

Negotiators voice scant hope for progress

London talks aimed at reviving ME peace process begin

LONDON, May 4: Negotiators voiced scant hope of major progress Monday as Pales-

The important thing is to have an effort to stretch, not only on the Israeli side," said Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, as he emerged from the first round of discussions with British leaders.

"We have gone the extra mile, well beyond the extra mile. We need some corollary effort from the Palestinian side, and we hope that will be forthcoming," said Netanyahu as he headed towards a meeting with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Discussions were expected to focus on a US proposal for further Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.

Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived for separate meetings at the Downing Street office of British Prime Minister Tony Blair in brilliant sunshine, the Israeli leader departing before the Palestinian drove up.

Their motorcades moved swiftly through the British capital and past groups of demonstrators because of less-than-usual traffic. Monday is a national holiday.

Blair welcomed Arafat outside the office, but neither spoke to reporters as they went inside. Arafat was to meet later with Mrs Albright. The Palestinian and Israeli leaders were not expected to engage in face-to-face talks.

Outside Downing Street, rival demonstrators shouted at each other. A couple of dozen Arab demonstrators waved black flags and banners with slogans. "Peace process go to hell" and chanted "Allah Ak-



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat meets with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo Sunday. The meeting came shortly after Mubarak's meeting with US Vice President Al Gore.

bar" (God is Great) About five yards (metres) away, a small group of pro-Israelis shouted back and chanted "Give peace a chance."

Netanyahu agrees to 11 pc withdrawal from West Bank

AFP adds: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has agreed to an Israeli troop withdrawal from 11 per cent of the West Bank ahead of talks on the

scope of the pullback in London with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the Haaretz newspaper reported today.

Israeli sources told the daily that Netanyahu had accepted the figure, which falls short of a reported US proposal for a 13 per cent withdrawal, in talks Friday with US Vice-President Al Gore.

Netanyahu will discuss the new Israeli stance with Albright in his meeting with her

later Monday, the sources said. Netanyahu hinted to flexibility in the Israeli position in meetings last month with British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the newspaper reported.

Netanyahu's diplomatic advisor, Uzi Arad, denied Israel had changed its stance that any withdrawal from more than nine per cent of the West Bank would endanger the country's security interests.

Kesri gets bail in defamation case

NEW DELHI, May 4: The former president of India's main opposition Congress Party was granted bail Monday pending trial for defamation over his comments linking right-wing riots to bombings in a southern Indian town, a local news agency reported, reports AP.

Sitaram Kesri appeared in a city court in the case filed by the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the parent body of the governing Bharatiya Janata Party. If convicted, Kesri could be jailed for two years.

United News of India said Kesri was allowed to remain free on bail of 10,000 rupees (about 250 dollars).

Telecast begins today ATN Bangla' sat TV channel launched

CALCUTTA, Apr 4: The first 24-hour Bangla satellite TV channel, "ATN Bangla" was launched here by the Calcutta-based company ATN Arihant International Limited. The channel will begin telecast from tomorrow, reports PTI.

Addressing a press conference here, the chairman of ATN Limited, Siddhartha Srivastava said the strategy on alliance of the ATN channel and "ATN Bangla" channel would prove extremely beneficial in terms of marketing and promotions.

He claimed that the "Bangla channel" would become one of the most profitable Indian satellite channels.

Muslim rebels won't disrupt polls in Philippines

MANILA, May 4: Muslim rebels will not disrupt next week's national elections, and most will be allowed to campaign and vote for candidates of their choice, a rebel official said Monday, reports AP.

Ghazali Jaafar, chief peace negotiator for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, announced the rebel policy to counter reports they plan to disrupt the May 11 polls.

On Saturday, about 1,000 armed men who claimed to be MILF rebels surrounded a government party campaign rally and warned there will be bloodshed if the elections are held as scheduled.

Thai Army seize arms of Karen rebels

BANGKOK, May 4: The Thai military has seized a weapons cache believed to belong to Karen rebels fighting the government of neighbouring Myanmar, which was reported Monday to be razing Karen villages deep inside the country, reports AP.

