

Ajit Singh expelled from Janata Dal

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: The once powerful Janata Dal party appeared on the verge of splitting Friday after it expelled a challenger to former Prime Minister V.P. Singh, the party leader, reports AP.

It would be the second split in 13 months for the party that came to power in the 1989 election and briefly broke the hold of the Congress Party.

Congress, headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao, returned to office last June after new elections prompted by the collapse of two Janata Dal governments.

On Thursday, the Janata Dal expelled Ajit Singh, a power broker from Uttar Pradesh state who had been a Cabinet minister in the 11-month government of V.P. Singh. The two men are not related.

Ajit Singh was ousted for encouraging his supporters to split the Janata Dal in the Uttar Pradesh state legislature earlier this month and for defying the authority of the party's leadership.

The expulsion could be a boon to Rao's minority government if Ajit Singh leads a breakaway faction into an alliance with the Congress Party.

Dangers lay ahead, says Shevardnadze

WASHINGTON, Dec 27: Former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze warned Thursday that dangers lay ahead in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and establishment of a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), reports AFP.

Shevardnadze said in an interview in Moscow with the US-based Cable News Network (CNN) that the CIS, set up on December 8 in the Belarusian capital of Minsk, "cannot guarantee us a peaceful life."

"The states making up the CIS do not have the experience," the former Foreign Minister said although he added that it had been inevitable that the previous structure had disintegrated "because it had run its course."

Shevardnadze warned that there could be what he called "cataclysms" in some of the 11 new independent states making up the CIS.

"I do not think we are going to have a peaceful life, a calm life. I wish I were wrong. It may be painless in some re-

publics, but there will be cataclysms in other republics," he said citing the case of violence-wracked Georgia, where Shevardnadze was born and rose to prominence.

The man, who was former President Mikhail Gorbachev's first and last Foreign Minister and who guided Soviet foreign policy through six years of change which ended the cold war, said he was also concerned about questions of citizenship, borders and military potential.

"Some of these (newly independent) states have immense military potential and this is still a problem to deal with," Shevardnadze said.

Turning to Gorbachev, who resigned as president Wednesday, and Boris Yeltsin, the Russian President who has assumed much of his power, Shevardnadze said the two could not be compared because they had "different personalities."

"Yeltsin is a political figure of very large calibre. He is a very courageous person, one who can make decisions quickly," Shevardnadze said.

Maximum security alert in Punjab

House-to-house search to flush out Sikh extremists

AMRITSAR, Dec 27: Indian army soldiers today hunted Sikh militants who slaughtered at least 51 train passengers in the Punjab district of Ludhiana, prompting a state-wide maximum security alert, reports AFP.

Hundreds of soldiers were engaged in a cord-and-search operation in and around the village of Sohian where four gunmen travelling on the train staged the massacre Thursday evening, police sources said.

House-to-house searches were under way to flush out the killers, suspected to be still hiding in the area, as Punjab state authorities shrouded a top security alert in anticipation of an upsurge in Sikh separatist violence.

The 5-LF passenger train was on its way from Ludhiana town, centre of the industrial district of the same name, to Ferozepur when the gunmen brought it to a halt by pulling an emergency alarm chain.

Police sources in this Sikh holy city said the killers, armed with AK-47 assault rifles, then sprayed gunfire on passengers, targeting Hindus, who constitute a minority in Sikh-dominated Punjab.

Newspaper reports today said Hindu were separated from Sikh passengers before being riddled with bullets by the gunmen, who fled in a vehicle parked near the Sohian Railway Crossing.

Police confirmed that most of the 51 dead by official count were Hindus who included one woman and three children. Unofficial reports put the death toll at 60.

Ludhiana district, of which Sohian is a part, has in recent months emerge as one of the principal staging grounds for Sikh separatist attacks in Punjab.

Thursday's massacre was the worst since the army was deployed in the northern frontier state three months ago to staunch Sikh militancy and prepare the ground for assembly elections the government wants to hold by February 15.

