

Edward, Sophie on honeymoon

LONDON, June 21: Britain's Prince Edward and his bride Sophie began their honeymoon today at a secluded Royal estate in Scotland...

But before flying to Scotland late on Sunday, the couple threw a post-wedding party at their Bagsho Manor home...

Edward and Sophie, who stayed out of camera shot all day, organised the party to celebrate the birthdays of her father Christopher Rhys-Jones and Prince William...

Yeltsin gives files of assassination of Kennedy to Clinton

WASHINGTON, June 21: US President Bill Clinton's hour-long summit with Boris Yeltsin yielded an unexpected bonanza Sunday when the Russian president handed over a thick stack of KGB files on the assassination of John F. Kennedy...

White House officials were quoted as saying the declassified reports, in Russian, would be translated, analysed, and eventually released to the public.

BRIEFLY

Russia begins war games: Russia began military exercises Monday to practice repelling a theoretical attack from the West...

The West '99 manoeuvres involve army formations in Russia's western regions and ships from its Baltic Fleet. All troops will be on high alert during the six-day exercises...

Russian theatre director killed: A prominent Russian theater director was beaten to death in his apartment in an apparent contract killing...

Israeli man arrested in Thailand: Thai police have arrested an Israeli man on suspicion of murdering a countryman in Thailand after a drug deal went sour...

Quake shakes Siberian regions: A moderate earthquake measuring 4.9 on the Richter scale occurred in the central Siberian region of Buryatia Monday morning...

KLA emerges as political force

135,000 ethnic Albanian refugees back in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, June 21: The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which signed an agreement early Monday on its own demilitarisation...

The United Nations' June 10 resolution ending the conflict between NATO and Yugoslavia demanded that the KLA disband as a military force to guarantee the safety of Serbs remaining in the province...

Hashim Thaci, the KLA's political leader, who signed the demilitarisation agreements and was one of the Kosovo signatories to the Rambouillet peace accord in France...

Created in 1992 with financial and logistical help from radicals in the Albanian diaspora, particularly in Germany and Switzerland, the KLA first resorted to violence at the end of 1995...

The KLA emerged from the shadows in November 1997 during the funeral of an Albanian killed by Serb police.

Announcing that they were KLA members, a group of armed men appeared for the first time in public, promising to continue "the struggle for the liberation of Kosovo."

Dismissed as "terrorists" by Belgrade, the KLA suffered heavy losses during attacks by Serb forces between February and October 1998...