The seizure, reported by the Bangkok Post, included rocket launchers, mortars, assault rifles and 23,000 rounds of machine-gun ammunition wrapped in plastic sheets and buried in Tak province, 370 kilometres northwest of Bangkok.

Military officials did not say how they discovered the arms.

Ethnic Karens constitute most of the 100,000 refugees from Myanmar, also known as Burma, living in camps along the Thai border, fleeing persecution by the Myanmar military.

Ranariddh returns to prepare party for polls

Khmer leaders won't surrender

PHNOM PENH, May 4: The Khmer Rouge claimed Monday that its remaining leaders had no plans to surrender, despite reports by government generals that there was nowhere left for them to run, reports AP.

"Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea remain unified with our people to forever save the Cambodian nation and people," said Monday's Khmer Rouge radio broadcast, referring to two of the three top leaders.

Low-level fighting continued between government troops and a dwindling band of guerrillas in the mountains along the border as more refugees fled into Thailand.

Some 10,000 new refugees, mostly Khmer Rouge civilians sprinkled with fighters, have passed Thai checkpoints in recent days and joined the 64,000 Cambodian refugees already in Thailand. The guerrillas turn over their weapons as they cross the border.

The broadcast called reports in the Thai press that Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea had contacted Defence Minister Tea Banh to discuss surrender the result of "cheating propaganda machines."

No mention was made of the man regarded as the group's most brutal and powerful chieftain, Ta Mok, who replaced the notorious Pol Pot as leader last year in a bloody power play.

Pol Pot led the Khmer Rouge regime that caused the deaths of as many as 2 million people between 1975 and 1979. He died April 15 of a purported heart attack under house arrest by his old comrades.

Tea Banh told reporters that government troops were in full control of the last Khmer Rouge stronghold, a piece of high ground called Hill 200. Searches were being carried out for the leaders and their radio transmitter.

"They are on the run in jungle along the border," Tea Banh said.

Cambodian leader Hun Sen indicated over the weekend that the end of the once-formidable guerrilla army was at hand but

refused to speculate on the whereabouts of the top trio. "Let us keep the secret now, we are putting out bait to catch a big fish," Hun Sen said.

The remaining Khmer Rouge were seriously weakened when many guerrillas recently defected over unhappiness with Ta Mok's harsh rule and refusal to consider a peace deal. Thousands of other war-weary guerrillas have made peace since 1996.

Thai military officers said Monday that some Khmer Rouge leaders were negotiating with Gen. Nhek Bunchhay, commander of opposition forces loyal to Prince Norodom Ranariddh, who was deposed as co-prime minister by Hun Sen

in a coup last July. Meanwhile, Prince Norodom Ranariddh returned from exile Monday to prepare his severely weakened royalist party for elections called by his arch-rival Hun Sen, who deposed him as co-premier in a bloody coup last July.

Ranariddh, who has said his return would be indefinite this time following two short forays home over the past six weeks, was met by about 300 supporters at Phnom Penh's airport. He called on Hun Sen to reverse his refusal to meet with him.

"The main parties have to talk to each other to pave the way for the elections, to pave the way for what happens after the elections," Ranariddh said.

IAEA looks into Pak scientist's bid to help Iraq build bomb

VIENNA, Austria, May 4: The International Atomic Energy Agency is investigating whether a top Pakistani scientist offered Iraq plans for nuclear weapons, the agency's spokesman said Monday, reports AP.

IAEA spokesman David Kyd confirmed a Newsweek magazine report that his agency is looking into a secret Iraqi memorandum naming Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan as offering to sell designs for a nuclear bomb.

"We are pursuing leads concerning individuals that were contactable in the pre-Gulf War period regarding Iraq's clandestine nuclear programme," Kyd told The Associated Press.

Kyd refused further comment, saying: "We will wait for reaction from the person they named in the story."

