

Kaifu may visit China, Mongolia

TOKYO, May 6: Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu said Sunday he hoped to visit China and Mongolia sometime after the summit of major industrialised nations in London in mid-July. Kyodo news agency reported, reports Reuter.

Speaking informally in Manila to Japanese reporters accompanying him on a five-nation southeast Asian tour, he said he would like to make the trip at an appropriate time, possibly around August.

Japan has decided to cooperate as much as possible with China in its policy of reform and door-opening. A trip to China contributes to the peace and stability of Asia. Kyodo quoted him as saying.

Landslide kills 64 in Uzbekistan

MOSCOW, May 6: Sixty four people have been killed by a landslide in the Soviet central Asian republic of Uzbekistan, the independent news agency Interfax said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The landslide, which occurred on Saturday near the mining town of Angren 100 km (60 miles) East of Tashkent after torrential rain, buried eight houses.

Sihanouk refuses to meet Hun Sen

BANGKOK, May 6: Cambodian resistance leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk has turned down Phnom Penh Premier Hun Sen's offer of a meeting, diplomats and Cambodian sources said here Saturday, reports AFP.

Hun Sen's proposal was conveyed last month to Prince Sihanouk, Cambodia's former King, by an official of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) stationed in Pyongyang, where the Prince is currently staying, the sources said.

Heart problem surfaces as Bush ends busy week

WASHINGTON, May 6: Saturday was an easy day by George Bush's standards, reports AP.

He flew to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to caution University of Michigan graduates about incursions on free speech and to declare the Great Society a failure.

Then it was back to Washington and the half-hour helicopter ride up to Camp David, Md. where he and Barbara Bush spend every free weekend.

It was to be a relaxing end to a typically long Bush work week.

The 66-year-old president's stamina, drive and athletic ability made it all the more shocking when hours later he was hospitalised with a troublesome, irregular heartbeat.

Bush demonstrated throughout the long months of the Kuwait crisis and Gulf War a capacity to conduct business at all hours of the night and

day, calling foreign leaders before dawn and meeting generals in his residence at night.

It was 4:20 pm (2020 GMT) Saturday when the president felt himself gasping for breath as he jogged along one of Camp David's wood-chip paths.

Better check it out, he told his Secret Service agents.

They walked down to the infirmary where Dr. Michael Nash, an Air Force major, checked Bush's pulse.

It was beating fast and erratically.

Nash diagnosed it as an atrial fibrillation, not a heart attack but an irregularity that clearly warranted a trip to Bethesda Naval Hospital.

There was no effort to put into play the 25th Amendment, which provides for a temporary transfer of presidential authority.

Presidential press secretary Marilyn Fitzwater was upbeat when he went before the cameras at 8:30 pm (0030 GMT Sunday) to give more details of the president's condition.

Bush was getting the drug digoxin to get his heart beating normally again. The irregularity was "relatively common."

