

International

New govt will bring political stability, hopes Pak army chief

ISLAMABAD, Feb 18: Pakistan Army Chief General Jehangir Karamat said Monday the armed forces were hopeful the new government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif would bring political stability to the country, reports AFP.

While the masses had high expectations from the elected representatives "we are also equally hopeful that stability will come and national matters will be deliberated upon and solved, the general told reporters after Sharif was sworn in by President Farooq Ahmed Leghari.

Karamat, who is a key member of the newly created Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS) believed that inflation needed to be controlled first saying that this would reduce the size of the federal bud-

get. Asked whether defence expenditure would be curtailed, he said "the basic need is to reduce the threat to the country."

Without elaborating he said a lot should be done and a strategy be evolved to settle the issues.

Pakistan says it cannot ignore defence of the country in view of massive arms build-up by rival neighbour India with whom it has fought three wars since 1947 mainly over the long standing Kashmir dispute, and it cannot be thrown on the back burner," the army chief said.

India-Pakistan talks held during ousted premier Benazir Bhutto's government were stalemated in January 1994 on the Kashmir issue.

"There were high expectations of a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir issue during the previous era. Now again there are high expectations," Karamat said, referring to Sharif's offer of dialogue with India.

On CDNS he said it was up to the government and the parliament to decide the future of the CDNS, which analysts say has allowed the powerful army a political role.

It is a useful forum for discussions and not for decisions, he observed.

Sharif has taken a cautious line on the future of CDNS set up by Leghari in January to aid and advise the government on major national issues.

Headed by Leghari the 10-member CDNS includes the premier, army, navy and air force chiefs and the ministers of defence, finance, foreign affairs and interior.

Many analysts fear the CDNS might tie the hands of the government.

Sharif has the authority on paper to abolish the council but he has indicated no such intention, apparently conscious of keeping relations with the powerful military on the right course.

The army chief also dismissed accusations by some party leaders of Benazir that the army was allegedly instrumental in rigging the February 3 elections.

Soldiers deployed for election duties had neither the time nor control over polling stations he said adding that their job was to maintain peace and tranquillity on polling day which was adequately ensured.