A Newsweek statement identified Qadeer Khan as Pakistan's top nuclear-weapons scientist. Neither he nor Pakistani government officials were immediately available for comment Monday. But Newsweek said both the government and Qadeer Khan had

denied involvement.

An October 1990 memorandum from Iraq's intelligence service to its nuclear weapons directorate mentioned Qadeer Khan as offering to help Iraq "manufacture a nuclear weapon," said Newsweek.

It was among the documents turned over by Iraq after the 1995 defection of Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, Lt Gen Hussein Kamel, who ran Iraq's secret weapons programme through the 1980s, Newsweek said.

Iraqi officials reportedly rejected the offer, fearing it was meant as a ruse to entrap them. Kyd said it was too early to draw conclusions.

"When you find some notes in Arabic in a huge pile of documentation of thousands of pages, one has to be prudent," he said.

Kyd said that investigation results would be turned over to the Pakistani government. "It's up to them to decide what to do next," he said.

"We are not a tribunal. All we do is present the evidence."



President Clinton puts his arms around First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, right, and daughter, Chelsea, left, Sunday as they leave MacArthur Park restaurant in Stanford, California. The Clintons spent the weekend with Chelsea at the home of Steve Jobs and emerged from seclusion to attend church on the Stanford campus, followed by brunch. Clinton was scheduled to travel to Los Angeles for a fund-raiser Sunday. - AP/UNB photo

Tanker crash claims 11 in Bombay

Eleven people were killed when a tanker carrying toxic chemicals rammed a truck in the western Indian city of Bombay, the Press Trust of India said yesterday, AFP says from New Delhi.

It said two of the victims were women adding the crash occurred overnight Saturday on a highway in Bombay. The victims were hitching a ride on the truck.

France's Nat'l Front loses seat

France's far-right National Front suffered a surprise defeat, losing its sole parliamentary seat in a key by-election Sunday in the southern port city of Toulon, officials said, AFP says from France.

Results showed Socialist candidate Odette Casanova winning 50.07 per cent of the vote against National Front rival Cendrine Le Chevallier in the final round of the two-stage vote. Le Chevallier was fighting to keep her party's only seat in parliament.

Ex-spy chief goes on trial in ROK

Seven former agents of the main government spy agency, including its chief, went on trial Monday on charges of smearing President Kim Dae-jung during his election campaign last year, AP reports from Seoul.

Another three former officials of the Agency for National Security Planning, including its No 2 man, were under arrest awaiting trial on similar charges.

The charges include meddling in politics in violation of laws governing the agency's activities. If convicted, they could face up to five years in prison.

Netherlands goes to polls Wednesday

Some 11.7 million Dutch citizens are called to the ballot box in Wednesday's general election, with polls predicting voters will reinstate incumbent Labour Premier Wim Kok at the head of a coalition government, AFP reports from the Hague.

There are 22 parties contesting the general election. Together they have put forward a total of 1,095 candidates who are competing for one of the 150 parliamentary seats up for grabs.

HK woman dies after jetfoil crash

A 77-year-old woman died Monday and 24 people remained in hospital with injuries suffered when a jetfoil hit a submerged object on a voyage to the neighbouring Portuguese enclave of Macau, AP reports from Hong Kong.

Marine officials still were trying to find the submerged object and learn what caused Saturday's crash, which injured 121 of the 244 people on board.

Artillery shell kills 6 in Vietnam

An artillery shell from the Vietnam War killed six people and injured three others in the Mekong Delta province of Tien Giang, local press reports said Monday, AP reports from Hanoi.

The incident took place last week when farmer Nguyen Van Kieu, 40, threw into a fire the 105mm shell he collected late last year while dredging a canal near his house. The explosion instantly killed Kieu and five construction workers.

Earthquake shakes Taiwan

An earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale struck east of Taiwan yesterday, but there were no immediate reports of damage, officials said, Alukers says from Taipei.

A Central Weather Bureau statement said the quake's epicentre was about 100 miles due southeast of Taiwan's eastern coastal city of Hualien and some 30.4 km beneath the earth's surface.

