

# Keating-Mahathir row may create diplomatic crisis

SYDNEY, Dec 4: Prime Minister Paul Keating came under mounting pressure today to swallow his pride and help mend Australia's frayed relationship with Malaysia amid fears the row could develop into a full blown diplomatic crisis, reports Reuters.

The onus to end the row, which threatens billions of dollars worth of business for Australia, fell back on Keating late on Friday when Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad rejected a written peace offering by the Australian leader.

The blunt-speaking Keating, who sparked the tiff by referring for Mahathir as a "recalcitrant" for boycotting the Seattle Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) regional trade summit last month, was silent on Saturday. But he is due to appear on a national television programme on Sunday and is expected to address the issue.

A foreign affairs spokesman said the government was analysing Mahathir's comments on Keating's letter. He said, "however, he was not in a position to comment on reports that Keating might delay a proposed visit to Malaysia next month."

Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said on Friday that Keating had delayed the visit, giving no reasons.

"Whether such a visit will take place in future will depend on ties between Malaysia and Australia, and especially on relations between Mahathir and Keating," he said.

The Australian national newspaper said on Saturday that Australia's relations with Malaysia were on the brink of crisis, which could even see Australia reduce its involvement in the five power defence arrangements, a key regional defence group.

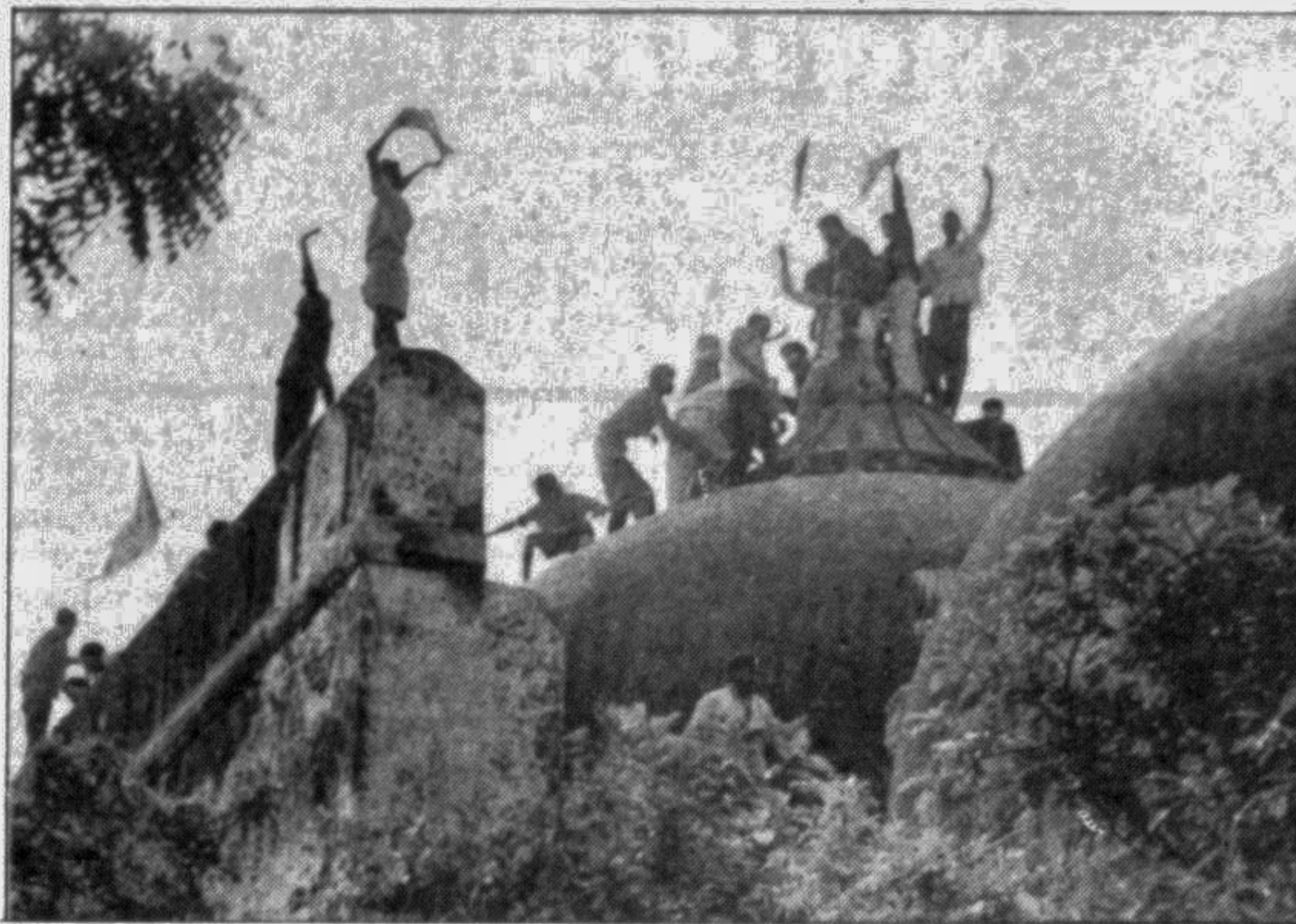
Those close to him say that

Keating has been furious at the way the crisis has unwound over the past 11 days," the Australia's Foreign Editor, Greg Sheridan, wrote.

"He was incandescent with rage when he saw statements attributed to the Malaysian Defence Minister, Jajib Razak, which appeared to suggest that Australian defence contractors bidding to build patrol boats and frigates for Malaysia could be disadvantaged because of the row."

Australian engineering group transfield has bid for a US two billion dollar contract to build 30 naval patrol boats for Malaysia.

Opposition leader John Hewson told reporters that Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, now in Papua New Guinea, should go to Kuala Lumpur immediately to try to heal the relationship and that Keating should speak directly to Mahathir.



The photograph showing Hindu extremists on top of the dome of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya after they stormed the shrine on December 6 in 1992. — AFP photo

## Off the Record

### Life easy, marrying easier

ABU DHABI: A 78-year-old Beduin man in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has married more than 40 times, but is still looking for another wife, reports AFP.