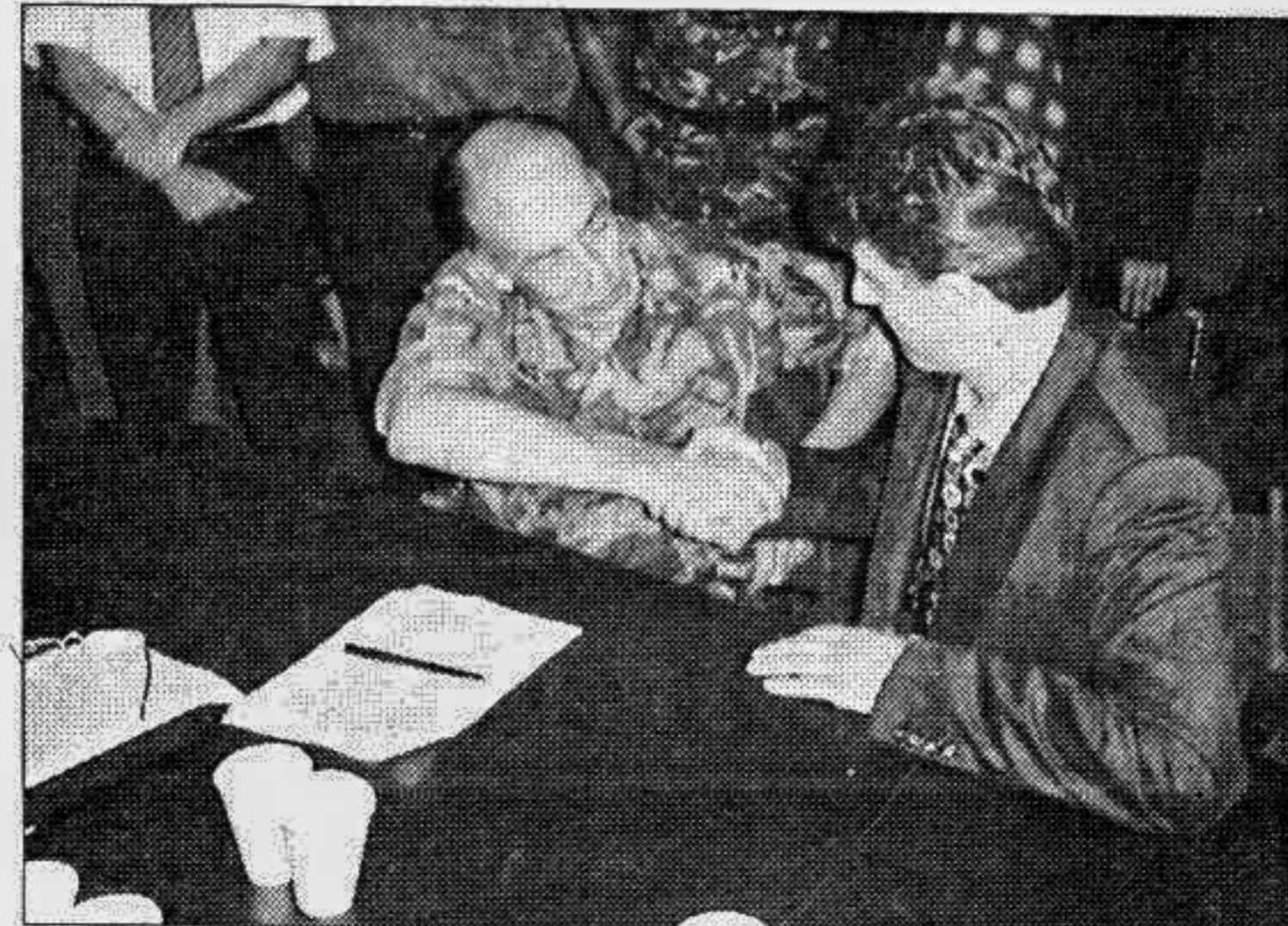
The withdrawal of government troops this month allowed the KLA to regroup and to retake positions it had previously lost.

Meanwhile, around 135,000 ethnic Albanians have returned to Kosovo since the end of NATO's bombing campaign 11 days ago, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Monday.

On Sunday alone, more than 20,000 refugees left northern Albania while over 14,000 departed from Macedonia, UNHCR spokeswoman Judith Kumin said in Geneva.

Most of them returned home in their own vehicles. However, a growing number of refugees are hiring taxis or minivans to take them back, or are being picked up by relatives, she said.

The UNHCR has estimated that around half of the ethnic Albanian Kosovo refugees in neighbouring countries will re-



KFOR Commander British General Sir Mike Jackson (L) and UNHCR (Kosovo Liberation Army -KLA) Commander in Chief Hashim Thaci shake hands after signing an accord on the demilitarisation of the Kosovar guerilla movement...

turn in their own cars or tractors and these are proving to be the people in the first wave of returns, she said.

There are still more than 600,000 refugees in Albania and Macedonia.

With the withdrawal of Yugoslav security forces from Kosovo completed over the weekend, the UNHCR hopes to be able to begin organized returns to cities in southwestern Kosovo "very soon."

Worries that large, spontaneous returns could overwhelm the aid agencies appear not to have been borne out so far.

The UNHCR had earlier forecast that between 400,000 and 500,000 Kosovars would trek back home by September.

Kumin said most of the returnees had gone back to areas where the level of destruction was not that great and where the "absorption capacity" was "relatively better."

Some of those returning from banishment across the border were staying with friends and relatives in towns

Kashmir conflict may escalate, warns Delhi

SRINAGAR, India, June 21: The Indian army, flush with the success of capturing a strategic ridge in Kashmir, launched fresh offensives Monday to evict cross-border Islamic raiders from the disputed Himalayan territory, reports AFP.

