

Pakistan rules out 'limited war' with India

ISLAMABAD, Mar 4: Pakistan yesterday ruled out the possibility of a limited war with India, claiming New Delhi could not afford one, reports PFI.

There will be no limited war with India as it (New Delhi) is aware that it cannot afford such a confrontation and knows its vulnerability, Javed Jabbar, Media Adviser to Pakistan's military ruler Gen Pervez Musharraf, said at a news conference here.

He said Pakistan's armed forces had adequate conventional capability to counter any threat from across the border.

Claiming that the present military regime was committed to peace, and peace alone, Jabbar alleged India had been greatly pained at the coming to power of the present government and we had to face unprecedented hostility.

India has hiked its defence budget by 28 per cent and made futile efforts to get Pakistan declared a terrorist state, he said, adding that the government has countered these odds effectively and foiled India's bid to malign Pakistan.

Pakistan has also drawn the international community's attention to the reign of extremists in India, he added.

Benazir terms US policy toward Pakistan 'confused'

PARIS, Mar 4: Former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto on Friday described as "confused" US policy toward her country, reports AFP.

"They (the Americans) are not able to make up their mind as to what they want," Bhutto told reporters at a luncheon during a private visit to Paris. She said the conflict between Pakistan and India had turned Southeast Asia into the most dangerous place in the world and quick action had to be taken to avoid any escalation.

Bhutto said India's decision to increase by 28 per cent its military budget this year was a "very bad sign" that was likely to be followed by Pakistan.

It is time for both governments to confront this matter," she said. "War talk and war hysteria can get out of hand."

The former premier, who has been living in exile in London, said she wanted to return to Pakistan but would not be welcomed back at this time.

"I want to go back, I miss my home, my family," she said. "I don't like living like a nomad."

CPI leader Geeta Mukherjee dead

NEW DELHI, Mar 4: Geeta Mukherjee, veteran leader of the Communist Party of India, died early Saturday of a massive heart attack, her party said. She was 76, reports AP.

Her death came suddenly as she was preparing to leave for a party programme in the northern town of Aligarh, 125 kilometers (75 miles) southeast of the national capital, New Delhi, the Press Trust of India news agency said.

Her sudden death shocked party colleagues and lawmakers who had backed her in parliament Friday as she vociferously protested a government decision to allow civil servants to join a Hindu organization linked with the assassination of Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi.

The issue has rocked parliament since the budget session began earlier this month. Mukherjee joined the communist party in 1924 as a "student" and was one of the founding members of the communist movement in the state of West Bengal. She was the widow of prominent communist party leader Bishwanath Mukherjee.

She was the secretary of the CPI national council and the deputy leader of the party in the Lok Sabha or the lower house of parliament.

Protesters demand trial of Pinochet

SANTIAGO, Mar 4: Some 1,000 people staged a noisy protest here Friday night, demanding that ex-dictator Augusto Pinochet be prosecuted, and saying his apparent robust health upon return to Chile made a mockery of claims he was unfit to stand trial, reports AFP.

Today all of Chile saw the return of the dictator, getting off the plane, walking, smiling and leaving no doubt he enjoys good health, groups representing victims of the 1973-1990 said in a statement read at the gathering.

The march through central Santiago culminated at La Moneda, the presidential palace that was the target of air and ground attack in the 1973 military coup.

Protesters chanting "assassin, assassin" held up photographs of friends or relatives who were among the thousands killed during the dictatorship.

The demonstrators lowered to half-mast the dozen flags that front La Moneda.

Pinochet arrived in Chile Friday morning one day after British Home Secretary Jack Straw freed him after 16 months of house arrest. Straw ruled on medical advice that Pinochet was unfit to stand trial in Spain, where he is wanted on charges of torture.

Upon arrival, Pinochet was taken to Santiago's Military

Hospital, but checked out nine hours later.

"It was all a farce, a make-believe," said Patricia Silva, whose brother was killed under the dictatorship and who heads a group representing victims of military rule.

A total of 60 lawsuits have been filed in Chile against Pinochet, but, as a senator for life, the former dictator enjoys immunity from prosecution.

AP adds: In Chile, where the population is sharply divided over his 17-year-rule, his supporters threw him a welcome that clearly demonstrated the backing he enjoys from the armed forces, right-wing politicians and prominent businessmen.

"Augusto Pinochet rescued our country!" exclaimed Ana Maria Aguirre, 51, waving a large poster of Pinochet as he left the military hospital.