"I still want to have another wife if I find a suitable one," the man told the magazine Al-Shurua.

Born in the oasis town of Al-Ain, Ali Ibn Ghadir Ibn Mohammed Al-Qitabi said he could no longer remember how many times he had married. "It could be 40 times or more. The number is too big to remember," he said.

"I married from among four UAE tribes. The other wives include four from Egypt and the rest from India. Some stayed with me for years, some months and others days. I had children by only three of them," he said.

The turbaned, bearded man did not keep more than four wives at a time, because of a prohibition by Islam.

Explaining how he came to have so many wives, Ali said, "life was easy and marrying was easier." He added, "dowries did not exceed a camel, and those who did not have camels gave only 15 rupees."

He said he loved his first wife most. "I will never find a wife like her, even if I marry 100 times."

"I like active wives and hate lazy women," he added.

Despite such onerous marital preoccupations, he still finds time for his other hobby — raising camels.

"I have many camels. They are among the most expensive and fastest. Recently, I sold one to a Sheikh for 450,000 dirhams (122,600 dollars)," he said.

"One of them, called Al-Tawalla Boush Al-Asayel, had lived with me for more than 40 years. I was so upset when she died that I prayed for her."

### Fahd recruits women into slavery?

HOUSTON: Two ex-servants of the Saudi royal family are accusing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and King Fahd of being involved in an international conspiracy to recruit women into slavery, reports AP.

In a suit filed this week in Houston, Josephine Alicag 37, of the Philippines, and Sriyani Marian Fernando, 35, of Sri Lanka, allege the late Prince Saad Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud and his former wife, Princess Noora, forced them to work against their will.

The women alleged they were virtual slaves until they escaped from Houston's Ritz-Carlton Hotel in late 1991 while Prince Saad, who died in July, was in Houston for medical treatment.

A similar suit was filed by the women earlier this year. Lawyer Jerry Payne said Thursday the new legal challenge was filed against the Saudi government because estate of Prince Saad may not have assets in the United States to collect from, although the Saudi Kingdom does.

Payne also said he wants to show in court that the Saudi government is involved and responsible for enslaving women through fraudulent recruitment of servants in Third World countries.

### Imam becomes army captain

WASHINGTON: Muslim Imam Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad was shown in as an army captain Friday, becoming the first Islamic chaplain to serve in the American military, reports Reuter.

