

State elections to decide Rao's fate

NEW DELHI, Sept 30: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, faced with elections which may decide his political future, has called on all estranged colleagues to return to the ruling Congress (I) Party, reports AFP.

Rao, 72, said in a statement here late Tuesday that those who believed in the 'Ideals, culture and values of the freedom movement (of India)' should re-join in the Congress (I).

Rao, who is also the President of the Congress, the country's oldest political entity, said former colleagues were presently 'Scattered in several political parties.'

The Prime Minister said India was confronted by communalism and terrorism today.

'This is the time for each one of us to search his or her heart and determine our role when India, which was given to us so generously, asks of us our contribution for the nation's survival,' the statement said.

The statement came for days after Rao launched his party's campaign here for elections scheduled in November in the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.

All four were ruled by the

Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), (Indian People's Party). But their governments were dismissed by New Delhi after Hindu zealots razed the Babri Mosque in Uttar Pradesh.

The mosque razing sparked bloody Hindu-Muslim violence which left some 2,000 people dead.

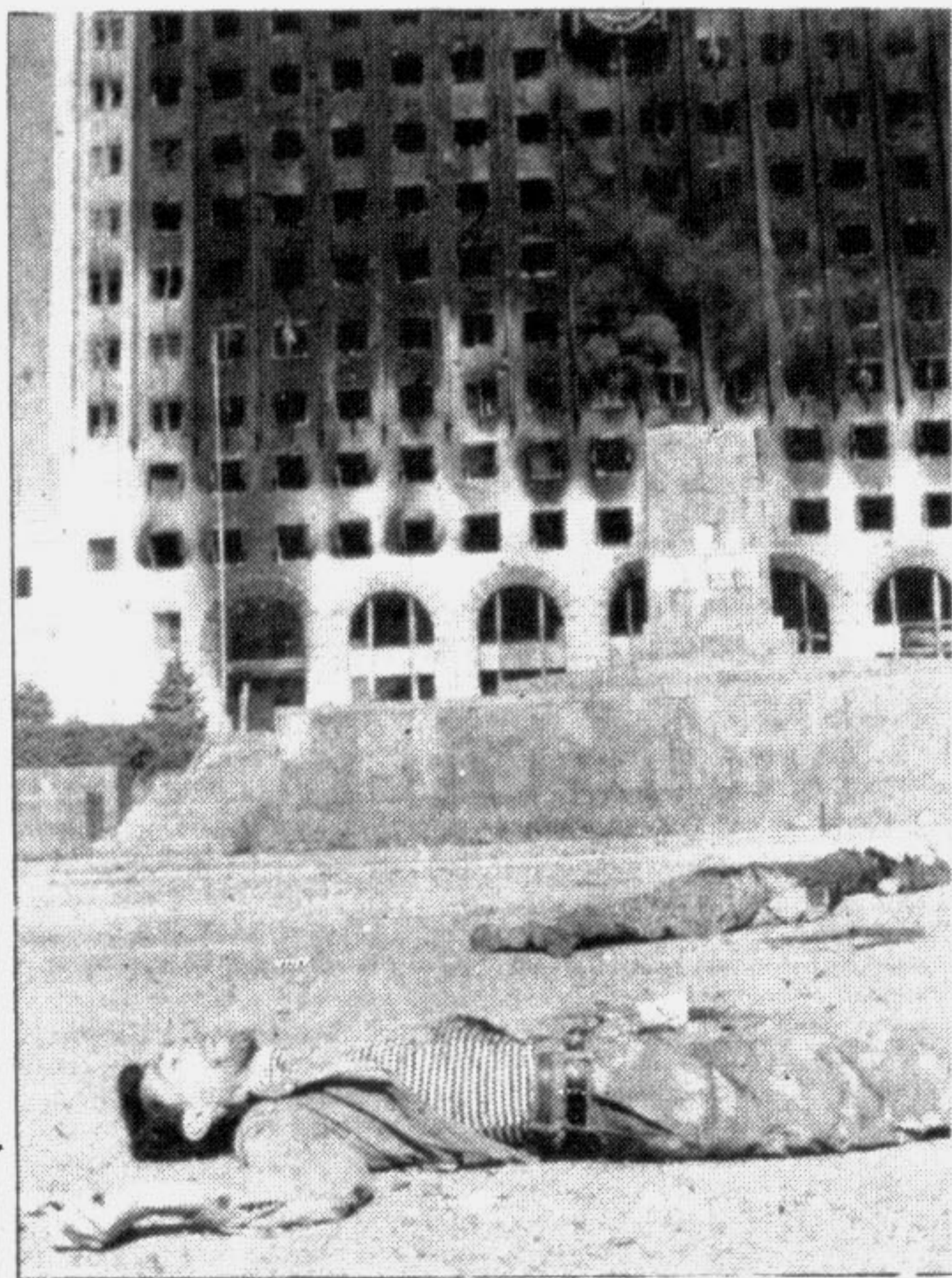
Political observers have warned that if the Congress fails to take power in at least two of the four states, then dissidents in the ruling party would seek to oust Rao.

