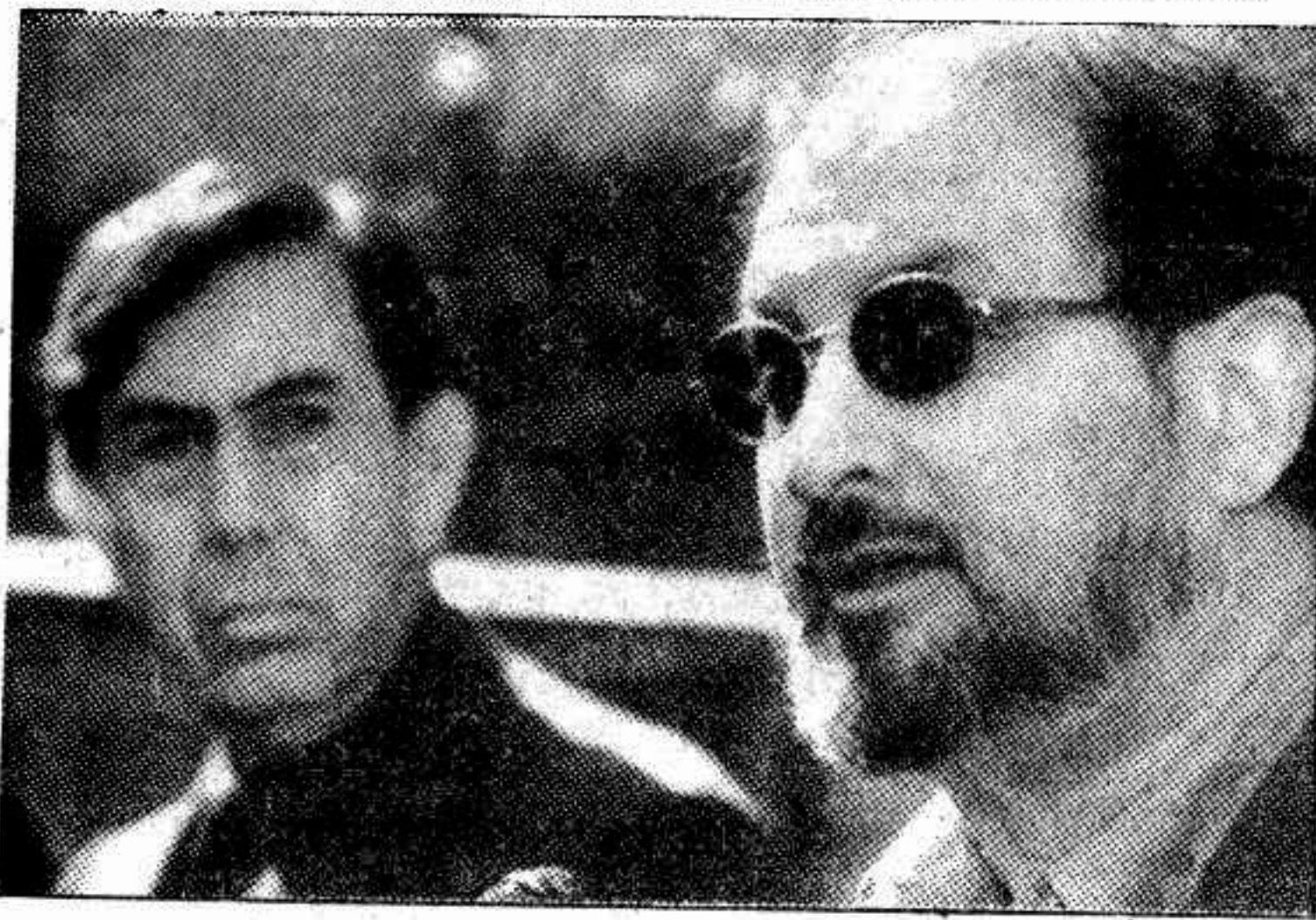


BRIEFLY



Flanked by Mexico City Mayor Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, right, author Salman Rushdie speaks at a "Cities of Refuge" centre for persecuted writers in Mexico City on Monday. The new centre is one of 32 such centres worldwide designed to serve as a refuge for persecuted and oppressed writers. — AP/UNB photo

Tigers bomb army bases in Lanka:

Tamil Tiger guerrillas fired mortar bombs at army positions in northern Sri Lanka, killing at least one soldier and wounding two others, the Defence Ministry said yesterday, AFP reports from Colombo.