On June 15, Sikh militants staged two separate train attacks in the same district, killing 77 people by police count and more than 100 according to unofficial accounts.

The attacks, coupled with the selective killing of election candidates, aborted state polls that had first been set for June 22.

The latest massacre, which came a week after 13 people were killed in a Ludhiana bomb blast, was seen by police as a

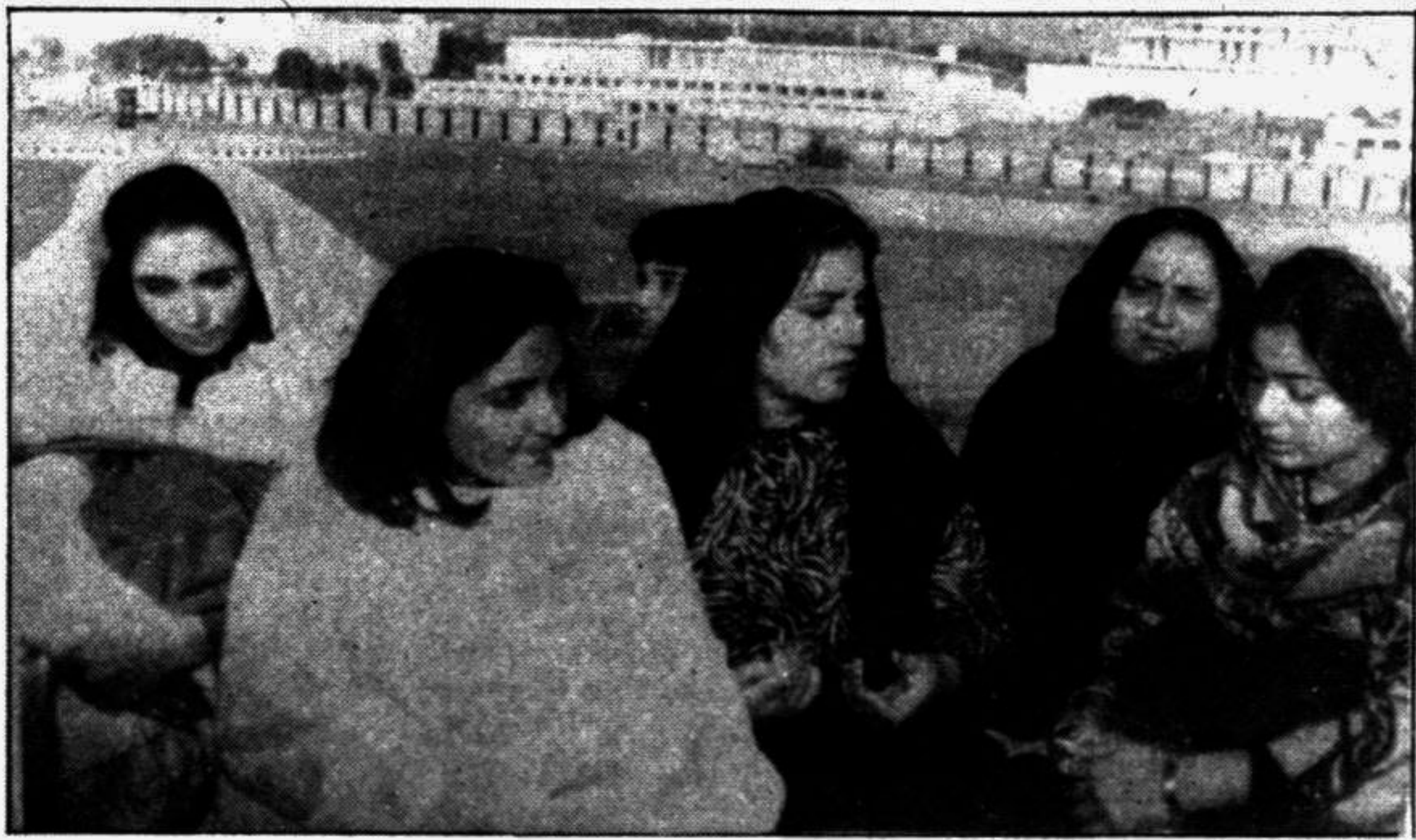
Sikh militant bid to "show their presence" in the face of army operations.