The renewed combat came amid a warning that the six-week-old conflict could escalate if the raiders and what New Delhi describes as Pakistani army regulars did not withdraw from the Indian zone of Kashmir.

The army also for the first time since launching the attacks on May 9 took 100 Indian and Western journalists to northern Kashmir's Drass sector where the key ridge fell to a fierce air-ground attacks Sunday.

"New offensives have begun," a military spokesman told AFP in Srinagar without elaborating.

The Indian air force, however, said fighter pilots were on the standby as air strikes were put on hold because of persisting bad weather over the battle

zones of Drass, Batalik and Kargil.

"There have been no air strikes so far because the weather has still not improved," an air force spokesman said.

India launched unprecedented air strikes on occupied positions on May 26 and has so far lost two MiG jets and a helicopter gunship in combat.

Other sources said combat troops were advancing on the 15,140-foot (4,590-metre) high Tiger Hills for a greater foothold in Drass located on the Line of Control (LoC) that divides the two zones of Kashmir.

The fresh advance came a day after Indian troops, following a 21-day bloody battle, wrested the strategic peak of Point 5140 from more than 100 raiders who had been occupying the heights for more than two months.

The raiders atop the 16,962-foot (5,140-metre) Point 5140, the highest peak on the Toloing ridge, had fractured Indian communications by directing deadly fire on a key highway below them.

The battle zone was shut to domestic and international journalists on June 5 for "security reasons" and was reopened Monday only after the fall of the Toloing ridge.

Thousands of Indian troops backed by artillery and air power have been battling the guerrillas and alleged Pakistani soldiers. Hundreds have died or been wounded on both sides.

Indian police, meanwhile, broke up a Moslem protest rally in the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar on Monday, where nearly 40 activists from a separatist forum took to the streets to express solidarity with the guerrilla intruders.

Witnesses said the anti-Indian marchers shouted slogans such as "We will die for Kashmir's freedom," before being arrested in Srinagar's downtown Lal Chowk area.

Brájes'h Mishra, National Security Advisor to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, said the current hostilities with Pakistan could escalate if the raiders refused to pull out of Kashmir.



Indian women carrying an effigy of Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif shout anti-Pakistan slogans at a protest march near the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi Monday to protest Islamabad's alleged support of Islamic raiders in India-held Kashmir.

Pakistan dismisses India's claim on G8 backing

ISLAMABAD, June 21: Pakistan Monday denied that a communique issued by the G8 nations supported India in the neighbours' dispute over Kashmir and said the call for an end to the conflict was good advice, reports AFP.

"The communique does not reflect a negation of the Pakistani stand or support for the Indian position," said Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, quoted by the daily Jang.

The G8 call for respecting the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Indian and Pakistani parts of the disputed Kashmir applies to both countries, he added.

The communique issued in Cologne, Germany on Sunday by the Group of Seven industrialised nations plus Russia was not a diplomatic coup for India which had tried to influence the major powers against Pakistan, he added.

"It's a good advice that the conflict should be defused by the two countries and dialogue resumed" to find a peaceful solution to issues plaguing bilateral relations, Aziz said.

He said the G-8 communique on the Kashmir crisis was a

balanced document urging both India and Pakistan to respect the borders in the disputed region.

Pakistani and Indian armies have been fighting artillery duels since last month along the 720-kilometre (446-mile) LoC in Kashmir after India launched military operations to flush out guerrillas in the Himalayan peaks.

New Delhi has accused Islamabad of allowing the Islamic militants to cross into Indian-controlled Kashmir to occupy strategic heights in Kargil and Drass.

Pakistan denies the charges and says the guerrillas are "freedom fighters" in the "indigenous struggle for right of self-determination."

In the communique, the G8 leaders expressed deep concern at the military confrontation in Kashmir "following the infiltration of armed intruders which violated the line of control."

An Indian foreign ministry statement Sunday welcomed the G8 communique, interpreting it as condemnation of Pakistan's role in the six-week-old conflict.



Mick Jagger performs in the pouring rain as the Rolling Stones end their "Bridges to Babylon" European tour in Cologne Sunday, attended by some 50,000 fans.