UN envoy meets Lankan officials to keep children out of war

COLOMBO, May 4: A UN envoy met with Sri Lankan officials Monday as part of a campaign to keep children out of the country's 15-year-old ethnic war, reports AP.

Olara Otunnu arrived in this Indian Ocean island Sunday on a week-long visit during which he will travel to areas controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main rebel group.

The Sri Lankan government accuses the LTTE of using children as fighters in its battle for an independent homeland for the minority Tamils.

The UN appointed Otunnu as special representative for children in armed conflict after the General Assembly adopted a report by Graca Machel in 1996.

"Mr Otunnu's visit is a recognition of Sri Lanka's desire to implement the Machel Report, which would contribute towards addressing the issue comprehensively at both the national and international level," the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry said in a statement Monday after Otunnu met with Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and other officials.

Otunnu was not available for comment.

Otunnu's duties include lobbying governments and private organisations to enforce the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which calls on states not to recruit children below age 15 into armed forces. He has also urged the creation of programme to help integrate former child fighters into society.

The LTTE announced Sunday it would observe a unilateral cease fire Wednesday and Thursday, apparently timed to coincide with Otunnu's visit to the war theater.

11 more killed in fighting

Meanwhile, Tamil Tiger rebels shot and killed 10 Sri Lankan policemen and a government soldier during a raid near the eastern city of Trincomalee, the Defence Ministry said Monday.

Defence Ministry spokesman Major Kumara Dewage said a group of guerrillas attacked the Patchanor police post and fatally shot 10 policemen and wounded five others during the Sunday night attack.

Afghans fear fresh fighting following collapse of talks

KABUL, May 4: In Afghanistan's war-ravaged capital, people greeted the news Monday that peace talks in neighbouring Pakistan had broken down with fear and frustration, reports AP.

The talks which collapsed on Sunday were seen by many in Afghanistan as their best chance at peace in nearly two decades of relentless war.

"When we got the news from the radio last night we absolutely lost hope because this was our last chance," said Mohammed Kharameel, a shopkeeper on a street littered with the scars of war.

Giant craters in the road were reminders of deadly rockets that fell on the city. Several flags marked the spot where two young boys had died in a rocket assault.

Afghans began to hope for peace last April 17 when Washington's ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson crisscrossed Afghanistan and got both sides in the bitter conflict to agree to their first face-to-face talks in two years.

Initially the talks resulted in a breakthrough agreement to establish a governing commission of religious scholars, with each sides sending 20 people

and neither side having the right of veto.

The United Nations and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) hailed the agreement as a major hurdle overcome on the road to peace.

Then last Thursday they hit a snag.

The opposition wanted the Taliban religious army to open blocked roads to regions of Central Afghanistan where the United Nations says already 100 people have died of starvation.

More than 50,000 people have been killed in Kabul.

that, based on Kuklinski's information, the United States intervened.

Because of Poles' slow reckoning with the past, Kuklinski has had to postpone a permanent return home. Concerns for his safety persist. He still lives in hiding and armed bodyguards surround him as he tours Poland.

The most painful experience of his exile, Kuklinski said last week in Krakow, has been knowing that many Poles feel he betrayed his nation. A court in September threw out a communist-era treason conviction and a death sentence, ruling that he acted in Poland's best interest. But by not publishing an explanation, the court left room for doubt about Kuklinski's guilt.

After the democratic changes, Kuklinski said he offered to stand trial. He set one condition: That certain documents be produced as evidence. Then-President Walesa refused, he said.

Poland struggles to sort out truth & lies of communism

NOWA HUTA, Poland, May 4: Their oily faces smudged with grime, workers at the Nowa Huta steel works idled their machinery — on bosses' orders — to listen to a visitor: Col Ryszard Kuklinski, a Cold War CIA spy, reports AP.