She charged that Chile had been slipping into socialist chaos under Allende in the 1970s before Pinochet and his fellow officers stepped in with their bloody coup.

"Pinochet! Pinochet! Gracias!" many in the crowd shouted, as they were held back by police around the gates of the hospital. Many wore headbands inscribed with Pinochet's name, or waved red, white and blue Chilean flags.

Marco Figueroa, a 22-year-old student, said he was over-

joyed. "I am just so happy. I can't believe we have him back."

He added that Pinochet appeared more robust than expected because he was back at last on Chilean soil. "He is hardy, he is a soldier and he found strength upon returning home," said Figueroa.

Pinochet left about nine hours later amid extremely tight security. Troops swiftly shut the doors of his white-walled compound behind his Mercedes Benz when he reached home.

Across the city, dozens of human rights activists and relatives of dissidents, who disappeared during Pinochet's regime, held a vigil in front of the presidential palace.

Pinochet was arrested in London on Oct. 16, 1998, on a warrant issued by a Spanish judge.

The human rights groups maintained he looks healthy and that his illness was a ruse to avoid extradition to Spain.

"Pinochet is not as sick as they say. And it has been proved today with the kind of reception they organised for him," said Viviana Diaz, head of an organisation of relatives of the disappeared.

Straw's final report on Pinochet said doctors found it unlikely the general could fake mental incapacitation, and Chile's interior minister dismissed claims of fakery.



Chilean ex-dictator Augusto Pinochet waves to supporters and the press upon arrival in Santiago, Chile, on Friday. Pinochet left Britain on Thursday after British Home Secretary Jack Straw announced his decision to free him on health grounds. — AFP photo

Chinese Communist Party leader sacked for corruption

BEIJING, Mar 4: A senior Communist Party official close to China's number two Li Peng has been sacked for corruption, the official Xinhua news agency reported today, says AFP.

Cheng Kejie, a vice chairman of the China's parliament the National People's Congress (NPC), was removed from his post just a day before the opening of the NPC's annual session.

Cheng is suspected of being involved in activities violating the law and discipline, is now reflecting on his own problems, and has applied for leave to the session and the NPC standing committee," Xinhua quoted an NPC statement as saying.

Xinhua said Cheng will not be admitted into the parliament meeting.

He is the latest victim of a wide-reaching anti-corruption campaign being headed by Premier Zhu Rongji, which has unearthed a series of huge scandals in recent months reaching into the heart of government.

Cheng was summoned to Beijing in 1997 by NPC chairman Li Peng to become one of the 18 parliamentary vice chairmen. Before that he governed the southwest autonomous region of Guangxi.

Hong Kong press reports have implicated Cheng in a corruption scandal involving 66,000 US dollars, a relatively paltry sum compared to the multi-billion dollar scandals discovered in recent years.

Cheng's former number two in Guangxi, Xu Bingsong, was arrested in June 1998 and sentenced a year later to life in

prison for his role in the scam.

The Hong Kong press has said Cheng has been under house arrest since last summer.

The timing of Cheng's sacking is significant as Premier Zhu is expected to give considerable weight to the fight against corruption in his work report speech to the opening session of the parliament on Sunday.

Voting begins in Thailand

BANGKOK, Mar 4: The people of Thailand were voting in Senate elections today in a crucial first test of a new constitution framed in a bid to purge the rampant corruption which has for decades tainted their democracy, reports AFP.

The Senate polls will install 200 representatives in the upper house of parliament which will have powers to examine legislation and impeach the government.

They are the first polls run under a new 'people's constitution' promulgated in 1997 and intended to make politics more democratic, transparent and less prone to corruption.

But despite thousands of election posters sprouting out of lampposts, billboards and from cars campaigning has strangely muted.

New laws make it illegal for candidates to do much more than introduce themselves to the public, and, officially at least, political parties have been barred from organising campaigns.

Israel not yet close to deal with Syria

JERUSALEM, Mar 4: Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office denied on Friday a report from Israel's Channel One Television which said Israel and Syria were weeks away from reaching a peace agreement, reports Reuters.

Israel has no information concerning the possibility of resuming the talks with the Syrians and the date when they will be renewed," said an official from Barak's office.

The television report said the deal "was in the bag". It said the accord, including an agreement on an Israeli troop pullout from south Lebanon, would be presented to the nation within five weeks.

