

No violence in Assam polls

NEW DELHI, June 7: About three million people voted in the insurgency-scarred state of Assam Thursday, the first national balloting since last month's assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, reports AP.

Ballots were cast for seven parliamentary seats and about half of the seats in the state legislature. There were no reports of violence, according to Chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan.

Voting for the rest of the legislature and another seven seats in Parliament will be held Saturday. Results will be announced on June 16, when nationwide counting of votes begins.

Seshan said about 55 percent of the eligible 5.4 million voters cast their ballots. The figure was low for Assam, where a turnout of over 70 percent is common.

It was the first voting since 1985 in Assam, a tea-growing state in eastern India. The state was excluded from the 1989 parliamentary elections because of insurgency campaigns by tribal guerrillas and ethnic Assamese militants.

Photographer clicked 10 frames of Rajiv's assassination sequences

NEW DELHI, June 7: A blur of orange and magenta is now the focus of Indian detectives who say it was a photograph taken by a freelancer who clicked his camera when a bomb last month killed former premier Rajiv Gandhi, reports AFP.

The cameraman also died in the blast. The photograph is the last in a sequence of 10 frames he took May 21 from the moment the former Premier reached Sriperumpudur a southern Indian town, until a woman exploded a bomb reportedly attached to her body, killing him.

Only eight reprints of the 10 frames have been released by Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) detectives who now say tests and analysis at advanced photographic laboratories prove the last frame was of the final act.

"We are sure the last frame was of the explosion," said an official CBI spokesman in New Delhi, adding that the original negatives magnified with lenses have revealed more

telling details. CBI detectives say a woman triggered a battery operated pellet-filled plastic explosive strapped to her back after worming her way up to the former Premier on the pretext of touching his feet in a traditional Indian gesture of reverence.

Freelance photographer Hari Babu, the officials said, clicked the 10 frames which included pictures of an orange-dress clad killer, a suspected male accomplice and the blurred photo of the blast in which he too died.

The final frame showed a close-up of orange in the foreground, a huge flash of magenta and in the blur of background colours a shadow that could be a distorted face, the spokesman said, adding that magnifiers had revealed that the magenta was the colour of the vivid blast printed on slow-emulsion film.

The camera too had burn marks, "another CBI official said, referring to the proximity of Babu to the former Premier whose brain, face, a kidney, parts of a leg, stomach and spleen, were torn apart by the powerful blast.

Sixteen people including the assassin, widely believed to be a member of the Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels, died instantly in the blast which occurred just before Gandhi was to mount a speaker's dais.

"It is possible the photographer pressed the trigger of his camera by reflex when the blast hurled him backwards," the CBI spokesman said, "it is the only evidence we have."

The CBI spokesman said he could not reveal the location of the remaining two frames.

The first photograph taken with a flash shows Gandhi alighting from a car to face cheering people and the sec-

ond, third and fourth show him meeting members of his Congress (I) party.

The sixth frame, released earlier to the press, captures the alleged killer standing with a suspected male accomplice flanked by a girl and her mother. The seventh shows her inching her way to Gandhi, being hugged by the same young girl she was photographed with in the earlier frame.

The eighth showed the fateful moment.

The CBI has also seized a video camera of another man who reportedly filmed the entire sequence, but so far detectives have not given any details of what the tape contained.

Indian journalists who claim to have seen the footage have spoken of the presence of a fourth woman on the film, and the CBI has said it is seeking her whereabouts.

Lankan engineer prepared device killing Rajiv?

NEW DELHI, June 7: A Sri Lankan chemical engineer from Frankfurt may have prepared the device that killed former Premier Rajiv Gandhi last month in an assassination plot involving a human bomb, a report said Thursday, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency in a dispatch from Madras said investigators probing the May 21 assassination in nearby Sriperumpudur town were working on the theory that an expert came from Germany to make the bomb.

A Sri Lankan Tamil chemical engineer "may have come" to Madras from Frankfurt, made the pellet-filled plastic bomb and returned, PTI quoted official sources as saying.

However, a spokesman here for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said the agency had "not arrived at any such conclusion."

Jayalalitha calls off campaign

NEW DELHI, June 7: A movie star-turned-politician tipped to win elections in India's Tamil Nadu state has called off her campaign, saying she feared threats to her life, newspapers reported Friday, reports AFP.

Jayalalitha Jayaram, 43, who heads the regional All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party, said in a statement in the Tamil Nadu capital Madras Thursday that police had requested her not to campaign any more.

The statement followed the

May 21 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the Tamil Nadu town of Sriperumpudur. Gandhi's Congress (I) party is fighting elections in the southern state in alliance with AIADMK.

