

## India's founding fathers on trial

NEW DELHI, May 19: The values of India's founding fathers — secularism, socialism and a casteless society — are being put to the test in parliamentary elections this week, reports AP.

Voters will choose India's fourth government in 19 months, climaxing one of the most politically turbulent periods since independence in 1947.

There are half a billion eligible voters, making the election the largest exercise in democracy the world has ever seen.

Indian elections are almost always violent, and campaign clashes have claimed nearly 100 lives since March.

Voting in about 600,000 polling stations will be staggered over three days — Monday, Thursday and next Sunday — so that millions of police and paramilitary troops can be shifted to likely areas of violence. Complete results are not expected until May 28.

No previous general election has aroused so little enthusiasm in the people or so much dread," said Prem Shankar Jha, an economic journalist and former govern-

## 54 killed in Chinese boat capsizes

BEIJING, May 19: An overloaded ferry carrying villagers to a weekend temple festival flipped over and sank on a north China reservoir, killing at least 54 people, an official newspaper said, reports Reuter.

The Hebei Daily said the ferry was carrying more than 100 people when it overturned and sank.

## BRIEFLY

### 7 Iranians held in Iraq:

Seven Iranian infiltrators were captured Monday last inside Iraq, the official Iraqi News Agency INA reported Saturday in a dispatch monitored in London, reports AP.

INA, citing an official source, said the seven were apprehended by villages in Balad Ruz district east of Baghdad.

Iran sent in a large number of saboteurs across the border with Iraq to carry out subversive acts and riots in various Iraqi governorates, the Iraqi authorities apprehended a number of these saboteurs, INA said.

### Rafsanjani backs Palestinians:

Iran's President Hashemi Rafsanjani has expressed support for the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories, saying it is a very encouraging and a right way to liberate the Zionist-occupied Muslim land, Xinhua reports from Tehran.

Speaking to a group of visiting Palestinian writers, poets and artists, the President warned it is a mistake to think that the Zionists will be satisfied with what they have obtained or may give some concessions to Muslims and Palestinians.

### US to keep armored force in Kuwait:

The United States will keep a brigade-sized armored force inside Kuwait until September 1, defense Secretary Dick Cheney confirmed Saturday, AFP reports from Washington.

Cheney, appearing on CNN's "Evans and Novak" Talk Show, said he signed earlier this week the deployment orders to move elements of the 11th armored cavalry regiment from Germany to Kuwait.

"U.S. forces now in Kuwait will return home, he said. "The situation in Kuwait is still very unstable," Cheney said in explaining the decision to keep U.S. forces in the Emirate longer than originally planned.

### Strife-torn prison sieged:

Hundreds of Mexican Marines and police surrounded a prison close to the U.S. border on Saturday after police said 18 inmates were killed and 10 wounded in fighting between rival drug gangs, Reuter reports from Batamoras, Mexico.

"It was purely internal. When tensions calm and we establish internal control, we will go after those responsible for the killings," state judicial police spokesman Non Hinojosa told reporters.

A force of 200 Mexican Marines was joined by special anti-riot teams and federal judicial police units outside the Cereso state prison near a residential neighbourhood of Matamoros, just across the Rio Grande river from Brownsville, Texas.

### Palestinian shot dead:

A young Palestinian was shot to death by Israeli soldiers on Saturday during clashes in a village in the northern West Bank, Israeli military sources said, reports AP from Jerusalem.

The clashes began when some young villagers started stoning a patrol in the village of Nassifia near Jenin, an Israeli spokesman said.

The soldiers, who were in danger, then opened fire at a suspect who was leading his companions on and refused to obey orders, he said.

A Palestinian hospital source said a young villager, short in the abdomen, was taken to Itihda Hospital in Nablus where he died of his wounds. His identity was not reported.

### Countdown for Columbia:

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) officials Saturday began the countdown for Columbia's nine-day space mission, on which astronauts will study how humans adapt to space by medically monitoring one another, reports AP from Cape Canaveral.

The 1st space shuttle flight was scheduled to blast off at 1200 GMT Wednesday carrying a crew of seven including three physicians and one cell biologist, on the first space mission in 5-1/2 years and the first one planned for medical research.

After floating through a tunnel from the cabin to the space module in the shuttle's cargo bay astronaut will carry out a battery of medical tests as Columbia orbits the earth 295 kilometers (184 miles) above its surface.