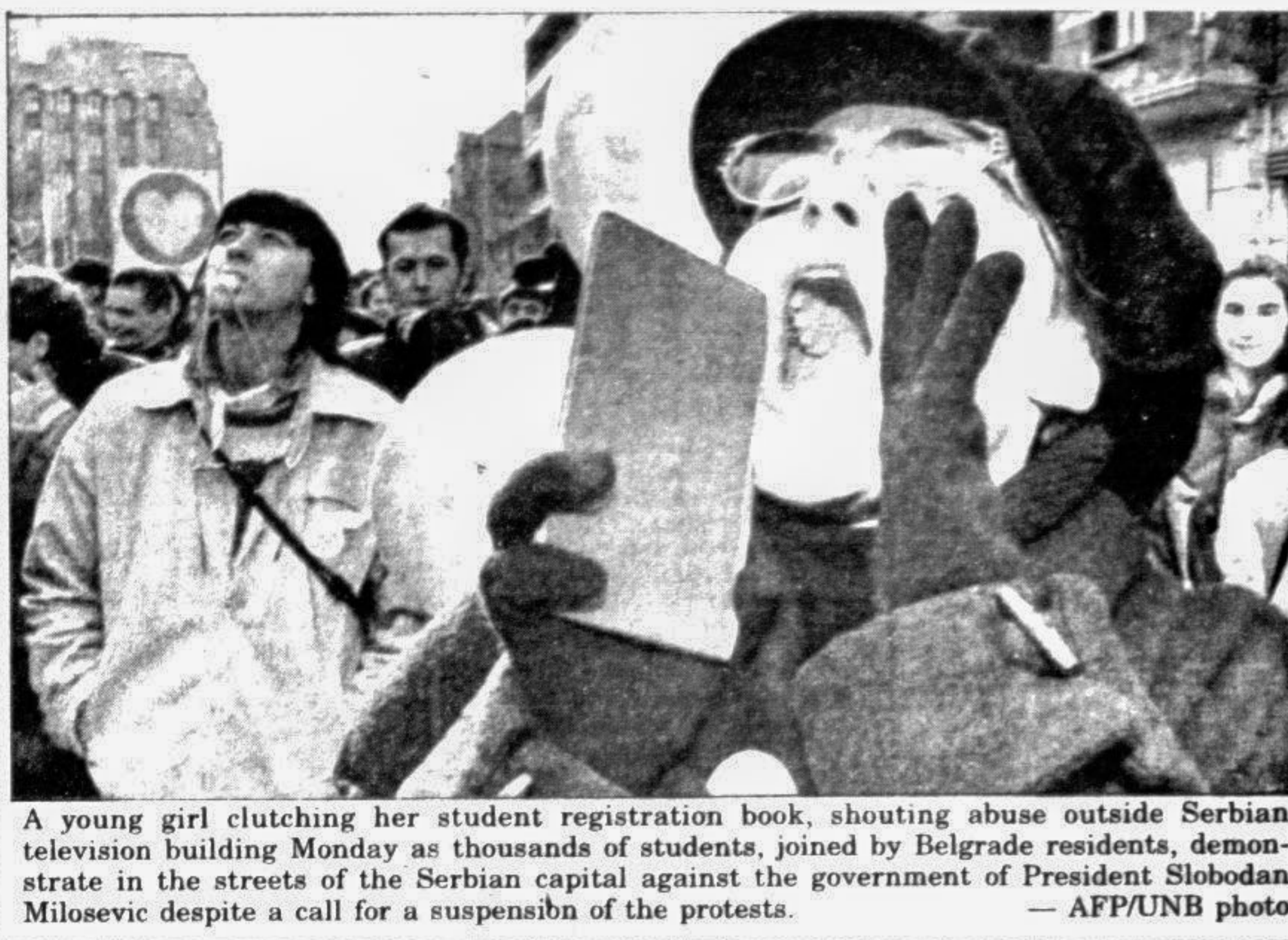
Nepal to redefine foreign policy priorities

KATHMANDU, Feb 18: Nepal will redefine its foreign policy priorities in order to promote the country's economic interests in the world, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said yesterday, reports Xinhua.

Addressing a programme held by Nepal Council of World Affairs in Kathmandu yesterday, Deuba said that Nepal will have to build new bridges and lay out new avenues to the outside world on the foundations of shared economic interests.

The government has adopted a policy to enhance economic diplomacy aimed at expanding the country's exports, attracting direct foreign investment and promoting tourism through strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation, he said.

Noting that Nepal is a country locked between India and China, the prime minister said the country must strive to turn its geographical disadvantage into economic advantage of readily available markets for its products and services.



A young girl clutching her student registration book, shouting abuse outside Serbian television building Monday as thousands of students, joined by Belgrade residents, demonstrate in the streets of the Serbian capital against the government of President Slobodan Milosevic despite a call for a suspension of the protests. — AFP/UNB photo

THAI KING GETS WMO AWARD

Thai king gets WMO award: Thailand's constitutional monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, will receive a special award Tuesday from the World Meteorological Organisation, according to Radio Thailand, AP reports from Bangkok.

The award honours the king's work in meteorology and hydrology, and will be presented by the WMO Secretary-General Goodwin Obasi during a royal audience at Chitralada Palace. The 69-year-old king, who with 50 years on the throne is the world's longest reigning monarch, has long been concerned with the plight of poor farmers in his kingdom. He has built a meteorological station at Chitralada Palace to help forecast weather conditions that might affect farmers.

New Mujlis chief elected in India: Mohammad Sami Ullah was Monday unanimously elected president of the All India Muslim Mujlis at a meeting, PTI reports from Allahabad.

