



This file photo dated October 24, 1998 shows the Sultan of Selangor, Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Alhaj (L), aged 73 next week, during the coronation of his wife Siti Aishah (R) at the Alam Shah Palace in Selangor. Malaysia named Sultan Salahuddin yesterday as the country's new constitutional monarch to succeed King Tuanku Ja'afar, whose five-year term ends April 25.

— AFP photo

BRIEFLY

S'pore executes 3 for murder:

A woman and two men have been hanged for participating in the 1997 stabbing murder of the woman's landlady. The Straits Times reported Saturday. AP reports from Singapore.

The hangings occurred Friday, but were not announced in advance. Singapore authorities refuse to say how many people have been hanged during the republic's 34 years of independence. The three people were convicted on February 6, 1998 of participating in the murder of Sivapackiam Veerappan Regasamy, 53, on March 13, 1997.

Ariane rocket blasted off: Western Europe's 116th Ariane rocket blasted off on Friday from French Guiana, placing into orbit satellites for the Arabsat Organisation and Britain's Ministry of Defence, the Ariane Space Company said. Reuter reports from Kourou.

The Ariane-4 rocket lifted off from the European Space Agency (ESA) launch centre in Kourou on the northeast coast of south America at 7.44 PM local time (2244 GMT). Twenty minutes later, space officials said the Arabsat 3A satellite separated from the rocket.

Theatre director Quintero dies: Tony Award-winning theatre director Jose Quintero, whose landmark productions of Eugene O'Neill dramas renewed interest in one of America's greatest playwrights, died Friday of cancer. His last decade of his life had been increasingly ignored by critics and audiences. AP reports from New York.

He won two Tonys, for a production of "Long Day's Journey into Night" and for directing "A Moon for the Misbegotten," energising the off-Broadway movement after World War II. Among the actors he worked with during his nearly 50 years in the theater were Jason Robards, Colleen Dewhurst, George C. Scott and Geraldine Page.

Cuban dissidents to go on trial: Four prominent Cuban dissidents will go on trial Monday for sedition, 20 months after they were arrested, family members said Friday. AP reports from Havana.

Vladimir Roca, son of the late Cuban Communist Party leader Blas Roca, Rene Gomez Manzano, engineer Feliz Bonne and economist Maria Beatriz Roque were leading members of the opposition coalition Concilio Cuban when they were jailed in July 1997.

Roca's wife, Magaly de Armas, said that court officials informed family members Friday that the trial would begin Monday. She had no other details.

US freezes arms sale to Greece temporarily

WASHINGTON, Feb 27: The Clinton administration temporarily froze weapons sales to NATO ally Greece earlier this month because of suspicions it had provided Russia with secret NATO aircraft jamming codes, the US Defence Department says, reports AP.

The suspension of arms sales is likely to be lifted, however, because an investigation by Army Maj. Gen. Henry A. Kievenaar Jr concluded that the suspected transaction did not happen, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said.

We did receive some information which we investigated and found there was not a problem," Bacon said. He said Kievenaar returned Thursday from Athens and was briefing members of Congress on his findings.

The Washington Post, which reported the arms cutoff to Greece in its Saturday editions, said some members of Congress were not satisfied and wanted more details. A classified intelligence briefing by Kievenaar was planned for next Monday and Tuesday.

"That never happened," Bacon said, citing the conclusions of Kievenaar's investigation.

Suharto to file defamation suits

JAKARTA, Feb 27: Former Indonesian president Suharto is to sue popular reform politician Amien Rais and two other people for defamation, a report said today, says AFP.

"Pak Harto (a popular apelation for Suharto) can no longer stand it, being insulted by those figures," Suharto lawyer Muhamad Assegaf was quoted by the Media Indonesia daily as saying.

"Pak Harto feels his good name has been sullied and the best way out is to bring this (cases) to court."

Assegaf aid in Surabaya, east Java, on Friday that the suits would be directed against Rais, academic George Adicondro and economist Christianto Wibisono.

