

BRIEFLY



Visiting Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller (R) shakes hands with Japanese Foreign Minister Yohhei Kono prior to their talks at a Tokyo hotel on Sunday. Ciller arrived on a four-day official visit to Japan. — AFP photo

UN rapporteur Ermacora dead: Felix Ermacora an Austrian law professor who has served for nearly 12 years as UN special rapporteur (investigator) on Afghanistan died on Friday at the age of 72, his family said, Reuter reports from Vienna.

Ermacora was suffering from an illness he picked up while on a UN mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan in December. The author of numerous books on constitutional law and human rights, Ermacora was born on October 13, 1923 in Kalgenfurt. He was a lieutenant in the German army during World War II.

Cold wave grips Himachal: Cold wave further tightened its grip in most parts of Himachal Pradesh yesterday following fresh spell of heavy snowfall. PTI reports from Shimla.

Normal life was hit in the entire tribal belt and higher reaches of the state following the snowfall.

Colombian rebels kill 8 soldiers: Colombian guerrillas killed eight Venezuelan soldiers and injured three more in a pre-dawn border attack on Sunday, the military said. Reuter reports from Caracas.

Three more Venezuelan navy infantrymen were missing after the assault at Rio-Meta 375 miles (600 km) southwest of the capital Caracas.

Critics circle award '94: The National Book Critics Circle awarded its 1994 fiction prize on Sunday to Carol Shields' "The Stone Diaries," a tender and witty portrait of an unassuming woman growing old in the 20th century. AP reports from New York.

The winner for general nonfiction was "The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War" by Lynn H Nicholas.

Filipino rebel kidnaps 4: Muslim extremists have seized four people hostage on a southern Philippine island in what officials fear could be the start of an election-related kidnapping spree. AP reports from Zamboanga.

The victims — one woman and three men — were taken at gunpoint by the bandits in Maibung on Jolo Island 944 kilometres (590 miles) south of Manila, authorities said. The victims were sales representatives of Zizmore Corp. said Danilo Patagoc, a spokesman for the cosmetics company.

British director Clayton dies: Director Jack Clayton, who launched the "kitchen sink" school of British filmmaking with "Room at the Top," has died at the age of 73, AP reports from London.

Clayton died on Saturday in a hospital at Slough, 15 miles west of London, on Saturday after a short illness, news reports said on Sunday.

2 executed in Egypt: The Egyptian authorities have hanged two Muslim militants sentenced to death for killing a German tourist and two Egyptians in the Red Sea resort of Hurghada, security sources said yesterday. Reuter reports from Cairo.

The two men, Mohamed Atallah Omar and Rabie Mohamed Mahmoud, were hanged last week at a Cairo prison and the bodies were buried under tight security on Friday in their village in the southern province of Qena, they said.

Poppy crop destroyed in Pakistan: Pakistani authorities forcibly destroyed the opium poppy crop in a semi-autonomous tribal region bordering Afghanistan on Sunday, the private PPI news agency said. Reuter reports from Islamabad.

It said paramilitary troops, in the latest of a string of harsh measures to combat narcotic drugs, uprooted or destroyed poppy plants covering more than 52 acres (21 hectares) of land in the Mohamand agency tribal area.

Nicaraguans protest Bush's visit: A small band of protesters accused former US President George Bush of being a "killer" at the end of his 24-hour visit to Nicaragua on Sunday. Reuter reports from Managua.

About a dozen people, mostly the mothers of war dead who were protesting Bush's support of Contra rebels in Nicaragua's 1980s civil war, hoisted a banner proclaiming "Bush killer" and "out of Nicaragua" at the airport.

DPRK quits sex slave seminar: A three-day seminar on Asian women forced into sexual slavery for Japan's World War II army opened Monday without the participation of delegates from North Korea. AP reports from Seoul.

Seven North Korean women delegates abruptly cancelled their planned trip to Seoul to attend the seminar hours before they were to have crossed the border on Sunday.

Six Russians found dead in Paris: Six Russian immigrants were found shot dead Monday at a house in a Paris suburb, and the teen-age son of one of the victims were taken into custody for questioning. AP reports from Versailles, France.

Those killed, according to police, were wood merchant Eugene Polevov and his wife, an elderly couple that were the parents of either Mr or Mrs Polevov; and another couple that were friends of the family.