Troops have put separatist groups under great pressure in the district centred on Amritsar, reputed to be the headquarters of Sikh militancy, and the attack may have been designed to divert the army's attention, police sources said.

Security forces have killed scores of militants in recent weeks, prompting many underground activists to flee to places outside Punjab, the sources added.

Sikh militants, divided into several groups and sub-groups, are fighting for an independent theocratic homeland in Punjab, a prosperous farming state bordering Pakistan.

Some 4,650 people have died in separatist violence this year.



ISLAMABAD: (L-R) Beena Qureshi, Rafat, Seema Khurram, Zubeda Hayat and an unidentified friend stage a hunger strike Thursday in front of the parliament building to protest against the alleged gang-rape of Farhana Hayat late last month. Beena, Seema and Zubeda are victim's sisters and Rafat a friend. -AFP/UNB Photo

Hunger strike in Islamabad protesting assault on Farhana

ISLAMABAD, Dec 27: About 60 people protesting at the alleged gang-rape of a friend of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto staged a day-long fast on Thursday outside the presidential palace in Islamabad, reports Reuters.

The group was led by Beena Qureshi, a sister of Farhana Hayat, who says she was raped late last month by five gunmen on the orders of Irfanullah Marwat, a powerful official in Sindh Province. He is also President Ghulam Ishaq Khan's son-in-law.

The government denies the charge, which led to widespread protests across the country by opposition parties and human rights groups.

"We have been forced to come out on the streets to seek justice," Qureshi said in a speech at the hunger strike camp.

She had earlier staged a week-long hunger strike outside the Punjab Province Parliament in the provincial capital Lahore.

Qureshi was joined in Thursday's fast by two other sisters, a brother, several members of her Khattar Clan and a parliamentary deputy of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party.

"I will stage similar demonstrations in every city and town of Pakistan to demand an end to such heinous crimes," she said.

The government has ordered a high level inquiry, but Hayat's family and opposition politicians say the real culprits cannot be found while the present Sindh Province administration is in office.

CPM blames Gorbachev for Soviet collapse

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: India's largest Communist Party, shocked by the dismantling of the Soviet Union, called it a "historically retrograde development" on Thursday and predicted socialism in the shattered nation would be resurrected, reports Reuters.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), which has long sought guidance from Moscow, said the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first nation to embrace socialism, was primarily the fault of Mikhail Gorbachev, who resigned as president on Wednesday.

This historically retrograde development was not totally unexpected given the totally disastrous policies launched in the last few years by the leadership of the USSR, particularly by Mikhail Gorbachev, the party said in a statement.

The CPM said it was confident "that the people of the former Soviet Union and the communists who had over the decades built up a successful and powerful socialist state... would in the years to come rally together in future struggles."

Primakov made Director of Russian Foreign Intelligence

MOSCOW, Dec 27: Yevgeny Primakov, the head of the re-organised Soviet espionage services, was appointed Thursday Director of the Russian Foreign intelligence service, TASS news agency said, reports AFP.

The appointment was made public after Primakov had a meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin who announced last week that Russia was annexing Soviet agencies such as the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the former KGB's espionage branch.

Primakov, a former adviser to Mikhail Gorbachev who stepped down on Wednesday as Soviet President, had been put in charge of the nationwide central intelligence service on November 6.

Clashes leave 5 dead in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 27: Five people died in sporadic unrest throughout the country, including three killed in violence in the Chisel black homeland, police said Friday, reports AP.