Rais has repeatedly accused Suharto of corruption, graft and collusion while he was president. He has also claimed members of Suharto family have offered him huge sums of money to draw him into their political sphere.

Suharto, who resigned as president under mounting public pressure last May, is being investigated for possible corruption, collusion and nepotism.

Indian coalition govt wins crucial parliamentary vote

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: India's ruling coalition today won a crucial parliamentary vote seeking approval of its decision to dismiss an opposition-ruled government in the eastern state of Bihar, the United News of India (UNI) said, reports Reuters.

The government led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the resolution by 279 votes against 250 in the lower house, the Lok Sabha.

The ayes have it. Speaker Ganti Balayogi told weary lawmakers after a marathon two-day debate in a late-night vote whose result was delayed when an electronic counting system broke down.

Earlier this month, the coalition cited a wave of killings in Bihar to dismiss the rival Rashtriya Janata Dal government, but invited charges of political vendetta from critics led by the main opposition Congress Party.

Vital voting support for the rulers came earlier on Friday from the regional Telugu Desam Party, which has 12 deputies in the lower house.

Estrada-Muslim rebels talks cancelled

ZAMBOANGA, Feb 27: Philippine President Joseph Estrada said Saturday his talks with a secessionist Muslim rebel leader have been cancelled after the rebels refused to accept the government's conditions, reports AP.

Estrada was to meet Salamat Hashim, chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, on Sunday, but the rebel leader refused to accept his invitation to hold talks at the presidential yacht.

He said the rebels also refused to back down on their demand for a large number of guards for Hashim and for a long motorcade which would allow the MILF to openly display its forces.

"Not only out of respect for me personally but for the office of the president, they should not display this kind of actuality as if they are ready for a fight and threatening us," Estrada said. "We cannot allow that."

His meeting with Hashim was supposed to cap Estrada's five-day swing through the impoverished Mindanao region to push government development projects and peace negotiations to end three decades of Muslim rebellion.

The MILF, with an estimated 13,000 guerrillas, is the larger of two Muslim rebel groups fighting for an independent Islamic state.

Estrada, however, has said he will not allow the establishment of an independent state that will dismember the country.

"That never happened," Bacon said, citing the conclusions of Kievenaar's investigation.

Mediterranean Europe tightens security along coastlines

ATHENS, Feb 25: Western European countries bordering the Mediterranean are intensifying security along their coastlines to deal with a rising tide of human trafficking from South Asia, reports IANS.

Following an emergency European Union (EU) meeting in Brussels last month, immigration officials have recommended increased patrolling to track down criminal gangs which bring illegal immigrants into Europe. Greece and Italy, with their long Mediterranean coastlines and a border patrol that many other European countries consider lax, have long been regarded prime entry points for illegal immigrants.

Greece has started tightening its borders, as is evident from the growing number of foiled attempts to enter the country illegally. Both Greece and Italy are eager to prove to other EU member countries that they have non-porous borders.

Two weeks ago Greek authorities seized a "consignment" of 29 illegal immigrants in the western port city of Patras. Television news channels showed shots of turban-clad Sikhs being escorted into

prison vans.

International

US foreign policy goals outlined

Americans must embrace inexorable logic of globalisation: Clinton

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 27: President Bill Clinton outlined a foreign policy of active involvement overseas — from China to Kosovo — for the final two years of his administration, saying Friday that Americans "must embrace the inexorable logic of globalisation," reports AP.

He also offered a defense of China on the same day that the State Department reported a sharp erosion of human rights in that country.

"Everything from the strength of our economy, to the safety of our cities, to the health of our people depends on events not only within our border but a half world away," Clinton said.

Aides billed the president's speech to California business and policy leaders as a major address laying out his goals for the remainder of his term. The bloody conflict in Kosovo, where his administration has yet to cement a peace deal despite Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's intercession and an offer of US peace-

keepers, was a centerpiece of Clinton's outline.

"Kosovo is not an easy problem," Clinton said. "But if we don't stop the conflict now, it clearly will spread. And then, we will not be able to stop it except at far greater cost and risk."

