

**BRIEFLY**



Former US President Ronald Reagan sits in front of his birthday cake Monday in Westwood. — AFP photo

**Reagan turns 84:** Former President Reagan blew out candles on a chocolate mousse cake and flashed his famous smile during a private 84th birthday party thrown on Monday by his staff, a spokeswoman said. AP reports from Los Angeles.

Reagan blew out three candles atop the cake after devouring his favourite meal—meat loaf, mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese — at the private Regency Club party with nine staff members, said Cathy Busch, spokeswoman for Reagan. "He just loved it. He was thoroughly enjoying himself," she said.

**Benazir to visit Singapore:** Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will visit Singapore between March 7-10 in response to an invitation from the Prime Minister of Singapore. AFP reports from Islamabad.

During the visit, Benazir is expected to discuss bilateral matters and other issues of common concern, special emphasis will be placed on seeking Singapore's participation in various economic projects in Pakistan.

**US poet James Merrill dies:** Pulitzer Prize winning poet James Merrill, whose long, distinguished career included 14 books of verse, died on Monday. He was 68. AP reports from New York.

Merrill, who had homes in Connecticut and New York City, died of a heart attack while on vacation in Tucson, Arizona. J. D. McClatchy, a friend and fellow poet, told the New York Times.

**27 die in Mexican road mishaps:** At least 27 people were killed and another 35 injured when two buses collided head on and truck and two cars smashed into the wreckage, officials said. AP reports from Los Mochis, Mexico.

A tire blowout caused the driver of a bus to lose control and veer into oncoming traffic about 10 kilometers (six miles) south of Los Mochis, setting off Sunday's accident, investigators told the newspaper El Debate de Los Mochis.

**Malaysia to hold seminar on Islam:** Malaysia will hold an international seminar on the values of Islam and Confucian teachings from March 12-14, it was announced on Monday. Xinhua reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said it was hoped that the seminar would help Malaysians understand, respect and practice the teachings of positive concepts for the benefit of fostering brotherhood and unity.

**Attack on Lankan editor:** A Sri Lankan newspaper editor has been hospitalized after he and his wife were attacked in a Colombo suburb by unidentified men wielding clubs, colleagues said today. Reuter reports from Colombo.

They said Lasantha Wickrematunga, editor of the Independent Sunday Leader, suffered cuts and bruises when the couple was assaulted by four men near their home. His wife, Raine, received minor injuries. Their vehicle was smashed by the attackers.

**Briton jailed for killing 2 Turks:** A British engineer is being detained after his car struck and killed two Turkish pedestrians, a British official said on Monday. AP reports from Istanbul.

The car of Gary Curtis, 35, from Newcastle, England, hit two young women crossing a main road in Istanbul late on Saturday. The two women later died in a hospital, said the British Consulate spokeswoman speaking condition of anonymity.

**Fire in ROK ship kills 16:** At least 16 people were killed and seven seriously injured in a fire aboard a container vessel being repaired in a South Korean shipyard yesterday, a spokesman for the shipowner said. Reuter reports from Seoul.

The 17,682 gross tonnes ship Hanjin Busan caught fire in drydock in the southern port city of Pusan, he said.

**New Azeri defence minister named:** Azeri President Geidar Aliyev has named Major General Safar Abiyev as defence minister, reports reaching here said Monday, reports Xinhua from Moscow.

Abiyev, who is also promoted to Lieutenant General, will replace Mamedrafi Mamedov, who has been defence minister since August 1993. The reports said there was no official explanation for the change.

**UN will send mission to Burundi:** The United Nations Security Council will send a mission to Burundi this week to assess the current wave of social and political unrest there, the current council president, Legwaila Legwaila of Botswana, said Monday, reports AFP from United Nations.

"We have agreed to send a mission of seven members of the council to Burundi and Kigali," Legwaila said after consultations Monday among the Security Council's 15 members.

**Russian lawyer charged with theft:** A controversial lawyer has been charged with the theft of ancient eastern manuscripts worth up to 250 million dollars from a St. Petersburg library, Moscow newspapers reported Tuesday. AP says from Moscow.

Dmitry Yakubovskiy, once appointed by President Boris Yeltsin to investigate government corruption, was formally charged on Jan. 19 "with complicity in the theft of ancient manuscripts," the English-language Moscow Times said.

**US lays down conditions for last-chance summit on Bosnia**

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher laid down conditions on Monday for a proposed "last-chance" summit on former Yugoslavia saying the meeting must have weeks of preparation and not overbuild expectations.