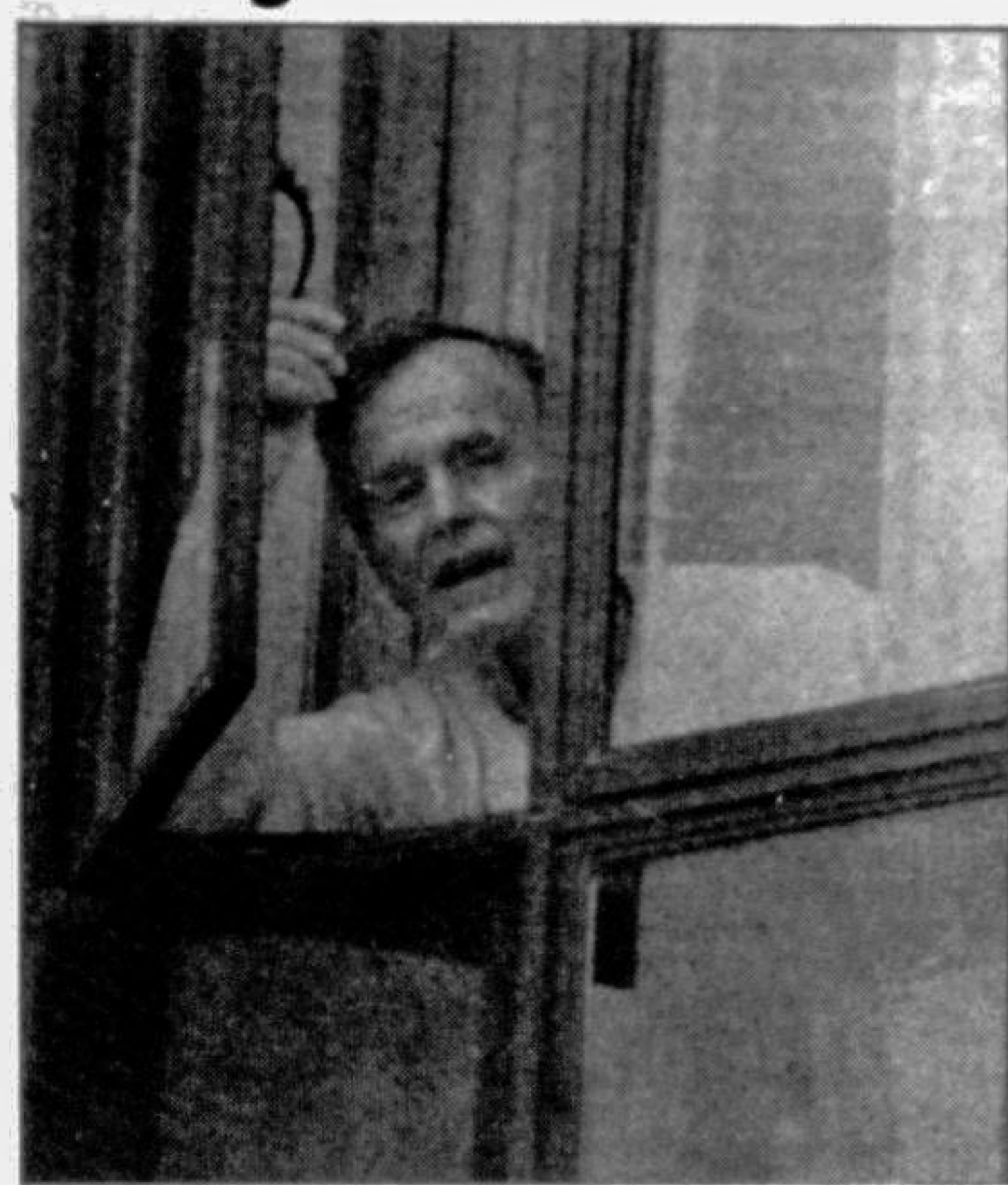
A White House official led news organizations to believe Bush would be leaving the hospital early Sunday morning, possibly heading back to Camp David.

But at the White House, a written statement from Fitzwater Sunday morning confirmed that everything was not yet back to normal.

Bush's heart was still beating too fast. He was getting an additional drug, procainamide.

Later, Mrs. Bush, heading home from the hospital, revealed her husband would be spending a second night in the White House.

Then at 9 pm (0500 GMT) Sunday, Fitzwater announced that doctors would decide before dawn Monday whether to give Bush an electrical shock treatment to restore a normal heartbeat.



BETHESDA (Maryland): US President George Bush yells at reporters from his hospital room window Sunday that he 'wants out now' as he spends the day at Bethesda Naval Hospital, where he is currently undergoing treatment for an irregular heart beat. —APP/UNB photo

Zardari acquitted of bank fraud charge

KARACHI, May 6: A special court here Sunday acquitted former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari in a bank fraud case, the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) said, reports AFP.

The court also ordered the acquittal of Ehsanul Haq Piracha, former Finance Minister during Bhutto's 20-month stint, and Saifur Abbas Rizvi, President of Habib Bank Ltd.