The BJP will then call for fresh elections to parliament.

Samphan to meet King Sihanouk

PHNOM PENH, Sept 30: The Khmer Rouge president is to fly to the capital Friday to meet with Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk.

Khmer Rouge officials in the Communist group's compound here told the Associated Press their president, Khieu Samphan, would meet with Sihanouk for the first time since he again became king, 38 years after he abdicated to enter politics.



Georgian soldiers killed during the battle for Sukhumi lay in front of the parliament building in Sukhumi on Tuesday.

— AFP photo

Ochmchire falls to Abkhazian rebels

TBILISI, Sept 30: Abkhazian separatists today captured the town of Ochmchire three days after seizing the provincial capital of Sukhumi, the Georgian Defence Ministry announced, reports AFP.

'Ochmchire was taken,' the ministry press chief spokesman, Iosif Marguchvili, said.

The fall of Ochmchire following that of Sukhumi Monday means that the separatists now control virtually all of Georgia's Abkhazia breakaway region.

Only the Gali region at the southeastern tip of Abkhazia remains under Georgian government control.

Some 1,400 supporters of former Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who were in Ochmchire along with several thousand Georgian government troops, left the area late Wednesday to return to western Georgia, sources close to the former president said.

Meanwhile, in Moscow a television station had reported earlier today that Abkhazian separatists had broken the siege of the southern Abkhazian town of Tkarcheli which had been surrounded by Georgian government troops for more

than a year, a television station in Tbilisi reported.

The report said that the rebels broke the siege on Wednesday, and had joined with other units near Ochmchire in order to block retreating government troops.

The 13-month war between the separatists and government troops in Abkhazia broke out when the separatists declared independence from Georgia in 1992.

According to Interfax the rebels have reached the Kodori river, located about 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Sukhumi, and were preventing reinforcement troops from reaching the area through the Balc Sea coast.

The rebels have also taken control of the region's airport where Georgian troops abandoned their equipment and weapons and fled toward Tbilisi through the mountains, the television report said citing Abkhazian sources.

Interfax said that clashes were continuing today around the coastal town of Gulripsh, the last Georgian stronghold located about 12 kilometres (seven miles) south of Sukhumi.

Off the Record



LONDON: A Sotheby's employee presents on Wednesday precious jewels soon to be auctioned in Geneva. The 'El Mansour Diamond', a step-cut stone weighing 50.82 carats, is estimated to go under the hammer for one and a quarter million pounds (2.12 million dollars), and the diamond bracelet mounted by Van Cleef and Arpels is expected to fetch a quarter of a million pounds (379,000 dollars).

— AFP photo

The Hurt Man because I got hurt a lot

LOS ANGELES: During years of sexual torture by his father, Erik Menendez told jurors, he nicknamed himself 'The Hurt Man', reports AP.

He testified Wednesday that he told some of his friends the name but never said what it stood for. 'I just told them it was because I got hurt a lot,' Erik said under questioning by defence attorney Leslie Abramson.

Erik, 22, and his brother, Lyle, 25, are accused of murdering their parents, Jose and Kitty Menendez, in their Beverly Hills mansion in August 1989. The brothers testified that they killed in self-defence. Prosecutors contend they wanted to get the 14 million dollar family fortune.

Later Wednesday, Erik described being haunted by guilt over the killings—as well as having flashbacks of sexual torture and nightmares about suicide that drove him to seek psychiatric help.

Erik, in his third day of testimony, told of drills his father conducted in which he sat him in front of a mirror and asked if he had told anyone about their sexual relations.

He would say, 'What's going to happen if you tell someone,' Erik said.

'I said, 'You'll hurt me,' and he said, 'Wrong.' At that point, Erik said, he was required to hit himself in the head for giving the wrong answer and when the question was asked again, 'I said, 'You'll kill me.' And he said, 'Right.'

When he was 15, Erik said, his mother insisted he get a girlfriend and gave him a six-month deadline. He said he didn't want contact with girls or anyone who talked about sex for fear they would find out about him and his father.