First contingent of UN police in E Timor

DILI, East Timor, June 21: The first 41 members of an unarmed UN police force for East Timor's vote on its future arrived here Monday from Australia, reports AFP.

The contingent, some of them women and all wearing sky-blue UN berets, were greeted as they disembarked from a C-130 military transport plane at Dili's Comoro airport by police commissioner Alan Mills and Leo Pardede of the Indonesian police.

Mills said the 15 Australians, 10 New Zealanders, seven Britons, six Spaniards and three Irish would be deployed Tuesday.

Lie-detector tests for US N-scientists

WASHINGTON, June 21: The US government has begun lie-detector tests on some 5,000 federal employees, in an effort to shore up security at nuclear weapons laboratories around the country, the Washington Post reported Monday, reports AFP.

The employees taking the lie-detector tests are nuclear scientists and other workers in sensitive positions within the Department of Energy, the newspaper reported.

Energy Secretary Bill Richardson reportedly ordered the testing in response to allegations that Chinese spies stole nuclear secrets from national laboratories run by the department.

North Korea warns US, ROK will be 'doomed to death' if provoke clashes

SEOUL, June 21: North Korea has warned South Korea and the United States will be "doomed to death" if they provoke further military clashes following a naval battle between Seoul and Pyongyang last week, reports AFP.

The caution, transmitted late Sunday by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), came before Pyongyang delayed the start of planned inter-governmental talks between North and South Korea in Beijing.

"If the US imperialists and the South Korean rulers persist in military provocations despite our warnings, all the US forces present in South Korea and the South Korean puppet army, not several battalions or scores of provokers, will be completely annihilated," it warned.

The agency, quoting an authoritative signed commentary in the Rodong Sinmun newspaper, accused South Korean gunboats of firing the first shots in a battle between rival Korean naval vessels in the Yellow Sea. South Korea was lying about the high-seas freight to disguise its humiliating defeat, it added.

Their sophism is nothing

but a desperate outcry of those who lost their spirit from an annihilating blow after provoking the North like a puppy knowing no fear of the tiger."

"The South Korean authorities had better bear in mind that if they twist the sleeping tiger, they will not go scot-free," the commentary said.

The angry rhetoric came ahead of today's scheduled talks between the vice foreign ministers of North and South Korea in Beijing at which the two sides were due to discuss the reunions of families separated in the Korean War.

But North Korea asked for a five-hour delay in the start of that talks, prompting worries the gunbattle may deal a blow to the talks, the first such round to be held in 14 months.

Reuters adds: North Korea hit out at the United States and Japan today for organising a "policy of hostility" against it after the Group of Eight (G8) major nations voiced deep concern over Pyongyang's missile programme.

"This is reckless interference in the matter of North Korean sovereignty," Pyongyang Central Radio was quoted on Tuesday by Radiopress, a Tokyo monitoring agency, as saying.

'UN must find creative way for Iraq's cooperation'

DUBAI, June 21: UN chief Kofi Annan said the Security Council must find a way to encourage Iraq to renew its cooperation with the United Nations with a view to lifting sanctions, in an interview published Monday, reports AFP.

"I am of the opinion that the needs of the Iraqi people and its humanitarian situation be taken into consideration," he told the London-based Arab newspaper Al-Hayat.

Annan said a US-backed British draft resolution at the Security Council calling for a conditional suspension of the embargo was "a new attitude because it's the first time they talk of a suspension of sanctions."

"I don't know what response Iraq will give after it has examined the details," the secretary general said.

"The current situation is difficult for the Iraqis and for the entire region," said Annan. "We should think of the future of the younger generation which is growing up in an atmosphere of frustration and sanctions."

He said the UN oil-for-food accord which allows Baghdad to export crude in return for humanitarian imports was not the answer to all the problems caused by the sanctions, in force since Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"One cannot live by bread alone. The Iraqi economy must be supported, otherwise it will collapse," he warned.

"I hope the Iraqi authorities will cooperate when the Security Council members have adopted a new formula, so that we can go forward and the sanctions be lifted as soon as possible," Annan said.