Clinton spoke on the West Coast as the State Department released in Washington its annual human rights report to Congress. The coincident timing put Clinton in the awkward position of defending China — and his policy of engagement with the communist giant — at the same time his administration reported a sharp deterioration in that country's human rights record.

A crackdown on political dissent late last year reversed recent signs of improvement, the State Department found. Clinton tried to find an explanation in China's economic problems.

"China's rate of economic growth is declining just as it is needed to create jobs for a growing and increasingly more mo-

bile population," Clinton said. "We can see in China the kinds of problems a society faces when it is moving away from the rule of fear but is not yet rooted in the rule of law."

Continuing to defend his engagement, without interruption by applause, Clinton said: "Sooner or later China will have to come to understand that society and the world we're living in... simply cannot purchase stability at the expense of freedom."

"On the other hand, we have to ask ourselves: What is the best thing to do to try to maximise the chance that China will take the right course?"

With the impeachment trial over, Clinton has found himself more easily able to involve himself in foreign policy.

The president has faced criticism over the continued stand-off with Iraq and the peace talks on Kosovo. The speech, however, was being portrayed as a call to press ahead with existing policy, not as a sign of a new direction.

Turkey blasts Athens for flying Ocalan's 3 women aides to Greece

ANKARA, Feb 27: Turkey's Foreign Ministry on Friday attacked Athens for flying three women aides of captured Kurdish guerrilla chief Abdullah Ocalan to Greece saying its amounted to continued support for terrorism, reports Reuters.

"This action shows that Greece has not taken the necessary lessons from the situation it has fallen into because of its support for terrorism until now," ministry spokesman Sermet Atacanli said in a written statement.

The three women were flown to a military base near Athens on Thursday after being stranded at the Greek Embassy in Kenya following the seizure of Ocalan by Turkish special forces last week.

The women who had refused to leave the embassy without assurances for their safety were among the last people to see Ocalan before he was captured. Greece had sheltered him for 12 days at its Nairobi Embassy.

It organised the trio's exit after getting written assurances from Kenya and ensuring European Union diplomats were observing the operation.

Atacanli described the women as PKK militants and said Greece needed to understand that on the issue to terrorism "the door of persuasion was closed."

Greece must clearly and immediately cut its links with terrorism in order to become a country with which there can be normal relations, Atacanli said.

A photograph of the cover of Monica Lewinsky's book "Monica's Story" that will hit bookstores March 4. The book written by British author Andrew Morton is being published by St Martin's Press.

— AFP photo

Marriage in style

NEW DELHI: Call it a fairy tale affair or a crude display of wealth, but this was one double wedding that will be remembered long after the traditional Hindu rituals concluded in a village not far from the national capital, reports IANS.

One of the bridegrooms arrived by helicopter for the lavish wedding party thrown by Haryana legislator Kartar Singh Bhadana near his home in Sarai Khwaja, in Haryana state, for his two daughters under a resurrected version of Calcutta's famous 19th century British era marble monument the Victoria Memorial. The replica was built at a cost of Rs. 7 million (\$166,666). An estimated 7,000-8,000 guests, including Haryana legislators, bureaucrats and industrialists, attended the wedding party and, according to one report, were presented with cash gifts before returning home.

About 1,500 flower pots decorated the entrance alone and a pond was dug up with a bridge built for the two brides to walk across. No expense was spared for the celebrations with the extravagance on display even along the road to the marriage venue where banners advertised the wedding.

Guests were served a variety of cuisine with huge billboards everywhere boasting of what was on the menu. Trying to be different, Bhadana got a procession of elephants to accompany the bridegrooms to the marriage enclosure where the brides were later brought in for the Hindu rites.

The bridegroom who arrived by helicopter reportedly circled above, dropping leaflets giving details about the marriage ceremonies before landing at a helipad created nearby. He whisked his bride away in the helicopter, just the way another bridegroom had done some months ago in southern India's Karnataka state. That groom had even got married in the helicopter, with Muslim priests solemnising, while relatives and friends cheered way down from the ground below.