Zardari 37, who is in jail facing about a dozen other cases of financial scandals and extortion, was accused of using his influence as husband of the then Prime Minister to fraudulently obtain a loan of 150 million rupees (about 6.5 million

dollars for his friend Fauzi Ali Kazmi.

Kazmi was arrested on charges of defrauding the bank by manipulating an unsecured loan to set up a chain of duty-free shops.

The prosecution cited 32 witnesses but only seven could be examined, the APP said, adding that Kazmi was among those acquitted by the court headed by retired Justice Fakhruddin H. Sheikh.

Bhutto was sacked on August 6, 1990, after President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dissolved the parliament blaming her of abusing power.

She has challenged the legality of special courts and demanded trial in normal civil courts.

ROK dissidents to stage nationwide protests

SEOUL, May 6: An alliance of 40 radical and dissident groups vowed Monday to stage a fifth nationwide protests unless President Roh Tae-Wo releases political prisoners and abolishes security laws, reports AP.

Dissident leaders said demonstration will be staged Thursday in Seoul and 20 other major cities to press for the abolishment of Roh's governing Democratic Liberal Party unless their demands are met.

Also Monday, five riot policemen were formally indicted in connection with the fatal beating of a college student that triggered the nationwide protests.

The main opposition New Democratic Union Party issued a statement renewing its demand that the entire Cabinet resign and threatening to stage rallies nationwide unless political and economic reforms are made.

"We will take determined offensive actions to appeal directly to the people and to denounce and rectify the democratic nature of Roh's regime," said a resolution issued by the party's Executive Committee. Some party members are active in the alliance.

Australia to send troops to help Kurdish refugees

CANBERRA, May 6: Australia will send about 70 soldiers to the northern Iraq border area with Turkey to help Kurdish refugees, Defence Minister Robert Ray said Monday, reports AFP.

He told reporters that four medical teams and a dental team, with supporting headquarters units and a water purification team, would be sent to British-built refugee camps in the area.

Ray said the soldiers would carry rifles and other "Personal weapons", but would be authorised to shoot only in self-defence.

They will leave Australia Friday for 30 days, but their deployment might be extended by up to three months.

They will be under Australian command but might come under British "tactical control" at times, Ray said.

Off the Record

Even python loves an Admiral

BANGKOK: A four-metre-long (13-foot) python that wrapped itself around the neck of a statue of a beloved Admiral has choked off the optimism of the people of a southern Thai province still recovering from a devastating 1989 Typhoon, reports Reuter.

Hundreds of people in Chumphon rushed to see the snake on the statue of Admiral Krommahaung Chumphon Keth U-Domsak, the founder of the Royal Thai Navy, the mass-circulation Thai Rath newspaper reported on Sunday.

"Many local residents felt that the unusual phenomenon was a particularly grim omen of the province," the Thai-language paper said.

Typhoon Gay killed more than 500 people on land and many hundreds of fishermen from south Thailand were lost at sea.

A snake wrapped itself around the neck of another statue of the admiral, a sort of patron saint for local fishermen, just before Gay struck, residents said.

Police were investigating how the snake climbed on to the life-size statue. They said a preliminary check indicated it slithered there itself.

Local photographers were doing a brisk trade in pictures of the anomaly.

Dating game in China

BEIJING: In a country where the search for a spouse is a task largely left to official matchmakers or relatives, appearing on television to actively solicit a partner is nothing less than a revolution in Chinese behaviour, IPS reports.

But ever since it opened in September, Beijing Television's (BTV) dating game programme, 'let's meet tonight,' has been a runaway hit with the capital's 10 million viewers.

"It takes real guts to appear on TV," said a young Beijing girl. "But people are more open now. They are not afraid to be shown on TV looking for a spouse."

Indeed, the 15-minute programme does not appear to be in danger of running out of men and women to feature in its four times weekly show. The station is swamped with applications to appear on the programme despite the stiff 60 yuan 12 US dollars entry fee.