In Washington, a US State Department official said: "There are no plans for a meeting (between Israeli and Syrian negotiators) and we are not aware of any deal that is in the works."

Israeli-Syrian peace talks resumed in December after an almost four year halt. The talks

broke down in January over Israel's refusal to agree to a withdrawal to the lines it held on the eve of the 1967 Middle East war when it captured the Golan Heights.

The television report said the border issue had been resolved and it would be drawn between the 1967 lines and the international border, slightly to the east.

"We're talking about a full peace, security arrangements that are satisfactory to the Israeli sources... sovereignty over the water," it said, adding that the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River would be under full Israeli control.

Education Minister Yossi Sarid, who heads Barak's most dovish coalition partner, said "the thought prospects the negotiations would soon resume were reasonable."

"It's not impossible that an agreement between US and Syria will be sealed within several weeks," he told the television.

Off the Record

Clinton most charismatic man: Monica

NEW YORK, Mar 4: Monica Lewinsky, whose tawdry affair with President Bill Clinton nearly cost him the White House, said in a magazine interview that "any woman" left alone with the president would have done what she did, reports AFP.

Clinton "is the most charismatic man. Any woman alone in a room with him for five minutes would have done the exact same thing," Lewinsky said in the interview with the young women's lifestyle magazine Jane, on the newsstands on March 3.

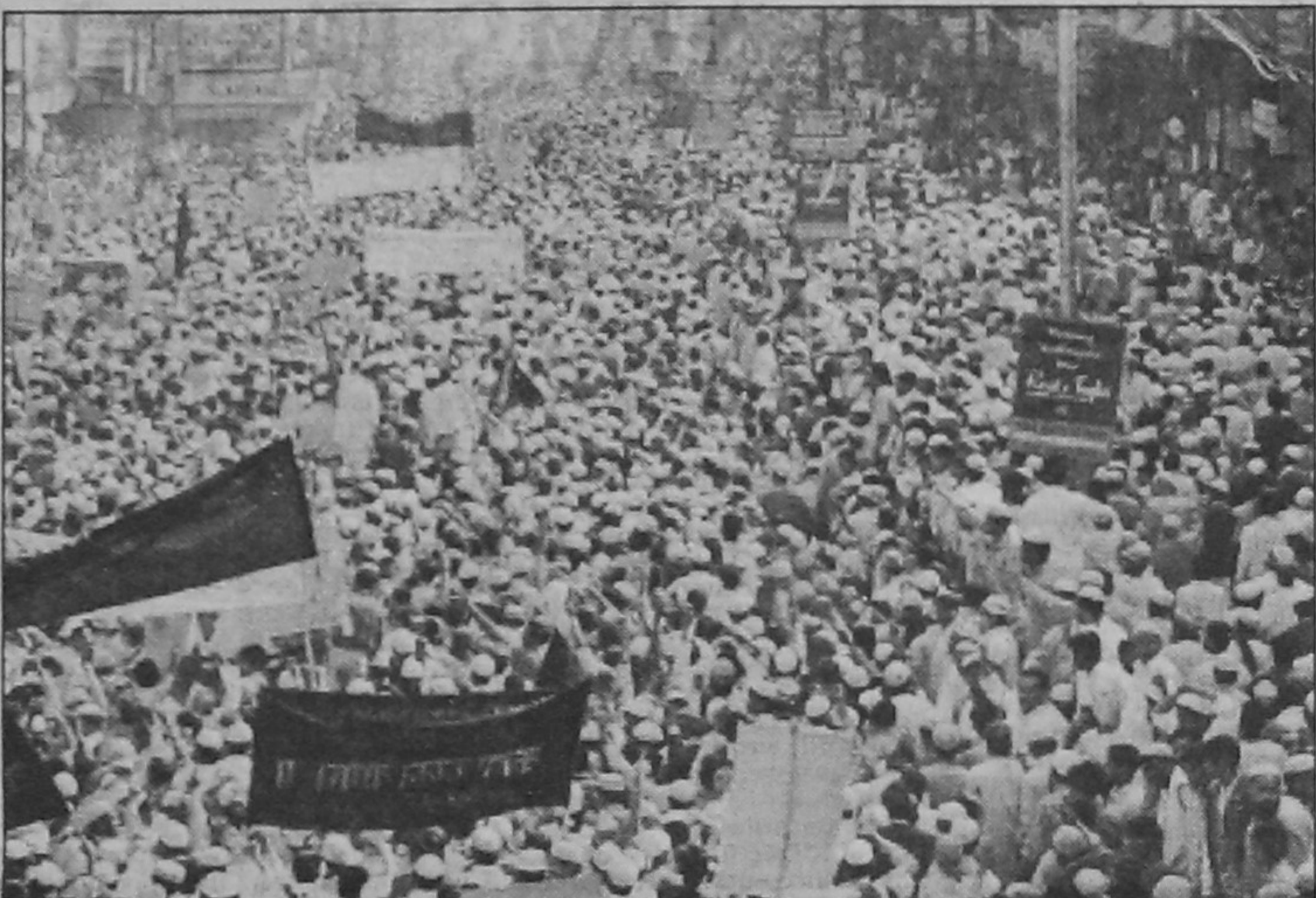
"I know women are looking at me, thinking, 'Why did (Clinton) pick her?'" said the former White House intern, whose trysts with the president were documented in the graphic investigator's report that led to his 1998 impeachment by the House of Representatives.

