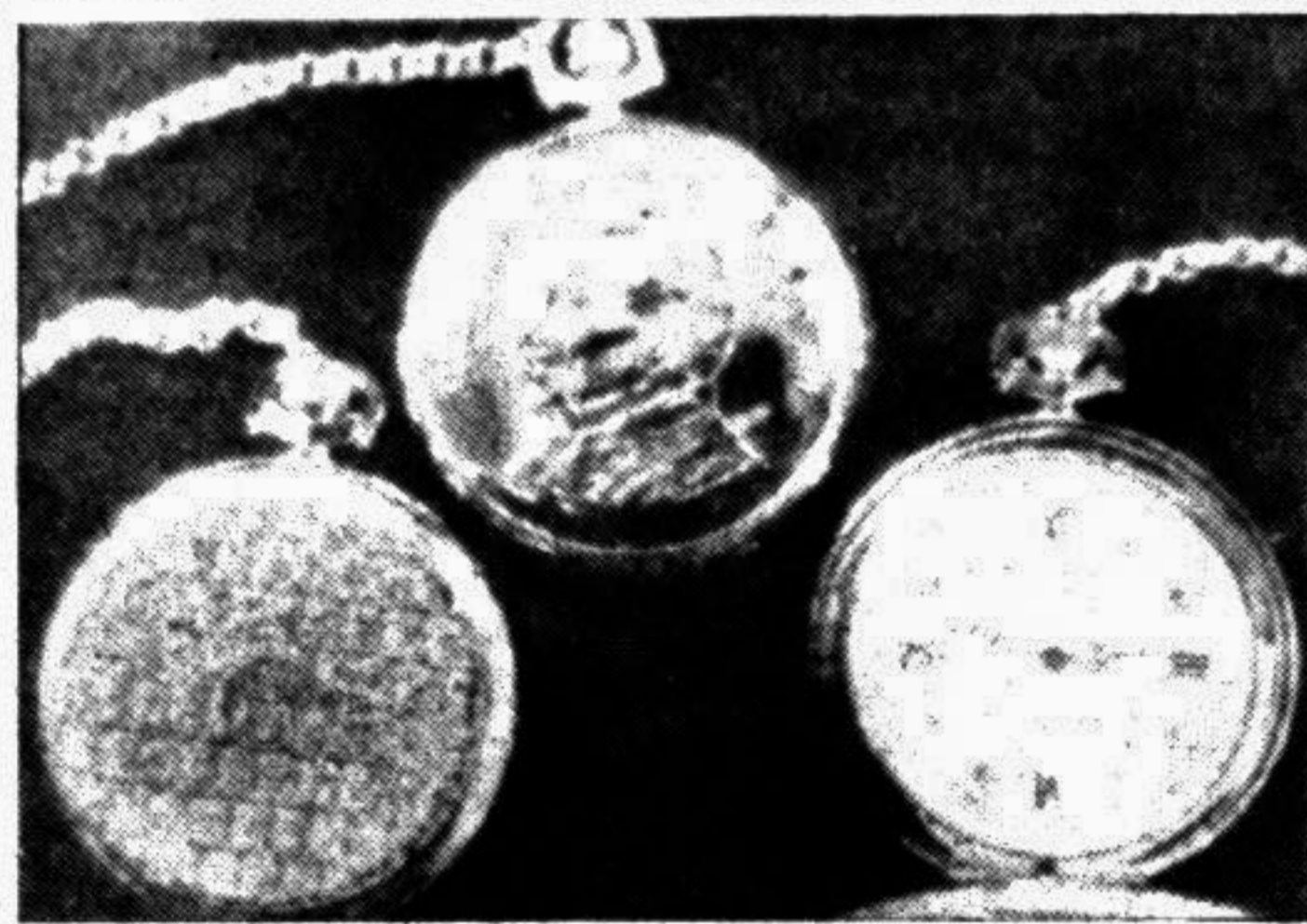


BRIEFLY



Pocket watches designed to commemorate paramount leader Deng Xiaoping are seen on display in Shanghai. Deng's profile is engraved on the cover and the Chinese characters for 'long life' are carved 100 times on the back.

— AFP photo

US expresses support to Claes: US Vice-President Al Gore on Monday expressed the "full and complete confidence" of the United States for NATO Secretary General Willy Claes, who is under fire in a corruption scandal in Belgium. AFP reports from Brussels.

"We strongly support Willy Claes," Gore told reporters after talks on Monday at North Atlantic Treaty Organisation headquarters.

Saudi FM to visit Washington: Saudi Arabia's foreign minister will visit Washington later this week for talks on the Middle East peace process, maintaining UN sanctions on Iraq and other issues, the State Department said on Monday. Reuter reports from Washington.