Like the Solidarity steel workers who fought for democracy in the 1980s, Kuklinski took great risks so that Poland could discard communism. But some workers don't see the connection, provoking a debate over whose sacrifice was greater — theirs or Kuklinski's.

Throughout Poland opinion is split on the man who for nearly 10 years smuggled communist secrets to the West, fleeing to the United States in 1981 after disclosing the most damaging secret of all: the regime's plans to break the Solidarity movement with military force.

In general, the debate over Kuklinski's place in history — traitor or hero? — reflects Poland's struggle to evaluate its

totalitarian past, to distill the truth from the lies of 44 years of communism.

Kuklinski's 11-day visit, which started last Monday, has heightened arguments not only in steel plants but in parliament, in newspapers and in city squares where crowds gather to see him.

The discussions take place without full knowledge of the communist regime's deeds: Poland chose roundtable talks over a truth commission, allowing for ex-communists to govern today alongside former Solidarity activists. Communist-era files remain sealed. The facts of Kuklinski's own case remain in dispute.

In the absence of full historical disclosure, personal experience defines opinion of Kuklinski.

At Nowa Huta, workers participated in the bloody Solidarity strikes that forced the communists to open talks leading to democracy. But the steelworkers showed no unity with a man

who also defied the communists. Only a small group of union leaders honoured Kuklinski. And while a few dozen workers heard him speak in their unit, the rest of the steelworks' 17,000 employees went about their labour.

"I served in the same army as Kuklinski. I took the same oath and I was true to it," one worker said bitterly, refusing to give his name. He considers Kuklinski a traitor.

He and others take their cue from Solidarity founder Lech Walesa, who refused to meet with Kuklinski on Sunday at the Gdansk shipyards where the pro-democracy movement started.

To Walesa, only one group deserves credit for toppling communism. "No agent did more than the workers," Walesa told a news conference on Saturday.

There also are Kuklinski skeptics at the other end of the spectrum: Former communist

party members who see merit in the old system; military officers angered by honours heaped on a man who broke his oath.

Still others come from a generation that demands loyal to country, no matter what system rules. They reject the notion that Poland was not sovereign under the communist regime, that it was under Soviet control.

Kuklinski has sought to dismantle that thinking during his visit, explaining that he started spying when he saw that Poland was only a tool of the Soviet Union.

Documents he saw showed that Soviet rulers intended to use the Polish military to attack the West, sacrificing Poland to a counterattack. The consequences of the plans would lead us to annihilation," he said.

But what his spying contributed to Poland's freedom remains unclear. Historians only speculate that the Soviets planned to invade Poland and

Columbia returns with most animals aboard dead

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, May 4: Exhausted from a two-week flight that killed many of the animals on board, Columbia's astronauts said the casualty rate would have been higher if they hadn't set up an intensive care unit, reports AP.

As it was, 55 of 96 baby rats came back dead, victims of maternal neglect.