The native of Buffalo, New York, was sworn in at a Pentagon ceremony and will be assigned to the 18th airborne corps at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, after attending the Army Chaplain School.

Muhammad will join 3,152 other army, navy, air force and marine corps Jewish, protestant and catholic religious ministers now in the armed forces.

Colonel Herman Keizer, Director of the Armed Forces Chaplain's Board, said Friday's step followed several years of discussions between the defence department and the Muslim community in the United States. He said another Muslim candidate was studying to become a chaplain in the navy.



The Princess of Wales accepts applause after making an announcement on Friday that she will be making a dramatic cut in her public duties and profile. The Princess was at a lunch at the Hilton Hotel for Headway, the National Head Injuries Association, in London. — AFP photo

## Delhi, Pindi to solve Kashmir crisis thru' talks, hopes China

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: China hopes that India and Pakistan would produce "positive and constructive" results.

Kashmir has been the chief bone of contention between the south Asian neighbours since its erstwhile Hindu Maharajah joined India following the subcontinent's 1947 independence from Britain and partition.

India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir, which they both hold in part.

The January meeting after a gap of more than 15 months between their foreign secretaries follows recent tensions over a Muslim separatist revolt in the Indian zone which New Delhi accuses Islamabad of fuelling.

Pakistan denies direct involvement but extends moral and diplomatic support to the secessionist campaign it describes as a legitimate struggle for self-determination.

Li, who was due to leave today for Pakistan at the end of his trip here, stressed that Beijing was neutral.

He described China as a friend of both countries, and said: "We hope the advice of the friend would be heeded and understood."

During his five-day stay here, Li met President Shankar Dayal Sharma, Prime Minister P V Narsimha Rao and External Affairs Minister Dinesh Singh. He said the talks were "very fruitful."

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## Major parties fear return of communists in Germany

BERLIN, Dec 4: Germany's mainstream political parties are quaking at the prospect of a spectacular neo-communist comeback in local elections this weekend in Brandenburg, the biggest state in former East Germany, reports AFP.

The polls will be the big parties' last chance to test the water before the 1994 marathon election year which will culminate in legislative polls for the federal parliament next October.

There is enormous disappointment among people in the former East Germany because they expected too much and the authorities failed to appreciate the difficulties ahead," said Hans-Juergen Hoffmann, of the

Infas Public Opinion Institute.

In Brandenburg some two million voters will be called upon to renew town and city councils and elect new mayors in what will be the first local elections in the former communist eastern Germany since reunification in 1990.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) which between them control most towns, are bracing for serious setbacks.

An opinion poll published on Wednesday indicated that 81 per cent of the state's inhabitants were unhappy with the way their towns were run.

Ordinary people who have

seen their dreams of instant prosperity turn to ashes, seem to have lost interest in politics.

In one out of five of the state's 1,700 localities, no-one has even bothered to run for mayor. Politicians fear abstention could reach 50 per cent in parts of the state.

The election could not come at a worst time for the CDU: The CDU-led Saxony-Anhalt state has been plunged into crisis since Sunday when its government resigned amid allegations that some of its members from Western Germany were being overpaid.

In September Kohl's party suffered a serious reverse in Hamburg when it polled an all-time low of 25.1 per cent — a loss of 10 per cent in two years.

## US implements fresh sanctions on Libya

WASHINGTON, Dec 4: The White House Friday implemented new economic sanctions against Libya intended to pressure Tripoli into surrendering two men accused of blowing up Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, reports Reuter.

The explosion killed 270 people, including 11 on the ground.

The actions signal that Libya cannot continue to defy justice and flout the will of the international community with impunity," White House Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers said.

"We remain determined to ensure the perpetrators of these acts of terrorism are brought to justice," Myers said.

The sanctions, approved by the United Nations Security Council November 11 at the urging of the United States, Britain and France, officially

took effect on Wednesday.

The White House offered no explanation for its two-day delay in implementing them.

UN Security Council resolution 883 freezes assets owned or controlled by the government of Libya around the world and bans the provision of equipment to refine and transport oil.