The post fell vacant following the death of M Zulfikar Ullah. The meeting was attended by members from Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and other states, a press release said.

3 rebels get life term in Jordan: Jordan's state security court Monday sentenced three Muslim militants to life in prison with hard labour for possession of explosives they intended to use for attacks on Israeli tourists, AFP reports from Amman.

Ali Fakir, Herima Gharayba and Yussef Rababa smirked when they heard the verdict, according to an AFP reporter in the courtroom. Their lawyer, Radhi Gharayba, said the sentence was "hard and difficult" and he would appeal as allowed under Jordanian law.

Road mishap kills 4 in China: Four people were killed and three injured when two cars collided head on and burst into flames in southern China's Guangdong province, yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

A motorcyclist was among the injured hit by flying debris in the crash which killed the two drivers and two passengers in the cars were also hurt. Almost 70 people have been killed in Guangdong province in the past week mostly migrant workers returning to work in the province after the lunar new year holidays.

Argentina opens embassy in Hanoi: Argentine President Carlos Menem on Tuesday formally opened his country's embassy in Hanoi, establishing full diplomatic relations with Vietnam, AP reports from Hanoi.

Menem attended a ceremony at the new Argentine Embassy shortly before concluding his two-day visit. "This visit has allowed me to see with my own eyes the achievements and the profound changes in the economy of Vietnam," Menem said during a meeting with Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet. Vietnam is keen to establish closer business ties with Argentina and other potential South American trade partners.

Thai govt, UN to sign deal: The United Nations, aid groups and the Thai government will sign a cooperation agreement next month to implement Thailand's eighth five-year development plan, Radio Thailand said Tuesday, AP reports from Bangkok.

As a first step in putting the plan into action, Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh will allocated \$800,000 for a pilot project in Yanhawa, a poor section of Bangkok, to test some of the policies. The United Nations will contribute \$10 million to the project.

Tripura violence death toll rises to 36

AGARTALA, Feb 18: The death toll in rebel violence and security force firing in riot-hit Khowai sub-division rose to 36 today with the recovery of two more bodies by the police today, reports PTI.

Official sources said that the insurgents gunned down 34 persons at various places, while two militants were killed in police firing.

The overall situation in the area in west Tripura district was "peaceful" barring a minor incident of a blaze by militant at Shantinagar last night.

Tripura Home Minister, Samar Choudhury told PTI that an Assam Rifles Patrol Party yesterday shot dead a tribal militant in Khamartilla area of Kalyanpur in an encounter. Besides, five armed militants were arrested from the area by the police.

Choudhury said that the situation would be "absolutely normal very soon" as more troops would reach Tripura today and would be deployed in the curfew bound areas of Khowai.

Tokyo seeks extradition of terrorists Lebanon detains 5 men of Japan's Red Army

TOKYO, Feb 18: At least five members of Japan's Red Army terrorist group, which carried out numerous hijackings and other attacks in the 1970s, have been detained by authorities in Lebanon, Japanese media reported Tuesday, reports AP.

Among those taken into custody was Kozo Okamoto, who had been sentenced to life in prison in Israel for his role in the May 1972 attack on Tel Aviv's Lod Airport, in which 24 died and dozens were injured, the reports said, quoting anonymous Japanese government and police sources.

Okamoto, 49, was released from prison in May 1985 as part of an exchange of prisoners between Israeli and Palestinian forces.

Also taken into custody, the reports said, were Mariko Yamamoto, 56, Kazuo Tohira, 44, Masao Adachi, 57, and Hisashi Matsuda, 48. All were on international wanted lists. All but Yamamoto are men.

The government has not confirmed the reports, and Foreign Minister Yukihiro Ikeda told reporters Tuesday that officials were looking into it. If the detentions are true, officials said Japan would probably want custody.

