Ecuador have begun talks on ending border clashes over a disputed jungle region, but Peru is still sending troops to the remote area by truck and river boat, reports AP.

Ecuador announced a ceasefire Tuesday, but Peru refused to confirm any agreement had been reached.

Diplomats from the two countries met separately overnight with representatives from the United States, Argentina, Brazil and Chile, guarantors of a 1942 treaty that was supposed to define the border. The talks in Rio de Janeiro began Tuesday afternoon and lasted into early Wednesday morning.