Jayalalitha said she had been told she was on a "hit list" and that there were plans to kill her. "The Hindustan Times" another newspaper quoted her as saying.

Jayalalitha did not say who was trying to kill her, but Tamil Nadu Congress (I) leaders have previously said that Sir Lankan Tamil Guerrillas were out to get the AIADMK

General Secretary. Tamil Nadu is divided from Sri Lanka by a narrow strip of sea.

The AIADMK and Congress (I) are jointly fighting elections to both the 234-seat Tamil Nadu Legislature, as well as the coastal state's 39 seats in the federal parliament. Elections for both are due on June 15.

The statement appealed to voters in Tamil Nadu "Let not the bloodshed by Rajiv Gandhi on Tamil Nadu soil be wasted. Give a verdict that teaches a lesson to the forces out to uproot democracy."

Newspapers added that se-

curity had been beefed up in Jayalalitha's Madras residence, and unfamiliar vehicles plying the road opposite her home were now checked by police.

Gandhi died instantly at an election rally when an unidentified young woman detonated a powerful plastic explosive wired to her body while pretending to touch his feet.

The killing forced authorities to put off the second and final phases of countrywide balloting from May 23 and 26 to June 12 and 15. The first round had taken place on May 20.

BRIEFLY

Bush's terms for summit: President George Bush said Thursday no date would be chosen for a US-Soviet summit until progress is made in START talks with the Soviet Union aimed at reducing superpower strategic arsenals, reports AFP from Washington.

"We want to move further along on START (Strategic Arms Reduction) before setting the date for a possible summit," Mr. Bush said.

The President said he planned to meet with his national security staff to discuss the US stance on arms reduction before Secretary of State James Baker meets in Geneva Friday with Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh.

Savimbi to run for presidency:

Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi announced here Thursday that he would run for the Angolan Presidency in elections scheduled for September 1992 and declared his conviction that he would win, reports AFP from Paris.

"We want the presidential mandate limited to five years, with the President only being allowed to serve one term," said Mr. Savimbi, the leader of the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

He said UNITA would transfer its headquarters to Luanda in July. Mr. Savimbi signed a ceasefire agreement in Lisbon last week with Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, ending a 16-year-old civil war with the Luanda government.

Saudi FM wraps up visit to Iran:

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal wrapped up a landmark visit to Iran on Thursday with Tehran radio predicting that the Gulf states could soon revise their long chilly relations with Iran, reports Reuter from Tehran.

The radio also said the prince, visiting Tehran just three months after the two countries restored relations, met Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and invited him to visit Saudi Arabia.

Prince Saud quoted by the radio, told Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati that foreign ministers of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) had recently agreed on the need for better ties with Tehran.

Bush keen to scuttle ME arms race:

US officials denied on Thursday that American weapons sales in the Middle East conflicted with President George Bush's proposal for an international effort to control the regional arms race, reports Reuter from Washington.

Bush announced last week he will seek agreements to eliminate weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and restrict the flow of conventional arms.

But democratic Senator Claiborne Pell, chairman of senate foreign relations committee, said the admister was sending contradictory signals on conventional arms and accused it of "pushing" arms in the region.

Israel won't allow UN in ME talks:

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has sent a negative reply to a letter from US President George Bush which sought to bridge Israeli-Arab differences on Middle East peace diplomacy, the Israel and army radio stations said on Thursday, reports Reuter from Jerusalem.

The two radio stations quoted US and Israeli sources in Washington as saying Shamir told Bush that Israel would not allow the United Nations a role in a proposed Middle East peace conference.

Israel has insisted that any such conference must be a one-off affair followed by peace talks between Israel and individual Arab states.

US to issue Desert Storm stamp:

The US Postal Service will issue a special commemorative stamp honouring those who served in Operation Desert Storm, reports AP from Washington.

"These courageous men and women served to preserve the freedom Americans cherish so dearly," said US Postmaster General Anthony Frank, noting that 2,500 postal employees were among reservists called up for the war with Iraq.

The 29-cent stamps feature the Southwest Asia service medal, authorized in March for troops serving in the war.

40 new MPs in Lebanon:

The Lebanese government on Thursday appointed 40 new members of parliament, creating an equal balance between Muslims and Christians in an expanded parliament, cabinet sources said.

The list includes the second woman MP in the country's history, Nayla Moawad, the wife of former President Rene Moawad, who was assassinated shortly after his election in November 1989.

Thirteen ministers drawn from outside parliament — including Prime Minister Omar Karami — were among those given seats. The final list was to be announced today in a decree signed by President Elias Hrawi and the Premier, reports AFP from Beirut.

