

**Pollution kills more than road accidents**

GENEVA, June 17: Pollution caused by motor vehicles can kill more people a year than road accidents, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has found after studying European countries Austria, France and Switzerland, reports AFP.

Long-term exposure to exhaust fumes caused the premature death of 21,000 people from respiratory and heart disease in the three countries, compared with nearly 10,000 deaths from accidents, a WHO report said Wednesday.

The report was prepared for submission to a conference of 70 environment and health ministers being organised by the United Nations agency in London from Wednesday through Friday.

The growing evidence that air pollution is causing a major health burden adds to the effects of road traffic through noise, accident and barriers to cycling and walking, and we need to approach this head on," said Carlos Dora, a doctor with the WHO's European centre for environment and health.

"We are paying a huge price for this excessive road transport: With our money and with our health."

**Gore launches presidential campaign**

WASHINGTON, June 17: US Vice President Al Gore plunges into the 2000 White House race with Democratic front-running status and a formidable fundraising machine, but low poll numbers and a rising-star Republican challenger have him campaigning as an underdog, reports AFP.

Gore, 51, threw his hat in the ring Wednesday in his birthplace of Carthage, Tennessee, in a mere formal step in the long-expected campaign which has won the unusually early endorsement of President Bill Clinton.

The only challenger for the party's nomination thus far, former senator Bill Bradley, trails Gore by some 40 points in the polls and he is twice as far behind in name recognition.

Gore has also locked up the essential political "money men" who finance the increasingly exorbitant US races and the endorsements from key interest groups.

**First cloned human embryos**

LONDON, June 17: US scientists have cloned the first human embryos, the Daily Mail reported today, says AFP.

Using methods similar to those which produce Dolly the Cloned Sheep at Edinburgh's Roslin Institute, they produced a male embryo comprising nearly 400 cells, according to the British tabloid.

The scientists at the Massachusetts-based Advanced Cell Technology then incinerated it after two days.

They want to produce human body tissue which can be used to treat patients with various conditions, including nerve damage, diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

A DNA-loaded nucleus of a human cell was extracted from a skin sample from a man's leg and then inserted into the outer protein of a hollowed out cow's egg under laboratory conditions, said the Mail.

The egg was then placed in a laboratory dish and soaked in a chemical solution which fooled it into thinking it was a newly conceived embryo.

**110-yr-old learner**

BUENOS AIRES, June 17: She still hopes to live many more years, an illiterate 110-year-old Argentine woman has started learning to read and write to prepare herself for the challenges of the next century, reports Reuters.

"I want to learn reading and writing as one has to be prepared for the future," said Concepcion Fernandez, interviewed in the northern province of Chaco by the state-run news agency Telam.

Fernandez, a mother of 12, started taking lessons at home on Saturday under a programme launched by the government of the impoverished cotton-growing province.

"I want to live many more years, I am sound, I only feel a minor pain in leg where a horse once kicked me. But nothing else," said Fernandez, who continues to work on the land.

**Lanka mass graves probe makes breakthrough**

JAFFNA, Sri Lanka, June 17: Forensic experts made a breakthrough Thursday when they found the remains of two men during excavations of a suspected mass grave in this embattled northern Sri Lankan district, reports AFP.

The internationally monitored excavations which began Wednesday at the village of Chemmanai, 11 kilometres south of here, unearthed the remains, officials said.

The site was pointed out Wednesday by a former soldier, currently facing a death sentence for rape and murder of a teenage Tamil and her family, who claimed three killed people were buried there in 1996.

The Jaffna Magistrate Manikkaswagam Ilanchevian ordered the excavations after the soldier, Somaratne Rajapakse, said in open court here he knew 10 grave sites in the area.

"I know of 10 places where people have been definitely buried," Rajapakse said

**Indian Navy on alert to counter Pak build-up**

said, quoting defence sources.

Officials said earlier this week that India had shifted some ships from their usual stations in the Bay of Bengal to areas off the west coast, which borders Pakistan.

"Operations are in progress," a senior army official, who asked not to be identified, told Reuters. He could not immediately confirm if Indian warplanes also were involved in the attacks to flush out guerrillas dug into the icy heights.

"Although it has currently adopted a defensive posture, it is in a position to launch an offensive at short notice," it quoted him as saying.