### Nepali Congress holds victory rallies:

Youths staged motor-scooter rallies around Kathmandu Saturday to celebrate their liberal Nepali Congress Party's victory over communists in the Himalayan Kingdom's first free polls in three decades, Reuter reports from Kathmandu.

Thirteen months after Nepali Congress and Communist demonstrators united to force King Birendra to surrender absolute power, the two parties are polarised with the communists sweeping the capital and the liberals winning national power in the May 12 general election.

# 4 men in scramble for wooing 514 million Indian voters

NEW DELHI, May 19: Three men say they are confident of being able to form the next government of the world's most populous democracy after Indian elections that start Monday, reports Reuter.

A fourth, sure that no party will win a majority, sees himself as the likely kingmaker or even a compromise prime minister.

The four men wooing India's 514 million voters in the May 20, 23 and 26 election are: Rajiv Gandhi, the reluctant politician who led the Congress party to its second defeat since India won independence from Britain in 1947.

Grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, the airline pilot entered politics on the death of his younger brother Sanjay in 1980 under pressure from his mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter.

He succeeded her hours after she was assassinated in October 1984. Promising to lead India into the 21st century, he won a landslide victory in elections that December.

He later became mired in charges of corruption and inefficiency and Congress lost its majority in November 1989. In opposition, it helped bring down one minority government a year later and backed another, under Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar.

Gandhi confessed he was taken by surprise when Shekhar quit in March to force the election. Powerful regional Congress bosses will threaten Gandhi's leadership if he fails at the polls.

Gandhi, 46, has sought to shrug off both the pro-rich image that helped defeat him in 1989 and the sluggish image he acquired in opposition. His Italian wife Sonia has tried hard to identify with Indian culture.

Campaigning strenuously by road and rail through the searing summer heat of India's politically-dominant northern plains, Gandhi has been mobbed by tens of thousands of villagers.

But the men may just have wanted to see Nehru's grandson while women have always turned out for the man whose fair-skinned good looks once made him the nation's heart-throb.

Congress remained the biggest party in the old Parliament and Gandhi's opponents hope the crowds will not translate into votes.

Lal Krishan Advani, likely Prime ministerial candidate of the right-wing, Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which has surged late in the campaign. Few outside its ranks see it winning a majority, but not for want of skillful efforts by Advani to project it as India's party of salvation.

Advani, a clean-living, 63-year-old, is a lawyer who puts BJP policy across persuasively to the outside world and to moderate urban voters. He can also strike up an instant rapport with crowds of Hindi-speaking villagers.

He is the driving force behind a BJP campaign that critics say aims at creating a militant Hindu state. He says the BJP just wants to stop its opponents pampering the 120



RAJIV GANDHI  
Leader, Congress Party  
Prime Minister 1984-89



L. K. ADVANI, Leader,  
Bharatiya Janata Party



CHANDRA SHEKHAR,  
Leader, Samajwadi Janata  
Party Prime Minister since  
Nov 1990



