

Failed impeachment of Ramaswami puts Rao govt in dock

NEW DELHI, May 23: A failed impeachment of a Supreme Court Judge found guilty of corruption charges has put the government in the dock, as a raging debate on tumbling public morality grips India, reports AFP.

Suspensions of corruption and abuses of power, which forced the Congress (I) into the political wilderness in 1977 and 1989, resurfaced on May 11 when the ruling party failed to impeach Judge Ramaswami during his trial by parliament.

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, who steered the Congress (I) back to power in 1991, ordered his party MPs to abstain en masse from voting on an impeachment motion after a three-judge panel found him guilty on 12 out of 14 charges of misusing public funds.

The party had originally allowed its MPs to vote according to their conscience.

"The Congress (I) has formally pronounced itself to be a moral leper," wrote Nirmal Goswami, a respected commentator.

"Charges against the Judge were of financial irregularities and not of corruption and did not merit an impeachment," was the lame reply of the Congress (I), stung by a wave of righteous indignation sweeping India.

"Ramaswami has done a signal service. He was brought out the inner mind of the Congress leaders, who are prepared to condone petty larceny as they indulge in a magnum loot," said Nikhil Chakrabarty, one of India's top journalists.

Dispute over appointment of CMs from UNP Lankan opposition plans to fight govt decision

COLOMBO, May 23: The political opposition in Sri Lanka prepared Sunday to fight a government decision to appoint chief ministers in provincial assemblies where it has no majority following polls last week, reports AFP.

On Friday, the government appointed chief ministers from President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga's United National Party (UNP) to head the northwestern and southern provincial councils despite a combined opposition having a majority in both bodies.

The opposition People's Alliance had also won the key western council, which covers the territory of Colombo, in the May 17 elections to seven

provincial councils. The UNP had won four of the provinces.

The development has plunged the country into a fresh political crisis with the main opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which is leading the alliance, vowing to carry out a protest campaign against Colombo's move.

The SLFP has condemned the government decision to appoint chief ministers to the northwestern and southern provincial councils as "a blatant violation of the spirit of the constitution and an assault on democracy."

Opposition leaders were to meet Monday to plan a strategy of both political and legal action to secure the leadership of the two councils where the

UNP had no working majority, political sources said.

The opposition has also planned a protest campaign that would include a series of meetings islandwide to drum up public support for the reversal of the government decision, a spokesman for the alliance said.

The next important development is expected to be when the assemblies concerned vote for their respective speakers, or chairmen.

Provincial councils are the most important local government bodies and enjoy limited autonomy to enact laws, raise taxes and establish a provincial police force as well as paramilitary units.

The SLFP claimed that the combined opposition, including a breakaway faction of the UNP, had a one-seat majority in the 55-member southern council and a two-member lead over the UNP in the 52-member northwestern council.

Under the constitution a provincial governor, who is appointed by the President, should name a chief minister from the party which, in his opinion, could command a majority in the regional assembly.

Meanwhile the government Sunday named W P B Dissanayake as chief minister of the central provincial council, where the UNP won a absolute majority.

Off the Record

Death couldn't sever lovers' tie

SARAJEVO: Two lovers lie dead on the banks of Sarajevo's Miljacka river locked in a final embrace, reports Reuter.

For four days they have crawled near Arbana bridge in a wasteland of shell-blasted rubble, downed tree branches and dangling power lines.

So dangerous is the area no one has dared recover their bodies.

Bosko Brkic and Admira Ismic, both 25, were shot dead on while Wednesday trying to escape the besieged Bosnian capital for Serbia.

Sweethearts since high school, he was a Serb and she was a Muslim.

"They were shot at the same time, but he fell instantly and she was still alive," recounts Dino, a soldier who saw the couple trying to cross from government territory to rebel Serb positions.

"She crawled over and hugged him and they died like that, in each other's arms."

Squinting through a hole in the sandbagged wall of a bombed-out building, Dino points to where the couple lie mouldering amid the debris of Bosnia's 14-month civil war.

Candle rally to remember those dying from AIDS

SYDNEY: Some 5,000 people gathered Sunday evening for a candlelight rally to remember those who have died here from Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), reports AFP.

Men and women, many of them members of the city's large gay and lesbian community and wearing red ribbon, gathered with candles in and around Green Park, adjacent to Saint Vincent's Hospital, which treats many Australian AIDS patients.

More than 2,300 Australians have died for AIDS-related illnesses since it was first detected here in December 1981, and nearly 17,000 have been diagnosed as having the Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV).