Government forces retaliated in kind during the clash on Monday but rebel casualties were not immediately known, a ministry spokesman said. However, he said two members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed by troops in two other clashes in the north of the country on Monday.

Colombia seized huge weapons:

The Colombian Navy on Monday captured a boatload of weaponry bound for guerrillas in Colombia, a navy spokesman said, AFP reports from Bogota.

The weapons appeared to be for Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas and may have come from El Salvador, the spokesman said. The shipment included 25 rifles, one machine gun, two submachine guns and more than 40,000 rounds of ammunition, a navy spokesman said.

3 drowned in Red river in Hanoi:

Three students have drowned in the Red River in Hanoi, a teacher and the police said yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi. Five of a group of 11 students who were playing on a sandbank of the biggest river of the Vietnamese capital dropped into a whirlwind when the ground suddenly sank in the afternoon of last Friday, the teacher told AFP.

The three were taken away and drowned while the other two were saved by a boatman, police said.

14 die as footbridge collapses in China:

Fourteen people died and an unknown number were still missing after a footbridge in southwestern China collapsed, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The 180-metre (600-foot) bridge at Oijiang country in Chongqing collapsed Monday, plunging about 20 armed police and an undetermined number of civilian pedestrians into the Oijiang River, officials told AFP by telephone.

Shanghai trains 50,000 students:

Shanghai, China's economic and commercial centre, has trained over 50,000 post-graduate students over the last 20 years, Xinhua reports from Shanghai.

The figure includes 45,000 master's degrees and 4,500 doctor's degrees. Shanghai has established a comprehensive system of academic studies and training programmes in recent years, according to one local official.

US hiker killed in NZ:

An American hiker from Huntington Beach, California, died after falling down a rock face while crossing the Ball Pass in Mount Cook National Park, police said Tuesday, AFP reports from Wellington.

The victim was Paul Gerard Hornack, a management consultant, police said. One of a party of two 44-year-old men being guided over the pass Monday toward the Caroline Hut, near Mount Cook, he stumbled, overbalanced and lost his footing.

Japanese FM begins UK, ME tour:

Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura left Tokyo yesterday for Britain and Middle East countries to help accelerate the Middle East peace process, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The nine-day tour will take him to Britain, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Palestinian autonomous region and Israel to underline Japan's plan to help the peace process with economic aid, foreign Ministry officials said.

China to carry out its 1st manned space flight

SHANGHAI, Jan 5: China has announced plans to carry out its first manned space flights "by the end of this century or the beginning of the next," the official Liberation Daily reported today, says AFP.

Success would make China first country in more than 30 years to join the United States and Russia — including the former Soviet Union — in the exclusive club of manned space mission launchers.

In future, the country will follow the advancement of world space technology development, and try its best to attain manned space flight by the end of this century or the beginning of the next," the newspaper said, citing a dispatch from the official Xinhua news agency.

The front-page report, which quoted an unspecified news

source in the space industry, gave no exact timetable.

"Research institutions have already begun research on this area and made some achievements," it said.

Manned space flights are seen as needed "to maintain a leading position internationally" in the space industry, the report said, adding that the achievement would lead to more opportunities to advance China's space technology.

XU Dazhe, a top domestic aerospace scientist, said earlier this year that the immediate task toward manned flights was to boost Chinese rockets' payload capacity.

The boosters have only placed five-tonne satellites in low geostationary orbits to date, but manned missions would require lifting capacity of 20 tonnes or more, said XU.

Habibie determined to conduct just, fair polls in June

JAKARTA, Jan 5: Indonesian President B J Habibie today said his government was determined to conduct just, fair and open elections in June and urged all Indonesians to shed their suspicions of his government, reports AFP.

"In line with turning the elections into a success, we should also eliminate the feeling of suspicion between components of the nation, especially between the socio-political forces, and suspicion of the government," Habibie said.

