

BRIEFLY



Women's leadership

US First Lady Hillary Clinton (L) peers out into the crowd before she is introduced by Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) before her speech on Wednesday to the Women's Leadership Forum of the Democratic National Committee in New York. Hillary is expected to announce soon if she will run for the Senate seat vacated by Sen. Patrick Moynihan. — AFP photo

Mozambique appeals for aid: Mozambique has appealed for international aid to help the country recover from flooding that has left 200,000 people homeless and caused huge crop losses. AP reports from Maputo.

Tremor jolts southern Iran: A magnitude 6.2 earthquake shook southern Iran yesterday, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported, AP says from Tehran.

There was no immediate word on damage or injuries. The quake, which hit at 9.08 am local time (0538 GMT), was centered 900-km Southeast of Tehran, the capital, IRNA said, citing Tehran University's Geophysics Institute.

Shevardnadze on Japan tour: Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze arrived yesterday in Japan on a five-day official visit for talks aimed at further deepening ties between the two countries. AP reports from Tokyo.

Making his first visit to Tokyo as president of the former Soviet Republic, Shevardnadze was to meet Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi later in the day.

One sentenced to death in Cuba: A provincial court in southeastern Cuba has sentenced the killer of a policeman to death by firing squad. Cuban state television said Wednesday. AFP reports from Havana.

State television showed the public applauding after a Santiago de Cuba court sentenced Francisco Portuondo Medina to death. The report did not say when the trial took place.

New Japanese envoys to US, Russia: Japan's prime minister has approved the appointments of new ambassadors to the United States and Russia, a newspaper reported yesterday. AP says from Tokyo.

Administrative Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Shunji Yanai, 62, will succeed Kunihiko Saito as ambassador to Washington, and Deputy Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Minoru Tanba, 60, will be the new envoy to Moscow, the Asahi newspaper reported. The report said the appointments will be officially announced in May. The Foreign Ministry refused to confirm the postings.

DPRK team extends talks with US: US officials said the North Korean official, including delegation chief Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan, were to remain in New York for further talks on access to a suspect North Korean nuclear site, AFP says from New York.

The North Korean officials Wednesday cancelled a visit to Iowa that had been planned at the invitation of a private group specialising in conflict resolution, the organisation said.

2 rebels killed in Philippines: Government soldiers clashed with about 20 suspected Muslim extremists at dawn yesterday (Thursday) in a remote southern village, killing two rebels, a military spokesman said, AP reports from Zamboanga.

The rebels opened fire on the soldiers, who were patrolling an area on the outskirts of Lawi-Lawi village in the island province of Basilan, triggering a firefight in which two rebels were killed, said Horacio Laphind of the military's Southern Command.

Anwar's lawyers tell probe panel Rahim should be charged with attempted murder

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 4: The powerful former police chief who assaulted jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim on the night of his arrest should be charged with attempted murder, a panel probing the police violence was told Thursday as it wound up its hearings, reports AP.

The panel, headed by a retired federal chief justice, heard this week a confession from Abdul Rahim Noor, the ex-inspector general of police, and details of how a handcuffed and blindfolded Anwar was assaulted in a police lock up.

Tan Sri Rahim Noor ought not to be let off lightly, said Anwar's lawyer, Karpal Singh, in his final submission to the panel. He referred to the former police chief by a government-given title.

But Anwar's lawyers have argued that it was premeditated. Several police officers have testified that Abdul Rahim had

asked to check if Anwar was blindfolded before he went into the cell and launched the frenzied attack.

The panel, which does not have the power to prosecute, only to make recommendations, appeared to accept that the level of violence directed against Anwar was severe.

Judge Augustine Paul, presiding over the corruption trial Thursday barred a defence witness from testifying.

The evidence of Vasantha Nair, a government doctor who examined Anwar four days after he was assaulted in detention by the former police chief, was irrelevant, Judge Augustine Paul ruled.

"Assault and medical issues aren't relevant," Paul said soon after the doctor walked to the witness box. She left without uttering a single word.

Trial of Khmer Rouge leaders Ranariddh opposes Hun Sen's option for truth commission

PHNOM PENH, Mar 4: The president of Cambodia's National Assembly said Thursday he does not support Prime Minister Hun Sen's preference to bring genocidal Khmer Rouge leaders before a truth commission instead of an international tribunal, reports AP.

Prince Norodom Ranariddh complained that the government has not provided him with a copy of a United Nations report that recommends a Khmer Rouge tribunal be set up in an Asia-Pacific country other than Cambodia. He was speaking to reporters as he arrived at parliament.