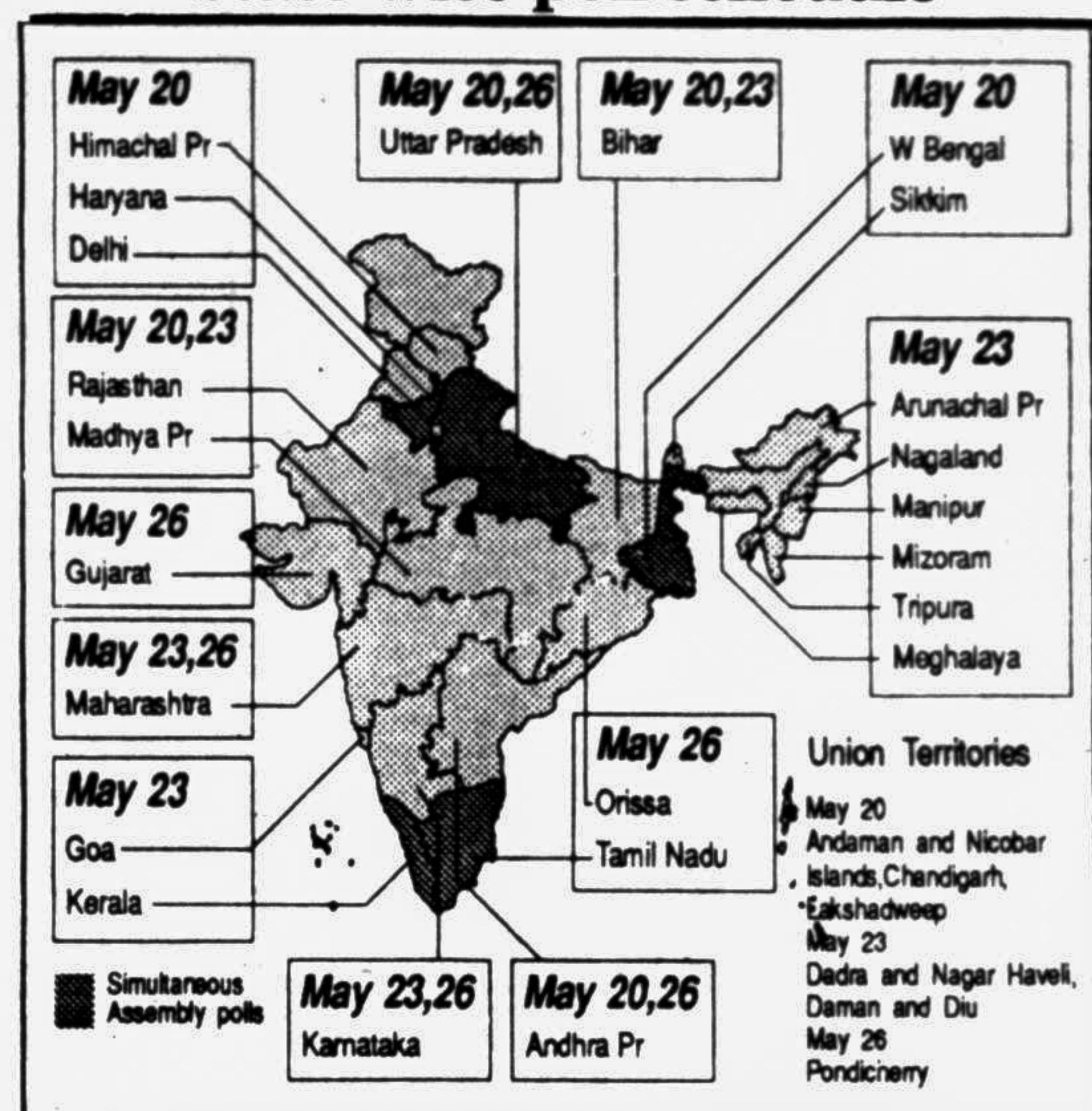
V. P. SINGH, Leader, Janata  
Dal, Prime Minister 1989-90

million Muslims among India's 850 million people with special legal provisions.

Advani is credited with the strategies that boosted his party's strength from just two seats to 86 in the 1989 polls.

Now he hopes the BJP will ride to victory on a wave of Hindu emotion over the site of

## State-wise poll schedule



a 16th century mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya. Advani courted arrest last year by marching to claim the site, which he says is the birthplace of the Hindu god Lord Rama. His protest helped bring down the government of Vishwanath Pratap Singh.