Israeli attack in S Lebanon condemned

CAIRO, Feb 27: The Arab League on Sunday condemned what it called Israeli aggression in South Lebanon and called on the international community to force the Jewish state to pull out of Lebanese territory, reports AFP.

The league said in a statement that it was "following with much anxiety reports on savage Israeli aggression against Lebanese territory and innocent inhabitants."

It said Israeli attacks violated United Nations resolutions, notably Resolution 425 calling on Israel to withdraw its troops from South Lebanon.

Afghan govt aided Taliban forces, Rabbani claims

KABUL, Feb 27: Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani said on Sunday his government had aided the Taliban militia, a powerful, student-led force that now challenges his government in Kabul, reports Reuter.

"I have given direct assistance or logistical support to the Taliban," Rabbani said in a Reuter interview in Kabul. He gave no further details.

But Taliban, which has won control of about one third of Afghanistan in fighting over recent months, has denied links with any of the Mujahideen groups that took over from the collapsed communist government in 1992.

Taliban founder Maulvi Mohammad Umar, in an interview published by a Pakistani newspaper on Sunday, accused Rabbani of trying to prolong his rule by seeking to foil a UN peace plan that would hand government to a neutral interim council.

"We feel Rabbani would not agree to the transfer of power," Pakistani daily the News quoted Umar as saying in the interview conducted in the southern Afghan town of Kandahar.

"He is avoiding the implementation of UN special en-

voys Mahamoud Mestiri's peace plan for Afghanistan. In fact he is planning to fight Taliban," Umar said.

Taliban says it will join the interim council only if its demand for a neutral security force for Kabul are met. They also want any future administration to be strongly Islamic.

Rabbani said there was no difference between "our goal and their (Taliban's) declared goal", and added: "But everything should be done through government channels. The (Taliban) movement and its demands should be coordinated with the state."

Mestiri last week postponed the date of the power transfer until March 21, new year's day in Afghanistan, from February 21, after a string of military successes brought Taliban to the gates of war-shattered Kabul and the militia group made fresh demand.

Rabbani said talks on Taliban's involvement in the future administration were continuing.

But Umar said Rabbani wanted to destroy Taliban, which has overrun the eastern strongholds of Rabbani's main rival, former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Japan accepts probe into sexual slavery

TOKYO, Feb 27: Japan will accept a UN investigation into the issue of Korean and other Asian women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II, the Foreign Minister said today.

The government will welcome a visit by Radhika Coomaraswamy, a special UN investigator on human rights, to look into the case of "comfort women", the ministry said.

Coomaraswamy, a Sri Lankan jurist, has been appointed by the UN commission on human rights as a special rapporteur on violence against women.

She will stay in Japan for about a week, possibly in May, to gather information from government officials as well as representatives of private organisations mainly on the sex slavery issue, the ministry said.

Repatriation of Lankan refugees resumes

COLOMBO, Feb 27: A group of 500 Sri Lankan Tamils arrived in Mannar port Monday becoming the first batch of refugees to reach home after repatriation resumed six months after it was suspended following the outbreak of plague in India, reports AP.

The refugees are among the 8,000 people who have agreed to be repatriated to Sri Lanka. About 64,000 Sri Lankan Tamils live in refugee camps in south India, and another 40,000 live outside the camps. Many of them want to return home since a truce between the government and the Tigers has held since Jan 8.

Repatriation was suspended when Sri Lanka banned the entry of ships from India because of the fear of pneumonic plague.