Spokeswoman Christine D Shelly said she could provide no details about the meetings planned with US officials and Prince Saud Al-Faisal.

16 die in Chinese boat capsizes: Fifteen teenagers and a woman were drowned when an overloaded boat carrying them home from school capsized in central China, local officials said yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

"It was a very small boat carrying many, many people," a director of the city government office in Zixin in a remote area of Hunan provinces said by telephone. "It was seriously overloaded and the owner had no licence."

Australia will give \$5m to DPRK: The Australian government will contribute five million US dollar to the international plan to build lightweight nuclear reactors in North Korea. Foreign Minister Gareth Evans said yesterday. Reuter reports from Canberra.

"Australia's decision to make this contribution is a reflection of the immense importance we place on supporting practical means to improve security on the Korean Peninsula," Evans said in a statement.

King Hassan okays new cabinet: Moroccan King Hassan II on Monday approved a new government made up of centre-right politicians and technocrats, an official statement said. Reuter reports from Rabat.

The 36-strong cabinet list was presented to the king by Prime Minister Abdellatif Filali, a 67-year-old liberal who was reappointed on January 31.

Gunmen kill 5 in Angola: Gunmen killed five people in an ambush in Angola's northeastern province of Lunda Sul, state radio reported. Reuter reports from Luanda.

The uniformed gunmen struck as the five travelled from the provincial capital Saurimo to a nearby village, the radio said late on Monday.

Chinese dissident denied asylum: A Tokyo court denied a leading Chinese democracy activist asylum Tuesday, upholding rigid interpretation of a law over when potential refugees must apply to authorities. AP reports from Tokyo.

"I didn't have very high hopes, but I'm still very disappointed," said Zhao Nan, 44, a key player in Chinese democracy movements and the former editor of anti-government journals in China. He served almost two years in a labour camp in 1982-84. He said he believed his special six-month visa would be renewed anyway after expiring March 20.

Canada imposes 'citizenship fee': Canada, a land of choice for would-be immigrants around the world, announced on Monday it was imposing a "right of citizenship fee." Reuter reports from Ottawa.

Finance Minister Paul Martin said that as part of an austerity budget announced on Monday, anyone applying to immigrate must pay of fee of C 975 dollar (697 US dollar) the fee will be refunded to those whose applications are not accepted.

21.5kg cocaine seized in India: In the biggest ever seizure of cocaine in the country, 21.5 kg of the narcotic, valued at about Rs 43 crore in the international market, was recovered by officials of the Narcotic Intelligence Bureau of the Tamil Nadu crime branch CID, who also arrested three persons by laying a trap on Monday. PTI reports from Madras.

Blast kills one in Hyderabad: An explosion ripped through a building housing a police forensic laboratory in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad on Monday, killing one person and injuring another, authorities said. Reuter reports from Hyderabad.

The cause of the blast which brought down most of the building and was heard up to two km (one mile) away was not known, but police said they suspected an extremist group had planned explosives.

Pak minister off to Bosnia: Pakistani Defence Minister Aftab Shaaban Meerani left for Bosnia yesterday to celebrate the Muslim festival of Eid ul Fitr with Pakistani troops serving there as part of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR). Reuter reports from Islamabad.

A Defence Ministry spokesman said Meerani would also visit Albania and Croatia during his ten day Balkan tour.

De Klerk's car stoned outside rally: A crowd complaining about poor housing threw stones at Deputy President F W de Klerk's car in a mixed-race township near Johannesburg, a de Klerk spokesman said Tuesday. AP reports from Johannesburg.

The incident occurred Monday night after de Klerk, the former president, addressed a rally of about 500 people in Reiger Park, 20 kilometres (12 miles) southeast of Johannesburg.

Pope sending envoy to Lima, Quito: Pope John Paul II is sending an envoy to Lima and Quito to back peace efforts in the border war between Ecuador and Peru. AP reports from Vatican City.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro said Monday that Italian Cardinal Carlo Furno would go in the pope's name to speak "with the highest-level authorities of those countries."

Lanka for improved ties with China: Lakshman Kadirgama, the first Sri Lankan foreign minister to visit China in 17 years, said Tuesday he laid the groundwork for improved contacts between the two countries. AP reports from Hong Kong.

Speaking in Hong Kong after a four-day visit to Beijing, Shenzhen and Canton, he said: "We've made good contacts and established commitments. That's good enough for a start."

Further delays can jeopardise talks, warns Prabhakaran

COLOMBO, Feb 28: It has been six weeks since government negotiators and Tamil rebels held their last round of peace talks, and both sides are criticising each other, reports AP.