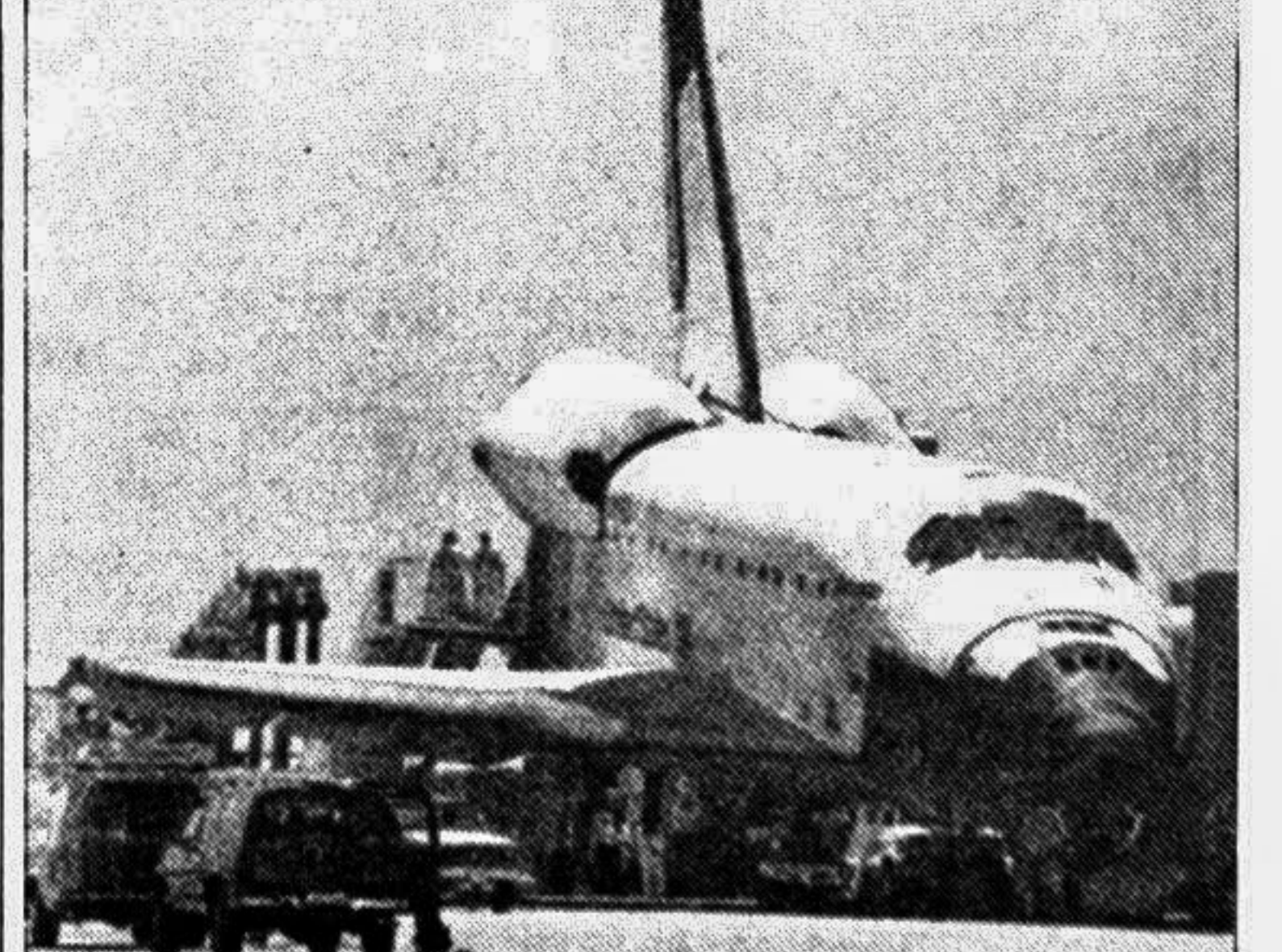
"When you initially see this, you say, 'Oh, no!'" Then we started treating. I guess the veterinarian in me kicked in," Richard Linnehan said late Sunday after the space shuttle landed, ending a 16-day mission that was the most in-depth study ever into how the brain operates in space.

Scientists want that question answered before planning possible moon colonies or a trip to Mars. Linnehan said the mission also provided immediate lessons for the international space station, to be assembled in orbit beginning this year.

The mortality rate was even higher among the young swordtail fish that flew on the mission: 200 dead out of 225, most likely because their water was too warm. But the astronauts didn't learn about that until after they landed; they didn't have access to the fish in orbit.

They did have access to the rats, however, and did everything in their power to save the tiny, emaciated rodents once it became clear they were quickly dying of dehydration.

The astronauts were also hustled off Columbia. Six of the seven crew members left on stretchers; doctors wanted them reclining to preserve the lingering effects of their weightlessness. Ten hours later, they were still undergoing medical exams; the tests were expected to go on for days.



Safety workers examine the Space Shuttle Columbia during post-landing activities, Sunday on Kennedy Space Centre's runway 33. Seven astronauts landed safely ending a 16-day mission. - AP/UNB photo