Speaking at parliament while unveiling the draft state budget for 1999-2000, Habibie said there was still "enough time" for people to gradually decrease their suspicions and lay the basis for mutual trust.

A nation will not be able to survive long in an atmosphere of continuing suspicion and mutual distrust," he said.

Indonesians, he said, should not doubt his and the government's intentions to turn the

first elections, since the fall of Suharto who has government has promised for June 7, into a just and fair one.

"I have instructed all ranks of the government and ABRI (the Indonesian armed forces) to remain neutral, impartial and maintain equidistance between all organisations partaking in the elections," he said.

He said the government was fully aware of the fundamental importance of the elections for the future of the nation and the state, and for the restoration of domestic and foreign confidence on the government and the economy.

"The government is fully aware that a elections that are accepted, trusted and respected by the people is a must to form a government that can function efficiently and effectively in restoring national development and the building of pure democracy," he said.

"We are determined to implement the polls as honestly

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The recent attacks on Christians in western India is part of a conspiracy to discredit and overthrow the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government, the prime minister said on Monday, reports AP.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee said he would thwart such efforts, the Press Trust of India reported. Vajpayee was speaking at a public meeting in the southern city of Bangalore where he took part in a two-day meeting of the BJP's national executive.

The prime minister did not say who these conspirators were.

Over the last two weeks, Christians and their properties have been attacked and dozens

of churches have been destroyed in the western state of Gujarat. The state is also ruled by the BJP.

Militant Hindus say missionaries are forcibly converting Hindus.

Christians, who are a mere 2.5 per cent of India's overwhelmingly Hindu population, deny this.

Federal investigators sent probe the attacks have blamed Hindu right-wing groups who share the BJP's right-wing ideological background. But the BJP has not been directly blamed. The BJP head a coalition of 19 parties with varying ideologies and it has toned down its rhetoric to make its leadership more acceptable.

The BJP has criticised the anti-Christian violence and assured full protection to them, but Christian groups say these are mere words and the government needs to show in more concrete terms that it will take action.

But the BJP has refused calls for a ban on the Hindu groups accused of orchestrating the violence and for imposing federal rule on the state to ensure peace.

During his speech on Monday, Vajpayee said he feared that published reports on the attacks were exaggerated and that he himself would visit Gujarat to assess the situation, PTI said.

Over the last few days, Vajpayee been deeply criticised

by both his allies and members of the opposition for the anti-Christian attacks. He has found it difficult to defend his government despite assurances that the matter will be dealt with speedily.

Last week, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or the World Hindu Council, one of the groups accused for the violence, said it was being targeted as part of a "global conspiracy" because it was linked to the BJP. Giriraj Kishore, the VHP's vice president, was quoted in newspapers

as saying the goal was to create support for Congress Party leader Gandhi, an Italian-born Catholic.

Kishore did not substantiate his allegations.



From left, Vice President Al Gore, his wife Tipper, California Governor Gray Davis, his wife Sharon, and former governor Pete Wilson with his wife Gayle acknowledge the crowd after Davis was sworn in as the 37th Governor of the State of California Monday, in Sacramento. — AP/UNB photo

Trial continues

Anwar's lawyers accuse police of planting stains on mattress

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 5: Lawyers defending sacked Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in his sex and corruption trial on Tuesday accused police of planting seminal fluid stains on a mattress, reports AP.

After beating Anwar unconscious on the night of his arrest, police could have extracted the semen from him, attorney Christopher Fernando suggested to a police officer during cross-examination, Fernando suggested to a police officer during

cross-examination. "Do you know that semen could have been extracted from Anwar Ibrahim while he was unconscious and planted on the mattress that was in police custody?" he asked.

The mattress in question was seized by Assistant Superintendent of Police Mohamad Rodwan Mohamad Yusof, who on Monday testified how he collected the mattress from an apartment and brought it to the police headquarters.

Prosecutors say that it had

13 stains, which on chemical analysis by state DNA experts turned out to match Anwar's.

They are trying to prove Anwar used the apartment for secret sexual rendezvous, committing adultery and sodomy, both crimes in this predominantly Muslim country.