TV opens up a new way for people to seek to love. It is a revolution from Parent-Ar-Ranged Marriages. Matchmaking offices and marriage ads in newspapers in that people have more choice and a clearer image of the subjects," said BTV Chief Editor Yu Zhifang.

West sold \$13.2b arms to ME

WASHINGTON, May 6: The five permanent members of the UN Security Council supplied more than 163.2 billion dollars worth of military equipment to Middle East nations over a 14-year period, according to a congressional study, reports AP.

Their best customer was Iraq, importing 52.8 billion dollars in arms during the period.

"Iraq awakened the industrialized countries and its Middle East neighbours to the dangers of poorly regulated arms transfers and exports of technology," according to the study, entitled 'Middle East Arms Control and Related Issues.' It was released Sunday.

The report said Middle East nations bought almost 214 billion dollars worth of advanced weapons and medium level technology between 1974 and 1988, with more than 75 per cent coming from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Saudi Arabia, the second biggest spender, bought 34.6 billion dollars in weapons. Other leading arms recipients included Iran, Libya and Syria, all considered unfriendly to US interests in the region.

The arms purchases of nine other Mideast and North African nations — Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Kuwait, North and South Yemen and Tunisia were included in the study.

The reports said the leading arms merchant was the Soviet Union, with more than 74 billion dollars worth of weapons transfers to the region. Next was the United States, with 44 billion dollars in arms deliveries. The two accounted for 56 per cent of the arms transfers from major suppliers during the period.

France, China and Great Britain — the other permanent

Li, Kim for better ties

BEIJING, May 6: Two of the world's few remaining hard-line communist leaders assured each other of friendship and support when China's Premier Li Peng met North Korea's President Kim Il-Sung in Pyongyang on Saturday, reports Reuter.

At the meeting, splashed across the front pages of China's state-controlled newspapers today, Li told Kim: "China and Korea are linked by mountains and rivers, just like lips and teeth."

Saying he was extremely satisfied with Sino-Korean relations, Li added: "No matter how the international situation changes, we will make further contributions to such relations."

Diplomats believe, however, that Li took with him to North Korea a face-saving plan to solve a potentially embarrassing problem between Beijing and Pyongyang caused by Seoul's announced intention of applying for full United Nations membership for South Korea.

BRRIEFLY

UK election likely this year: Prime Minister John Major is likely to call a general election later in the year after further interest rate cuts to woo back voters to the ruling Conservatives British newspapers said in London, reports Reuter.

They quoted market analysts as saying base rates could be cut at least twice before the Autumn.

Soviet envoy's Pak visit put off: The Soviet Union has cancelled a visit to Pakistan by one of its senior diplomats for discussions aimed at finding a political solution to the Afghan conflict, a foreign ministry spokesman said in Islamabad Sunday, reports AFP.

The visit is off for the moment but we can not say why the Soviets have decided to call it off," he said.

It could be due to recent developments in Afghanistan, particularly the liberation of Khost by the Mujahedeen," the spokesman said.

The Afghan guerrillas scored a military success on March 31 in the eastern city of Khost, bordering Pakistan, which they captured after 17 days of bloody fighting against troops of the Soviet-backed Kabul government.

60 pilgrims drown in India: At least 60 pilgrims drowned when their overcrowded launch capsized on southern India's Godavari river on Sunday, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported in New Delhi, reports Reuter.

PTI said the 40-seat capacity launch was carrying about 100 passengers when it overturned near the town of Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh State.

The victims, including women and children, were all pilgrims travelling to a temple on the banks of the river. About 45 passengers were rescued, the news agency said.

Soviet miners to continue strike: Militant Siberian Coal Miners vowed on Sunday to continue their crippling strike until the Soviet government formally approved the transfer of the troubled industry to the control of Boris Yeltsin's Russian Republic, Reuter reports from Moscow.

A spokesman for the Kuzbass regional strike committee said. Strike leaders would meet on May 7 to discuss the Kremlin's transfer offer originally scheduled for signing on Sunday.