"This year the theme is 'let's be together, and it is there for the HIV community, gay and lesbian community, but also for care, and for all people who feel they are affected by HIV and AIDS,'" said Gerard Lawrence, coordinator of the memorial rally, estimating the turnout at more than 5,000.

Because he committed more than 50 rapes

BEIJING: A district police director in the southern Chinese province of Guangxi was executed Friday for having committed more than 50 rapes, the People's Daily said Sunday, reports AFP.

Lu Shizhang, of Longan district, was accused of having raped 11 women more than 50 times, the newspaper said, but did not specify the dates. He had also molested 10 other women and had made obscene gestures to young women.

He was executed shortly after the verdict was read in public, the daily said.

Row over sextuplets' unmarried mother

LONDON: The birth of sextuplets in Britain caused a storm of controversy Sunday following reports that the unmarried mother received free fertility treatment, already has one child and lives apart from the babies' father, reports Reuter.

Britain's Sunday newspapers also carried reports that the sextuplets' father has three children by his ex-wife.

"Row as sextuplets' man is exposed as father of 10" said the Observer newspaper's headline. "Birth pangs for sextuplets' story," said the Sunday Telegraph.

Jeangibbins who had been taking fertility drugs, gave birth to five girls and a boy by caesarian section last Wednesday in the northern city of Leeds. She has a six-year-old son by the infants' father, Jan Vinck, 36.

The babies, who were born 11 week prematurely and weighed between two pounds 12 ounces (1.25 kg) and one pound six ounces (0.6 kg), were making good progress and have an 80 per cent chance of survival, a hospital spokesman said.

Priceless relics found in Spanish galleon

MANILA: Nearly 400 years after being sent to the bottom by a marauding Dutch warship, the Spanish galleon San Diego has yielded a huge trove of archaeological treasures, reports AP.

Eusebio Dizon, Chief of the underwater archaeology department of the National Museum, said 28,000 items have been catalogued since the haul was made in 1991. The list could grow once coins and other smaller items have been cleaned.

The collection will provide scholars with many clues about life aboard a Spanish galleon, trade patterns in Asia and military matters.

Among the articles recovered were 3,000 pieces of blue and white Ming Dynasty China, the porcelain artifact most sought-after by collectors. Divers also found Philippine pottery, Japanese swords, Spanish cannon and muskets, European-made astrolabes and dozens of Spanish silver coins.

They also found more than 100 skeletal remains.

Dizon said some of the jars were still intact and contained remnants of food like hazel nuts and bones of wild pigs and cows.

"It could be the world's most extensive underwater archaeological find," he said.

Japan will ask China to publish defence budget

TOKYO, May 23: Japan, concerned about China's recent military modernisation and expansion, will ask Beijing to publish military information as part of an effort to create mutual confidence, a news report said today, reports Reuter.

The Daily Yomiuri Shimibun quoted Foreign Ministry sources as saying Foreign Minister Muto was expected to make the request during talks scheduled for Saturday in Tokyo with his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen.

Qian will visit Japan from May 29 to 31 to meet Muto, Prime Minister Kichiro Miyazawa and other officials.

The paper said Muto would

urge China to disclose as detailed a breakdown as possible of its military spending, possibly by publishing a defence white paper.

The Japanese Minister is also expected to express Tokyo's regret over China's reported plans to reinforce its navy with an aircraft carrier, the daily said.

The Japanese news agency Kyodo said on Thursday that China was negotiating to buy two aircraft carriers from Russia.

China's neighbours are worried that it wants aircraft carriers to help stake its claim to the spratly islands in the South China Sea, which are claimed in whole or part by six countries in the region.



Patients suffering from gastro-enteritis are wheeled into the Infectious Disease Hospital in Calcutta Saturday. The disease has already claimed more than 800 lives in the Indian state of West Bengal, which borders Bangladesh.

Unofficial truce in Kabul

KABUL, May 23: An unofficial ceasefire went into effect in southern Kabul Sunday with ex-communist militia acting as a buffer force between defence ministry forces and rival factions, witnesses said, reports AFP.

The tense truce followed 12 days after the outbreak of devastating fighting which has left some 1,000 dead and thousands more wounded.

"Till now no official ceasefire has been announced," said defence ministry spokesman General Yunus Qanouni.

But roads in south Kabul were open for civilians for the first time since the fighting started, and many residents took advantage of the calm to flee the area with what belongings they could carry.

UN condemns killing of peacekeepers in Cambodia

UNITED NATIONS, May 23: The Security Council on Saturday condemned the killing of two UN peacekeepers from China in Cambodia, but China refused to blame the Khmer Rouge for the attack, reports AP.