Hun Sen responded to the report Wednesday in a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The letter said the government favours a South Africa-style truth commission because of fears a tribunal may anger the thousands of former Khmer

Rouge rank-and-file who have made peace with the government.

Ranariddh, whose royalist party is the junior partner in Hun Sen's coalition government, said he respected the prime minister's concerns for peace, but argued that it should not come at the expense of justice.

"I think he has chosen stability because he has to take responsibility as prime minister. I do not blame him at all," the prince said of Hun Sen.

"My opinion is different. Principle is principle. Justice is justice. I would think that to close down this very bleak page of Cambodian history a trial is needed," he said.

Ranariddh said he would like to call a closed-door meeting of the National Assembly for a broad discussion of Hun Sen's decisions on the Khmer

Flights over no-fly zones illegal, say Russia, China Iraq resumes pumping oil thru' key pipeline to Turkey

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 4: Iraq has resumed pumping oil through a key pipeline to Turkey that had been put out of commission by what Iraq said was a US airstrike on Sunday. UN officials said, reports AP.

UN oil consultants from the Dutch firm Saybolt, who monitor the flow of oil into Turkey, reported that Iraqi exports resumed at 12:58 am Thursday local time (2158 GMT Wednesday), said a statement from the UN oil-for-food programme.

UN officials had expressed "deep concern" about the strikes on the pipeline communication centres and their impact on the programme, which lets Iraq sell limited amounts of oil to buy food and medicine for Iraqis suffering under UN sanctions.

Low oil prices and the dilapidated state of Iraq's oil industry have already resulted in a

900 million dollars shortfall in what the United Nations needs to run the programme, the program has said.

On Wednesday the head of the program, Benon Sevan, told the Security Council that if the pipeline resumed functioning within a day, there would be only "minimal delays" in exporting the oil out of the Turkish port Ceyhan.

There had been enough oil stored at the port — 2.38 million barrels — to keep ships carrying their normal loads, he said.

The United Nations didn't say how Iraqi engineers restored the pipeline. But Sevan had said earlier that Saybolt technicians at work trying to restore the damaged communication links.

Iraq has been barred from

exporting oil freely since UN sanctions were imposed in 1990 to punish Iraq for invading Kuwait. Under the oil-for-food program, Iraq can sell 5.2 billion dollars over six months.

About half the oil Iraq exports flows through the pipeline.

In the council meeting Wednesday, the United States and Britain defended themselves against criticism of the Sunday strike and another one Monday.

Deputy US Ambassador Nancy Soderberg said the US pilots were only acting in self-defense as they patrolled the no-fly zones which Washington and its allies established after the 1991 Gulf War to protect minority Kurds in northern Iraq and Shiites in the south from Saddam Hussein's army.

Washington argues that the

no-fly zones are justified under Security Council resolutions that call for the protection of minorities in Iraq.

Within the region, our pilots have been increasingly targeted," Soderberg said. "We are taking measures in defense of ourselves to protect our pilots."

Russia and China, however, say the council has never explicitly authorized the no-fly zones and say the patrols violate Iraq's sovereignty. On Wednesday, they repeated their claims that the flights are illegal, diplomats said.

In addition, council member Malaysia expressed concern about the intensification of the strikes, and France and Bahrain expressed concern about the humanitarian consequences, diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity.



German President Roman Herzog (L) meets on Wednesday in Buenos Aires with relatives of people of German origin who disappeared in Argentina during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. The relatives asked for Herzog's intervention to open the archives at the German Embassy in Buenos Aires in hope to find information about their missing loved ones. — AFP photo

US hopes to resume training programme for Pak army

WASHINGTON, Mar 4: The United States hopes to resume training programmes for the Pakistani military and eventually to end all sanctions against both Pakistan and India, a State Department official told Congress Wednesday, reports AP.

"The goal is a sanction-free relationship with both countries," said Assistant Secretary of State Karl F. Inderfurth, expressing optimism about South Asia after last month's meeting between Pakistani and Indian prime ministers.

The administration is asking Congress to restore funding for military-to-military training under a programme ended with Pakistan in 1990 amid concern over its nuclear weapons programme. India qualifies for US training, which is partly aimed at instilling

human rights values in soldiers.

"We want to see the Pakistani military continuing to look westward," said Inderfurth, indicating he did not want it to be influenced by the Taliban that dominate Afghanistan.

A lifting of all sanction, however, will require more commitment to a non-nuclear future by India and Pakistan, he said.