In an interview with Reuters, he was cooler to the French proposal for a summit than the European Union which earlier in the day gave its full backing to the idea of a meeting that would bring together leaders of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia.

Christopher also asserted Bosnian-Serb leader Radovan Karadzic could not be allowed to attend a summit unless he accepted the so-called contact group plan that would partition

Bosnia along a 51-49 per cent split among ethnic factions.

"The United States' position has long been that a so-called summit meeting... could be useful but only if it's well-prepared and we've not changed that position," he said.

He said he and allied European foreign ministers had "not really had a full discussion of a possible summit meeting and I would not think it's a good idea unless we can get it well prepared and know that it's going to accomplish something."

"What the world doesn't need is another overbuilding of expectations and to have them dashed because nothing happens."

This was an apparent refer-

ence to the previous international conference on Bosnia in London in 1992 which occurred amid optimism that such a huge effort by the United States and Europe could facilitate a negotiated settlement among Bosnian-Serb, Muslim and Croat factions.

The conference idea so being resurrected after thousands more deaths and several years of misery and failed peace initiatives.

EU foreign ministers unanimously endorsed the French plan saying in a joint statement it could pave the way for an "international conference to deal with all matters relating to the conflict in former Yugoslavia."

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe told reporters

after the EU meeting in Brussels it was not yet decided where or when to hold the conference but it was important to get talks restarted before spring when fighting could flare again.

Despite his misgivings, Christopher said the meeting could be useful because of the new and serious threat stemming from Croatia's order for UN peacekeepers to leave its territory by March 31, raising fears the Balkan war could spread.

He said a summit could address that problem and put pressure on Karadzic to accept the peace plan put forward by the contact group: the United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany.

**S Korea demands resumption of talks with North**

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: South Korea's foreign minister on Monday demanded that rival North Korea shed its hostility toward Seoul and restart North-South talks it broke off after the death last year of its communist President Kim Il Sung, reports AP.

"My government will do whatever it can to dismantle relics of the Cold War on our peninsula — but as it takes two to tango, we expect genuine change in the attitude of North Korea," Minister Gong Ro-myung said.

Welcoming Gong at the State Department, Secretary of State Warren Christopher joined him to urge revival of the interrupted dialogue between the two Koreas. But neither minister reported progress toward bringing Pyongyang back to North-South meetings. The United States has been pressing the issue at talks with North Koreans about opening liaison

offices in Washington and Pyongyang.

The United States would not have entered into its deal with North Korea to freeze a suspected nuclear weapons project without Pyongyang's agreement to resume meetings with Seoul, Christopher asserted.

Reaffirming an American "unshakable commitment" to South Korean security, Christopher said the accord "lifts the specter of a nuclear threat from all of Northeast Asia." It contains "so many positive elements that it behoves us to work very hard and objectively in implementation."

Said Gong: South Korea's government and people "fully support the agreement and... believe it will lay the groundwork for easing tension."

He stressed that "inter-Korean dialogue among other things, is the key to the success of this agreement"

which promises North Korea modern nuclear power reactors, oil supplies and progress toward US recognition in return for scrapping an unsafe graphite reactor producing plutonium useable for weapons.

Some analysts consider the broken dialogue evidence of uncertainty in the post-Kim Il Sung leadership and a typical Pyongyang manoeuvre aimed at splitting South Korea and the United States.

The nuclear accord and friction between the two Koreas are dominating Gong's first Washington visit as foreign minister. He met Defence Secretary William Perry late on Monday.

Asked if South Korea would consider using "Team Spirit" — a major joint US-South Korean military manoeuvre — to leverage North Korean compliance with the nuclear agreement, Gong said, "We are keeping this in mind."

**EU team to visit ME**

PARIS, Feb 7: A European Union delegation is to tour the Middle East this week in an effort to get regional peace talks moving again, French officials said Monday, reports AP.

The government ministers from France, Germany and Spain "begin their visit in Damascus, Syria on Wednesday and are to go on to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Gaza and Beirut."

The delegation plans "to encourage the parties to move ahead," said French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Catherine Colonna.

France, which holds the six-month EU rotating presidency until July, will be represented by Foreign Minister Alain Juppe. Germany will send Foreign Minister Hans Pöhl, and Spain its EU secretary of state, Carlos Westendorp, as well as the vice-president of the European Mediterranean commission, Manuel Marin.