Photographs accompanying the interview include one showing Lewinsky in sunglasses, a hat and a trench coat posing — provocatively, if none-too-subtly — next to a fire hose.

Regarding the saturation media coverage of the affair, Lewinsky, 26, denounced "preconceived notions about me that were false," and defended her relationship with Clinton, who was eventually acquitted by the US Senate.

One of the ones that makes me angriest is that my intentions were malicious, or that this was not a mutual relationship," she said.

"That it was a wrong relationship, everybody agrees on. But people think it was just one thing, and from my point of view, as a young woman and as someone who has a brain and a heart and a soul, that was incredibly degrading and incredibly hurtful," she added.



Tens of thousands of Indian Muslims shout anti-government slogans during a protest march on their way to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's residence in New Delhi on Friday against a northern state introducing legislation requiring official permission to construct mosques. The protesters said Uttar Pradesh government controlled by Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party was restricting their religious freedom. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

US Defence chief to visit Japan: US Defence Secretary William Cohen will visit Japan from March 15 to 17 for discussions on issues relating to the US military presence in the country, a Japanese news agency reported Saturday. Reuters reports from Tokyo.

Cohen will hold talks with Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and other senior Japanese officials that are likely to touch on issues such as Japanese funding support for US troops in the country. Kyodo News reported citing Japanese Defence Agency officials.

Haiti postpones elections: Dogged by organisational problems that left more than 1 million voters unregistered, Haiti on Friday postponed March 19 elections until a date to be specified, AP reports from Port-Au-Prince. The announcement came only hours after the UN Security Council urged Haiti not to postpone the legislative and local elections, which it said were crucial to the Caribbean nation's fledgling democracy.

3 drug traffickers killed: Three Afghan drug traffickers were killed in separate incidents Friday during shoot-outs with Russian border guards, the border guard press-centre said, AFP reports from Dushanbe. The first shooting at the southeastern border happened at 1400 GMT 2000 BST when gunmen from Afghanistan, some already in Tajik territory, began shooting. Russians returned fire, killing two Afghans and confiscating a kilogram of heroin and a grenade. Five hours later, another shooting left another Afghan dead. Russian border guards seized a Kalashnikov rifle.

Russia to help China build space station

MOSCOW, Mar 4: Russia is ready to help China build a national space station, deputy prime minister Ilya Klebanov told ITAR-TASS today before returning to Moscow from Beijing, reports AFP.

"We had very serious discussions with our Chinese friends on this topic," Klebanov said. "They have their own ideas, but asked us to help them with our expertise," he added.

Klebanov, who was on a three-day visit to China which ended Saturday, held meetings with Chinese President Jiang Zemin who said he supported Russia's position and action in Chechnya, where Russian soldiers are battling a separatist movement.

In return, Klebanov said he supported China's stance on the Taiwan issue.

Their comments reflected those made by Russian officials and Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan who was in Moscow earlier this week.