Much of the economic sanctions imposed against India and Pakistan following nuclear testing last year have been lifted as tensions have cooled in the region, but bans remain on sales of military items or anything that might have a military use.

Under questioning by members of Congress, Inderfurth said the administration recognises India's concerns about

China.

In demanding that both powers give up nuclear testing and nuclear weapons production, "the United States has taken into account both governments' conceptions of their own national interests," he said, adding later that he was referring partly to Indian concerns about China.

Inderfurth called for more breakthroughs like the Feb 20 meeting in Pakistan between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who made the dramatic gesture of travelling to Pakistan on an inaugural bus trip between the two countries.

"Recognising that progress so far has been largely praiseworthy, we look forward to the next few months to concrete steps by both parties that will enable us to reassess the sanctions regimes," Inderfurth said.

Aid agencies rush help to Albanian refugees US prefers diplomatic solution to crisis in Kosovo

WASHINGTON, Mar 4: Stepping up diplomatic efforts to reach a peace settlement in Kosovo, the United States has dispatched former Sen. Bob Dole to the province today and is weighing the possibility of sending Ambassador Richard Holbrooke to Belgrade for talks with Serb leaders, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

State Department spokesman James Foley said there have been encouraging signs in recent days that the Kosovar Albanians have been moving toward acceptance of a peace plan proposed by six mediating nations.

Once formal acceptance by the Albanians is achieved, "pressure on the Serbs to do so will mount," Foley said.

"We believe that that message will become increasingly clear to President (Slobodan) Milosevic in the days to come," he added.

On Capitol Hill, Defense Secretary William Cohen predicted that, with no peace agreement and no peacekeeping force, there was a "likelihood of bloodshed continuing to take place on a massive scale, with migrations of tens of thousands of people out of the region of the Balkans to the other areas."

Another report added: With a lull in fighting in Yugoslavia's Kosovo province, aid workers have begun to deliver humanitarian supplies to ethnic Albanian refugees.

Relief workers delivered food, blankets, mattresses and medicine Wednesday to the region along the Macedonian border in southern Serbia, Yugoslavia's largest republic.

Defying NATO warnings, Yugoslav forces have pounded suspected positions of the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army in recent days, sending terrified villagers into the open.

Yugoslav forces refrained from attacks on rebel positions Wednesday but sent an armored vehicle convoy through the area in an apparent show of strength. Aid workers said Yugoslav army tanks were thought to be hidden in nearby hills.

About 4,000 people remain displaced by the clashes. UN refugee agency spokesman Fernando del Mundo said. Some crossed into Macedonia or found shelter within Kosovo, while several hundred were stuck on mountain slopes in cold weather.

Some 2,000 people have been killed and over 300,000 displaced in a year of fighting in Kosovo. Ethnic Albanians make up 90 per cent of the province's population.

In a separate statement, the Serbian government accused the OSCE mission of "manipulations" and support for the rebels.

US threat on Bin Laden delaying return of UN staff to Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 4: US warnings that it may take further military action in Afghanistan to punish Osama bin Laden are partly responsible for holding up the return of UN staff to the country, diplomats said, reports AP.

Washington has told the United Nations that it may not be able to warn the world body beforehand if it launches another air campaign such as the August strikes on Bin Laden's Afghanistan, the diplomats said Wednesday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The diplomats stressed that the United Nations has other security concerns with Afghanistan that are delaying the return of the United Nations after its seven-month absence from the country.

But they said that the recent US warning, contained in a six-point paper, distributed to the United Nations in Islamabad, Pakistan and Geneva, was figuring into a decision on when

and under what circumstances the United Nations would come back.

The United Nations withdrew its international staff from Afghanistan on Aug 22, a day after an Italian UN military adviser was shot and killed in the Afghan capital Kabul.

The slaying was believed to have been retaliation by the Taliban for the Aug 29 airstrikes on a suspected terrorist training camp run by Bin Laden in eastern Afghanistan.

Washington has said it was acting in self-defence, claiming Bin Laden was behind the twin bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed 224 people.

The United Nations has demanded guarantees and proof from Afghanistan's Taliban militia that they are making progress on their investigations into the killing of the Italian adviser and two other UN workers slain in July, before returning international staff to the country.

Gorbachev says All is not lost yet to improve ties with US

WARRENSBURG, Missouri, Mar 4: Relations between the United States and Russia are deteriorating, but it's not too late to work out a solution, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev told a campus audience, reports AP.

Speaking to more than 5,000 people at Central Missouri State University Wednesday night, Gorbachev said American and Russian leaders should meet and review the relationship between the two superpowers.