Iran urges Pakistan to end attacks on Shi'ite Muslims

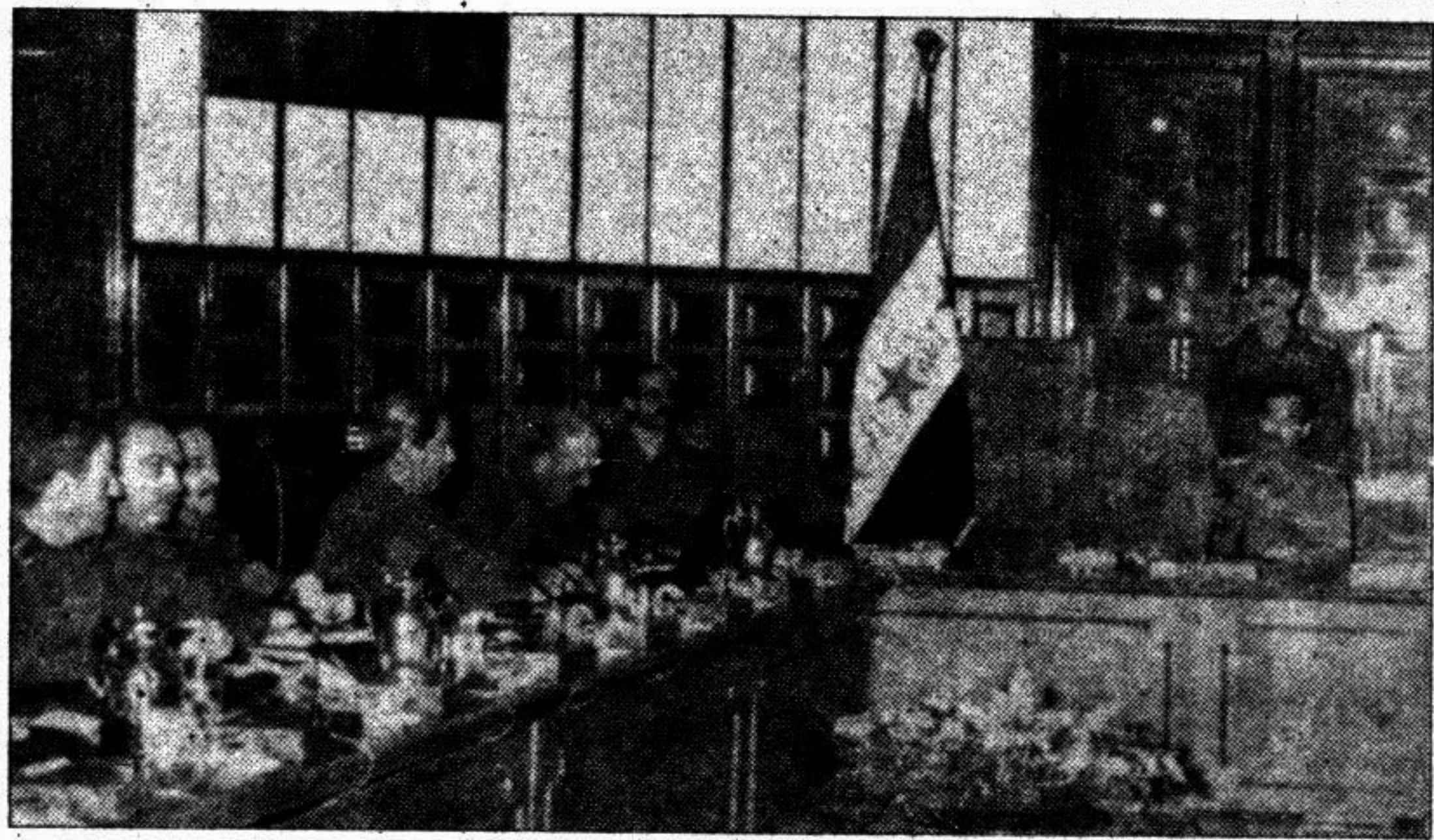
TEHRAN, Feb 27: Iranian newspapers today urged Pakistan to put an end to attacks against the country's Shi'ite Muslim community after the massacre of 20 people in two mosques in Karachi, reports AFP.

"Tehran expects the Pakistani authorities to arrest the perpetrators of such criminal acts," said the English-language daily Iran News.

Chinese HR activist allowed to appeal

BELJING, Feb 27: A leading human rights activist in Shanghai has been given a chance to appeal his labour-reform camp sentence, but not enough time for a lawyer to prepare his case, his wife said today, reports AP.

Yang Zhou, a co-founder of a human rights group in Shanghai, was sentenced without trial in October to three years of "re-education through labour."



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (R) chairs a cabinet meeting on Sunday in Baghdad. Saddam said the UN embargo imposed on his country was a "weapon of the weak," telling the cabinet that "the Iraqi's great material and moral capacity will make the embargo a revolutionary experience which will add to their past struggles." — AFP photo

LTTE rejects govt decision to open Elephant Pass

COLOMBO, Feb 27: Sri Lankan Tamil rebels have rejected a government decision to open two land routes to the rebel-held Jaffna peninsula to civilians and vehicles, reports Reuter.