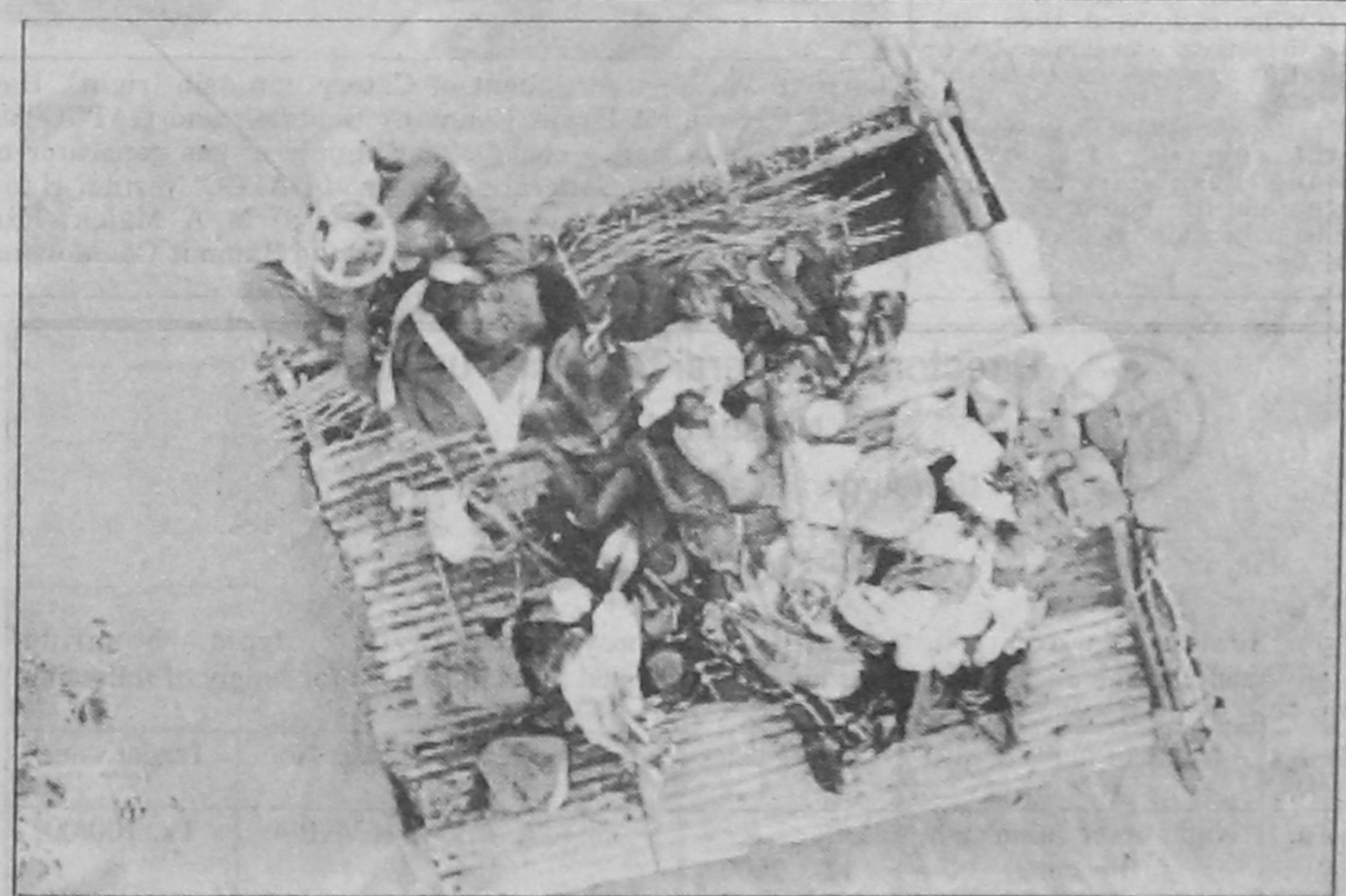
Mozambique appeals for more aid

LONDON, Mar 4: Mozambique's president Joaquim Chissano appealed Friday for more international aid for his flood-stricken country, saying the total cost of recovery would be at least 250 million dollars, reports AFP.

In an interview with the BBC, he said Mozambique needed more tents, food, blankets, clothes, medicines, water containers and water purifiers. He said a previous estimate that Mozambique needed 65 million dollars in aid was now inadequate, as it had been based on a figure of 300,000 people displaced.

"Now we are speaking about one million people affected," he added.

As well as immediate aid, Chissano said, Mozambique also needed help to repair basic infrastructure such as roads, bridges, power-lines and schools, giving a total burden of at least 250 million dollars.



A rescue team member of the South African Defence Force (SANDF) is lifted up to the helicopter on Friday as they were picking up flood victims from a rooftop of their house near the Limpopo river some 200 km north of Maputo. — AFP photo

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