One sentenced in Kuwait:

A martial-law court on Thursday sentenced a man to two years imprisonment with hard labour and fined two others after finding all three guilty of crimes involving collaboration with Iraq, reports AP from Kuwait City.

Maroud Al-Azimi, who has no declared nationality, was given the two-year sentence for the specific crime of breaking and entering a house with the intention of stealing, and of possession of unlicensed weapons. He was also ordered to pay a 340-dollar fine.

Two unidentified Kuwaitis, one of them present in court Thursday, will be fined 170 dollars each for possession of weapons and unintended manslaughter, the court ruled. No other details of the charges were disclosed.



ISLAMABAD: Ex-premier Ghulam Jatoi shows to the press a bugging device, which he said had been planted under a table in his hotel room in Islamabad Thursday. — AFP photo

**Bangkok suspends return of Burmese refugees
3 top NLD politicians surrender to army**

BANGKOK, June 7: Three members of Burma's main opposition party have surrendered to military authorities after joining an outlawed parallel government in an ethnic insurgent camp, official Radio Rangoon said Thursday, reports AFP.

The three men, members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), surrendered without weapons May 31 in Kyak Kyi township, north of Rangoon, the radio said in a report monitored here.

It identifies the three as Kyak Kyi township NLD Vice Chairman U San Tun, 40, Secretary-General U Tun Aung, 49, and Finance Secretary U Tin Win, 42.

The radio failed to say whether or when they would be released.

San Tun went underground two months ago and joined the parallel government in Magerplaw, headquarters of the ethnic Karen insurgency near the Thai-Burmese border, it said.

Tun Aung and Tin Win also joined on May 23 the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), the parallel government launched December 18, 1990, by Sein Win and some senior NLD members, the radio said.

A total of 12 NLD members from the same township including Tunoo, who won a parliamentary seat in General Elections may 27 last year, joined the parallel government in Magerplaw, it said.

Tun was appointed Social Affairs Minister in the parallel government.

The Karen National Union (KNU) insurgents allowed the NCGUB to use their Magerplaw headquarters as a base and

named it free land of the NLD, it said.

The surrendered parallel government followers said they gave themselves up to military authorities when the parallel government ordered them to try to smuggle cows out of Burma to seek funds for the NCGUB.

The three quoted military authorities as saying the KNU had provided 30,000 baht (1,200 US) to the NCGUB per month.

But the KNU reduced its assistance to NCGUB last month, leaving the parallel government in a precarious position, they said.

US accused of plot to kill Surinam leader

PARAMARIBO (Surinam), June 7: Surinam's government has accused the United States of organising a plot to murder the south American republic's army leader, Colonel Desi Bouterse, diplomatic sources said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Caractaker Prime Minister Jules Wijdenbosch summoned US Ambassador John Leonard to his office on Monday to lodge a protest over the alleged plot. The sources said Leonard denied all knowledge of any plan to murder Bouterse, who has dominated Surinamese politics for years.

An associate of Bouterse, Hank Herenberg, said the alleged plot aimed to kill Bouterse and make his murder look like a settling of scores between rival narcotics rings.

Herenberg made the charge at a press conference. He called on Thursday to give details of the alleged plot.

Reuter adds: Thailand has suspended the forced repatriation of thousands of Burmese illegal immigrants because Burmese officials refused to accept them, a military officer said today.

The Thai army said last month it planned to send more than 20,000 Burmese illegal immigrants back across the border.

Officials in the Burmese town of Myawadi, just opposite Mae Sot, had said they had nowhere to house the returnees nor the funds to feed them, Thai Colonel Akvichai Arthit said.

Top members of the Surinamese army are widely believed to be deeply involved in cocaine dealing. The country is a major transshipment point for narcotics bound for the Netherlands.

Political analysts said the accusations appeared aimed at influencing public opinion in the aftermath of parliamentary elections in late May in this former Dutch colony on South America's northeast coast.

A multi-ethnic coalition won the elections, called earlier this year after Bouterse ousted President Ramswak Shankar and installed a caretaker administration more sympathetic to the army, which ruled from 1980 to 1987.

Leaders of the New Front, as the coalition is called, said last week they intend to form a government on their own even though they lack the two-thirds majority in parliament needed to elect a president.

Maldives jails 18 Lankans

COLOMBO, June 7: The Maldives has jailed 18 Sri Lankan fishermen for terms ranging from 22 to 24 months for fishing in its waters, Colombo said Thursday, reports Reuter.

Sri Lanka was seeking a pardon for them, the government said.