Asahi national newspaper said a sixth member may also have been detained, while television network NHK the number of those apprehended could total eight. Kyodo News said the detentions took place Saturday during raids on various hideouts in Lebanon.

The reports said Japan is requesting that the five be handed over. Tokyo has sent investigators to Lebanon, where negotiations for their extradition have apparently begun, the reports said.

Japan's largest newspaper, the Yomiuri, quoted sources as saying that Lebanon, which had long tolerated the Red Army's activities, felt emboldened to crack down on the group as a result of progress in Middle East peace talks. The paper also said that more of the group's members could be apprehended.

Troops keep up advance into LTTE-held areas

COLOMBO, Feb 18: Thousands of soldiers kept up an advance today into territory held by Tamil Tiger guerrillas in northern Sri Lanka amid sporadic violence elsewhere which has left three dead, the Defence Ministry here said, reports AFP.

Infantry units, backed by tanks and the air force, moved deep into an area in the Vavuniya district earlier held by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), officials said.

They said there were no reports of casualties but the ground troops were taking more territory after resuming their offensive code-name *Edit Bala* after a 10-day break on Monday.

Even as the latest offensive got under way, the LTTE fired mortar bombs at an army patrol in the north-eastern Janakapura village overnight Monday, killing one soldier and wounding two others, officials said.

Security forces retaliated by killing two rebels in an ambush in the same district, officials said.

Although security forces were conducting their drive in the district of Vavuniya, rebels last week fired artillery guns at the town of Vavuniya and killed two constables and wounded several others.

The military push was originally launched from the de facto frontier post of Vavuniya and was moving westwards towards a remote military base on the north-western coast of Mannar.

The Mannar military facilities are currently supplied only by sea and air.

China, ROK reach accord over defection

TOKYO, Feb 18: China and South Korea have reached an understanding over the departure of the top level North Korean official seeking asylum at Seoul's embassy in Beijing, the Yonmu Shimbun said today, reports AFP.

Seoul has told Beijing that South Korean President Kim Dae-jung would soon send a letter to Chinese President Jiang Zemin promising not to use the defection, Hwang Jang Yop as a political tool against North Korea, the evening edition of the Yonmu Shimbun said quoting a high ranking diplomatic source in Seoul.

The letter is designed to defuse Pyongyang's anger over the issue, the source said.

A South Korean Foreign Ministry official has delivered the contents of the planned letter to the Chinese side, while Beijing has already informed North Korea, the source said.

Sri Lankan PM hospitalised

COLOMBO, Feb 18: Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike, 80, was admitted to a government hospital following a stomach ailment, doctors said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Bandaranaike who will turn 81 in April was admitted to the Sri Jaywardenapura hospital, doctors said. In November 1995 she visited an ayurvedic hospital in the South Indian state of Kerala for treatment for her arthritides.

Bandaranaike became the world's first elected woman prime minister when she led her assassinated prime minister husband Solomon Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) to victory in 1960.

She set another first when she became prime minister for a third time in November 1994 under a government headed by her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga who is President and head of state.

Astronauts make 5th spacewalk to repair Hubble Space Telescope

WASHINGTON, Feb 18: Two astronauts aboard the Shuttle Discovery stepped outside for a fifth, unscheduled spacewalk late Monday to repair the tattered insulation protecting the Hubble Space Telescope, reports AFP.

Mission specialists Mark Lee and Steve Smith continue the mending job begun earlier in the day by two of their colleagues who patched up some tears in the outer covering of the telescope using wire and clips as makeshift bandages.

When the crew of the Discovery first began to service the telescope February 13, they noticed nicks and tears in its insulation caused by temperature extremes in its orbit around the earth.

In the previous four spacewalks the 12-tonne telescope was upgraded with a spectrometer spectrograph guidance system and controls for its solar panels.