The semen stains, prosecutors have implied, are proof that he had an affair with his secretary's wife and repeatedly sodomised his former driver.

"Our allegation was that these seminal stains were planted on the mattress," Fernando told the court.

Mohamad Rodwan said he did not know if semen was extracted when Anwar was unconscious.

Israel toughens conditions for returning Golan, E Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, Jan 5: The Israeli Parliament adopted in a first reading Monday a law toughening the conditions for any return of the Golan Heights to Syria or the handover of East Jerusalem to the Palestinians, reports AP.

Deputies in the 120-member Knesset voted 55 to 35 with the 18 abstentions to approve the bill, which would require that any territorial concessions on the Golan or East Jerusalem be approved by at least 61 members of parliament as well as in a national referendum.

The legislation must now be considered by the Knesset Law Committee and be approved in a second and third reading by the full parliament to become law.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967 and annexed the strategic plateau in December 1981.

More than 13,000 Israeli

settlers live in the Golan as well as some 17,000 Syrians, most of them Druze.

Syria is demanding the return of the whole of the Golan in exchange for a peace treaty. Negotiations between the two sides have been suspended since February 1996.

Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967 and annexed the sector as part of its "eternal capital."

The Palestinians hope to make East Jerusalem the capital of a state of their own. Under the Oslo peace accords, the future of the city is to be negotiated between the two sides.

The Knesset gave preliminary approval to the Golan Bill in July. An official Syrian newspaper described the decision as a "declaration of war" and a "direct challenge to the whole international community and the United Nations."

Saddam's son directed executions of Shiite dissidents, claims US

WASHINGTON, Jan 5: One of the sons of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein directed the murder of hundreds of Iraqi dissidents last November in the Shiite region of southern Iraq, the State Department said Monday, reports AP.

Spokesman James P Rubin said tensions in the south, a stronghold of anti-Saddam sentiment, rose after the assassinations of two senior Islamic clerics this summer.

Over the past six weeks, he said, there have been reports of mass arrests throughout the southern region and in the Shiite areas outside Baghdad. Also, there have been hundreds of summary executions of dissidents at two prisons, he said.

"The repression reportedly reached a peak in November, with hundreds killed in actions directed personally by Quasai Hussein," Rubin said.

"Regime military action

against the Shiites is an intrinsic and continuing part of this campaign of repression. Since 1991 the regime has been carrying out the widespread and brutal repression of the Shiite population of southern Iraq."

Rubin said opposition sources from the Shiite areas reported that seven villages were recently destroyed or turned into military outposts.

He added that more than 2,000 civilians who were unable to flee were reportedly taken hostage by regime forces and possibly sent to Baghdad. They were made up largely of the old, the infirm, women and children, he said.

As a means of protecting Iraqi Kurds in the northern part of the country and the Shiites in the south, the United States, Britain and France have forbidden Iraq to send military flights over these areas through the establishment of "no-fly zones."

Killing in Shiite mosque

Pak police arrest dozens of Sunni militants

MULTAN, Jan 5: Police arrested dozens of Sunni Muslim militants Tuesday in connection with the slaughter of 16 Shiite Muslim worshippers shot and killed as they prayed in a mosque in eastern Punjab province, reports AP.

Police and paramilitary soldiers were deployed by the hundreds throughout the province as mourners prepared to bury the victims of Sunday's vicious attack.

Four gunmen roared into a Shiite Muslim mosque in a small village of Quereshi More, several kilometres from here. They killed 16 worshippers who were completing their morning prayers before beginning their day long fast. Another 25 people were hurt, several of them seriously.

The youngest victim was a 12-year-old boy.

"I sent my son to the mosque to pray and he was brought home to me dead," said his mother Razia Bibi, who wrapped herself in a shawl shaking and crying.

Security forces set up check posts, blocked roads and searched vehicles in nearby Muzaffargarh, where many of the funerals are expected to take place.

The police are blaming the

sectarian slaughter on the militant Sipah-e-Sahabah (SSP) group or Guardians of the Friends of the Prophet.

