

Ciampi allies' defeat expedites general elections in Italy

ROME, Nov 22: The parties supporting Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi suffered a rout in local polls at the weekend, creating pressure for early elections for Italy's scandal-tainted parliament, reports Reuter.

"The government must step down and it would be a good thing if President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro went as well," said Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of wartime dictator Benito Mussolini, who came second in the southern city of Naples.

This parliament no longer represents anyone, said Irene Pivetti, a member of the Northern League, after 11 million disillusioned voters repudiated Italy's traditional parties in elections for 428 mayors and councils.

Markets gave the thumbs down and the Lira weekend to 986 against the mark, from 978 on Friday.

The Ciampi government now mainly relies on the support of parties that have become ghosts, the Milan daily Il Giornale said in a front page comment.

The government has been shattered by yesterday's vote and only inertia will probably allow it to survive until early general elections are called.

Ciampi, a technocrat installed at the head of a transitional government in April, is backed in parliament by the Christian Democrats, the Socialists and their tiny allies, the Liberals and the Social Democrats.

China advises Delhi, Pindi to exercise restraint

BEIJING, Nov 22: In the first official Chinese comment since the recent build-up of tension between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir issue, a top-ranking Chinese leader today asked the leaders of the two countries to remain calm and exercise restraint, reports PTI.

Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Chairman Li Ruihuan made the remark in an interview today prior to his visit to Nepal, India and Pakistan from November 25 to December 9.

Li, who is also a member of the seven-man standing committee of the Communist Party, will be in India from November 29 to December 5 as guest of the vice-president and Rajya Sabha Chairman KR Narayanan.

Benazir's decision on N-plan has erupted a political firestorm

ISLAMABAD, Nov 22: The freezing of Pakistan's nuclear programme has developed into a political firestorm, with no party or leader willing to accept responsibility for a deeply unpopular move, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto announced the programmes' suspension in early November, only weeks after being returned to power in legislative elections.

But the decision has turned out to have touched a national nerve, as well as evoked the vow of Bhutto's father, former Premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who promised to build a nuclear bomb for Pakistan at any price.

"If India developed an atomic bomb we will have to develop one, even if we have to eat grass or leaves or to remain hungry," he said.

Benazir Bhutto on Saturday said for the first time that the nuclear programme was suspended in July 1990, when she was still in power. The statement thus contradicted Bhutto's earlier contention that it was her conservative predecessor, Nawaz Sharif, who was Prime Minister from November 1990 to July 1993, who took the decision.

No sooner had the words left Bhutto's lips than the opposition, led by Sharif himself, leapt to the attack, accusing her of having accepted a grimy compromise that damaged national interests, just so that she could stay in power.

Bhutto's government lasted only one more month before it was ousted from office. In August 1990, by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan.

Bhutto's father set the nuclear drive in motion, in the declared aim of offsetting a perceived threat from India.

Since then, Pakistan has persistently denied any military nuclear ambitions, saying only that the programme is directed toward peaceful ends.

But the project has certainly assumed the dimensions of a national virility symbol, as well as bred western suspicions that Pakistani scientists have been working hard to devise a bomb, and could even do so, if need be, in a very short space of time.

The opposition's offensive has obliged Bhutto's team to perform verbal gymnastics in her defence.

The Prime Minister, her official spokesman said, had spoken of freezing the nuclear programme at the stage in which it was in July 1990 and did not say that the decision to do so had been taken in July 1990. The decision to this effect had, in fact, been taken later.

Despite their differences, Bhutto and Sharif agree on one thing: That the nuclear programme may be braked, but it will not be thrown into reverse gear.

That may not satisfy Washington, which is demanding a rollback in the project. It suspended economic and military aid for Pakistan in October 1990.

"A rollback is neither possible nor feasible," Benazir Bhutto says.



Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (C) holds her daughter Bakhtawar's (R) hand while signing an autograph for a boy (L, unidentified) during an universal children's day celebration in Islamabad Sunday. Bhutto said that the government would make all efforts to provide basic education to all the children. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Woman to woman

TORONTO: It was the bottle of Chanel that stopped the volunteers short as they packed gift bags of toiletries and other donated items for women in war-ravaged Bosnia, reports AP.

Into each pretty cotton sack went basics that are now luxurious in awe: shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper, detergent, vitamins, deodorant, socks, candles, a comb, a fresh towel, pain relievers and baby wipes.

But perfume? "If I was sitting up to my knees in mud for a year... If I'd gone through the kind of devastating experience the women of Bosnia have, the waft of perfume coming across my nose, I'd love it," said Laurie Buchanan, who organised the project.