Ciskei Police Commissioner Johannes Viktor said a clash between crowds armed with stones, knives and spears killed three people Thursday in a village in the homeland on South Africa's southern coast.

Off the Record

Cards to control rampant childbirth

BEIJING: China has enacted new rules requiring millions of migrant workers to carry "birth control cards" to prove they are obeying the one-child-per-family policy, the official China Daily said Friday, reports Reuters.

The cards, to include information on the bearer's marital status, birth record and use of birth control, must be presented before a migrant worker may take a job, seek a business licence or apply for a residence permit.

Family Planning Minister Peng Peiyun was quoted as saying the huge population of migrant workers remained "a hard nut to crack" for birth control officers charged with implementing China's strict family planning policies.

Wax-work of Gorbachev stolen

AMSTERDAM: A wax statue of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was stolen Thursday from Madame Tussaud's museum, hours after he quit his post in Moscow, the museum announced here, reports AFP.

"When the museum opened at 11.00 a.m. Mr Gorbachev's statue was still there, but two hours later we noticed it had disappeared," a spokesman said, adding: "We think this is a premeditated act to catch up with the news."

Last week the museum announced that after Gorbachev's departure his statue would be removed from a group of contemporary heads of state to join Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher in a "historic" hall of fame.

Daughter reveals father's secret of success

SANTA ANA, California: The daughter of financier Charles Keating Jr. says the financier, now convicted of fraud and fighting federal charges, worked three jobs at once in the late 40's before his business career took off, reports AP.

While working as a lawyer by day, he tended a family grocery store and, without telling his wife, cleaned drains at night, daughter Maureen Mulhern told the Orange County Register for a story Wednesday.

She recalled that the Cincinnati Zoo called on an April day to report a backed-up drain in the cage housing elephants.

"They told my mom this and she said, 'Ha, ha, ha. April Fool's.' She hung up the phone and he was fired," Mrs. Mulhern said.

The interview was conducted last week at the Keating family's walled compound in Paradise Valley, Ariz., where he returned after his Christmas Eve release on \$300,000 bail.

Keating, charged with a multimillion-dollar savings-and-loan swindle, is pleading innocent to federal racketeering charges after being convicted of fraud in state court.