The Security Council statement said it "strongly condemns all attacks against UNTAC (United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia) and demands that those responsible cease forthwith all hostile acts against UNTAC and take immediate measures to safeguard the lives and the security of UNTAC personnel."

The resolution also said that the United Nations "would respond appropriately should any of the parties fail to honour its obligations. It further warns that it will not countenance the use of violence to interfere with or overturn the democratic process in Cambodia."

The meeting was called by China, one of the five permanent members of the 15-member Security Council.

Chinese Ambassador Li Zhaoxing expressed his satisfaction with the vote.

"The Chinese position is clear."

Black faction clash leaves 13 dead

Mandela hopeful of setting date for polls thru' talks

JOHANNESBURG, May 23: ANC protesters clashed with a rival black group Saturday in a "wild shootout" near Johannesburg that left at least 13 dead and 61 injured, police said, reports AP.

Even as the violence raged, African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela gave one of his most upbeat political assessments in recent weeks.

Mandela, speaking hundreds of kilometers (miles) away at an ANC rally in the eastern town of Eastcourt, said political negotiations were "on the verge" of setting a date for multiracial elections that would end apartheid.

But the fighting in Tokoza, a perennially troubled township southeast of Johannesburg, underscored the explosive nature of many black areas.

As hundreds of ANC marchers headed toward a police station to protest a host of political grievances, they came under fire from residents of a migrant workers hostel loyal to the Inkatha Freedom Party, said police spokesman Capt. Wilkus Weber.

The ANC marchers re-

turned the gunfire, and the ensuing battles between the rival black groups lasted several hours, he said.

Two white security guards were among the 13 killed. Of the 61 injured, three were police who suffered burns when their vehicle was fire bombed, Weber said.

It was a big, wild West shootout," said Weber. "Both sides were engaged in a number of shootings."

Weber said police were not initially targets in the battle, but became involved as they tried to separate the warring factions.

ANC and Inkatha officials blamed each other for starting the fight. ANC member Elaine Saunders, who took part in the march, also claimed that ANC marchers did not fire any shots.

However, ANC marchers carried scores of weapons that included spears, clubs, handguns and AK-47 assault rifles, according to photographers at the scene.

Mandela, commenting Saturday night on the battle, said, "police know hostels are

barracks for hit squads, but are not prepared to seal hostels and make them safe."

The ANC and Inkatha have battled repeatedly in Tokoza, where many of the residents support the ANC, but those who live in the migrant workers hostel back Inkatha, a conservative, Zulu movement.

Black factional violence has claimed almost 10,000 lives since 1990. Black-white negotiations have not been disrupted by the bloodshed. In fact, the 26 parties involved appear closer to an agreement than ever before.

Mandela's speech in Eastcourt was the latest sign that a breakthrough could come soon in the protracted talks.

It's clear to everyone that democratic changes are coming," Mandela said. "We are now on the verge of announcing a date for elections."

The parties at the black-white talks say they want to set the date by the end of May and the most likely target is early 1994, a time acceptable to both the ANC and President F.W. de Klerk's white government.

BRIEFLY

Cold takes 4 in western China: A harsh Siberian cold has killed four people and left 13,500 head of livestock dead in western China, the China News Service reported Saturday, says AFP from Beijing.

Farm crops in agricultural areas throughout the Xinjiang Yugur autonomous region were also severely damaged by the hailstorms and bitter winds that swept down from Siberia, the report said.

The Oasis of Turpan was worst hit. Sixty houses were blown over by high winds, killing four people and seriously injuring three others.

Economic losses in the vast, arid region bordering Russia were put at 170 million yuan.

June 3 set for Endeavour flight: NASA managers set June 3 as the target date for launching Endeavour to retrieve a European science satellite, but said they're still bothered by a mysterious noise in the shuttle, reports AP from Cape Canaveral.

"We're shooting for June 3 unless something comes up and bites us," Kennedy Space Centre spokesman Bruce Buckingham said Friday.

For three weeks, NASA engineers have tried, to identify the source of the noise heard by workers in Endeavour's engine compartment.

The launching date is based on successful completion of that study, NASA spokesman Ed Campion said.

Two SLA men killed in blast: A bomb exploded Saturday in South Lebanon killing two members of Israel's proxy South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia and wounding a third, an Israeli military spokesman said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

The bomb targeted a motorised SLA patrol in Israel's self-declared "security zone" in South Lebanon.

Israeli troops and SLA reinforcements were dispatched to the area where a search operation was underway, the spokesman said.

The latest attack brought to 40 the number of bombs which targeted Israeli troops or SLA militiamen since January, the spokesman said.