Troops kill 200 militants this month Assailants massacre 33 more in Algeria

ALGIERS, Feb 18: Assailants armed with axes and swords massacred 33 people overnight Sunday in a mountain hamlet in northern Algeria, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

They said the killings occurred near the town of Blida, 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of the capital.

A group of around 30 armed men took people out of their homes family by family and decapitated them, the reports said.

AP adds: Security forces and local militias have killed an estimated 200 Muslim militants this month in an offensive in northern Algeria to prepare for June elections, informed sources said Monday.

Nicknamed "Joumia" (Together), the vast operation has centered on areas around the capital, the Titteri region south of Algiers, the Hauts Plateaux in the west and in the east, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

Authorities did not announce the offensive or give any casualty figures, but residents, Algerian newspapers and hospital sources said 200 militants were killed in the latest military operation during a 5-year-old insurgency.

Security forces don't reveal their losses either, but militants claimed killing 15 troops in one clash, a report confirmed by an informed source.

More than 60,000 people have died from militant attacks and security forces' operations since the military-backed government scrapped a January 1992 parliamentary runoff.

The Islamic Salvation Front, campaigning against high unemployment and corruption in this petroleum-rich nation, was expected to win.

The latest army offensive appeared in response to the insurgency's bloodiest, holy month of Ramadan, in which an estimated 350 people died in car bombings and massacres by February 9. Many attacks targeted towns where the government has armed so-called "self-defence groups."

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Off the Record

New way to show your affection

KANSAS CITY, Missouri: Some love-struck folks use flowers, gifts or tender words to show their affection. LaToyya West showed her love for Raymond Robinson by letting him wear her socks, reports AP.

Among the homeless, after all, few other acts can be more selfless.

"You got to have socks out there, so he knew he was special to me," said Ms West, 27, who met Robinson, 35, in a soup kitchen line shortly after she became homeless last summer.

The two talked about their meeting and their meaning to each other on Saturday, their wedding day. Pizza, soup and wedding cake were served at Grand Avenue Temple United Methodist Church, and the guests included friends from various shelters around town.

The newlyweds soon plan to leave the streets for the house of Ms. West's mother, who died recently. And Robinson was scheduled to go to work on Friday.

"He's every woman's dream of a man," Ms. West said. "He's not a '90s man. He's an old-fashioned, do-for-his-woman man."

Robinson, who grew up in the projects, abused drugs and was homeless for eight years, said God brought Ms. West to him.

"She shows me her love and her faith," Robinson said. "And she keeps me straight."

Zaire vows to intensify air raids on rebel positions

KINSHASA, Zaire, Feb 18: Government forces said they plan to intensify attacks on rebel positions in eastern Zaire after a series of air raids that witnesses said killed at least six people, reports AP.

The attacks on three rebel-held towns Monday represented the sharpest escalation yet in the five-month war.

Defence Ministry spokesman Leon Kalima gave no casualty figures from the bombings of Bukavu, Walikale and Shabunda. But he urged civilians to leave rebel-held areas.

"These bombardments will continue and intensify," Kalima said.

Aid workers said six people were killed and at least 20 wounded in Bukavu.

"These numbers could grow," said Brenda Barton, a spokeswoman for the UN World Food Programme in Nairobi, Kenya. "There's a panic in the town," and many people are fleeing, she said.

There were no immediate casualty reports from Shabunda and Walikale, two other towns under the control of Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire.

Kabila started the war in September after Zaire threatened to expel Tutsis who had lived for decades in eastern Zaire.

In Kalemie, 300 miles (480 kms) south of Bukavu, Kabila condemned the attacks as a "terrorist action" and said his army was preparing "to bring the war where these planes are coming from."

He said the Zairian planes came from Kindu, 200 miles (320 kms) west of Bukavu, one of two airports in eastern Zaire controlled by the government.

Kabila said the government was trying to demoralise the population, telling The Associated Press that there were no specific military targets in the areas that were bombed.