The jailed men were skippers of 18 fishing boats seized by the Maldives in March.

Following a request from Colombo, the Maldives earlier released 70 crewmen. It kept the skipper of each vessel under detention.

The Sri Lankan government said the 18 were jailed by Maldivian courts this month.

The Maldives, an Archipelago of 1,200 tiny islands in the Indian Ocean, is strict about foreign vessels fishing in its waters. Fishing is the main occupation of its 200,000 people.

Saudi ship banned from entering Egypt

CAIRO, June 7: A Saudi ship was banned yesterday to enter Egyptian territorial waters because the sheep aboard have an infectious disease, an official source of the environmental affairs office here said, reports Xinhua.

The Saudi merchant ship 'Tabuk' was prevented from unloading at Egyptian ports because its cargo of some 71,000 sheep are having an infectious mouth plague, said the official.

The ship, carrying sheep from Australia, had earlier arrived in international waters near Suez and requested permission to enter Al Adebeya port to unload its cargo.

Sikhs raid Nepali town, kill 2

KATHMANDU, June 7: Nepali police said yesterday they were seeking Indian help in tracking a band of Sikhs who raided a Nepali town and killed two people, reports Reuter.

They said 13 Sikhs armed with automatic weapons raided Dohara Bazar in the far west of Nepal on Tuesday, robbing shops of cloth and electronic goods.

One of the two people killed before the Sikhs fled was a former Gurkha soldier in the Indian army who resisted.

Police in the area said by telephone they believed the Bandits were hiding in jungles on the Indian side of the border.

Police superintendent Dil Prasad Benju said his Indian counterparts had agreed to a meeting later on Thursday to work out plans for a major search.

Sikh militants have waged a bloody separatist campaign in the north Indian state of Punjab for 10 years, but they have never operated so far away and police said they had no immediate evidence to suggest the Bandits were militants.

Off the Record

Schwarzkopf interview bogus

WASHINGTON: Those weren't the general's words. In a transcript distributed by the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Gen H Norman Schwarzkopf was quoted as saying the United States went to war with Iraq to benefit Israel and intended to march on Baghdad and remove President Saddam Hussein, reports AP.

In the alleged interview with Israel Army Radio, the commander of allied forces in Operation Desert Storm also was quoted as jeering at Saudi and Kuwaiti forces for hampering US efforts to evict Iraq from Kuwait.

But Schwarzkopf never gave the interview — not to the Israeli station's Washington correspondent, as the transcript claimed, nor to anyone else.

"It was a disinformation story," said a spokesman for the general's Central Command, Lt Cmdr John Jendro. "It was a hoax. The interview never took place."

Several Washington reporters received copies of the fabricated interview, some from a PLO representative and some from an official of the National Association of Arab Americans.

John Wallach, a foreign affairs specialist at Hearst newspapers, said he got copy of the remarks from Khaled Saffouri, the public relations director of the NAAA.

Saffouri had the Arabic text translated into English, Wallach said.

"I had no reason to believe it was a fake," he said. "It's cleverly done."

Wallach said he was told by PLO representative Hassan Abdul Rahman that the transcript came from the organization's information department in Tunis, which monitored the interview on Israeli Army Radio.

Abdul Rahman was out of town and not available for comment. Saffouri was out of the country and couldn't be reached.

But an NAAA official, Jeffrey Steele, said that "we don't distribute any information whose authenticity is in doubt." Saffouri was probably also taken in and believed the interview was real, said an NAAA official who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Bush in tears

ATLANTA: President George Bush tearfully recalled Thursday how he prayed at the presidential retreat in Camp David, Maryland, before sending Americans to war against Iraq, reports AP.