Hectic preparations were under way days before the Sarai Khwaja wedding with craftsmen especially brought in all the way from Calcutta to resurrect the famous marble monument of British Queen Victoria.

China developing new capability to attack Taiwan: Pentagon

WASHINGTON, Feb 27: By 2005, China will have the capability to attack Taiwan with highly effective air and missile strikes and to blockade Taiwan's main ports, the US military has concluded, reports AP.

In a report to Congress released Friday, the Pentagon did not predict a Chinese attack on Taiwan but painted a picture of the 2.5 million-man People's Liberation Army growing more modern and effective even as it shrinks in numbers and strengthens with morale problems and weaknesses in air transport.

For a Chinese invasion of Taiwan to succeed it would have to conduct a multifaceted campaign involving air assault, amphibious landings, a naval blockade, sustained conventional missile strikes and other support actions — a feat it could achieve only with "great difficulty" by 2005, the report said.

"Nevertheless, the campaign likely would succeed," it said, unless the United States interceded to aid Taiwan.

The communist government in Beijing views Taiwan as a renegade province and insists it

not seek international recognition as a separate state. It has refused to renounce the option of using force against Taiwan and has stated that it might do so under any of three circumstances: if Taiwan declared independence, if foreign power intervened to stop reunification or if Taiwan gained nuclear arms.

US policy is to view Taiwan as part of China, although it stills defensive arms to the island.

The Pentagon report said China is "still decades" away from possessing the capability to defeat a modern military force beyond China's borders. Its emphasis has been on developing innovative ways of using its strengths — such as advanced cruise missiles and ballistic missiles — to exploit an enemy's weaknesses.

"This approach potentially will give Beijing the 'credible intimidation' needed to accomplish political and military goals without having to rely on overwhelming force-on-force superiority," the report said.

S Korean leader promises talks with North

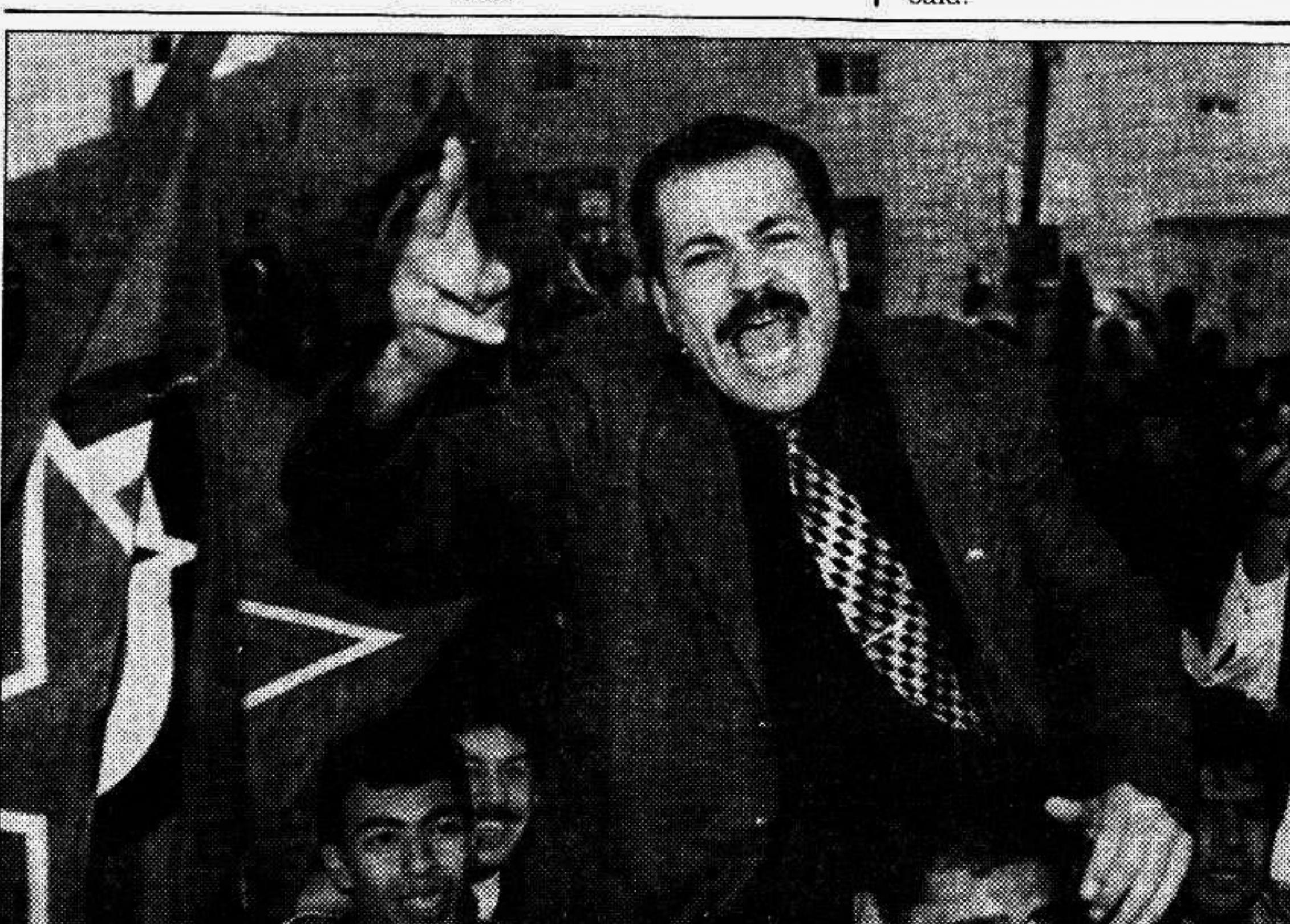
WASHINGTON, Feb 27: The acting president of South Korea's ruling party, Cho Se-hyun, said Friday his country will continue to seek dialogue with North Korea in an effort to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula, reports AP.