Erik said he eventually found a girlfriend and 'it was like a new life for me. It was something I never experienced before. I was actually happy.'

But he said his father would come to his room and sexually abuse him before he went on dates and sometimes he would cancel the dates. 'It made me really, really despise—hate—what was happening with dad,' he said.

Held for making silent calls

TOKYO: Police arrested a middle-aged Japanese woman accused of making up to 100 silent phone calls a day to the same woman for 12 years, news reports said yesterday (Thursday), reports Reuters.

The Kyodo news agency said unemployed Mikiko Miyamoto, 43, had allegedly been making the calls to the home of an acquaintance, now 69, since 1981. She would hang up as soon as the phone was answered.

Kyodo said the victim had been forced to seek treatment for psychological disorders resulting from the alleged harassment. Kyodo said Miyamoto had been charged with assault. She had denied the charges and did not give a reason for the calls.

Actress fined for failing to appear in obsessive love

LOS ANGELES: Actress Kim Basinger got no break in bankruptcy court from a judge's order that she pay 8.1 million dollar for failing to appear in the film 'Boxing Helena', reports AP.

A Superior Court jury had found in March that Miss Basinger broke a promise to star in the movie about obsessive love. It eventually was made with actress Sherilyn Fenn and was a box office bomb.

The jury ordered Miss Basinger to pay 8.9 million dollar to Main Line pictures, the producers of 'Boxing Helena.' Superior Court Judge Judith Chirlin later reduced the verdict to 7.4 million dollar but ordered Miss Basinger to pay an additional 7.13,522 dollar in attorney's fees and costs.

The actress filed a Chapter 11 bankruptcy petition on May 26 in an effort to avoid payment. But on Tuesday, US bankruptcy Judge Geraldine Mund ordered Miss Basinger to pay 100 cents on the dollar on the money she owes, plus 10 per cent interest.

China to continue N-test for tactical advantage in Asia

BEIJING, Sept 30: China has no choice but to continue nuclear testing if it wants to avoid losing its tactical advantage in Asia, as its existing nuclear arsenal will be obsolete within a decade, western experts here say, reports AFP.

US intelligence services say China is preparing to carry out an underground test in the Lop Nor desert, its nuclear testing ground in the Xinjiang autonomous region in the northwest.

Beijing has neither confirmed nor denied the reports,

merely recalling that China is the nuclear power which has carried out the least number of tests.

Photographs taken by US satellite show that a shaft has been sunk in LP Nor and a device placed at the bottom. Some American officials claim the Chinese have now concreted the site. If this is so, then it will take another three weeks for it to set before a test firing can take place, said one expert.

According to this expert, the Chinese might wait for the symbolic date of October 16, the

anniversary of China's first atomic detonation in 1964, to carry out the test.

China has carried out only 37 or 38 atomic tests, while the United States has carried out 950, Russia about 600, France 200 and Britain about 60, to which should be added all the nuclear tests carried out by the British in the United States with US backing, another expert said.

China carried out nuclear tests every year between 1964 and 1968 but since the 1980s, firings have become irregular.

Referendum in Maldives today

MALE, Sept 30: Maldivians vote on Friday to decide whether President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, ruler of the Indian Ocean archipelago for the past 15 years, should continue in office for his fourth successive five-year term, reports Reuters.

Analysts say the result of the referendum is a foregone conclusion. Everyone expects Gayoom, the only candidate, to be endorsed—even his opponents—but his winning margin may be lower than the 90 per cent or more that he has scored in the past.

Under the law of the Maldives, which has no political parties and bans open dissent, parliament must elect its presidential candidate and it choice must be endorsed by the state's 105,000 voters.

India offers to sell reactors, heavy water

VIENNA, Sept 30: India proposed to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it should sell reactors and heavy water under IAEA supervision, Indian delegation head R Chidambaram said on Wednesday, reports AFP.