Rebel leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran is warning that further delays could endanger the talks, which began in October after a socialist government was elected to power in Sri Lanka.

"There appears to be a paralysis of will," Prabhakaran said in a letter on Saturday to President Chandrika Kumaratunga. "Further delays can jeopardise the entire peace process."

Although both sides have blamed each other for the deadlock in the talks, a ceasefire announced by January 8 has held, despite minor violations. But negotiators are yet to

begin discussing political issues such as giving minority Tamils greater autonomy.

Last week, the government opened the only two land routes to rebel-held Jaffna Peninsula for the first time in four years as a conciliatory move to the guerillas, who have blamed the government blockade for depriving people of food and power.

But the rebels immediately said it was not good enough because a military base still remains beside one of the roads.

"Your government has negated our proposal for opening the land routes ... and taken an unilateral decision which can only gain propaganda yardage," the Prabhakaran letter said.

"This unilateral decision makes one thing very clear that the government is intent

in giving priority not to the needs of the people, but to military subterfuges," he said.

Kumaratunga has made speeches accusing rebels of plotting her assassination and of being insincere about a permanent political solution to the 11-year war for an independent Tamil nation. More than 34,000 people have died in the fighting.

Few people expected the peace talks to run smoothly or the ceasefire to last. But both sides appear disappointed and angry about delays that have developed in the negotiations.

Although the government has begun lifting a trade embargo with Jaffna, Prabhakaran has criticised it for still withholding fuel, vehicles and batteries, items the people really need.

Last week, the government sent two 300-kilowatt genera-

tors and construction equipment to begin the 40-billion-rupee (dhs-816-million) government reconstruction programme in devastated Jaffna.

9 Tamil rebels escape from Madras jail

NEW DELHI, Feb 28: The Indian authorities have sounded an alert in the southern state of Tamil Nadu after nine Sri Lankan Tamil militants escaped from prison, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today, says AFP.

The prisoners scaled the walls of the central jail in the Tamil Nadu capital Madras late Monday and escaped "under the cover of darkness," the news agency said.



Peace activists, among them 16 Americans and five Buddhist monks from Japan, demonstrating on Monday outside a Baghdad hotel against UN trade sanctions on Iraq.

—AFP photo

3 more shot dead in Karachi

KARACHI, Feb 28: Three people were shot dead overnight in various sniper attacks, and gunmen opened fire at a mosque in the city's central district, but no one there was injured, police and witnesses said today, reports AFP.

The fatal shootings were not motivated by the religious tensions that have gripped Karachi, the nation's commercial capital since Saturday, when 20 worshippers were gunned down in attacks on two Shi'ite Muslim mosques, police said.

Worshippers fled in panic when the attackers began shooting outside the central-district mosque late Monday, and the assailants dispersed when security officers near the mosque moved in, the witnesses said.

Taiwan apologises for '47 massacre

TAIPEI, Feb 28: Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui today gave the first official apology for the massacre of up to 28,000 people by nationalist troops in 1947 that has left deep scars on the island, reports AFP.

Lee acknowledged the animosity against the authorities caused by the killings on February 28, 1947. The president called for moves to "heal the wounds" between the island's native inhabitants and mainland Chinese who fled here after the civil war.

"As head of state, I take the blame for the error committed by the government and hereby extend my deepest apology" to

the families of the victims, he said at the inauguration of a monument to the dead in a Taipei park.

Lee promised the truth over the massacre would be revealed and called for an end to the hatred between native Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants.

According to a government report, between 18,000 and 28,000 people, including several hundred mainland immigrants, were killed when nationalist troops crushed an uprising sparked by a government inspector beating a woman selling untaxed cigarettes. The killings started in Taipei and spread across

the island.

The nationalists fled to Taiwan towards the end of the Chinese civil war and made it their base after being evicted from the mainland by the communists in 1949.

"For almost half a century, the historic wounds have cut deep in the hearts of people here," Lee said, expressing hope the monument helps heal the wounds.

He said the tragedy could have been avoided. "The incident has created a gap between the public and the government, detached public involvement in national development, and hindered social

progress," he said.

Lee said that with the erection of the monument, people should be forgiving and remove their hatred or grudges.

Lintzang-yi, a representative of the victims' families, accepted Lee's apology and also called for peace and justice within the island.

Prime Minister Lien Chan and several other government officials as well as representatives of the families unveiled the 100 million Taiwan dollar (3.7 million US) monument. There is a bell tower, a fountain and a stone structure resembling a person clasping his hands in prayer.