Case closed. The Chanel went it. Buchanan, an English teacher at Toronto's Humber College, recruited about 100 women to start the relief project, call to Woman to Woman. In early fall, they began to seek donations, spreading the word through church groups, synagogues, schools and workplaces.

The response was overwhelming. Couriers showed up at Buchanan's apartment, which was soon knee-deep in donations from across Canada.

Some people donated money, which was used to buy tights and socks. Others gave what might be considered luxuries, such as scented body lotion, or a shiny new lipstick.

Ibises return to nature

XIAN: Two artificially hatched created ibises, a rare bird on the verge of extinction, were recently returned to nature in Yangdian county, in north-western Shanxi Province, reports Xinhua.

It is the first time in the world that ibises were artificially hatched successfully.

There are now more than 40 ibises in the world, over 30 of which live in Yangdian county and its surrounding areas.

To save the bird from extinction, the ibis protection station of Yangdian began in March to experiment with artificial hatching of ibises with five eggs they obtained from a nest, under the guidance of zoologists from Shanghai zoo.

Two birds were hatched after 27 days and were bred in captivity for several months before they were released to their natural environment.

Living fossil of Chinese drama

GUIYANG: Discovered in the mountains in southwest China's Guizhou Province several years ago, Nuo culture, a so-called "living fossil of Chinese drama" dating back to primitive society, has drawn experts from some 20 countries and regions to make a study here, reports Xinhua.

According to Yang Xinya, director of the Guizhou Nuo culture museum, this well-preserved drama of primitive style advances the history of Chinese plot by 1,000 years, and is valuable for research in many fields such as ancient politics, economics, culture, religion and customs.

It may be the smallest museum in the world, but it is unique. In the main hall stands a 4-meter-high platform, on which the masked performers in religious garments dance and sing, creating a mysterious atmosphere.

Most attractive in the museum is the 2,000-odd vividly made masks, viewed as miracles in Chinese folk carving. Most of them date back to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

Yang said that last year, these masks made a hit in Paris and New York while on display.

She added that in the research of Nuo culture, some performances associated with "supernatural power in man" remain an enigma.

Last February, these breathtaking stunts astounded the audience in Shenzhen.

For example, some barefoot performers climbed a wooden column more than 10 meters high, stepping on sharp knife-blades. Some put their hands in boiling oil without being hurt. The most amazing feat is that a priest chanting spells charmed a huge stone mill into revolving on its own.

World would be a very different place if...

WASHINGTON, Nov 22: Most Americans believe the world would be a very different place if President Kennedy had not been assassinated 30 years ago, according to a poll released on Sunday night, reports Reuter.

The NBC news wall street journal poll found 55 per cent of the 751 respondents agreed with this statement, while 34 per cent disagreed.

When asked if they thought Kennedy was a truly great President, however, 51 per cent said they believed he was over-rated, thirty-seven per cent said they thought he was a great president.

Kennedy was the choice of 33 per cent of respondents to become the fifth presidential likeness carved into south Dakota's Mount Rushmore, alongside George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt.

US house rejects bill to make capital a state

WASHINGTON, Nov 22: The House of Representatives Sunday rejected a bill that would have made the US capital the country's 51st state, reports AFP.

The measure to create a state called New Columbia — Washington is officially known as the District of Columbia — was defeated by a vote of 277-153.

But statehood supporters had two reasons to celebrate anyway. The bill got more votes in favour than they had expected, and it was the first time the issue got beyond debate by legislative committees and was voted on by the full 435-seat chamber.

"I'm ready to declare a victory right now," said Eleanor Holmes Norton, Washington's non-voting representative in the house. "We're going to continue to press for statehood."

Currently the 600,000 people of Washington have just Holmes Norton defending their interests in the house, and no delegate at all in the Senate.

The city has limited self-rule, but Congress wields ultimate control over its budget and can overturn laws passed by the city council.

Supporters of statehood say Washington is treated like a colony, suffering taxation without representation.

The bill rejected Sunday would have created New Columbia while retaining a smaller federal district including the White House, Congress, and the city's monuments.

Opponents of statehood argued that it would be unconstitutional to redraw the boundaries of the seat of the federal government.

BRIEFLY

Palestinian shot:

Israeli troops shot and critically wounded a Palestinian who tried to ram a stolen garbage truck into their vehicle yesterday near a Jewish settlement in the occupied Gaza Strip, security sources said, Reuter reports from Gaza.

They said the troops were unhurt. An Arab Israeli was killed in the Strip earlier this month when a Palestinian driving a stolen garbage truck smashed into his car. The driver in that incident was not caught.