The UN chief appeared to put the onus on the Security Council "to find a way out of the current impasse," since UN arms inspectors evacuated Iraq,

Mahathir moves into new millennium capital

PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia, June 21: After exhorting his party to prepare for battle to ensure its dominance, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad on Monday moved into a grand new administrative capital which he called a showpiece of Malaysia's development, reports AP.

Bounding up a steep flight of stairs to the six-story granite building that loomed over manicured hills, Mahathir shook hands with his waiting staff. He then performed a small Muslim prayer before entering.

"We don't just build houses or shop lots. We build whole townships," Mahathir proudly told the first group of reporters allowed to see the wood-paneled interiors with its marble-walled foyers and hi-tech conference rooms.

"It is a showpiece of Malaysia's ability to do things in the construction industry," said the 73-year-old leader who has ruled the Southeast Asian nation for 18 years.

But in his office, Mahathir said he has not built this for himself.

"I hope my successors and the successors of my successors will enjoy this building," he said.

Government departments are expected to shift into Putrajaya, about 40 km south of Kuala Lumpur, in coming months. In the next three years, all government employees will be working from and perhaps living in the new township.

On Sunday, Mahathir tried to rouse his United Malays National Organisation to an electoral battle that many predict could be soon. The party has ruled since Malaysia became independent in 1957.

"The party is not going to talk about stupid things like reforms and civil society," Mahathir said Monday, when asked about what the message to the electorate was. "We are already very civil and we are reformed."

Political reform and greater individual rights in civil society are the main planks of opposition, which is planning to jointly challenge Mahathir in the next general election.

Anwar Ibrahim, Mahathir's former deputy who was sacked and arrested last September, is seen by many Malaysians as an icon of political freedom. He is serving a six-year sentence for abuse of office and is currently standing trial for sodomy.

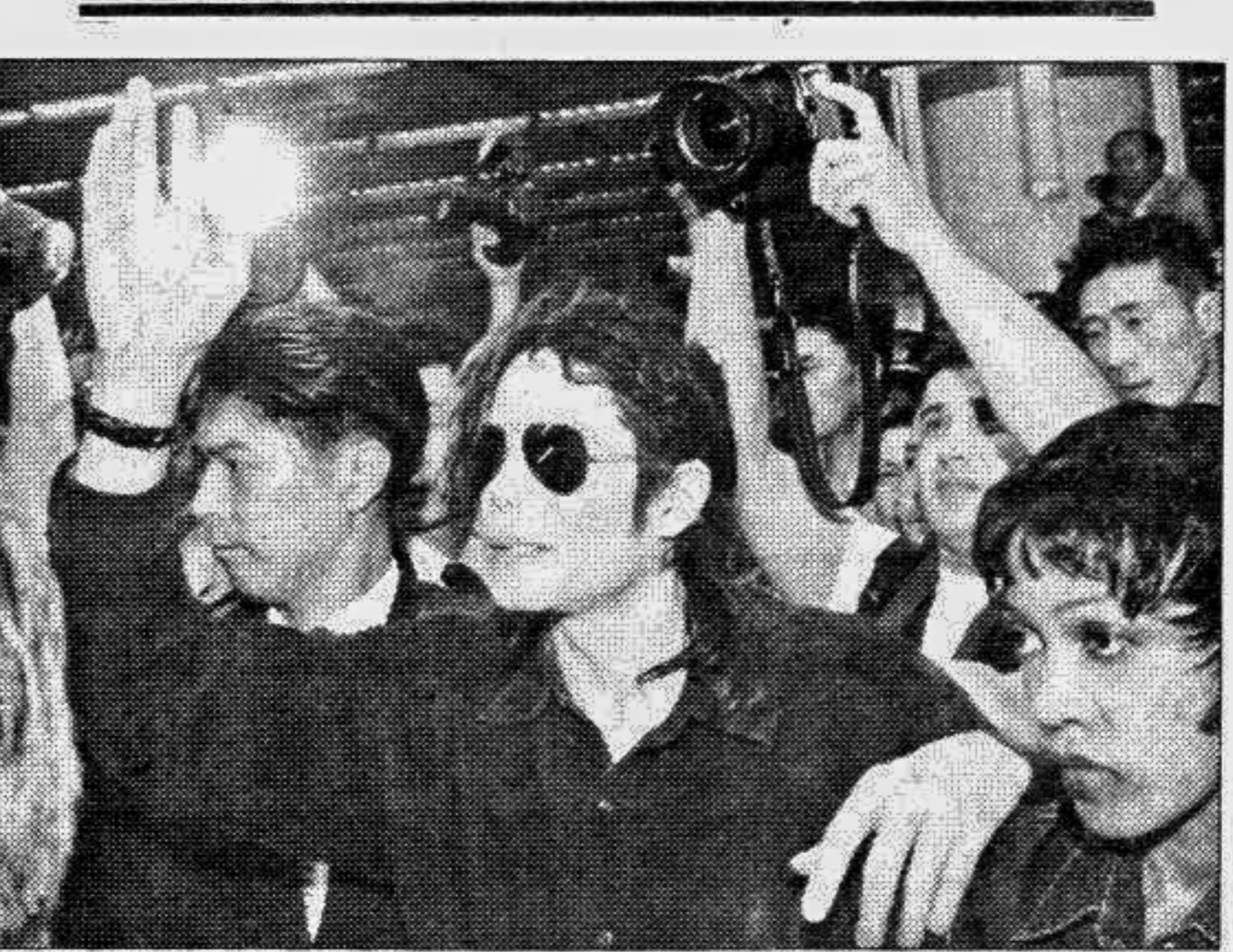
Putrajaya, as the 4,580-hectare (11,300-acre) metropolis is named, has been criticised by Anwar and others as an example of Mahathir's extravagant ways and his obsession with grandeur.