However, the sanctions exclude future funds derived from oil, natural gas or agricultural commodities exports, nor do they ban provision of production equipment used by Libya to drill for oil.

Myers said the president instructed Commerce Secretary Ron Brown to strengthen the existing US trade embargo against Libya by banning the sale from foreign countries to Libya of US made goods including oil refining and transporting equipment.

## Dispute over Ukraine's N-arms continues

BRUSSELS, Dec 4: The United States and Ukraine failed Friday to resolve a dispute over Ukraine's stockpile of more than 1,000 long-range nuclear warheads, reports AP.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher said most US aid to the East European country would be withheld, but offered to work out security guarantees jointly with Russia to allay Ukraine's concerns about its powerful neighbour.

"We are not against tripartite negotiations," Anatoly Zlenko, the Ukrainian foreign minister, said in welcoming the effort to assure Ukraine it could give up the warheads and not fear nuclear attack.

But Zlenko said Ukraine needed massive economic assistance to denuclearise.

## BRIEFLY

**Sino-Japan talks Dec 20:** Japan and China will hold talks on security issues December 20 in Beijing, including discussion on North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons programme, JIJI press said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Tadashi Ikeda, chief of the Asian division of Japan's Foreign Ministry, will head a delegation to the Chinese capital for the talks, JIJI said.

**11 children die in Rwanda blast:** Eleven school children were killed and at least 30 wounded on Friday when a mine exploded in the central Rwandan town of Remera, Rwandan radio reported. Reuter says from Kigali, Rwanda.

Children walking to school saw a banking on the road, scrambled to get it and triggered the mine to which the note was attached by a string, the radio said.

No-one has claimed responsibility.

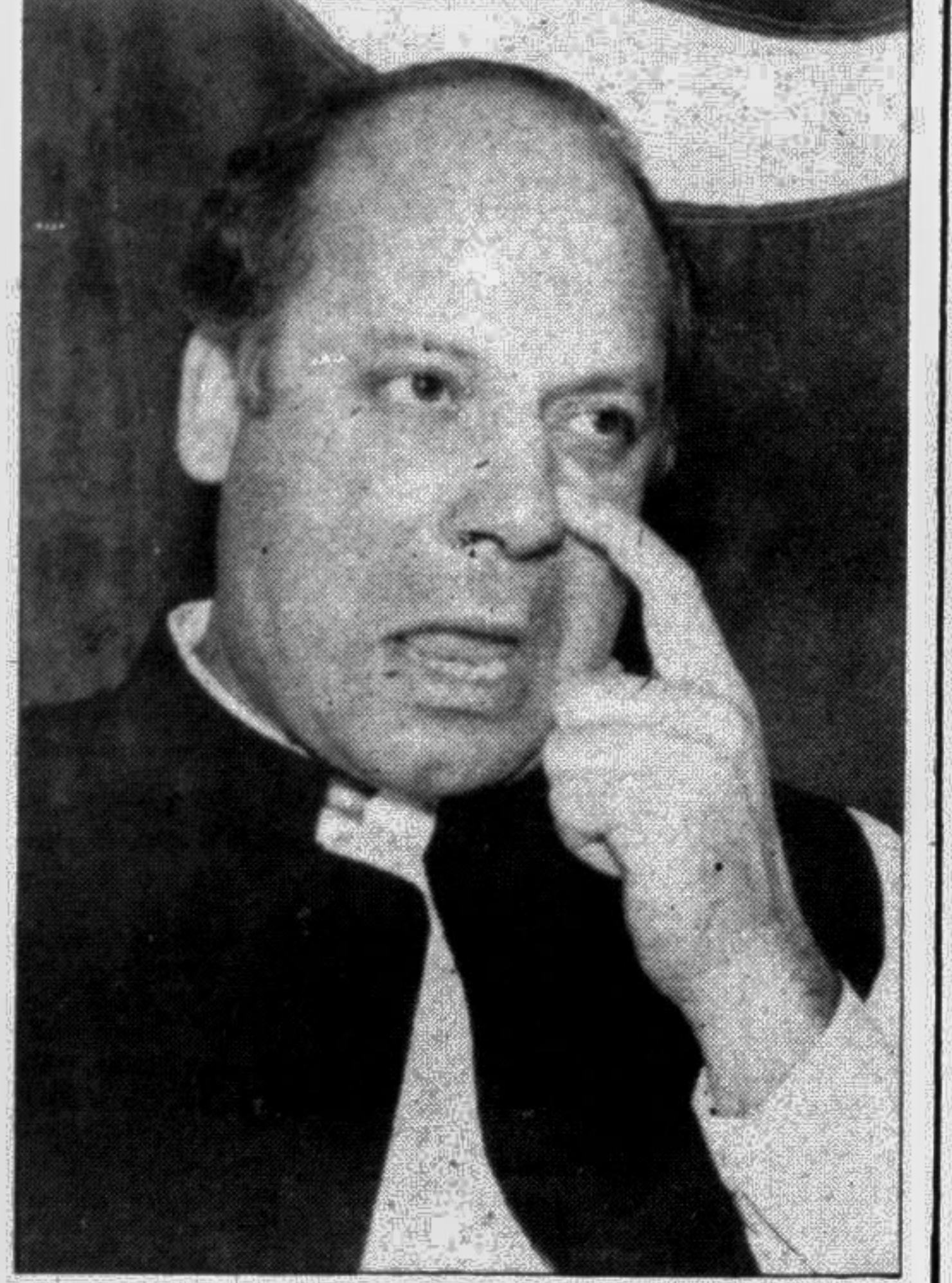
**Lewis Thomas dies:** Lewis Thomas, a world-renowned biologist and author who specialized in making the world of science understandable to the public, died Friday at the age of 80, a hospital spokesman said. Reuter reports from New York.