In dozens of raids overnight police said they arrested 46 activists of the SSP, which has denied involvement in the attack.

But this group has been blamed for hundreds of attacks on Shiite Muslims, mostly in eastern Punjab province.

A radical Shiite Muslim group Tehrik-e-Jaffria or Group for Shiite Law has declared a mourning period to last the next three days.

"The killers are roaming free. The government is doing nothing to stop handful of extremists responsible for sectarian violence," said Allama Sajid Naqvi, a leader of the Tehrik-e-Jaffria.

Police say they have sought help from a British anti-terrorism team which is to assist the authorities in combating terrorism.

Hundreds of people die each year in Pakistan in religious and ethnic related violence.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who escaped an assassination attempt on Sunday outside the Punjab provincial capital of Lahore vowed to end terrorism.

Off the Record

Love at first E-mail

BUENOS AIRES: An Argentine engineer and a Finnish mathematician who fell in love with each other on the Web, got married and now live in Finland, a newspaper reported Sunday, says AFP.

The daily El Tribuno of Salta in northwest Argentina, which reported the love story, said the couple visited their town, said they carried on a year-long courtship over the Internet.

They married and have been living in Finland for the last six months, the paper said.

La Orosco, 34, a civil engineer, and her husband, Heikki Juhanen Haaraala, 32, met in December 1996 when Haaraala, a doctoral candidate, came to Salta to deliver a lecture at the local University.

La attended the lecture because she taught a class in seismics and needed a mathematical programme for three-dimensional drawing, she told the newspaper.

She said the only contact she had with Haaraala was at the end of his lecture when they exchanged E-mail addresses and he kindly answered a question.

In February 1997, La asked Haaraala by E-mail about his thesis. He answered immediately, but told the newspaper that he did not remember her face.

It was "love at first e-mail," he smiled. At the beginning, they would write once a week, but after April 1997, when they got engaged, they wrote every day and in June, they exchanged photos by mail.

Manual for life's imperatives

WASHINGTON: A unique family manual for making love, war, sugar cookies and other imperatives of life is getting its first US showing in Washington, illustrated with some of Germany's finest art from 500 years ago, reports AP.

The medieval version of a one-volume encyclopedia seems to have been put together for a castle in a mining area near the Rhine River not far from Heidelberg. Suggested as the craftsman of the detailed drawings and engravings is an artist named Erhard Reuwich.

But that is little more than a guess, based on a picture of a Turk that Reuwich did in the 1480s that looks a lot like one in the book. To be on the safe side, experts identify the artist only as "the Householder Master."

"It was a time when artists worked in guilds, not as individuals," explained Andrew Robinson, in charge of prints at the National Gallery of Art. "They were known by their work, not by their names."

The roughly bound book has been taken apart dollars to make a facsimile edition of 750 copies, for sale at \$190 each. One copy of this edition is on show, along with pages from the original and other engravings believed to be by the same artist.

The National Gallery has put together an exhibit with examples of objects that the book depicts: a painted shield, half a suit of armour, an incense burner and a handy gadget called an aquamanile.

the Iraqi authorities wanted their replacement.

The entry visas of 10 — nine Britons and on US national — would not be renewed, while four other Britons working for UN contractors would be told to leave Iraq on completion of their assignment.

Three other US nationals working for the programme in Baghdad were, meanwhile, told they could remain in the Iraqi capital.

US State Department spokesman James Rubin played down the Iraqi request, saying that Iraq's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, Saeed Hasan, had verbally informed UN officials that no UN workers would be expelled, and that the denial of entry visas was "a temporary measure."

Of the 14 affected by the Iraqi decision, 12 are deployed in northern Iraq, while the two others — both British nationals — were in Baghdad.

The no-fly zone was extended to the south the following year to protect the Shiite Muslim minority.

He said that the UN legal department was looking into the matter.

Western diplomats said that a total of 14 British and US nationals had been informed that

the Iraqi authorities wanted their replacement.