But there were signs the deal could be stalled in Moscow, dampening hopes for a quick end to the Siberian strike that has already cost more than 7.5 million tonnes in lost production.

China bans cash prizes in schools: China's State Education Commission has banned contests in which school children compete for cash or expensive prizes because the competitions teach them capitalist or western values, the official China Daily said Monday, reports Reuter from Beijing.

Competitions involving costly consumer goods and money have become popular in recent years, the newspaper said.

"Many contests' organisers...were using advertisements to teach young people to compete for economic reasons," it said.

Kaifu ends SE Asia visit: Japan's Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu concluded a five-nation tour of Southeast Asia during which he raised Tokyo's diplomatic profile in the region and strongly backed the US military presence in Asia, Reuter reports from Manila.

"There have been almost in unison, expressions of hope for a more active Japanese role in the region, Japanese spokesman Sadaaki Numata said at the end of the tour.

Kaifu on Sunday urged Philippine President Corazon Aquino to take lead in pushing through possibly painful reforms of the Philippine economy.

Gorbachev warns against cold war
President Mikhail S. Gorbachev said Sunday he was worried that the United States may be readjusting its stance toward the Soviet Union, warning that might lead to a revival of the Cold War, Tass reported in Moscow, AP says.

Blacksmiths making guns for Indian politicians
After Ravana, BJP casts Sita in Gujarat

DINAPUR (India), May 6: Blacksmiths in this small north Indian village are working round the clock by the light of kerosene lanterns to make guns for politicians to use during general election this month, reports Reuter.

More than 60 blacksmiths in Dinapur, about 200 km (120 miles) south of the Bihar state capital Patna, are racing to meet unprecedented orders for crude, single-shot rifles.

Blacksmith Bhupender Vishwakarama, 60, said Dinapur and supplied guns to politicians

poll violence — although each of them says his workers plan only to move in self-defence against the others.

Violence in elections in Bihar, which returns 10 per cent of the country's 537 members of Parliament, has risen steadily.

Another report says: The Bharatiya Janata Party continued to mix politics with mythology when it decided to put up Miss Deepika Chakhalia, who portrayed the legendary Sita in the television serial Ramayana, as the party candidate from Godhra in Gujarat.

The young actress had joined the party. The BJP had earlier announced that Arvind Trivedi, who played Ravana in the same serial, would be a candidate from Gujarat.

Deepika's candidature was announced by the BJP vice-president, Mr S. S. Bhandari, together with 68 other names for Bihar, West Bengal, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh.

In Bihar where 51 candidates have been finalised for the 54-seats, party's nine sitting MPs have been retained. Amongst the newcomers is Mr Kameshwar Chopal from Rosra. Mr Bhandari claimed that Mr Chopal had laid the first brick in Ayodhya during the shilanyas ceremony in November 1989.

With the announcement of the third list of BJP candidates for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, the total number of the party's candidates has gone up to 394. The BJP is expected to field more than 450 candidates.

Meanwhile, Mr Bhandari also introduced to newspapers two more persons who joined the BJP today. While Maj Gen A. L. Suri said that he had joined the party at Mr Advani's invitation and had no intention of seeking the party ticket, former Congress (I) MP from Bihar Mr Ram Rattan Ram did not rule out the possibility of his contesting the elections.

Gen Suri, who retired in November last year, said that he had been an "admirer" of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh throughout his tenure in the services. He also said that he agreed with the BJP's approach that the "majority community should sit up and its demand for its rights and not be treated as second class citizens." He also said that he had great "personal admiration" for the BJP leaders.

However, Mr Ram said that his only difference with the Congress (I) was the absence of inner-party democracy. When he was subjected to a barrage of questions, party leader Dr Jay Dubashi hurriedly decided to change the subject. Later, Dr Dubashi mounted a strong attack on the Congress (I) leader, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, for speaking with a "forked tongue" during his meeting with financial writers last week.