Cho said it was too early to say whether the policy of engagement with North Korea adopted by President Kim Dae-jung's one-year-old administration was succeeding.

"North Korea is slowing coming out of a dark cave," he said at the National Press Club. "If this process continues, there could be great change and the threat of war on the peninsula would be reduced."

As President Bill Clinton met Friday with former defence secretary William Perry, who is reviewing US policy toward North Korea for Clinton, Cho said it was important for the two allies to stay in close touch on what course to take.

"We'll wait to see what Perry has to say before we evaluate it," said Cho, who is head of the National Congress for new Politics Party. "But one principle must be close harmonisation with the United States on Korean policy," he said.



A Palestinian protester shouts anti-US and Israeli slogans during a demonstration to mark the 31st anniversary of the Damascus-based Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) in Gaza City on Friday. Hundreds of DFLP supporters protested the arrest of the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan and US attacks against Iraq.

— AFP photo

Move to fight human trafficking from S Asia

Mediterranean Europe tightens security along coastlines

On February 6, coast guards exchanged gunfire with the two-man crew of a Turkish vessel allegedly smuggling 12 illegal immigrants, mostly from India, off an isolated cove on the eastern Aegean island of Kos. All the aliens were arrested.

On the same day, an Athens court sentenced a Greek national and his Pakistani accomplice to nine years imprisonment for smuggling illegal immigrants into the country.

Eftychios Zervoudakis, 43, and Haroun Emin Kureshi, 32, were arrested near Athens last month when they were about to pick up three Indian illegal immigrants dropped ashore by a Honduras-flagged cargo vessel, 'Volha'. A coastguard helicopter and three patrol boats spotted the 'Volha' near the island of Hydri and found about a dozen more illegal immigrants, all Indians, on board.

The Public Prosecutor's office in the port city of Piraeus last month ordered an in-depth investigation to determine whether a Greek shipowner was responsible for the death of the Asians. The probe was ordered following a report on the German State Television, ARD, about a large human trafficking network based in Punjab and with "tentacles" in Turkey and Piraeus.