On the first working day in putrajaya, Mahathir dismissed such criticism.

It has been built for the next hundred; two hundred; three hundred years," he said. "I will be watching from up there," he said, looking toward the sky.

Mahathir was clearly proud of the new creation, explaining to reporters how only 10 per cent of the building material was imported and the entire project had been designed and constructed by Malaysian companies.

Off the Record



US pop singer Michael Jackson waves at his South Korean fans after he arrived in Seoul's Kimpo Airport Monday. Jackson arrived here for a concert, which will be held on June 25 in Seoul.

Barber's roaring trade on back of rumour

PHNOM PENH: Thousands of Cambodian girls have been getting their hair cut amid rumours King Norodom Sihanouk dreamed the devil was on the hunt for long-haired virgins, residents and reports said today, reports AFP.

"My life is more important than my hair," one short-haired female resident was quoted as saying in the Khmer-language Koh Santeheap, which said barber shops have been doing a roaring trade on the back of the bizarre rumour.

Several residents in Phnom Penh told AFP they feared ghosts from hell were on the hunt for the souls of up to 20,000 virgins under the age of 20, attributing the prophecy to the King. "I am afraid of dying that is why I am having my haircut," said Yung, 19, who despite working as a prostitute was not taking any chances with demons she thought were lurking in the capital.

However palace officials have vigorously denied the 76-year-old King Sihanouk has had such a dream, and sought to allay fears of women flocking to lose their locks in the deeply-superstitious country.

"I contacted the Royal Palace this morning and they said there is nothing of the sort coming out of the palace," said Secretary of State for Information Khieu Kanharith.

"His Majesty the King has dreamed nothing of this kind." Police have also come up with a down-to-earth explanation. "It is the barber shops. They have been doing bad business so they started it," argued senior police official Lok Lorn.

Volkswagen as birthday gift

LONDON: Prince William, second in line to the British throne, received a German Volkswagen car as a gift for his 17th birthday today, the British press reported, says AFP.

In line with British royalty's new credo of sober non-extravagance, the 1.4 litre Volkswagen Golf is one of the most popular, and common cars on the roads here.

The eldest son of Prince Charles and Diana, Princess of Wales, is old enough at 17 to drive but must pass a test which was recently made tougher in order to hold a driving licence. The prince already owns a small-engined motorbike.



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad steps out of his car as he arrives at his new office in Putrajaya Monday. Mahathir started his first day of work at the new administrative capital yesterday.