8 militants killed in Punjab: Eight militants were killed and two arrested while one escaped from police custody in Punjab since Saturday night according to the police, reports PTI from Chandigarh.

A police spokesman told PTI here yesterday that a hard core militant of the KLF Surinder Singh alias Shinda was killed in an encounter near village Belowal in Batala district early yesterday.

A listed militant of the KLF Parjinder Singh and his unidentified accomplice were killed in another encounter near village Lakasari Nangal in Majitha district.

Three unidentified militants were killed in an encounter near village Raipur Daba in Jalandhar district.

Queen Mother leaves hospital: The Queen Mother was released from a hospital Sunday after surgery to remove food that had stuck in her throat, reports AP from Aberdeen.

The 92-year-old mother of Queen Elizabeth II was admitted to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary near her Scottish vacation home on Thursday. She underwent an hour-long operation Thursday night, but was kept in hospital another 64 hours for observation.

The Queen Mother was walking stiffly as she left the hospital. Asked how she was feeling, she said: "Much better, thank you. Everybody has been so kind. They have been wonderful."

The hospital was flooded with telephone calls, and flowers from Britons concerned about the widow of King George VI.

Car crash claims 2 in Iran: Canada's commercial attaché and a local employee of the Australian embassy were killed in a car crash in northwestern Iran that left nine others injured, police and embassy officials said Sunday, reports AFP from Tehran.

They said Derek Haro and the Australian embassy translator, Babk Sedigh, were killed instantly Thursday, on their return from a vacation, as their car collided with a minibus on the Neka to Behshahr road.

The First Secretary of the Australian embassy, David McLachlan-Carr and his parents were among the injured, along with six passengers on the minibus.

Sino-British talks on HK yield no result

BEIJING, May 23: China and Britain ended a third round of talks Sunday without any sign of progress toward agreement on holding Hong Kong's last elections under British rule, reports AP.

The two sides said a fourth round of negotiations would be held Friday and Saturday, indicating the process could stretch on indefinitely.

"Well, it's always good to keep talking, isn't it? The work we're doing is quite complicated work," Sir Robin McLaren, Britain's ambassador to China, said to reporters outside his embassy after returning from his latest meeting with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Jiang Enzhu.

The two men met for three mornings in a row in the latest round, using the afternoons to consult with their governments.

As before, McLaren refused to comment on the substance of the talks or say whether progress was made. However, comments made by the two sides on the issues indicate no movement from their original positions.

"The atmosphere was good, was McLaren's only remark on how the latest round went.

At issue is how Hong Kong

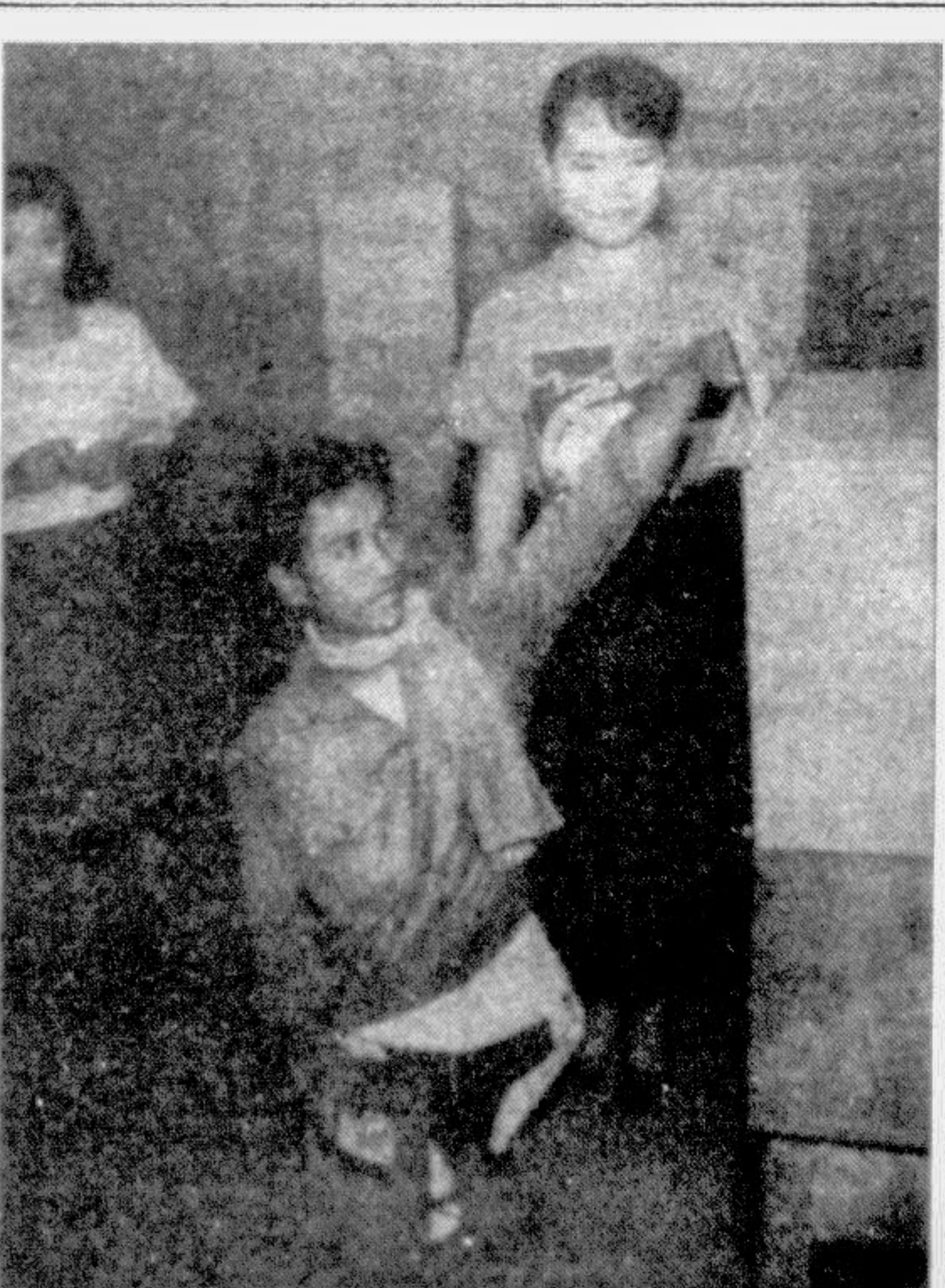
will conduct 1994 and 1995 local elections, its last before Britain returns the territory to Chinese rule in 1997.