On Wednesday, the delegation is to talk with Syrian President Hafez Assad. In Gaza, and Tel Aviv on Thursday.

**Kashmiri group issues death sentence against Muslim leader**

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: A Muslim separatist group has issued a "death sentence" against a prominent Kashmiri Muslim leader for his reported criticism of militants in the troubled Indian state, a newspaper said today, reports AP.

The outlawed Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen issued "shoot-on-sight" orders Monday against Abdul Gani Lone, a senior leader of the Muslim separatist all party Kashmir Freedom Conference, the Huriyat, the Indian Express said.

The Muslimeen, which advocates Kashmir's merger with Pakistan, passed the death sentence after Lone reportedly denounced the emphasis on the gun in the Kashmiri Muslim separatist struggle, the daily said.

Lone, who is undergoing medical treatment in New Delhi, has since disowned the statement, but the rebel group still accused him of not being faithful to the separatist campaign, the Express added.

Most Muslim militant groups fighting for Kashmir's secession want the disputed Himalayan region to join Pakistan. The other groups want Kashmir to become independent.

The Huriyat is an umbrella organisation of some 30 Muslim groups which back the separatist drive.

**18 Tamil rebels on hunger strike in Batticaloa jail**

COLOMBO, Feb 7: Eighteen Tamil rebel suspects detained in an eastern Sri Lankan prison have begun a hunger strike demanding to be released, officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

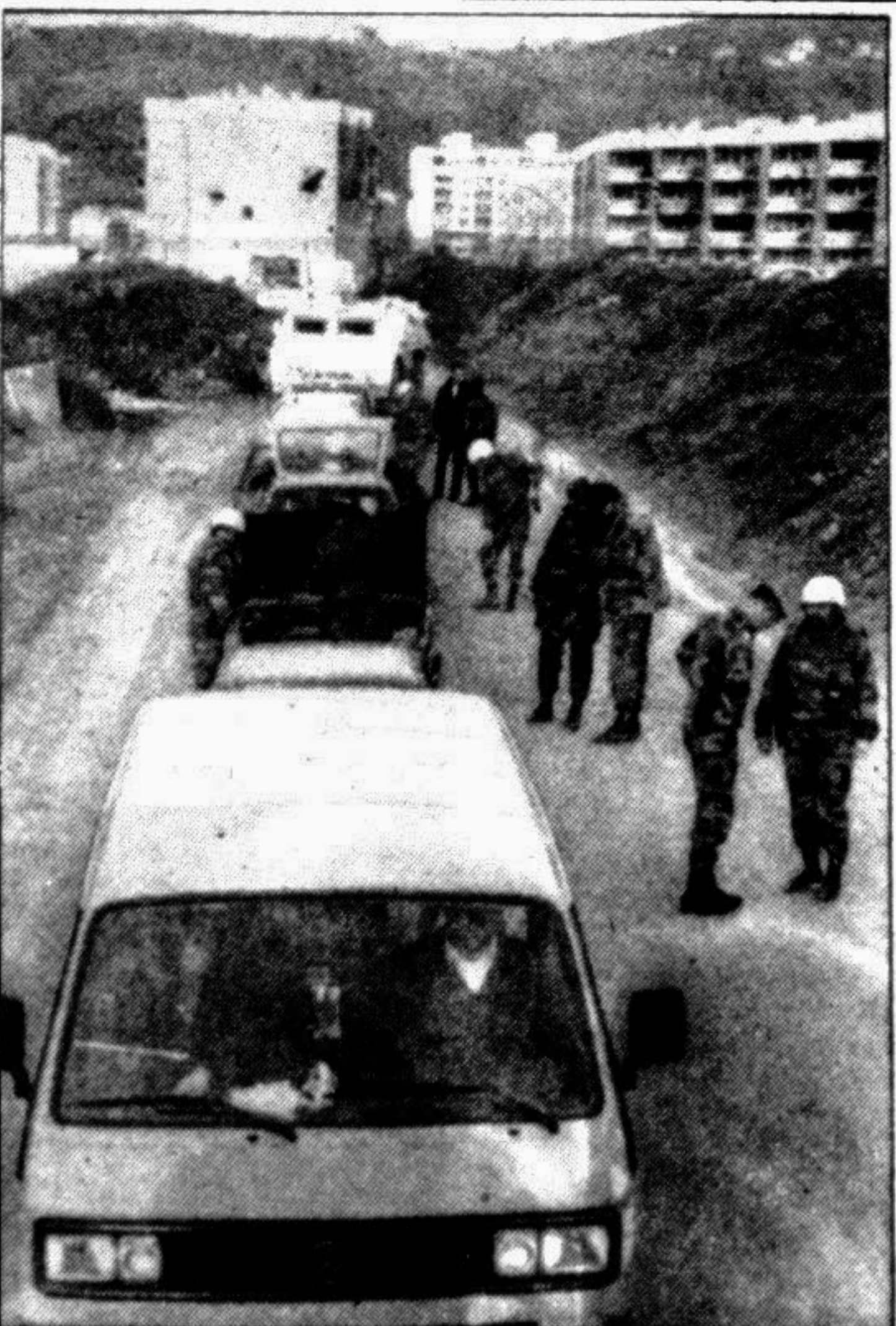
The prisoners in the Batticaloa prison began the hunger strike on Monday and some of them have been in custody several months, despite being recommended for release by a government commission, Joseph Pararajasekera, a Tamil lawmaker, told Parliament.