Since the fighting began, Kabila has routed government troops from the swath of land bordering Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. President Mobutu Sese Seko has rejected international calls for negotiations to end the conflict and vowed to press ahead with a counteroffensive launched in January from the eastern city of Kisangani, about 300 miles (485 kms) northwest of Bukavu.

Parliament met in closed session Monday to discuss the possibility of negotiations with the rebels.

'Saddam massing troops along Iranian border'

CAIRO, Feb 18: A major Iraqi opposition group claimed Monday that President Saddam Hussein has moved two army corps to its eastern border with Iran, reports AP.

The Iraqi National Congress also said Saddam has put all the army units on maximum alert and ordered officers in the elite Republican Guard, who are on leave, to report to their units.

Most of the troops have been transferred from the northern Kurdish sector, said the Iraqi Broadcasting Corp.

The report did not give any details of the movements or explain why Saddam had ordered them.

But a spokesman for the Congress said the movements could be an attempt by Saddam to divert attention from his troubles at home.

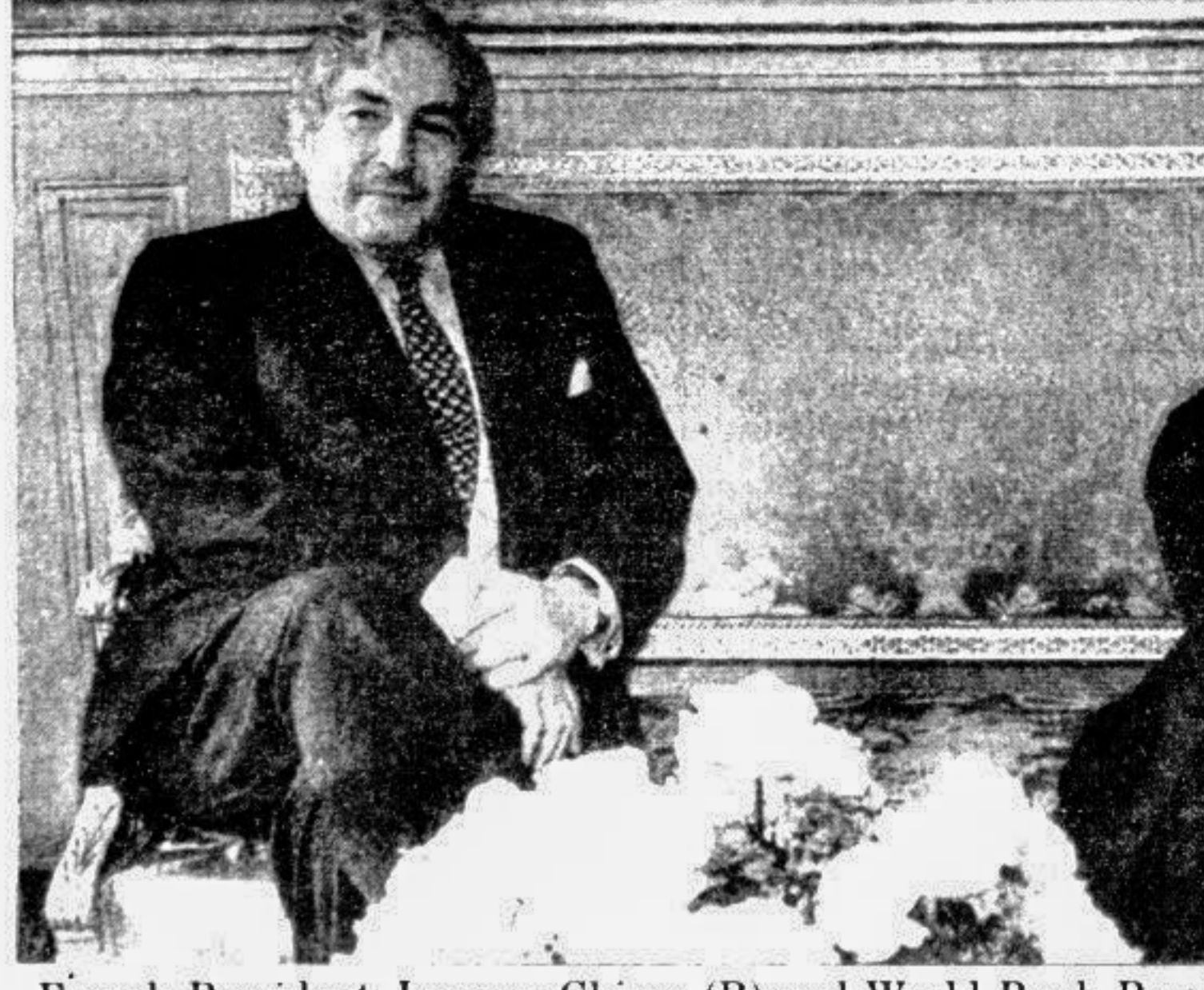
'State of Deng's health serious'