On Saturday, the army pulled the forward defence lines of a military camp at Pooneryn in the north back by 500 metres (yards), military officials said today.

But the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam wants the camp to be removed altogether. The rebels said they would agree to opening Elephant Pass, which also runs through an army camp, only after the Pooneryn camp was dismantled.

"Until the Pooneryn army camp is withdrawn, the opening of the Pooneryn road is not possible," Tamil Chelvam, head of the Tiger's political section

was quoted as saying in the Sunday edition of the rebel-run newspaper, Eelanatham.

He said that "even though the army retreated a distance of 500 metres... if they want, they can come to the main road in six seconds. Therefore it is meaningless."

Last Friday, the government said in a letter to Chelvam that it was opening the two routes as part of a series of steps to ease the hardships of the people of the north.

"It remains for the LTTE (Tigers) to do what is required on their part to facilitate free passage to these routes," it said.

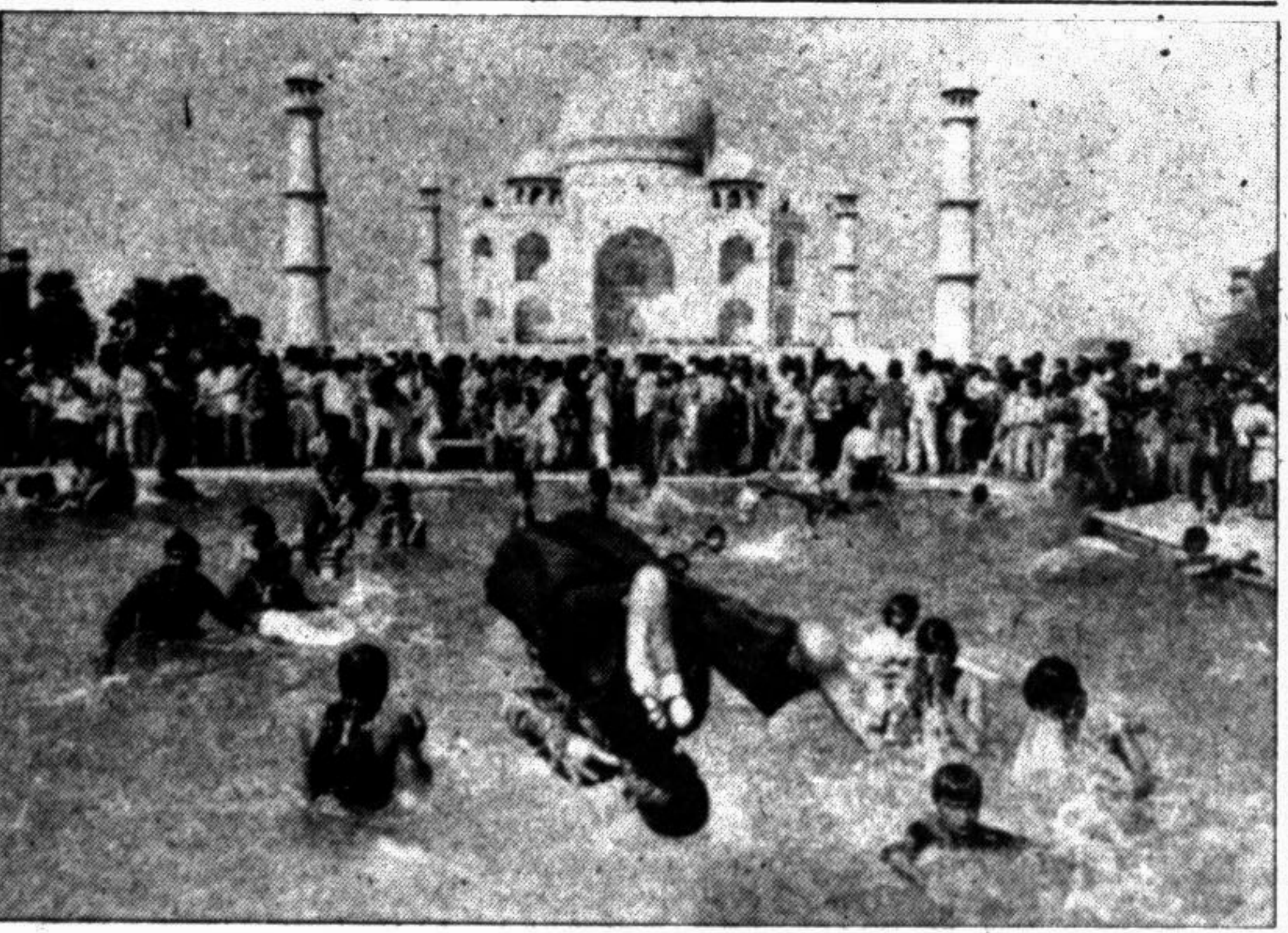
A truce has been in force since January 8 following talks initiated by the New People's Alliance government which took power last August. But the talks with the