Gun goes for 220,000 dollars

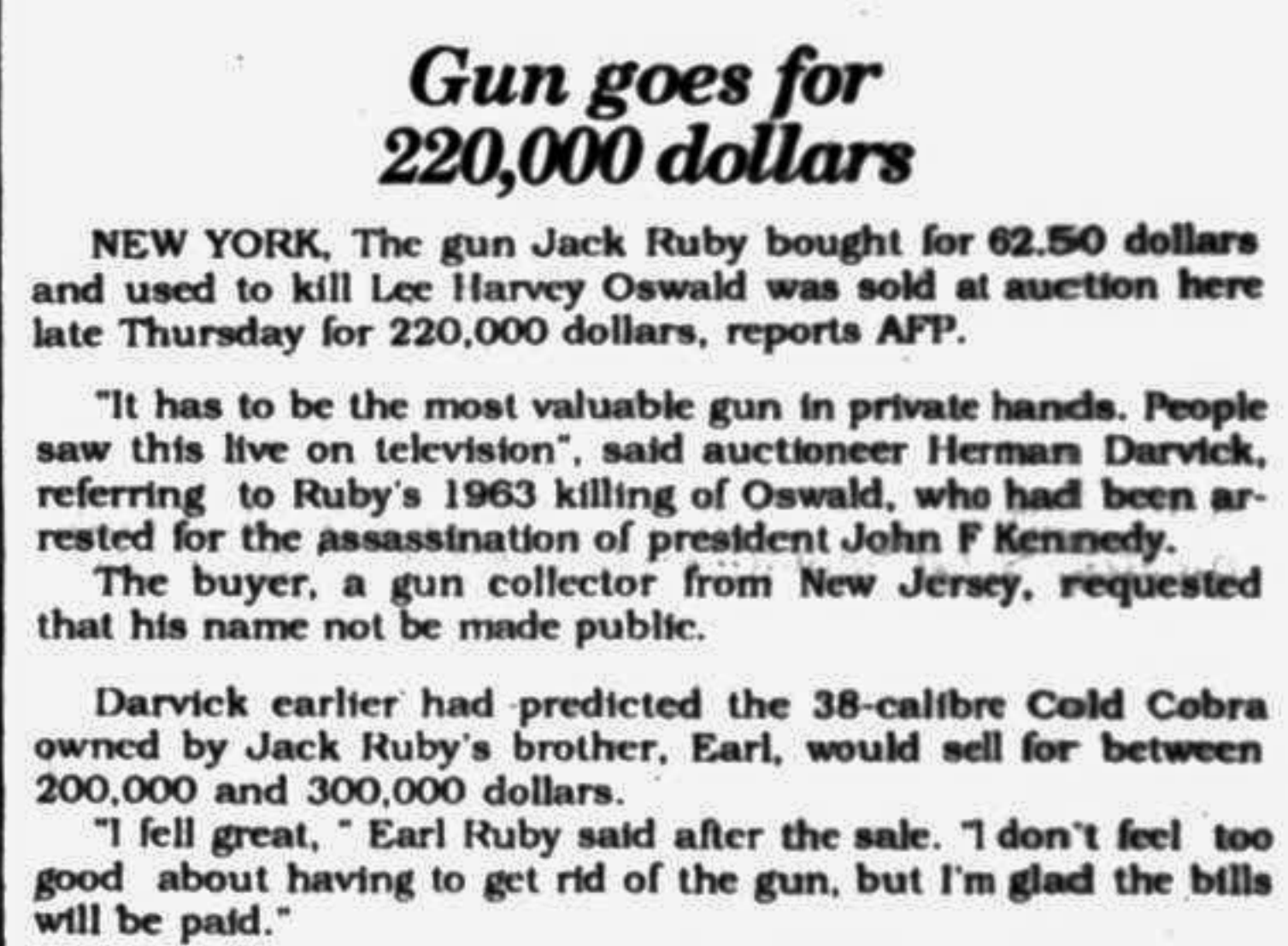
NEW YORK: The gun Jack Ruby bought for 62.50 dollars and used to kill Lee Harvey Oswald was sold at auction here late Thursday for 220,000 dollars, reports AFP.

"It has to be the most valuable gun in private hands. People saw this live on television," said auctioneer Herman Darvick, referring to Ruby's 1963 killing of Oswald, who had been arrested for the assassination of president John F. Kennedy.

The buyer, a gun collector from New Jersey, requested that his name not be made public.

Darvick earlier had predicted the 38-calibre Cold Cobra owned by Jack Ruby's brother, Earl, would sell for between 200,000 and 300,000 dollars.

"I fell great," Earl Ruby said after the sale. "I don't feel too good about having to get rid of the gun, but I'm glad the bills will be paid."



ATLANTA, Georgia: Miss World contestants listen to stage instructions Thursday. The contest takes place today (Saturday). From left to right are Miss Macan Christina Lam, Miss Panama Malena Estela Guillen, Miss Chile Carolina Beatriz Martinez and on the floor Miss Argentina Marcela Noemi Chazarreta. -AFP/UNB photo

Lankan navy destroys Tigers' boat

COLOMBO, Dec 27: A Sri Lankan naval gunboat destroyed a suspected Tamil guerilla boat off the island's northern coast killing an unspecified number of people on board, the military said here Friday, reports AFP.

The fiber glass boat, suspected of being used by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was attacked off Sri Lanka's point Pedor Coast late Thursday, a military statement said.

The curfew may go on for some time. There is something happening there in (in Pooner), a military spokesman here said.

BRIEFLY

Serbs plan smaller Yugoslavia:

The Serb-dominated federal presidency announced plans Thursday to create a new, smaller Yugoslavia that could include territory taken during a 6-month-old civil war with separatist Croatia, reports AP Friday from Yugoslavia.