China has threatened to replace Hong Kong's legislature, which will be elected in 1995 and should serve until 1999, if it does not like the election process. It also says it will unseat any legislators it considers too liberal.

Hong Kong Government Chris Patten proposed last year that democratic reforms be enacted to expand popular participation in the election. Although only 20 of the Hong Kong legislature's 60 members would be directly elected, a figure China and Britain previously agreed on, Patten suggested that voters be allowed to elect a special committee that would name 10 other legislators.

He also suggested changing the present system in which small, conservative professional groups fill most of the seats. Instead, he said each worker should vote for someone to represent his field.

China harshly denounced the plan and broke off normal contacts with the British government on the Hong Kong transition for months in hopes of forcing Patten to withdraw it.



PHNOM PENH: Ros Vibol, 20, a former Cambodian government soldier casts his ballot at a polling centre Sunday on the first day of the general election organized by the UN. Vibol lost both of his legs after a Khmer Rouge land mine exploded during a clash in 1990.

UNITA calls for fresh talks with govt

ABIDJAN, May 23: The Angolan rebel movement UNITA on Saturday called for new peace talks with the Luanda government, the day after six weeks of negotiations here ended in failure, but stuck to its demand to remain in the cities and towns it controls, reports AFP.

"We hope to come back to Abidjan in two or three weeks for a second round of negotiations," said Jorge Valentim, who headed the delegation representing the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

The talks began in Abidjan on April 12 and were suspended indefinitely Friday after UNITA refused to sign a peace protocol requiring the rebels to withdraw their forces from urban areas they control.

UNITA controls about 70 per cent of Angola.

"UNITA cannot and will never be able to leave the cities and villages it conquered with the blood of its best children, Valentim said. We cannot abandon them and let them be massacred by government forces, he said.

General Higinio Carneiro of the Luanda government delegation said it does not demand that the UNITA political orga-

nization withdraw from the cities, but that its soldiers return to their barracks. On their side, the government forces will respect the ceasefire, he said.

Despite the failure of the talks, the government remains open to dialogue, he added. "If UNITA thinks we can meet again in two weeks, we are prepared to think about it."

"But we don't want to come back to Abidjan to do the same propaganda exercise, he warned. We will come back if we are really going to resolve the Angolan problem."

Iran for closer ties with GCC

MUSCAT, May 23: Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati has called for closer ties between Tehran and the Gulf Arab monarchies to safeguard stability in the region, diplomats said on Saturday, reports AP.

Velayati meanwhile left Oman for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as part of a Gulf tour to repair the damage from an island's dispute and allegations that Iran sought to dominate the region.