Russian vessel fire kills one:

One crewman died and 77 were rescued when fire broke out on a Russian fishing vessel in the sea of Japan, Japanese coast guard officials said yesterday, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

A passing Russian tanker picked up the men after the fire aboard their 2,690-tonne vessel Pogranichnik Strel'nikov late on Sunday. The fire was put out yesterday.

"We received a report of the man's death from the Russian tanker which rescued the fishing boat crew. But the report did not give details of his death," an official of the Maritime Safety Agency said.

Ardolino dies:

Emile Ardolino, an Oscar-winning film director whose credits included the hit films "Sister Act" and "Dirty Dancing," has died. He was 50, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Ardolino died Saturday at his Los Angeles home, said Cindy Gilmore, a co-producer at Ardolino Productions. The cause was AIDS, she said.

Ardolino, whose film version of the ballet "The Nutcracker" is scheduled for release on Wednesday, was known primarily as a maker of dance films. He produced 28 episodes for the PBS series "Dance in America."

Three-minute earthquake:

A small three-minute earthquake shook the golden Triangle area of northern Thailand and eastern Myanmar late on Sunday, weathermen said yesterday, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

The quake, which measured about 4.0 on the Richter scale, shook jungle areas along the Thai-Myanmar border, 160 km (100 miles) northwest of the Thai city of Chiangmai. There were no reports of damage.

Landslide makes 1,000 homeless:

Landslides following heavy rains in West Sumatra made some 1,000 people homeless but there were no early reports of casualties, the Antara news agency said here yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Some 171 houses were destroyed and 51 others buried, forcing the evacuation of 244 families in Limapuluh Koto district of West Sumatra, Antara quoted a spokesman for local government as saying.

Lankan troops kill 8 Tamils:

Shri Lankan troops killed eight Tamil separatist rebels in an ambush in the east of the island, a military spokesman said yesterday, Reuter reports from Colombo.

He said the soldiers suffered no casualties in the attack in the Trincomalee district on Sunday night.

4 die in US plane crash:

A sky diver collided with a small plane, sending it spinning to the ground in a crash that killed all four people on board. The parachutist survived, AP reports from Northampton.

Alfred Peters was in stable condition in the intensive care unit of Cooley Dickinson Hospital. His age and hometown weren't immediately available.

Peters was free-falling after jumping from another plane when he hit the tail section of the Piper Cherokee PA28, said Mary Culvert, a spokeswoman for the Federal Aviation Administration.

BJP has no plan to celebrate December 6

BHOPAL, Nov 22: BJP President L K Advani, said here today that his party did not have any plans at the moment to celebrate December six as a 'day of rejoicing,' reports PTI.

Addressing a press conference at the Madhya Pradesh BJP office, the party president said that he would be meeting the BJP vice-president, O Rajagopal, and Mahalan at New Delhi after the assembly polls on November 28 and then he would verify from them what they had announced.

India's diplomatic ties with S Africa

NEW DELHI, Nov 22: After five decades on the front line of the anti-apartheid movement, India established full diplomatic relations with South Africa on Monday, reports AP.

Foreign Ministers Dinsh Singh and R F Botha of South Africa signed documents to open embassies in the two countries and hold regular meetings between officials.

"This is a historic moment," Botha said after signing the two-page agreement.

Israel accused of violating Muslim rights at Al-Aqsa

NICOSIA, Nov 22: Iran on Sunday accused Israel of violating Muslim rights at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and said the Islamic world should do all it could to liberate the holy-city, reports Reuter.

Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, in a message to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) quoted by Iran's IRNA news agency, expressed concern about the blatant violation of the legitimate rights of Muslims in Al-Aqsa.

Al-Aqsa Mosque in Arab East Jerusalem, which Israel seized in the 1967 Middle East war and later annexed, is Islam's third holiest shrine after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

The OIC has declared 1993 Al-Qods (Jerusalem) year.

He sent his message to the OIC secretariat in the Saudi city of Jeddah.

Singapore PM to shuffle cabinet next month

SINGAPORE, Nov 22: Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong plans to make changes in his cabinet next month, government news media reported Monday, says AP.

After the changes, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will be responsible for "overview" of the Trade and Industry Ministry, which he once headed, but will not necessarily take over again as minister, the semi-official Singapore Broadcasting Corporation said.

Lee, 41, has been recovering from cancer diagnosed a year ago. He left the ministry and other duties to undergo chemotherapy treatment for malignant lymphoma.

Kharafi first woman in Arab world to head a university

KUWAIT, Nov 22: The woman at the helm of Kuwait University wants to train her students to survive in a more difficult post-Gulf War world, reports Reuter.