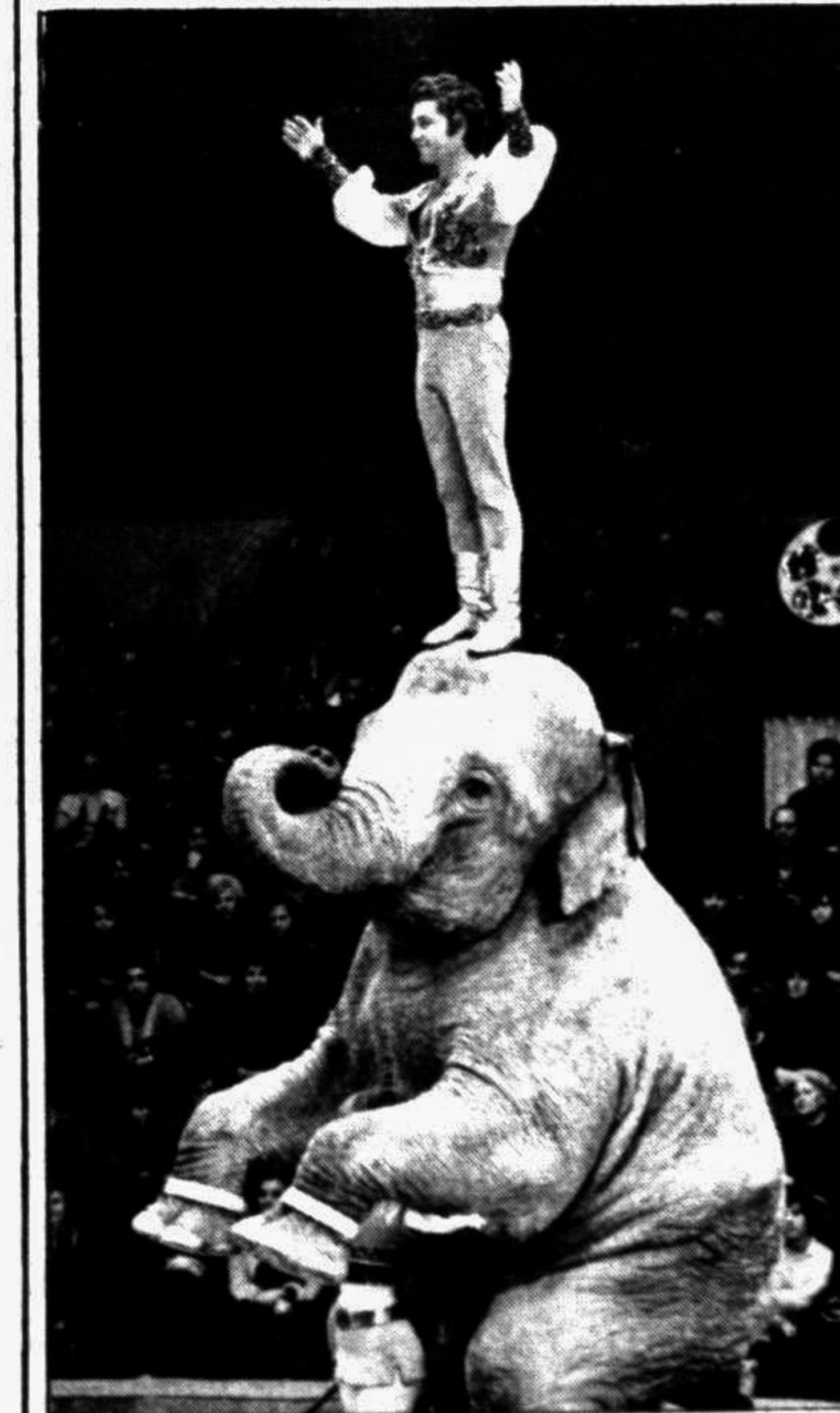
"Like a lot of people, I've worried a little bit about shedding tears in public, or the emotion of it," Bush told the Southern Baptist Convention. "But as Barbara and I prayed at Camp David before the air war began, we were thinking about those young men and women overseas. And I had the tears start down the cheeks."

"And our minister smiled back," Bush said. "And I no longer worried how I looked to others."

The audience roared in applause as Bush wiped away tears, confessing, "There we go."

Continuing his remarks, he said, "And I think that like others, a lot of others who had positions of responsibility in sending someone else's kid to war, we realized that in prayer what mattered is how it might have seemed to God."

"For me, prayer has always been important, but quite personal. You know us Episcopalians," he said.



MAN-ANIMAL AMITY — An elephant seen delighting thousands of Soviets by holding its trainer Sarvat Begbudi of Moscow State Circus.

Rust marries Pole

BONN: Mathias Rust, the young German who became famous by landing a light aircraft in Moscow's Red Square, has married a Polish girl in Reno, Nevada, the German weekly Bunte reported Thursday, reports AFP.

Mr Rust, 23, and his bride, Katharina Burdy, 27, were married in a 15-minute ceremony in the city renowned for gambling and quickie marriages and divorces, the magazine said.

The former pilot had earlier tried to get married on the Caribbean island of Mustique, a favourite resort of royalty and rock stars, but found undesirable, Bunte said.

A second try on Canouan, like Mustique one of the Grenadine islands in the Caribbean state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, failed when no church would perform the ceremony.

Mr Rust's Red Square exploit four years ago landed him a Soviet prison. In April this year he was convicted in Germany of stabbing a nurse in 1989 who resisted his advances and sentenced to two and a half years imprisonment.