Tigers, fighting a fierce 12-year war for a homeland in the north and east for Sri Lanka's 3.2 million Tamils, became bogged down over rebel demands for a safe land route and an end to an economic embargo on the north.

The latest rebel response could further delay the resumption of talks, which were likely to resume sometime this week. Government officials were unavailable for comment.

Chelvam said the Tigers had no objection to opening the Elephant Pass road after the government withdrew the Pooneryn camp to allow free movement along the road.

Both the army and the rebels would have to remove mines they have laid on either side of Elephant Pass, for it to be used.



Muslim youths frolic in a pool in front of the world famous Taj Mahal on Friday in Agra following Friday prayers during the holy month of Ramadan. Tourists and worshippers are strictly forbidden to enter the fountain waters on the grounds of the Taj Mahal and security quickly put a stop to the fun. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Back to centuries-old custom

TAIPEI: Sixty couples, including a Japanese bridegroom, were married Sunday in Taiwan's first-ever mass ceremony conducted according to a centuries old custom, reports AFP.

Brides and grooms, clad in bright red costumes as in ancient times, exchanged vows at the Confucius Temple, with Vice Mayor Pal Hsiu-Hsiung officiating.

Mizutani Mitsuhisa, a 34-year-old representative of a Japanese record company here, was among the grooms. "This is unique, a strange and yet sweet ceremony, full of solemnity and yet fun," he told AFP.

Mitsuhisa said he met his bride, 27-year-old teacher Lee Hui-Ching, in Taipei.

When they heard that the city government was to sponsor the joint traditional wedding, they decided to join in.

No sex please

SYDNEY: No sex please, we're Australian and too tired, reports Reuter.

Australians are typically sexual monogamists and often so tired with their fast-moving world that many rarely have sex, according to two new surveys published in the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper Monday.

Australia's Health Department research shows 76 per cent of Australians have had one or no sexual partner in the past six months and 42 per cent have had the same partner for the past 10 years.

Another survey, by Deakin University's School of Psychology in Melbourne, found about 30 per cent of Australians had sexual intercourse once a month, not very often or never.

The remaining 70 per cent of the 150 adults surveyed by the university practised sex at least once a week.

Deakin researcher Marita McCabe said she had expected the figure to be around 10 per cent. "They all want more of it, but do less of it," she told Reuters.

"I think people are tired, they are stressed... people have less and less time for it," she said, adding women in particular had less time for sex as they developed careers and continued to raise children and perform household chores.

It's a real miracle

MARSEILLE: A two-year-old girl was saved from drowning by her alert puppy which pulled the little girl from a pool where she had fallen in the southern French town of Meyrargues, the provincial newspaper reported Friday, reports AFP.

The daily said two-year-old Coralie had wandered away from her parents as they were cleaning up their garage Monday and fell into a neighbour's pool.

Dedi, the boxer, quickly grabbed the child and pulled her to the edge of the pool, where the panicked parents found Coralie crying and Dedi comforting her by licking her face.

Israel abolishes jt patrols in WB

JERUSALEM, Feb 27: Israel on Sunday abolished controversial joint patrols by police and armed Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank, a police spokesman said, reports Reuter.

But the spokesman said police were given the go-ahead by Attorney-General Michael Ben-Yair to form units of uniformed volunteers which settlers could join within the framework of the paramilitary border police.