The spokesman for the New York hospital — Cornell Medical Centre said that Thomas died in the night at the hospital from a rare form of cancer.

Thomas, who lived in New York, was the author of "The Lives of a Cell," "The Medusa and the Snail" and "Late night thought on listening to Mahler's ninth symphony."

**Azerbaijan to ban newspapers:** The State Department expressed dismay Friday over the decision of the Azerbaijan government to shut down all independent newspapers in the country, AP reports from Washington.

This and other repressive measures are "clearly aimed at limiting the freedom of expression of the Azerbaijani people," acting spokesman Christine Shelly said.



Opposition leader Nawaz Sharif addressing a press conference in Islamabad on Friday after nationwide by-elections took place on Friday. Sharif alleged that armed ruling party candidates had resorted to ballot stuffing in various constituencies. — AFP photo

## Kukis kill one, burn 250 homes of Naga tribes

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Tribal guerillas in a remote northeastern Indian state went on a rampage Saturday against rival tribesmen and burned more than 250 homes in five villages, a news agency reported, says AP.

At least one person was killed and two others seriously injured Preas Trust of India said.

Militiamen of the Kuki tribe in Manipur, a state bordering Myanmar, ransacked and torched homes in village after village of Naga tribes people and shot at fleeing residents.

The rivalry between the tribes goes back to late 19th century when the Kukis used to raid Naga villages and take them as slaves. The latest feud is over the control of territory.

## US seeks changes in ABM treaty

WASHINGTON, Dec 4: The State Department said Friday it is seeking changes in the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty that would enable the United States to defend American forces and allies against missile attacks by Third World countries, reports AP.

The ABM Treaty, completed in 1972, prohibits defenses against inter-continental missiles.

State Department spokeswoman Christine Shelly said a new approach is needed to address "the real problem of defending against attacks from states that have or may develop shorter-range ballistic missiles."

She said the prohibition against strategic missile defenses should be kept intact.

"Our intention is to make clear the distinction between theater missile defence not limited by the treaty and strategic defenses that are limited," she said.

## Gailani asked to become PM

KABUL, Dec 4: A senior Mujahideen leader said Friday he had been asked to become Prime Minister by Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani and other Mujahideen leaders, reports AP.

He said he would accept if various conditions were met.

Pir Sayed Ahmed Gailani, a hereditary Sufi leader with ties to former King Zahir Shah, said he would be prepared to take over the portfolio if the country expanded its national assembly and created a national army and security force.

But he said he also wanted better definition of the powers of the president, prime minister and cabinet.

Speaking to AFP at his Kabul residence Gailani said that if Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the current prime minister, resigned of his own will, or if the high council decides to dismiss him, then I will accept the post."