The announcement came as fighting raged on in Croatia. Croatian radio reporting Yugoslav air attacks on main Zagreb-Belgrade highway and the recapture by Croat forces of six villages that had been taken by the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army.

Branko Kostic, acting head of the federal presidency that is now run by Serbia, said a document was being prepared detailing the possible borders and structure of a new Yugoslavia, the Tanjug news agency reported.

Last week, Kostic said in an interview that the new federation would consist of the largest republic of Serbia, its ally Montenegro and autonomous Serbian enclaves within Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Tatarstan wants to join C'wealth:

The parliament of Tatarstan, a former autonomous republic in south Russia which declared independence, decided Thursday to ask for membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Interfax reported, says AFP Friday from Moscow.

The parliament voted 140 for the move, with one against and five abstentions. Membership was made necessary by the Soviet Union, the parliament agreed.

Lefts back Jewish settlements:

The leftist opposition labour party voted Thursday to support the construction of more Jewish settlements in the annexed Golan Heights, reports AP Friday from Jerusalem.

The resolution taken by a party conference held in Tel Aviv expressed "support for the settlers and would support the strengthening of settlement throughout the Golan," Israeli media reported.

Syria demanded during the Middle East peace talks in Washington that Israel agree to withdraw from the Golan Heights, which Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East War. Israel insisted on discussing an overall peace settlement before negotiating about land.

Israel annexed the Golan in 1981 and has built a string of collective farms and towns there that are home to about 10,000 Israelis. More than 16,000 Druse Arabs live in formerly Syrian villages.

South Korea recognises Russia:

South Korea extended recognition to Russia Friday, a Foreign Ministry statement said, reports AFP from Seoul.

The government of the republic of Korea recognises the Federation of Russia, which has succeeded the Soviet Union," the statement said.

South Korea's embassy to Moscow will be its embassy to Russia, it said, adding that the government was considering extending recognition to 11 other new republics in the former Soviet Union.

Sihanouk's son, daughter get posts:

A son and daughter of former Cambodian guerilla leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk have been appointed to senior positions in the Phnom Penh government, the Cambodian government news agency SPK said, reports Reuters Friday from Bangkok.

Sihanouk's son Prince Norodom Chakkrapong, a former commander of the Sihanoukist royal guard, has been appointed adviser to Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Princess Bopha Devi has been named Deputy Minister of Information and Culture, the agency said.

The Princess, a dancer of traditional Cambodian ballet, and her brother are in Phnom Penh.

Two Iraqi children off to Amman:

Two Iraqi children severely injured by allied bombings during the Gulf War have left for Amman to receive further medical treatment, reports Xinhua Friday from Baghdad.

The Baghdad Radio quoted an official of the German direct aid organisation as saying that the two children suffered from cardiac diseases but had not received proper treatment in Iraqi hospital due to severe shortage of medicines.

The radio said the organisation will pay all the cost of treatment and will then refer the patients to German hospitals for further treatment.

The organisation, in cooperation with other German humanitarian groups, has reportedly offered to cover the cost of treatment for some 32 children injured during the war.

Fresh fighting in Tbilisi

TBILISI, Georgia, Dec 27: The area around the parliament building here was engulfed in flames and dense smoke hung over the city center today as opposing militias battled with artillery and heavy machine guns along Tbilisi's main avenue, reports AFP.

The fighting was the worst since Tuesday and ended a truce agreed to on Thursday.

It was unclear how badly the parliament had been damaged in the fighting but fires raged out of control in the immediate vicinity of the building, where a hotel used as a base by opposition fighter as well as the Communications Ministry are also located.

Red tracers flashed across the sky in fire directed from the area around the parliament at several strategic locations in the city and there were frequent explosions of rocket-propelled grenades and artillery shells.