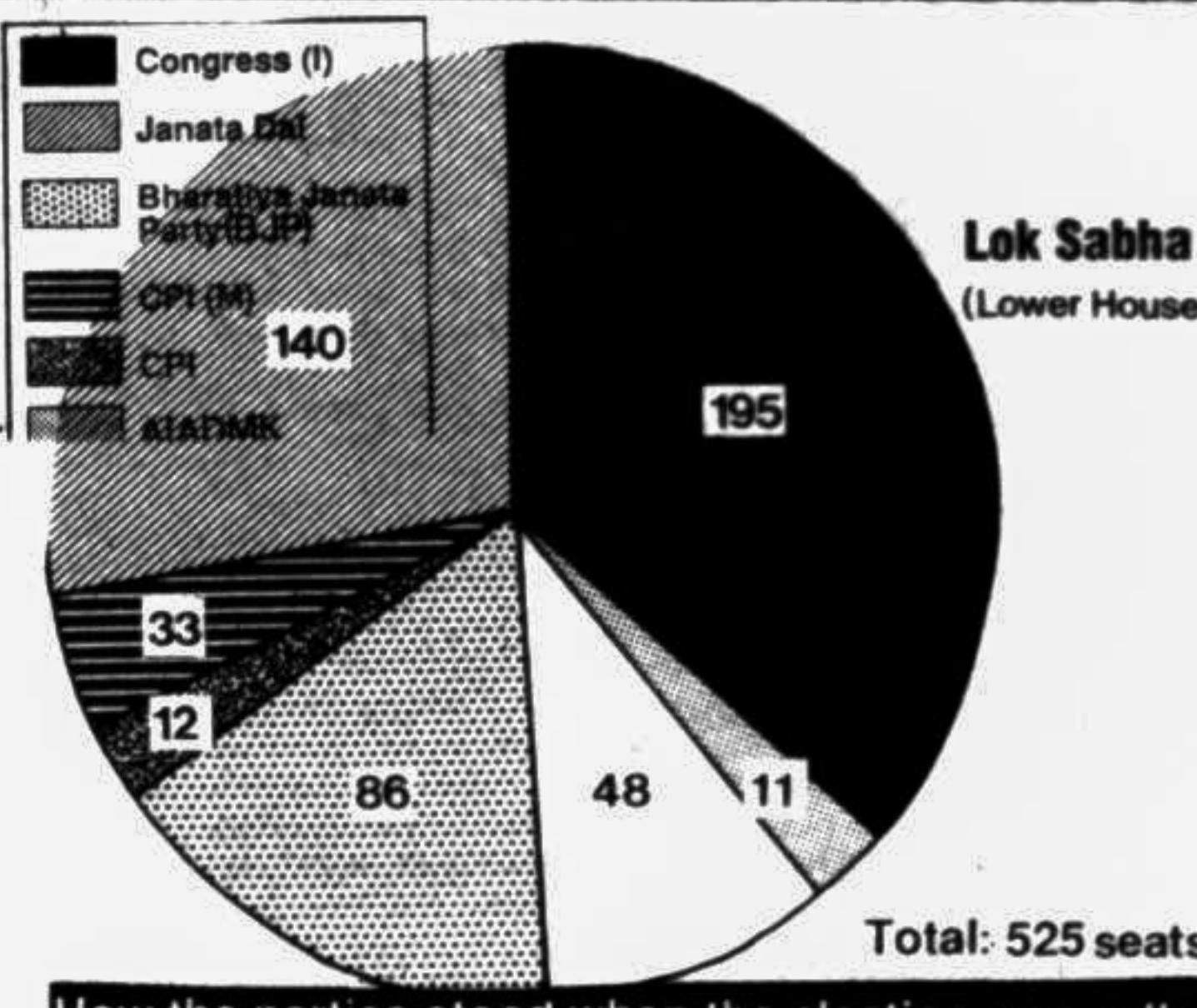
Vishwanath Pratap Singh: Creator of an anti-Congress alliance that took power as a minority government with outside support from the BJP and Communists in December 1989.

Singh had quit Congress after launching an anti-corruption drive as Gandhi's Finance Minister. Hailed by Indian media as 'Mr Clean', Singh lasted just 11 months as Prime Minister, a job he had always insisted he did not want.

In August 1990 he suddenly decided to implement a 10-year-old plan to raise the proportion of government jobs reserved for low castes in the Hindu hierarchy to nearly 50 per cent.

Newspapers blamed Singh when upper-caste students set fire to themselves in protest. Urban sophisticates, who had generated much of the atmosphere that brought him to power, deserted him. The BJP took up the Ayodhya issue and brought down his government amid caste and Hindu-Muslim riots in November 1990.

Singh is a bespectacled 50-year-old who often seems to lose the ends of his sentences in philosophical doubt. He says he sacrificed office to defend social justice. He hopes the low caste majority will carry him back to power.



How the parties stood when the election was called

## Labour telling lies to win votes: Major

LONDON, May 19: Prime Minister John Major, stung by a by-election defeat this week, launched a fierce counter-offensive against his Labour opponents Saturday as a national poll put them ahead of the government, reports Reuter.

The Harris Survey for Sunday's Observer newspaper gave Labour a four-point advantage over Major's Conservatives, further clouding the government's chances of retaining power at the next general election.

Labour has already rattled the Conservatives by seizing one of their rural strongholds Thursday in a bitter by-election contest widely seen as a trial run for a nationwide vote.

Major responded Saturday with his most virulent assault on Labour since becoming Prime Minister, accusing the party of scare-mongering and telling lies to win votes.

In the by-election, Labour campaigned on a pledge to protect Britain's national health service, saying the government planned to dismantle the system of free treatment and introduce supermarket-style, private health care.

"It seems Labour prefers lies and innuendo to the truth," Major said in a speech to Conservative Party members.

"It is time Labour called a halt to their shabby and shameful political campaign."

The conservative insist their reforms, which allow hospitals to become independent trusts within the national health service, are designed to improve efficiency.