"We have seen a lot of disappointment about the state of our relationship," Gorbachev said. "American does not want to be an equal partner with Russia."

Gorbachev, winner of the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize, also

said the world's economic order needs to be restructured.

"We need a more sane, just and peaceful world order," he said.

Gorbachev said Russian President Boris Yeltsin has proven himself incapable of running Russia. He said the election in Russia this fall is very important to the future of democracy in Russia.

He said the current democratic system is not functioning properly, giving "too much power to the president and not enough to the parliament."

"This is a major task for policy makers and the people to address," Gorbachev said. "It is my conviction that we can improve governance in Russia with new leadership."

Off the Record Operation Rabbit 2000

STOCKHOLM: Concerned by the fact that Swedish women are producing too few children, especially in the face of high fertility rates among immigrant women, authorities here are doling out novel incentives to preserve the ethnic balance of the country, reports IANS.

The present day average of 1.5 children per Swedish woman is the lowest ever in the country. Hence the authorities are encouraging various schemes to bring about a change in the procreative propensity of ethnic Swedish women.

The schemes are taking a pragmatic approach. Taking into account unemployment rates and evanescent social welfare, the schemes are thickly coated with cash incentives.

Pitea, a commune (municipality) high up in the sub-Arctic area of Sweden where the number of children born annually has dropped from 500 to 350, has so far come up with the most original scheme. It has launched "Operation Rabbit 2000" — a contest to give birth to the first child of the millennium — with which the commune hopes to boost its alarmingly dwindling population. Not surprisingly, the logo of the project shows a hare in heat.

The enticement offered is indeed copiously attractive. Besides the winner — the first child born in Pitea in the year 2000 — every child born in that year will get \$12,000 from the commune, a free villa, insurance paid up for seven years, free electricity and energy for 15 years, a long-term subscription to the local newspaper, Pitea-Tidningen, worth \$600 and bonds from the Pitea Valley Savings Bank worth \$1,200. Even the brat that shows up last in 1999 in the commune will receive substantial rewards.

Understandably, the contest is challenging. Most eligible girls, married, cohabiting or otherwise, are all keen to participate.

After consulting gynaecologists and other experts in the field, April 11 has been adjudged the most perfect day for fertilisation that — if conceived — will result in the baby being born on January 1, 2000. There is, however, another group of experts that vehemently believes March 17 would be the most propitious day.

The municipality is adopting many measures to help make the babies. Free wax candles, exotic, odoriferous flowers and bottles of wine will be supplied in order to help create an appropriately romantic atmosphere.

City of heart break

SAN DIEGO: New York City will break your heart.

A researcher at the University of California at San Diego says tourists who visit New York are 34 per cent more likely to die of a heart attack than visitors to other cities, reports AP.

The people who live there aren't safe, either. New Yorkers are 55 per cent more likely to die of a heart attack in their hometown than people living in other US cities, said psychologist Nicholas Christenfeld.

New Yorkers' risk of dying of a heart attack drops by 20 per cent when they are outside the city.

"Being in New York may be good for the rest of you, but leave your heart in San Francisco," said Christenfeld, who will present his findings Friday at a meeting of the Society for Behavioral Medicine in San Diego.

Christenfeld based his data on US death certificates from 1985 to 1994.

"New York gives you the full experience — stress, excitement, pressure, density," he said. "This won't cause a heart attack in a healthy young person, but if you're at high risk and teetering on the edge of a heart attack, it could push you over."

S'pore newspaper says Treasure trove dating to Ming Dynasty found

SINGAPORE, Mar 4: A treasure trove of porcelain, jade and gold has been discovered in the seas off oil-rich Brunei, with salvage operations held under tight security, Singapore's Straits Times reported today, says AFP.

Museum experts from France had helped Brunei in the operations, which also involved "mini" submarines, the newspaper reported, based on interviews with divers and crew members on salvage ships and others involved in the project.

It said divers brought up enough ceramics to fill three or four boxes a day — each about a cubic metre in size — during the operations held last year.

The ceramics were washed, inventoried and packaged on the barge before being sent back to shore every day under military escort, the report said.

When any ship came close, a helicopter would fly out immediately and warn the ship to keep away.