Ben-Yair, in a meeting with senior police officers, determined the original patrols — which included armed settlers in civilian clothes and vehicles — were illegal and must be cancelled, the spokesman told reporters.

Ran Chen, a member of parliament from the left wing Meretz Party, first raised the

issue last week when he expressed outrage that settlers and police were conducting joint patrols near the Palestinian ruled enclave of Jericho.

He said a policeman would have a hard time arresting settlers suspected of a crime who enjoyed such a close relationship with police.

Questions about Israel's ability to act against settlers reemerged earlier this month when several hundred of them attended a memorial ceremony for US-born settler Baruch Goldstein, who massacred 29 Arabs in a Hebron mosque a year ago.

Some 100,000 Jews live in settlements among a million Arabs in the West Bank, which was captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war. Israel turned over the Gaza Strip and Jericho to self-rule in May.

Fighting continues in Amazon despite truce

QUITO, Feb 27: Ecuadorean and Peruvian troops continued their border battle Sunday, and both sides raised their casualty counts in a month of fighting that a truce hasn't halted, reports AP.

Ecuador's military said fighting continued Sunday and that 26 of its soldiers had been killed and 75 wounded in the conflict, which has continued despite a ceasefire declared nearly two weeks ago. The previous figure was 25 dead and 62 wounded.

Meanwhile, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori said more than 40 of his country's troops had been killed so far. Peru previously said 38 of its soldiers had died.

Unofficial sources also indicated that Peruvian forces near the northern border had been placed on full alert against a possible invasion by Ecuador.

Radio station Radioprogramas reported Sunday the alert was ordered after

Peruvian intelligence detected massive movement of Ecuadorean forces near the border. There was no official confirmation of the report.

Earlier Sunday, Fujimori told a television interviewer that Ecuador had been warned that "total war" would result if anything happened to him while he was visiting troops near the conflict zone at the end of last week.

IRA rejects British demand to give up weapons

DUBLIN, Feb 27: Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, ended a weekend conference on Sunday with a blunt rejection of British demands that the IRA should give up its weapons as the price of entering peace talks, reports Reuter.

Gorbachev still believes Soviet Union can be preserved

MOSCOW, Feb 27: Freedom of speech, free elections, the end of the Cold War Mikhail Gorbachev is well aware of the gains made by the Perestroika he launched in March 1985, and still thinks his political strategy could have continued to develop in easy stages, reports AP.

Perestroika (reconstruction) showed the whole world, Soviet society undergoing a deep restructuring.

But you can find it already in the works of Lenin, remarks Gorbachev during an interview in his office in the Gorbachev Foundation here where he receives a steady stream of visiting politicians, businessmen and journalists.

But it is Gorbachev himself who will go down in the history books as the "Father" of Perestroika unwittingly crafting the breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new Russia.

The policy was not supposed to result in destruction right down to the very foundations, he said looking back to the death of Soviet communism.

At the beginning just like Khrushchev is thought we could keep the existing (political) system and that we simply ought to make it conform to the ideas of Lenin."

He did not understand until after the summer of 1988 that it was a mistake and that one could get out of that political system."

Democratic ideas went galloping ahead of him and after granting freedom of expression he had to be constantly running to keep up with the wave of liberalism he had unleashed.

There were often moments of hesitation he waited almost two years until December 1986 to end the internal exile

of dissident nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov and more than four years to order the retreat of the Red Army from Afghanistan.

Gorbachev remembers how the speeches of communist leaders in the years 1988 to 1991 began to reflect ideological shifts. They no longer spoke of socialism let alone of communism, but talked instead about the socialist idea or the socialist choice, he said.

But that more moderate language suddenly proved inadequate in August 1991 when communist hardliners mounted a short lived putsch which in three days finally freed the country though President Gorbachev did not realise it at the time.

When he got back from Foros in the Crimea where the coupmakers had confined him to a dacha, he reaffirmed his commitment to the socialist way.

But within days he stepped down as secretary general of the Soviet Communist Party and in December quite the presidency of an already defunct Soviet Union.

Reverting to the plus points of his Perestroika Gorbachev is pleased with the democratisation of the country and the end of the Cold War.

There are acquisitions which are still there and can withstand even being crushed by tank tracks he says with great conviction. But he thinks the current

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