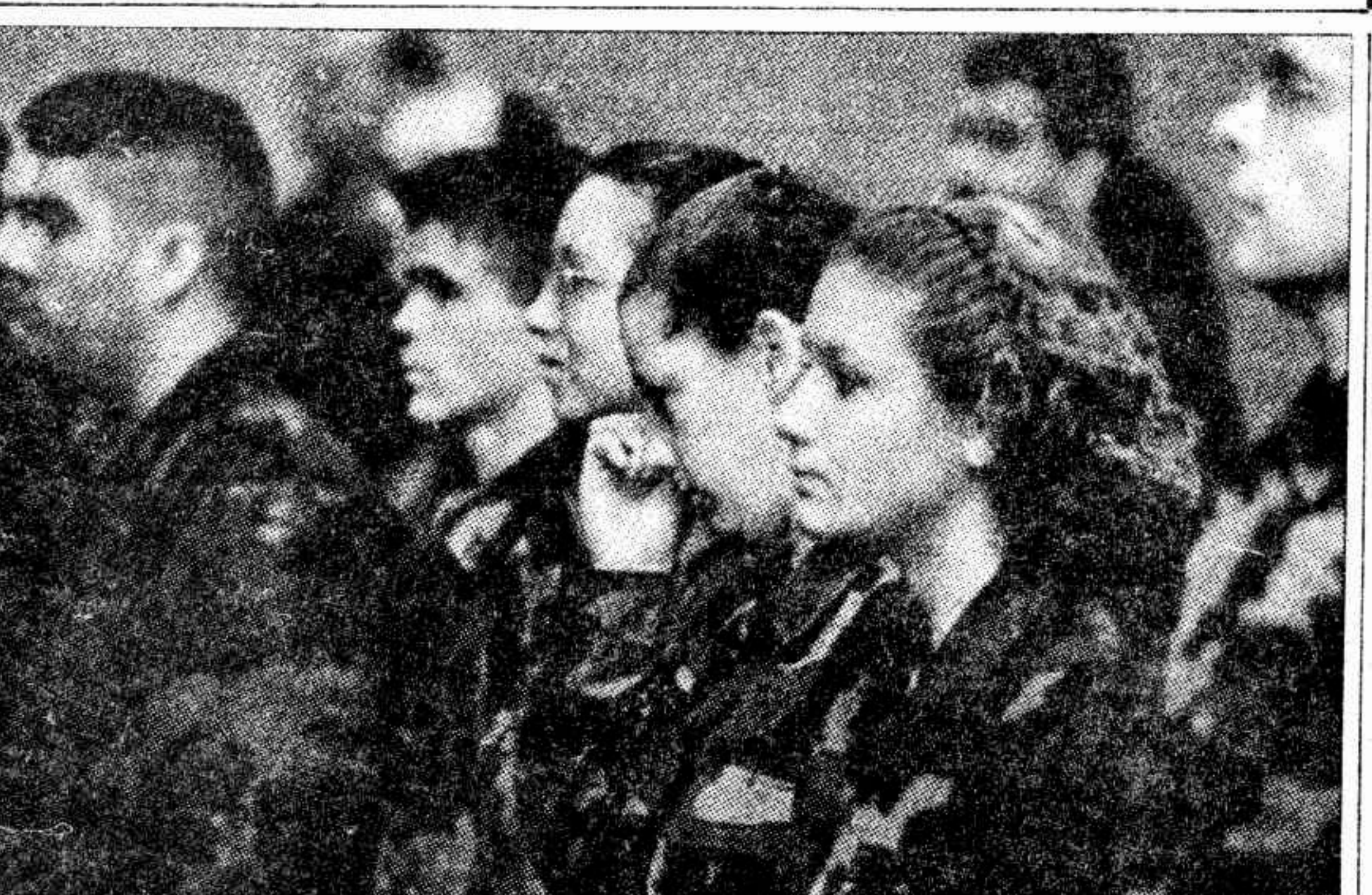
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United States National Guard Sp1 Kerry Hyson, of Taunton, wipes a tear from her eye as she stands with fellow soldiers as patriotic music is played during departure ceremonies at the Massachusetts Military Reservation, in Bourne Monday. Ten National Guard soldiers, all trained in air traffic control, will be deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina in support of the NATO peacekeeping effort. — AP/UNB photo