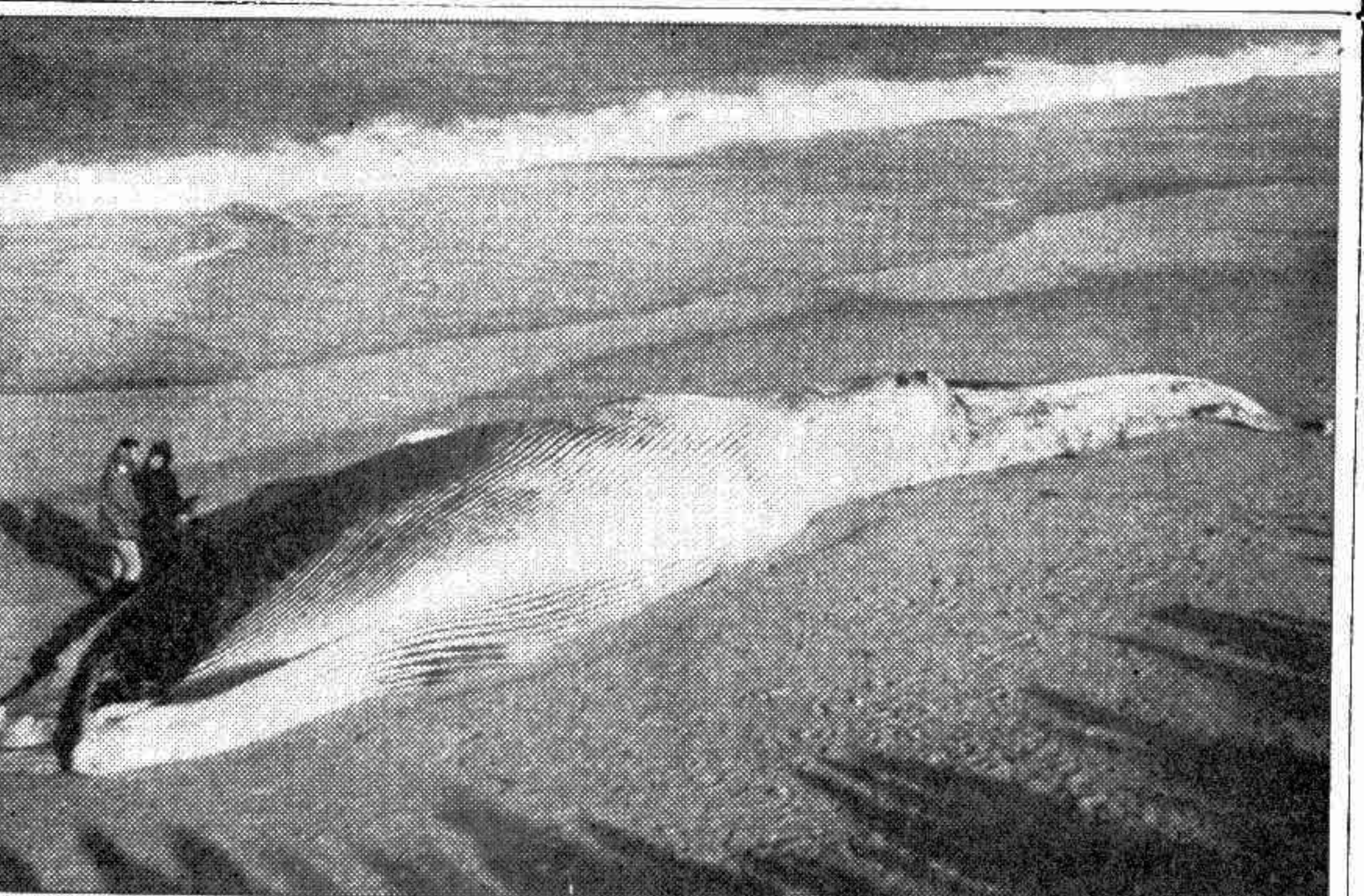
Gunawardena Nalin, the chief engineer of a barge which was the operation's nerve centre, told the paper.

Museum officials in Brunei, located on northeastern Borneo island, said they could not comment on the find, and international auction houses such as Christie's and Sotheby's had not been informed.

Based on descriptions and photographs of some of the blue and white ceramic pieces, experts at the Asian Civilisations Museum and Christie's international office here said they were probably provincial ware from the middle to late Ming Dynasty.

The Chinese Ming period stretched from 1368 to 1644.

Officials said it was difficult to ascertain the artifacts' commercial value without a detailed examination.



Whale experts examine the remains of a stranded 10-metre long whale on the beach of Saint-Martin-de-Brehal, Normandy on Wednesday. The animal weighing 40 tonnes is believed to have come from the North Atlantic having lost its orientation. — AFP photo