Raymunda Baccay (L), a Filipino domestic helper, bursts into tears Tuesday upon her deportation from Taiwan after giving birth to a baby. Her employer Yang Chien Chao-yun, holding her one-month-old son, Rummy, tries to console her. Baccay violated the local labour law by giving birth to a baby and is the first foreign worker to be deported for the cause.

—AFP photo

Gorbachev's car seized

MOSCOW, Feb 28: Speaking out against President Boris Yeltsin can be costly. For Mikhail Gorbachev, the price was his official car, seized by the state after a critical speech last week, reports AP.

Gorbachev spokesman Vladimir Polyakov said Tuesday that the car was repossessed by the state when the former Soviet president returned from a trip to Novosibirsk, where he urged early presidential elections.

"We connect this act of the president's administration with the great success of Gorbachev's trip to Novosibirsk," Polyakov said.

A spokesman for Yeltsin's office had no immediate comment on the latest episode in the long-running Yeltsin-Gorbachev feud.

Since Gorbachev relinquished the presidency in 1991, Yeltsin has responded to criticism by stripping the ex-Soviet leader of perks, such as office space and cars.

Drug trafficking spreading worldwide

VIENNA, Feb 28: Despite the seizure of substantial amounts of drugs, drug trafficking and abuse are spreading worldwide because the 149 countries signed up to international conventions are failing to implement control measures, the UN International Narcotics Control Board said Monday, reports AFP.

In its report for 1994, the board said there was a worrying trend in Africa and South America to use tranquilisers and stimulants for non-medical purposes while organized crime was increasingly involved in smuggling chemical substances.

The board warned that promoting the non-medical use of drugs can be compared to promoting the violation of traffic regulations or free access to weapons and poisons.

Protecting the well-being of the individual and society is the purpose of prohibiting the

non-medical use of drugs, which is certainly not an attempt to limit human rights," the report noted. It drew attention to the confusion created by some advocates of legalisation of the non-medical use of drugs with their statements about human rights.

It said that while drug control conventions established the acquisition and possession of drugs for non-medical use as punishable offences, there were alternatives to conviction and punishment which in many cases provided a better instrument to deal with the problem of drug abuse. They included treatment, education, after care, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

The report stressed that demand reduction programmes were a key element in the fight against drug abuse, in the same way as supply reduction measures.

Cannabis remained the

main drug of abuse in Europe as a whole, the report said.

Morocco, where European crime syndicates encourage illicit growing, was the largest single source of all cannabis seized in Europe.

The report cited Interpol estimates that in 1993, 63 per cent of the cannabis resin seized in Europe was of Moroccan origin.

Portugal and Spain were the main entry points for cocaine being smuggled into Europe, a substantial increase in seizures showed that seaports in Poland and the airport at Prague in the Czech Republic were used for trans shipment of cocaine, and there were reports from law enforcement agencies of increasing cooperation between criminal gangs in Poland and countries in Latin America.

Asia saw opium and heroin production continue, with Vietnam used increasingly as a

transit country for shipments from the Golden Triangle.

China recorded an upsurge in AIDS cases linked with abuse of heroin, which is also the main drug taken in Hong Kong which had 14,288 registered drug addicts in 1993.

Drug traffickers are using China as a major alternative land route from the Golden Triangle, and the authorities seized 4.5 tonnes of heroin in 1993.

Large-scale illicit manufacture of amphetamines and their abuse are among the greatest problems in East and South-East Asia.

"Ice," so called because of its crystalline appearance, has been Japan's primary drug problem for 20 years, and is the most commonly consumed drug in South Korea. It is also popular in the Philippines under the name "Shabu." The drug is abundant and costs little.

Syria won't sign deal hurting its dignity

DAMASCUS, Feb 28: President Hafez al-Assad, in tough remarks ahead of a new US peace initiative in the Middle East, has said Syria would not accept any deal which hurts its rights and dignity, reports Reuter.

"No-one on earth could drag Syria to do what it does not want. Political work should not lead to any abandonment of rights and dignity ... we will not accept any solution which does not meet our needs and does not preserve our dignity," Assad said at a banquet ending a Muslim fast on Monday.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will visit Syria and Israel early next month as part of a regional tour to try break a deadlock in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations which opened in 1991.

The talks are stalled over withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights, captured by Israel in 1967, and on security arrangements and the nature

of peace. Addressing Islamic clergymen, Assad said Syria would not give concessions on its rights and would not follow others in handling relations with Israel — and apparent reference to the PLO and Jordan, which have made peace agreements with Israel.

"When people feel danger they unite. They do not capitulate even if they come under direct occupation. They defend themselves with all their means.