Gamsakhurdia Thursday insisted from the basement of the parliament building in the former Soviet Republic that he would not surrender, despite a five-day opposition siege.

Interviewed on CNN television, an apparently weary Gamsakhurdia said, "I am not against negotiations."

"I can talk, and I can discuss problems with them, but their main aim is to force me to resign," said Gamsakhurdia, who spoke in English.

The Georgian President, who was elected in May with more than 85 per cent of the vote, has been held up in the building since Sunday, when opposition forces surrounded the building demanding his resign.

"I am against their criminal methods," he said referring to the opposition, which has accused him of having authoritarian tendencies. Gamsakhurdia said he opposed the "violence and civil war" but would not be forced from office.

"If it will be necessary, they can call a referendum" the President said defiantly.

AP adds from Washington the Foreign Minister of Georgia in the disintegrated Soviet Union has accused U.S. Secretary of State James Baker of encouraging the political violence raging there.

Foreign Minister Murman Omanidze said Baker's criticism of the newly independent republic stems from unreliable information about its government.

His December 20 letter to Baker was released by Georgia's Information Office in Washington, apparently in response to a U.S. decision to withhold diplomatic relations with Georgia and five other former Soviet republics pending improvement of their human rights, economic and political records.

The letter was prompted by a December 12 speech that Baker delivered at Princeton University in New Jersey, describing the fall of the Soviet Union.

"Clearly, other governments for example Georgia are showing already that communism can be replaced by governments that are authoritarian and equally undervaluing of our acceptance or support," Baker said at the time.

Omanidze said he was "astonished" that Baker was ignoring Georgia's democratic reforms, including the fact that it was the first Soviet republic to hold multiparty elections, and that it has allowed 134 political parties and 25 opposition newspapers.

Gorbachev to disappear for two weeks to decide future

MOSCOW, Dec 27: Mikhail Gorbachev slipped gracefully into the role of elder statesman Thursday, raising a glass of lemon vodka at a farewell party and saying he would disappear for two weeks to decide his future, reports AP.

Smiling broadly and bantering with journalists at a caviar-laden reception, Gorbachev promised that the press would still have him to kick around.

"I am not leaving the political scene," the 60-year-old former President pledged.

"For the next two weeks, I'm gone. But I'm not physically exhausted I simply need to recover," he said. "I think a gap should be defined between the end and the beginning of different stages of life."

It clearly will be difficult for citizen Gorbachev to shake off his old habits. He said he was counting on spending more time with his family, but when asked what his favourite leisure activity was, he replied, "politics."

"I'd like to have some people who would be a direct link between myself and the Russian government, so that there would not be any misunderstandings," he said at the soiree at the swank Otkryabskaya Hotel, formerly the hangout for the communist Party elite.

But he flatly rejected being any kind of "opposition leader" to Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

"Against whom? Against which political life?" Gorbachev said in reply. He said he and Yeltsin spoke recently for about nine hours and "it was a conversation of people whose interests are mainly the same."

"I told the President of Russia that as long as the Russian leadership sticks to the course toward democratic changes and reforms, they can always count on my support and protection," he said.



Gorbachev could not always count on the support of his own people, and that also was on his mind the day after his resignation as Soviet leader for nearly seven years.

"Society is tired. It hates all politicians, and because of that, it hates everything that has been achieved during perestroika, because people's everyday life is so hard," he said.

Reform, he said, will liberate society. "Then, people will really appreciate it, I am convinced. They are not all that ungrateful, our people," Gorbachev added.

He waded among the Soviet and foreign journalists and tucked into the red caviar.

Then, accepting a glass of lemon-flavored vodka, he raised it in a toast as reporters wondered if indeed the former Soviet leader once known for his anti-alcohol campaign would put it to his lips.

"You think I can't do it? Now I can afford to" he said, laughing and taking a sip.

Gorbachev refused to be specific about whether he would join a think-tank to keep his political profile high.

"For now there are some intentions and plans," he said simply.