A truce in Sri Lanka's bloody, 11-year ethnic war began Jan. 8 following several months of peace talks with the rebels and a government that came to power on a promise to end the war.

No cutoff date has been set for the cease-fire, but either side could end it by giving three days notice.

Four truce observers from Norway, Canada and the Netherlands are monitoring the cease-fire, and they met Sunday with guerilla leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in the rebels' northern stronghold.

More than 34,000 people have died in the war for a homeland in the north and east for the nation's minority Tamils. The rebels accuse the Sinhalese majority government and military of discrimination in education and jobs.



French UN officers check together with Bosnian Serb soldiers civilian cars leaving Sarajevo across the airport road linking the Bosnian capital with the rest of government-held Bosnia on Monday. The so-called "blue route" was closed since last July and reopened yesterday. — AFP photo

**Over 60,000 kidneys have changed bodies since '70 in India**

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: Nagendra, a 29-year-old villager from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, left a hospital in the southern city of Bangalore, 1,000 dollar richer but minus a kidney, reports AP.

The organ now nestles in the body of an ailing Malaysian man who dished out 2,500 dollar to cover the costs of the transplant, according to the police.

Nagendra's case came to light when he walked into a Bangalore police station to complain that the 30,000 rupees (1,000 dollar) he received for selling his kidney was only half of what he had been promised.

The illiterate, unemployed Nagendra was just one of hundreds of poor Indians who sold a kidney last year as part of a grisly trade in human organs which the government is only now moving to curb.

The Transplantation of Human Organs Bill, approved last weekend, prohibits donating

organs to anyone but close relatives and requires medical facilities and prisons to seek clearance from a committee before extracting body parts. The legislation, whose enactment has been sought by the World Health Organisation (WHO) also bans the extraction of organs from unclaimed bodies.

According to the Voluntary Health Association of India, more than 2,000 Indians sold a kidney for money last year as part of a multi-million-dollar racket.

"At the rate at which kidneys are being removed from live donors, a large proportion of India's poor could be functioning on only one kidney by the year 2000," said Sandeep Gulera, a surgeon at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

"The agent who escorted Nagendra to Bangalore for the transplant told the police he made a comfortable living recruiting donors for a city clinic

and earned between 15 and 30 dollars for each successful operation.

Three surgeons and several others people were arrested in Bangalore last week after police discovered that transplant operations were being performed at the city's government-run Victoria Hospital.

Bangalore police chief T Srinivasulu said the authorities had tracked down 21 donors and were searching for others. "We have to meticulously trace all the donors and recipients before (the accused) can be charged," he said.

The Bangalore kidney bazaar was the third to be busted since January 15 and transplants are frequent in Bombay and Madras, often involving middle eastern patients.

Shahajilal Tamboli, president of All-India Society for Voluntary Donation of Organs, estimates that more than 60,000 kidneys have changed bodies since 1970 in Bombay.

Bangalore, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Madras and New Delhi.

He said there was no shortage of donors and, as a result, the price of a transplant has come down. "Kidney transplants have now become drastically cheaper," he said.

Radha Natarajan, an ophthalmologist, said kidneys are not the only thing for sale — blood, bone marrow and eyes are also available.

"It is revolting to tag blood at 166 dollar, bone marrow, at 125 dollar or an eye for 2,000 dollar," he said.