## Hope for peace in N Ireland dim

DUBLIN, Dec 4: Prospects for peace in Northern Ireland by Christmas appear to have dimmed after Britain and Ireland failed to overcome "roadblocks" on the way to a settlement, reports Reuter.

Irish and British leaders met of Friday and said the two sides had to narrow significant differences to capitalise on what they have both called the best chance of peace in the province for years.

"We never expected the road to be easy. We expected roadblocks in the way," Ireland's Albert Reynolds told a news conference after seven hours of "very frank, very serious talks" with British Prime Minister John Major.

The two men meet again in a week at the European Community summit in Brussels for a second "working session".

## Italy to admit those immigrants who can support themselves

ROME, Dec 4: Scarf pulled tight, Mohammed Nadur moves between lines of cars stopped at a red light. He doesn't beg. He just holds the squeegee over windshields hoping the driver nods for him to go ahead, reports AP.

Sometimes he'll get a 1,000-lira note (about 60 cents). Most often it's less.

"If I don't do this, the alternative is do nothing," said the 25-year old Tunisian immigrant. "I look forward to the day I can be in Britain or America with a real job — a life."

To escape the wind off the Tiber River, he and other windshield cleaners huddle near metal sheets used for political advertising. Nadur leaned against a poster for the mayoral candidates of the Italian Social Movement, or MSI, a rising neo-fascist party with a tone that

sounds unfriendly to immigrants.

The MSI did well in first-round mayoral elections last month. In Rome and Naples, among the cities holding runoff elections Sunday, it took the largest bloc of votes and threatens to make poor immigrants feel even more unwelcome.

For most immigrants, the mainstream in Italy is a far-off goal. They occupy the fringes. Italians are the waiters, cab drivers, dishwashers and garbage men in a hiring system virtually closed to foreigners.

Stories like Nadur's abound: North African fruit pickers in southern Italy, Egyptians selling trinkets outside Rome's main train station, Poles trading tips at church on house-cleaning jobs.

The MSI tries to distance it-

self from neo-Nazi skinheads and other hate groups. But its stance is not one of openness either.

"Our policy is very simple," said MSI spokesman Niccolo Accame. "We want to admit only those immigrants who can support themselves."

Italy's immigrant population

"Who do we threaten?" asked Anna Siminski, a Polish woman who came to Rome by bus looking for housework. "Are we taking anyone's job? I don't think so. Why do Italians look at us like we're a problem?"

Some Italians say they fear economic refugees from North Africa and former Yugoslavia

"Italy has always been a place of emigration, not immigration," said Joursel Salman, head of the Committee of Foreigners in Italy, a private assistance group. "There is no structure at all here for immigrants."

Italy rolled back its welcome mat in 1990, changing laws to drastically cut the number of immigrants. People outside the European Community must get work visas before coming here and prove they have a job or relatives waiting.

In 1991, about 18,000 penniless Albanians crossed the Adriatic looking for a haven. Italy sent most of them back, with little public reaction.

Racial attacks are few, but have started to come with greater frequency, especially in economically depressed southern Italy.

## News Analysis

is less than nations to be north, but it is growing. Nearly 930,000 foreign-born people legally live in this nation of 58 million, government statistics show. Illegal immigrants could push the number well over 1.5 million, activists say.

Moroccans form the largest group. Filipinos, Somalis and Libyans have significant communities.

could overm Italy if the borders aren't tightly controlled. Others worry that with the privatisation of state-run companies, they will be competing with foreigners for work.

At a student march, one leather-clad skinhead made a cutting motion across his neck when asked how to deal with foreigners. His companions laughed.

## Sino-US accord on payload space

BEIJING, Dec 4: China has reached its first agreement with the United States to rent payload space in the US space shuttle programme for scientific research projects, official media said today, reports Reuter.

Jiang Jingshan, Director of the Centre for Space Science and Applied Research at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said his centre had rented eight payload booths to carry equipment for experiments in space physics.

The first mission is due to blast off in two years, he told the official China Daily.

Separately, China has contracted with the European space agency to take part in the "cluster programme," which also involves Britain, France, Germany, Austria and the United States, Jiang said.