Fayza Al-Kharafi, the Rector of Kuwait University, is the first woman in the Gulf and probably the entire Arab world to head a university. She is a firm believer in merit as the only criterion for advancement.

"What I would most like my graduates to be in independent, with a strong personality — people who truly learnt what they studied, and did not just study to get a certificate," she said in an interview.

"Life is getting more and more difficult, and the most important thing is to learn properly, so one can survive in society, whether this be in Kuwait or outside."

Kharafi took over the Emirati's only university in July following a distinguished career as a professor of Chemistry.

She wants to improve academic standards and make the youth of the wealthy, oil-exporting Emirate increasingly self-reliant.

Kuwaitis say their ability to remodel their education system will be crucial to any attempt to diversify the economy away from almost total reliance on oil and on foreign workers.

Kuwait is placing a strong emphasis on the need for education and training following the Gulf War depletion of once-massive financial reserves and the expulsion or flight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians seen as disloyal.

The absence of many of the people who ran the economy day-to-day has encouraged the idea that Kuwaitis must learn new skills and do such jobs themselves.

Students long virtually guaranteed a government job must now grapple with the idea of competing on merit for employment.

Kharafi, in her 40s and wearing an Islamic headscarf (hejab), is the latest in a long line of women who have been appointed to senior positions in Kuwait society.

"Women are taking their places, good and high places, in society," Kharafi said.

"But we should not look to the sex, male or female, but the qualifications. The person is a person, male or female."

Kharafi, educated at Egypt's Ein Shams University, said her priority was to improve teaching standards and practices.

Her next goal — to instill habits of independent thought and initiative among students used to traditional rote-learning — could not be achieved without a similar reform of the school system.

"Independent life needs a type of independent student," she said. "But this type of independent thinking should start from the beginning and should exist when they leave primary school."

Many of the students we receive want us to feed knowledge to them," Kharafi said.

"Instead, these students should learn an independent education by going to the libraries where they must depend on themselves and study for themselves."

"There is now a basic instinct in every Kuwaiti that they have to educate their children, that the primary investment is education," Rasha Al-Sabah, the Under-Secretary of the Ministry for Higher Education, said in a separate interview.

The government backs a more practical approach to education. Minister of Education and Higher Education Ahmad Al-Rubel last month complained of "tying down the minds of children with curricula that rely on memorising and repetition."

Kharafi's institution has 13,700 students, 65 per cent of them studying science, the remainder the humanities. Women make up 67 per cent of the student population, partly because many Kuwaiti men received university education abroad.

Even so, women win a disproportionate share of the highest grades at the university, Kharafi said.

Kharafi faces a host of secondary issues, notably pressure by Islamist MP for segregation of classrooms by sex.

She is not averse to the idea, but says: "This will cost a lot of money and effort. We do separate most cafeterias and that makes the girl students more relaxed."

"I think students want segregation but it depends on the facilities."

Seattle Summit signals a victory for China

BEIJING, Nov 22: The Seattle Summit between US President Bill Clinton and Chinese President Jiang Zemin signalled a victory for China which received assurances for better bilateral relations without making concessions, analysts said here, reports AFP.

The Chinese played their hand well and we have the impression that the United States was totally defeated," a western diplomat said, echoing the views of many observers following the Friday summit between the two leaders on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

The Clinton-Jiang summit was the highest level meeting between leaders of the two countries since Chinese troops marched on students and pro-democracy activists in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in June 1989.

China was successful in getting out of the situation of a boxer up against the ropes and now it is the United States turn in the corner, the diplomat said.

Jiang, who announced "a new beginning for the Sino-American relations," made no concessions on the sensitive issues of China's arms sales and human rights record.

China's only gesture toward appeasing the US government was made just before the Seattle Summit when Beijing agreed in principle to give the international committee of the Red Cross the right to visit its prisons.

The Chinese head of state, who is also secretary general of the Chinese Communist Party, completely ignored Clinton's remarks on human rights without drawing fire from the US leader.

When Clinton demanded concrete and immediate improvements on human rights, Jiang firmly replied that the United States had no right to impose its views on China.

Observers here says the meeting showed a change in the American tone in diplomatic relations with China over the past few months — a move away from hard negotiating tactics, explained principally by the economic crisis facing the United States.