Top medical practitioners said the new legislation would help make kidney, liver and heart transplants affordable to Indians by closing off access to rich foreign buyers.

But Health Secretary M S Dayal said illegal transplant would undoubtedly continue. "If you have a law how can you be sure it will not be broken?" he told the Times of India newspaper.

**Off the Record**



File photo of Queen Sonja of Norway taken in 1993, wearing the precious diamond and pearl tiara which was among the items stolen from the London jewelry firm Garrard's in a weekend heist, the royal palace said on Monday. — AFP photo

**Gold to beautify Golden Temple**

NEW DELHI: Indian Sikhs living in Britain will donate 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds) of gold to beautify their faith's holiest shrine — the Golden Temple in the Punjab city of Amritsar, news reports said Tuesday, reports AP.

The temple was the centre of a Sikh separatist campaign for a homeland and the scene of a fierce battle between Indian troops and entrenched Sikh militants in 1984. Later that year, two Sikh bodyguards assassinated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for ordering troops into the shrine.

Sikhs living in Britain felt the urge to replace the worn out gold plating that dons the temple top, the Indian Express newspaper reported. It will cost an estimated 50 million rupees (1.6 million dollars) to buy the gold and put it on the dome.

The gold plating of the temple was first done by Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early 18th century. Since then the gold has not been replaced.

**MP sentenced to 30 lashes**

TEHRAN: An Iranian cleric and member of parliament has been sentenced to 30 lashes and a year in prison for taking bribes, a newspaper said on Monday, reports Reuter.

Majid Naderi, a first-term deputy from the town of Bu'sin Zahra in central Iran, was convicted for his part in a 110 million rial (63,000 dollar at the official exchange rate) bribery case, the English-language Iran News said.

It did not say what the bribery case involved. Naderi, a 33-year-old cleric, was tried by the special court for clergy that also fined him 10 million rials (5,700 dollar), and banned him from taking gainful employment for five years, it said.

**It was John Ford before Spencer Tracy**

NEW YORK: Before Spencer Tracy, actress Katharine Hepburn's great love was director John Ford, but Ford's Roman Catholic beliefs prevented him from divorcing his wife, according to a new biography on Hepburn, reports Reuter.

Excerpts of the biography "Katharine Hepburn" by Barbara Leaming published in the March edition of Vanity Fair magazine, also give the most detailed account yet of the suicide of Hepburn's brother Tom and suggests it affected her relationships with men.

The author wrote that although it had often been reported that Hepburn did not wish to marry again after her first marriage, she did in fact desperately want to marry Ford.

"Mary Ford warned her husband that she would take custody of his beloved daughter, Barbara, if he ran off with Kate," Vanity Fair quoted from the biography.

"Jack is very religious, he'll never divorce me," Mary once said, according to the biography. "I'm going to be Mrs Ford until I die."

The book recalls a history of suicide in the Hepburn family. Her father's brother jumped from a window to his death and her mother's father and uncle shot themselves.

**Peruvian troops retake base in border zone**

LIMA, Feb 7: Peruvian troops recovered a base from Ecuadorian forces in a disputed border zone early on Monday as reinforcements were dispatched to the zone to strengthen defence positions, a television report said, says Reuter.

Peru's armed forces took total control of the Tiwinza post between 3 and 4 a.m. this morning after intense fighting on Saturday and Sunday. Frecuencia Dos television said in a report from its correspondent in the northern town of Bagua.

Quoting a Peruvian army official at the Ciro Alegria Base, from where the military operations are being launched, he said the casualties among Peruvian and Ecuadorian forces in the latest fighting "we estimated at 150."

"The battles have taken place on land and by air," he quoted the official as saying.

Fifteen military trucks carrying troops and ammunition were seen heading to a frontier zone in Condorancu

province to defend posts on the banks of Santiago river, where the native communities of Cotungos and Yotupe had come under attack by Ecuadorian forces, the report said.

Military officials were not available to comment on the report.

An official in government palace said President Alberto Fujimori, who visited the zone of the fighting on Sunday, was evaluating the latest military reports from the front.

Fujimori, speaking after the breakdown of peace talks in Rio De Janeiro, said Ecuador would be "forced to respect the Rio De Janeiro protocol, which is an international treaty, by means of diplomacy or by the force of arms."

Diplomats of guarantor countries of the 1942 treaty, which was signed by the two countries, suspended six days of peace talks on Sunday after Ecuador said it needed more time to consider a ceasefire proposal.