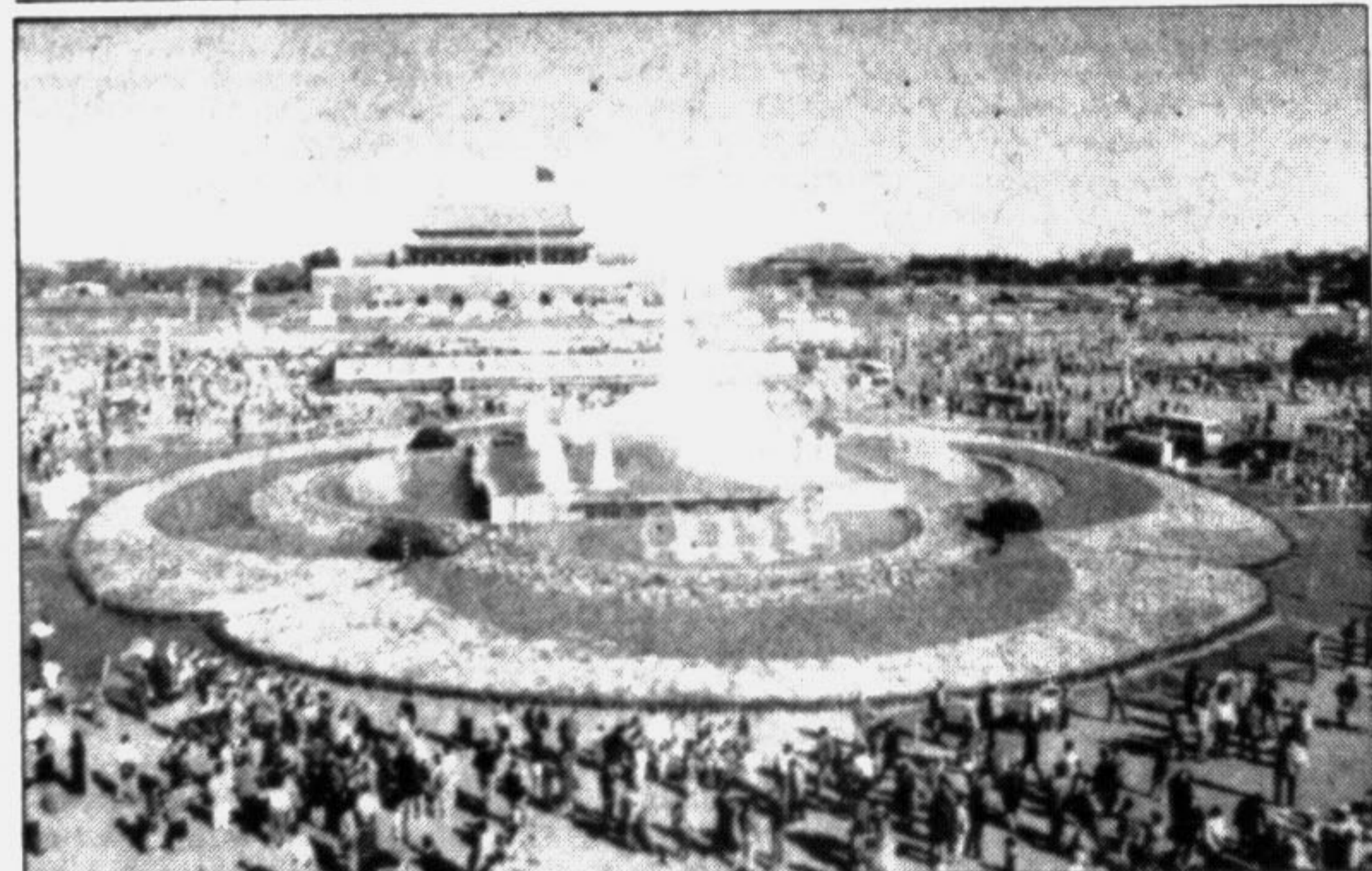
In speaking of India, which has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, he told the Vienna-based IAEA that 'we have designed a 5/10 MW multipurpose research reactor which provides a high enough flux for advanced physics and materials research, neutron activation analysis and other applications, and also for radioisotope production.'

'We shall be happy to offer this reactor for export under international safeguards.'

He added that 'we have also designed a small 30 KW experimental reactor fuelled entirely by U-233 in the form of uranium-aluminium alloy. This reactor... is also available for export.'

Chidambaram said the success of the Indian programme for producing heavy water made it possible to offer such water for export under IAEA safeguards.

India now has six research reactors, the first dating back to 1956 and the latest of which went into service in 1990. Sources at the agency said that India is now obviously trying to benefit from its knowhow and investments in civilian nuclear reactors.



Tiananmen Square is decorated on September 29 with more than 200,000 flower pots piled up to form various kinds of patterns and spell out messages such as 'Study Deng Xiaoping's Theory on Building Socialism With Chinese Characteristics.' More than one million pots of flowers decorate China's capital as the country prepares for National Day today. — AFP photo

Armed men kill 4 South African train passengers

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 30: A gang of armed men attacked passengers leaving a commuter train in the black township of Soweto and killed four, police said Thursday, reports AP.