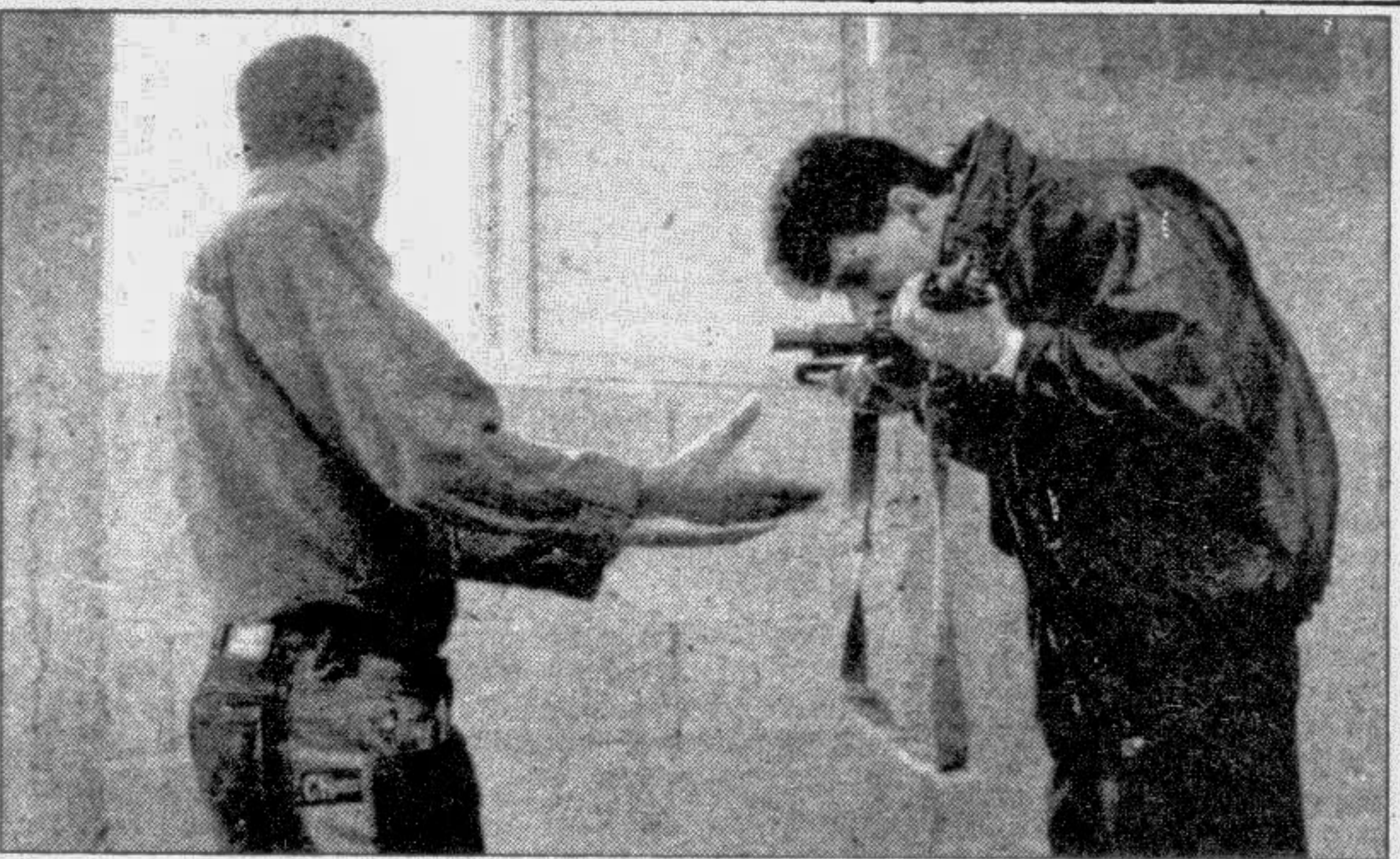
"Clinton is having trouble in bringing about the programme on whose strength he was elected and he cannot abandon American enterprises which are counting on access to the Chinese market," the diplomat said.

Such companies include aviation giant Boeing which received a visit from Jiang before the summit. The Chinese president remained the company that China was its biggest client.

Clinton wants at all costs to bring the United States out of recession and must come to terms with China which boasts the fastest growth of any country in the world and with which the United States has a 20 billion dollar trade deficit, analysts say.

The US president made clear his position that his policy was not to isolate China, shown by the sale last week of a super-computer in Beijing.

Sale of the computer had been blocked because it fell under the category of technology considered sensitive by Washington.



An unidentified Fatah Hawk member (R) kisses his weapon before handing it over to another unidentified Palestinian prior to giving himself up to the Israeli army Sunday. An amnesty has been granted for Palestinians wanted by the Israelis that turn themselves in voluntarily under the recently signed PLO accord. — AFP photo

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