Labour, which wiped out a conservative majority of more than 9,000 votes to win the by-election in the South Wales constituency of Monmouth, says the Conservatives are just bad losers.

## Reuter fellowships announced

LONDON, May 19: The Reuter Foundation has announced the award of University Fellowships to nine journalists from Africa, Asia and the Middle East, reports BSS.

## 36,264 denied entry into Japan in '90

TOKYO, May 19: The number of foreigners, mostly Asians, deported or denied entry by Japan last year rose by 60 per cent, according to official figures quoted Saturday night by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), reports PTI.

Their total was 36,264 and more than 82 per cent of them were branded 'illegal workers' who were mostly brought in by labour contractors working for industries hit hardest by an acute shortage of workers.

The Ministry of Justice said the widening economic gap between Japan and the developing countries was the cause of the continued illegal influx of Third World labour. The figures released by far showed that most of the foreigners were Asians, it pointed out.

## Quayle's jet forced to land, trip to Japan delayed

WASHINGTON, May 19: An electrical problem on Vice President Dan Quayle's jet has forced the plane to stop at an Alaskan Air Force base for repairs on Saturday, delaying Quayle's arrival in Japan, the White House said, reports Reuter.

"They have been delayed five hours and are still waiting for the plane to be repaired," said David Beckwith, the Vice President's spokesman.

An electrical malfunction in the navigational system of the Vice Presidential jet, air force two, was detected after it made a scheduled stop at Eielson Air Force base in Fairbanks, Alaska, at about 9:30 am (1730 GMT), Beckwith said.

He said the malfunction had no effect on the flight and did not jeopardise the safety of the passenger. Travelling with the Vice President was his wife, Marilyn, and Chief White House Economic Adviser Michael Boskin.

Quayle is on a six-day Asian trip with stops in Japan, Indonesia and Singapore.

He was expected to arrive in Tokyo shortly after noon today but his arrival will be delayed and several events scheduled for today have been cancelled, Beckwith said.

Beckwith said he did not know when the plane would leave Alaska.

## Fierce fighting around Kandahar on

ISLAMABAD, May 19: Fighting is continuing around the city of Kandahar, the second largest city in Afghanistan, between defending government forces and Afghan Mujahideen, according to Midia and ANA, two news agencies of Afghan Mujahideen based in Peshawar, reports Xinhua.

The Afghan government planes have been bombing Mujahideen (Muslim holy war fighters) positions around the city of Kandahar since the Mujahideen launched the operation last Wednesday.

The Afghan Mujahideen started their offensive by shelling the city of Kandahar with artillery and long-range missiles.

## Off the Record

### Aborigines committing suicide

SYDNEY: Suicide rates among aborigines have soared 10-fold since 1981 and now six times higher than they are for other Australians, the Medical Journal of Australia said, reports Reuter.

In a study published in the journal's May 20 issue, Dr John Claver of the mental health and evaluation centre in Adelaide said that in 1988, 105.3 suicide per 100,000 aborigines were recorded in the state of South Australia.

This compares with 10.1 per 100,000 in 1981. Rates in New South Wales State in the 1950s were around three per 100,000, but a survey of 1,000 tribal aborigines in the 1960s and 1970s found no incidence of suicide.

Claver said other studies showed that aborigines with a traditional background or close tribal links when young were less likely to commit suicide.

He said the study supported the theory that suicides were prompted by the social disintegration of the continent's indigenous people under colonisation.

### Shark meat dangerous

TALLAHASSEE (Florida): Shark meat contains such high amounts of poisonous mercury that eating it may be dangerous, Florida officials said Monday, reports AP.

"For those who continue eating shark, the frequency and amount consumed is directly related to the risk of mercury poisoning," said Dr Charles Mahan, state health officer.

The departments of Agriculture, and Health and Rehabilitative Services issued a joint health advisory cautioning fishermen and seafood lovers to limit their consumption of the increasingly popular meat.

HRS scientists found that the average methyl mercury concentrations in 25 shark samples exceeded state and federal standards.

Because the samples were taken at the retail level, state authorities could not say if the high mercury content is limited to certain types of sharks or specific waters.

Officials said adults should eat shark meat no more than once a week and children and women of childbearing age should not eat shark more than once monthly.



Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif greeted by people at Badshahi Mosque in Lahore May 17 after a special prayer for his government's decision to pass the Shariah bill and make the Quran to the supreme law of the country. —AFP photo.