US President Bill Clinton urged Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday to withdraw the militants, despite Pakistan's insistence that it only gives moral support and no military aid to some groups.

An alliance of guerrillas fighting Indian rule in Kashmir on Wednesday spurned the US

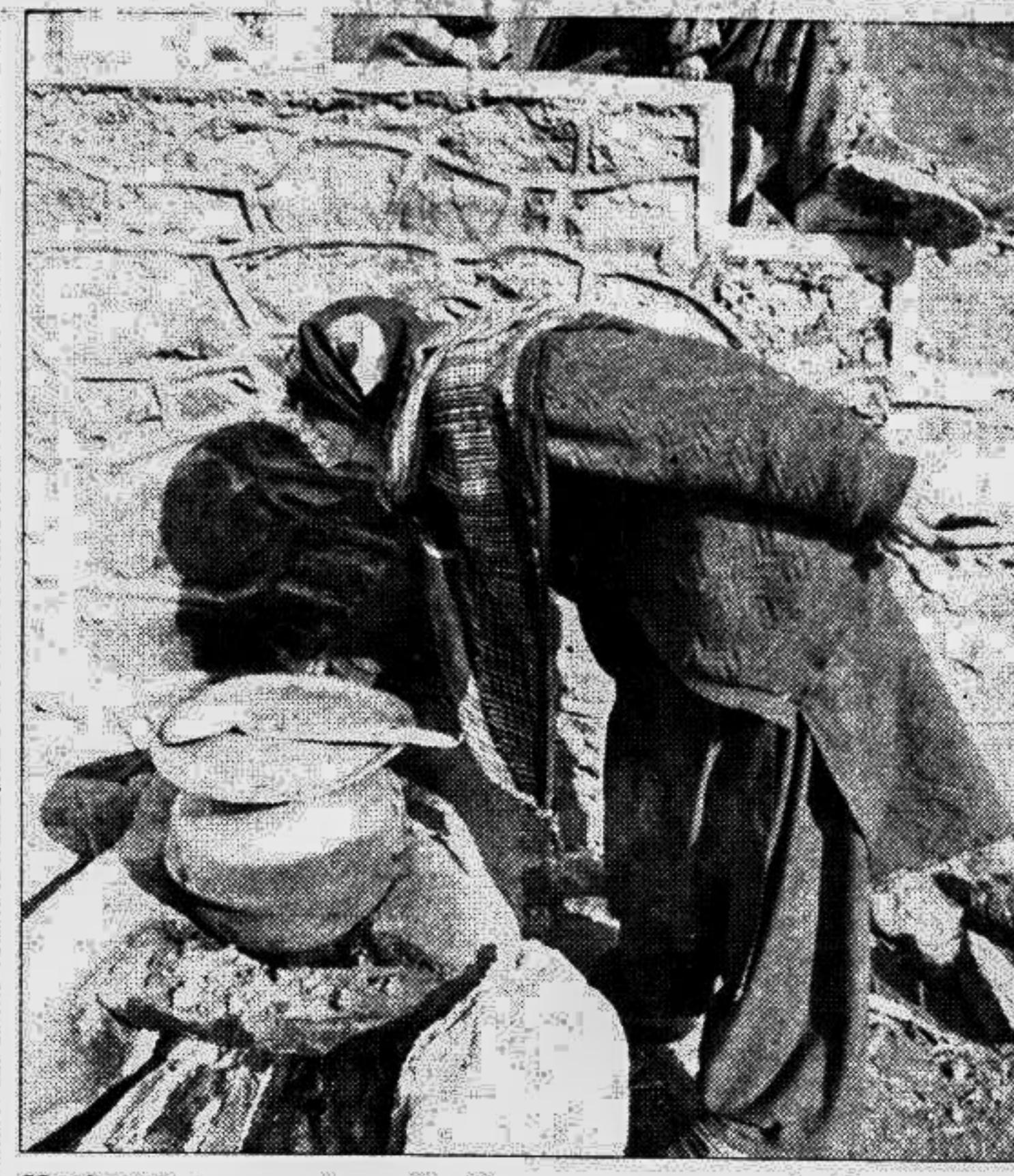
demand for their pullout from the Indian side of northern Kashmir.