The attack Wednesday night was the second mass attack in two days on black commuters, who are easy targets for extremists waging politically motivated warfare. At least 17 people have died this week in attacks linked to political violence.

Police Major Herman Oosthuysen said it believed about 10 men were involved in the train station shooting and that arrests were expected soon. The gang began firing at passengers as they left the people were injured.

On Tuesday morning, one man was killed and eight people were injured when gunmen opened fire on a black taxi-van south of Johannesburg.

UN peacekeeping needs overhaul

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 30: Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell on Wednesday said UN peacekeeping needs a major overhaul and urged states to provide standby troops for rapid deployment, reports AP.

Campbell, in her first address to the General Assembly, proposed a special panel of civilian and military experts to consider a permanent rapid deployment force under UN command possibly based on a new UN volunteer force.

Canada has fielded 100,000 men and women in UN peacekeeping, election monitoring and humanitarian operations since 1956.

The United Nations, the Canadian prime minister said, needs an early warning system and more preventive diplomacy.

Millions of Angolans have teetered on the edge of starvation

BENGUELA, Sept 30: For nearly a year, millions of Angolans have teetered on the edge of starvation, trapped behind the battle lines of one of Africa's bloodiest wars, besieged in hinterland cities cut off from all but sporadic relief flights, reports AP.

Now, suddenly, starvation has crept out of the bush and onto Angola's once-thriving Atlantic coast, an area with airports and docks, all within easy reach of he United Nations and private aid agencies whose warehouses in the capital, Luanda, are filled with donated food.

It is a tragic, frustrating paradox in a country that should be Africa's breadbasket and in an area that should be Angola's gold coast.

But profiteering and government-acknowledged corruption have combined to divert much of what is still produced along the Angolan coast north to appease the politically volatile population of Luanda. And the coastal region is not targeted for international food aid because, on paper at least, it is self-sufficient.

'This is starvation in the midst of plenty,' said UN World Food Programme local manager Leo Pavillard, who in recent weeks has set up

nearly 300 emergency feeding stations along the coast for 170,000 people struggling each day to eat enough to stay alive.

The United Nations estimates 3 million Angolans, more than one-quarter of the population, face imminent starvation.

Angola's 18-year-old civil war flared up again last October after UNITA rebel leader Jonas Savimbi rejected the results of the country's first national elections.

UNITA quickly took control of three-quarters of Angola's territory, capturing some interior cities and laying siege to many more.

The coast, from Luanda south to the Namibian border, has been securely in government hands since shortly after he fighting erupted anew a year ago. Thousands upon thousands of refugees from the battles for Huambo, Ganda, Cubal and other interior towns turned to the Atlantic cities for salvation.

But what little is produced here is now often shipped to Luanda, sending market prices in Benguela soaring out of the feeble reach of locals and refugees alike.

In three months, the price of a kilogram (2.2

pounds) of corn meal, an Angolan staple, has gone from 1,000 kwanzas to 15,000 kwanzas, while salaries have remained the same.

'For years, people always fled to Benguela. Now we have nothing—and where can we go?' asked Justino Adelino, a worker and volunteer relief cook at a salt farm in this once-charming beach town 280 miles (450 km) south of Luanda.

Adelino's boss, foreman Jose Antonio, rigged up a soup kitchen at the salt-farm because he couldn't bear to see the hundreds of children who came to the factory gates get any thinner.

'They came back every day. You see their hair fall out, their ribs get bigger and bigger—then they don't come back anymore,' said Antonio, who serves up UN food.

Wearing ragged sweaters and winter coats despite the early summer heat, the children get a tin plate of corn mash and beans at the end of their hour-long walk across farms abandoned by their owners out of fear of a rebel push to the coast.

Some of those in line at the kitchen are salt farm workers themselves who don't earn enough from their day's labour to eat.

UN peacekeeping needs overhaul

Taiwan expels 24160 Chinese

TAIPEI, Sept 30: Taiwan has expelled 24,160 mainland Chinese who entered illegally in search of work, the semi-official Straits Exchange Foundation said Thursday, reports AP.

The influx began in 1987 after the Taiwan government eased restrictions on private contacts between Taiwanese and Chinese. The main attraction is wages up to 22 times higher than on the mainland.

Last year 5,446 illegals were caught, and 2,000 are in detention centres awaiting repatriation, said the foundation, which handles exchanges with China in the absence of formal ties.

It said Taiwan will ask China to pay part of the estimated US 26 million dollar spent on rounding up and sending home the illegals.