"They fight with their flesh, bones, stones and knives ... they never capitulate to their enemy. Nobody accepts humiliation and nobody abandons his tradition, history and values," president Assad said.

Assad renewed his criticism of Jordan and the PLO, without referring to them by name, for signing separate peace deals with Israel but said Syria would not engage in a conflict with them.

EU to take fresh steps to repatriate boat people

HANOI, Feb 28: The European Union is prepared to consider new initiatives along with the Vietnamese government to repatriate 40,000 boat people scattered throughout Southeast Asia, reports AFP.

European Commission delegate Gwyn Morgan said Tuesday the refugee situation was "very urgent."

"If new resources are needed to help, we are ready to find these resources," he told a news conference.

An estimated 40,000 Vietnamese are still living in refugee camps around Southeast Asia, up to 25,000 in Hong Kong, but also in Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR), which has been supervising their repatriation since 1989, has set a December 30, 1995 deadline to get most of the boat people home. Hong Kong, however, has been given an extension till 1996 to complete the operation.

Most boat people are considered economic migrants and as such have not been given the status of refugees qualifying them to emigrate to a third country.

At present the rate of returns is too slow because many boat people are refusing to return to Vietnam.

The UNHCR says the flow of returnees should reach 1,800 a month from May 1.

Morgan said the rate of return of refugees was "disappointing." If the camps are to be emptied by December

1995, the rhythm will have to reach 4,000 a month. It will need a very special effort from the Vietnamese authorities and from the governments of Malaysia, Philippines, Hong Kong and others, as well as an increased understand of the international community," he said.

Morgan praised Vietnam for trying to solve the problem. From 1992-94 the European Union contributed to the repatriation effort through financial incentives, credits via Vietnamese banks and professional training schemes.

But the European community international programme officially ended on November 30 last year. However, the EU has agreed to a "bridging period" of seven months to help complete it.

Murayama rules out cabinet reshuffle soon

TOKYO, Feb 28: Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama said today he would not be carrying out a cabinet reshuffle in the immediate future, reports AFP.

He told journalists "I am not considering such an idea. The only thing I must do now is put all my energy into helping pass the budget programme and the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the (Kobe earthquake) disaster-hit areas."

The Socialist premier's government, formed in June 1994, has been severely criticised for its slow reaction to the January 17 earthquake

Off the Record

Couple jailed for defaming cops in sex scandal

KUALA LUMPUR: A former Malaysian police constable and his wife were sentenced to a total eight years jail for defaming seven policemen in a sex scandal in the country's longest-running court case, reports said Tuesday, reports AFP.

R Kanaperan, 43, and Mary Anne Abdullah, 34, were also fined 64,900 ringgit (25,960 dollar) for bringing the Malaysian police force into disrepute in the case which ended Monday after a trial lasting 112 days.

The couple, who have nine children had told a local newspaper and the police department in 1991 that Mary Anne had been a sex slave for seven policemen who used to work with Kanaperan.

The police department said it found the allegations untrue and subsequently charged the duo with defamation.

Magistrate Fazillah Begu M Abdul Ghani, sentencing the couple, said "the actions of both accused had smeared the reputation of the Malaysian police force."

Officials said 114 witnesses testified at the trial, including a Japanese forensic pathologist who viewed pornographic videos supposedly featuring Mary Anne with some of the implicated officers.

Fazillah also ordered the couple to pay the trial's cost following a request by the prosecution, the court did not specify the cost.

Bid to kiss woman chauffeur costs job

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's director of military intelligence (DMI) was removed from the sensitive post following a complaint that he tried to kiss a woman chauffeur during a visit to the United States, officials said, reports AFP.

Brigadier Chula Senewiratne is alleged to have made advances towards the woman driver during his three-day visit to the United States to attend a seminar on military affairs, officials said.

They said Senewiratne, who was the intelligence chief for more than a year, has now been relieved of his post and transferred to the army command at southern Ratnapura district. He was replaced by brigadier Shantha Kittigoda, who is security forces commander for northwestern Manjara region, officials said.

The army last year sacked a lieutenant colonel after he was found guilty of stealing women's underwear from a military camp in the United States.

Mysterious stones

BUCHAREST: Stones have been showering down nightly on several homes in a village in eastern Romania where police patrols have failed to shed light on the enigma, news reports here said Monday, reports AFP.

The targeted homes are located in the village of Sarulesti and have been tormented by the mysterious hail of stones nightly for the past week, the reports said.

"At first, we thought a group of criminals was doing this to divert the attention of police and villagers so that they could rob other homes in the village, but we have found nothing to back this theory," the local police chief said.