"We will not budget an inch from the territory we have captured in Kargil [area] under any external pressure," Muthida Jihad Council alliance chief Syed Salauddin told Reuters.

India hopes other major world leaders will echo Clinton's calls at a meeting of Group of Eight nations in Cologne on the weekend, and expects the group could even issue a statement on Kashmir. It did not identify its sources.

Indian officials say 600 to 700 infiltrators are still holed up in high ridges on its side of the Line of Control dividing Kashmir.

India says 297 fighters have been killed on the Pakistani side since last month while India has suffered 104 dead.



Kashmiri woman from the Dras area prepare food in a camp for displaced persons in Gagangir Thursday as cross-border shelling between India and Pakistan, and the fear that the conflict may escalate, has caused many people to flee from border areas.

— AFP photo



Ethnic Albanians wave the victory sign as Serb vehicles leave Kosovo Wednesday to take refuge in Serbia fearing reprisals from returning Kosovar refugees.

**US rejects Russian demands****'Torture centre' found in Kosovo**

HELSINKI, June 17: The

United States on Thursday rejected Russian demands for a separate zone for Russian troops in Kosovo amid dimming hopes for a rapid agreement on Moscow's role in KFOR peacekeeping force, reports AFP.

"We have made it quite clear that there will not be a separate Russian sector," US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright declared as she arrived here on the second day of talks.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said agreements had been reached on two key issues: Russia's place in the peace force's unified command structure, and on usage of the Pristina airport, which is held by Russian troops.

But he said: "There is still no agreement on the deployment."

"We managed to agree on a lot of points in Helsinki. But we do not have an agreement on a

Russian troops deployment," he told a news conference here.

Taking a stroll along Helsinki's waterfront during a break in the talks, US Defense Secretary William Cohen told reporters, "There can be no agreement until all points are agreed on."

Other US officials insisted that a partial agreement was not enough.

"It is all or nothing," a senior US defense official said.

"We need full agreement on not just the airport but on a deployment plan as well as a command structure," said another US official, adding that the US side viewed these issues as inseparable.

There is not high confidence that we will finish this thing today," he said.

Cohen held nearly eight hours of talks Wednesday with Russian Defence Minister Igor Segeyev, and then resumed the

knives, a sword and a chainsaw in the dark space.

A British military spokesman said investigators from the United Nations war crimes tribunal in The Hague had twice visited the cellar since it was found and had taken away documents and instruments used in interrogations.

"We have found what we believe is strong evidence of the systematic torture of prisoners by (Yugoslav President Slobodan) Milosevic's police in this cellar," British military spokesman Colonel Nick Clift said told reporters.

Meanwhile, British forces

have cordonned off this latest site, where the spokesman quoted ex-prisoners as saying that up to 500 inmates were held at a time in a room

with a frayed bed attached to it in a separate small room.

**US sends warships, planes to Yellow Sea**

SEOUL, June 17: North Korean ships steered clear of a disputed area in the Yellow Sea

on Thursday as US warships and aircraft headed to the region in a show of force following a fire fight with South Korean gunboats, reports AFP.

South Korea boosted its patrols of the tense buffer zone where the two sides fought a naval battle Tuesday, as the military in the area remained on a heightened state of alert to thwart any North Korean reprisals.

"Around 10 North Korean patrol and six fishing boats have been spotted between three and five kilometers inside their own waters but have not approached the buffer zone," the joint chief of staff said.

He indicated he would consider handing over power only after the polls.

The government's term ends in April and elections can be held up to two months after that, but Mahathir is widely expected to call for an early poll, fueling interest in his speech at the general assembly on Friday.

"In view of the recent incident between North and South Korean naval vessels in the Yellow Sea, ships from the US 7th fleet will deploy near (South Korea) to monitor the situation and contribute to peace in the west Pacific region," a spokesman for the 36-strong US Forces in Korea said.

The Pentagon said two naval vessels, including the cruiser Vincennes, would head to the area. Four EA-6B electronic surveillance planes would also be deployed.

The Vincennes, normally stationed in Japan, carries guided missiles. No decision has been taken yet on what other Navy vessel would be sent to the region.

In addition, the aircraft carrier Constellation will leave its base in San Diego Friday for Korea.