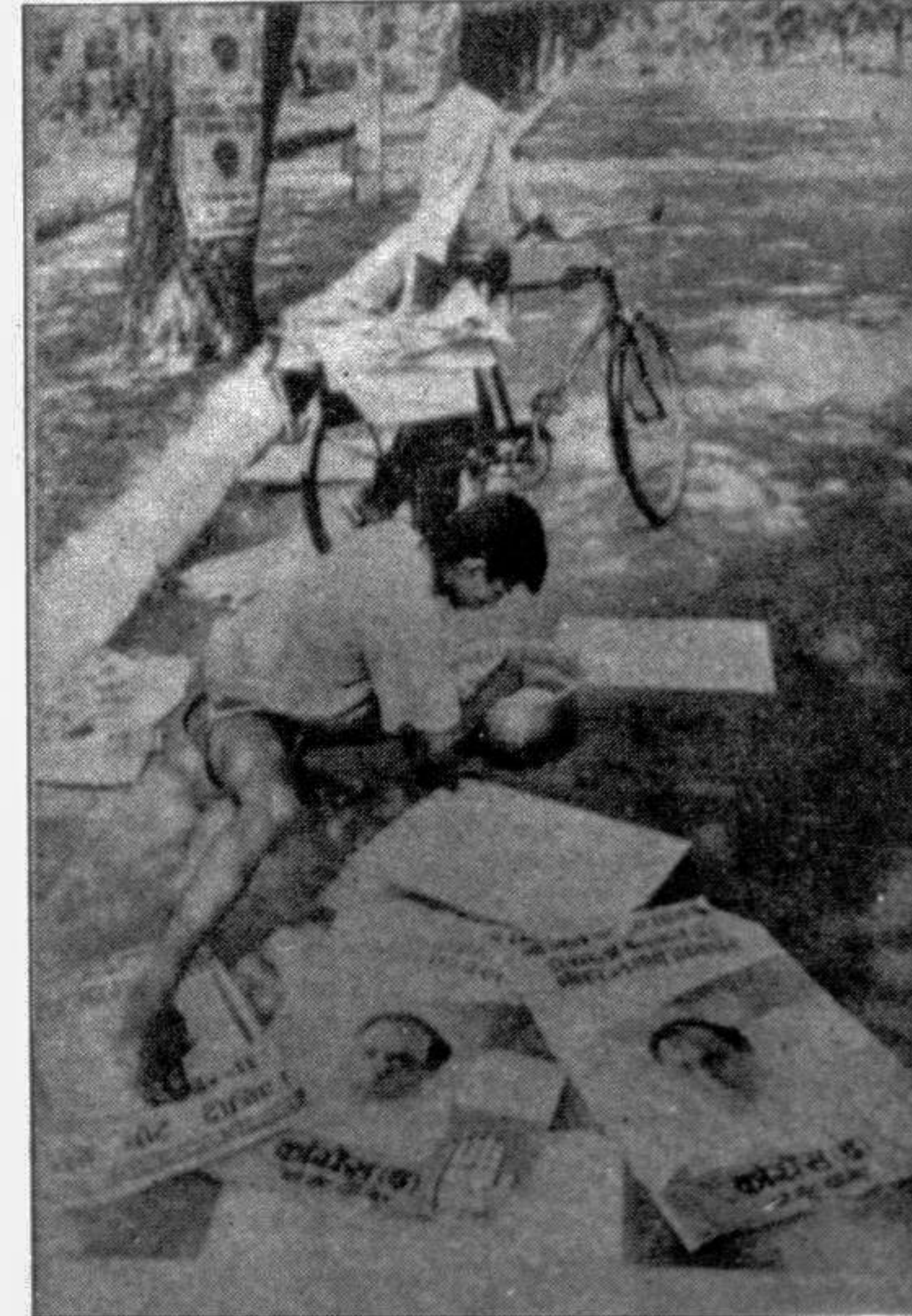
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Deepika



NEW DELHI: On a hot afternoon Sunday a young worker sits in the shade by the side of the road applying glue to posters depicting former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, whose Congress (I) party is trying to come back to power in India's May elections to Parliament. —APP/UNB photo.