BEIJING, Feb 18: China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping suffered a further serious health problem on Saturday after a massive stroke last week but his condition has since stabilized, well placed sources said today, reports AFP.

Deng had a big problem on Saturday. The state of his health remains very serious, said a source close to one of the handful of remaining Deng contemporaries.

A second source with strong connection to Beijing's Politburo confirmed Deng was seriously ill, but said that the 92-year old's condition had stabilized in the last two days after a serious ailment.

French businessmen meet in with a Deng candidate in Beijing on Thursday said he received a telephone call during their meeting and rushed out of the room after being told Deng had suffered a serious health problem.



French President Jacques Chirac (R) and World Bank President James Wolfensohn pose for a photographer as they meet Monday at the Elysee Palace. Wolfensohn just finished a four-African-nations tour, his second since his nomination at the head of the development institution in June 1995. — AFP/UNB photo

Both poverty & prosperity threaten planet's biosphere

WASHINGTON, Feb 18: The planet's biosphere is threatened by both human poverty and prosperity, and environmental groups say governments need to act urgently to save what is left of it, reports IPS.

They are using the fifth anniversary of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro to press for action, and say governments have not made much progress in implementing the commitments made then.

Major decisions taken in Rio have not been implemented since 178 nations signed the Global Environment and Development Plan in 1992. Activists also offer their own proposals for countries to catch up.

In its 'State of the World' Report for 1997, the Worldwatch Institute identifies eight countries as the world's environmental heavyweights. The Washington-based research group says these countries, described as the E-8, should pool their efforts, much like the 'Group of 7' major industrialised nations work together on a range of issues.

The G-7 provides an opportunity for governments to work together and move the ball forward in a formal or informal way," said Hilary French a senior author of the Report which was released here Saturday.

Unlike the G-7 which is dominated by northern powers, the E-8 would include a mix of developed and developing countries. These nations — China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Russia, Japan and Germany — together have 56 per cent of the world's population, 53 per cent of its forests, and account for 58 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions, the main artificial cause of global warming.

Notably, this group does not include an African country and French explains that the con-

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Worldwatch researchers say 10-year-old environmental initiative provides some key lessons for governments

They point to the 1987 Montreal protocol, and agreement which "calls for a phasing out of chemical substances that destroy the earth's protective ozone layer."

Worldwatch says the Montreal protocol, which has reduced production of CFCs by more than 75 per cent, is the kind of tough, legally binding agreement needed to address other global environmental problems.

"We see this as a success story with some good lessons," says French. She pointed to the importance of following the "precautionary principle" — the need to act before all scientific information is in the Montreal protocol marks the first time countries acted under this principle, French asserts.



Lithuanian couples kiss as they take part in a contest for the longest kiss in Vilnius, on Monday. For several days in a row the couples continued dancing taking small breaks every once in a while. — Reuter/UNB photo

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