News reports said two US nuclear-powered submarines had

arrived in the South Korean port of Chinhae to join in patrols of the Yellow Sea, but US military officials here declined to confirm the report.

Meanwhile, Pyongyang, warning the peninsula stood on the brink of war, banned South Koreans from visiting its capital and cancelled the planned handover of remains of US war dead.

Pyongyang vehemently denounces the South Korean authorities for bringing the country to the brink of war and worsening inter-Korean relations, its official media said late Wednesday.

DPRK conducting missile test

TOKYO, June 17: North Korea has been conducting propulsion tests on a long-range missile that could reach the western United States, Japanese media reported today, reports Reuter.

Quoting unnamed US military sources, NHK public television said reclusive North Korea in April started experimental propulsion tests of a Taepodong-2 missile with a range of up to 6,000 km (3,750 miles), which could put Alaska within its reach.

The US military sources did not rule out the possibility of Pyongyang testing-firing the newly developed Taepodong-2 missile by the end of this year, NHK said.

Kyodo news agency quoted Japanese government sources as saying North Korea has been preparing to test-fir a Taepodong-2 missile in July or August.

Citing information obtained through US intelligence satellites, the sources said the launch pad for the Taepodong-2 missile has been enlarged and fuel has been transported to storehouses, Kyodo said.



Outgoing South African President Nelson Mandela (R) waves as he arrives for the inauguration of Thabo Mbeki (R) as second democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa at the Union Buildings in Pretoria Wednesday.

— AFP photo

**Megawati faces attacks from Islamic groups**

JAKARTA, June 17: Megawati Sukarnoputri, whose party is leading the seemingly never-ending vote count of Indonesia's election, is the target of intense attacks from Islamic groups aiming at barring her path to the presidency, reports AFP.

Whether direct or veiled, the attacks focus on the religious make-up of Sukarnoputri's Indonesia Democracy Party-Struggle (PDIP), accused of containing too many non-Muslims, especially Christians.

Her political and intellectual competence, and even gender have also been called into question.

Whether she is presidential timber or not, we don't know. Although she is stupid, she loves people," the leading moderate Muslim leader Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid has said of his ally in the June 7 elections.

The attacks and the smears do not stop there.

"She was not interested in politics until later. Cooking is her main passion," said a member of a renowned study centre, who asked not to be named.

Indonesia's tabloids have also dissected the private life of Megawati and her immediate family, including the activities of her husband -- her third.

**Rescue operation on in Mexico**

PUEBLA, Mexico, June 17: Rebuilding efforts got under way Wednesday following a violent quake that shook central Mexico, leaving at least 25 people dead, hundreds injured and historic buildings damaged, reports AFP.

More than 500 Mexican soldiers were busy removing tonnes of rubble in the state of Puebla, the worst affected by Tuesday's quake that measured 6.7 on the open-ended Richter scale.

Workers used heavy machinery to clear roads blocked by mudslides triggered by the quake, while affected residents started repairing their damaged homes.

In the state of Puebla alone, 20 people were killed, including two children crushed by a collapsing wall. Another two were killed in Mexico City and three died in other areas, the Interior Ministry said.

In addition, between 200 and 300 people were injured in Puebla and dozens more in other states, officials said.



Tamil refugee children cling on to a barbed wire fence as a soldier keeps guard Wednesday at the village of Anandakulam in north-western Sri Lanka after security forces wrested control over the region from Tamil Tiger guerrillas. Troops took the area as forensic experts began excavations of a mass grave where some 400 people allegedly killed by government troops are buried.

**US, Russia at odds over lifting oil embargo against Iraq**

UNITED NATIONS, June 17: The United States gave qualified support Wednesday to a British-Dutch proposal that could lead to suspension of the oil embargo against Iraq -- but Russia said it was unrealistic and would lead to a deterioration of relations with Baghdad, reports AP.

The divide between Washington and Moscow shows that the Security Council still has a lot of work to do before its 15 members agree on a new policy towards Iraq.

But the new proposal, circulated Tuesday, did represent a significant breakthrough because Britain and the United States have never before agreed to even consider suspending the oil embargo.

The British-Dutch draft sets tough conditions before the embargo, imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, can be lifted.

Russia's UN Ambassador