

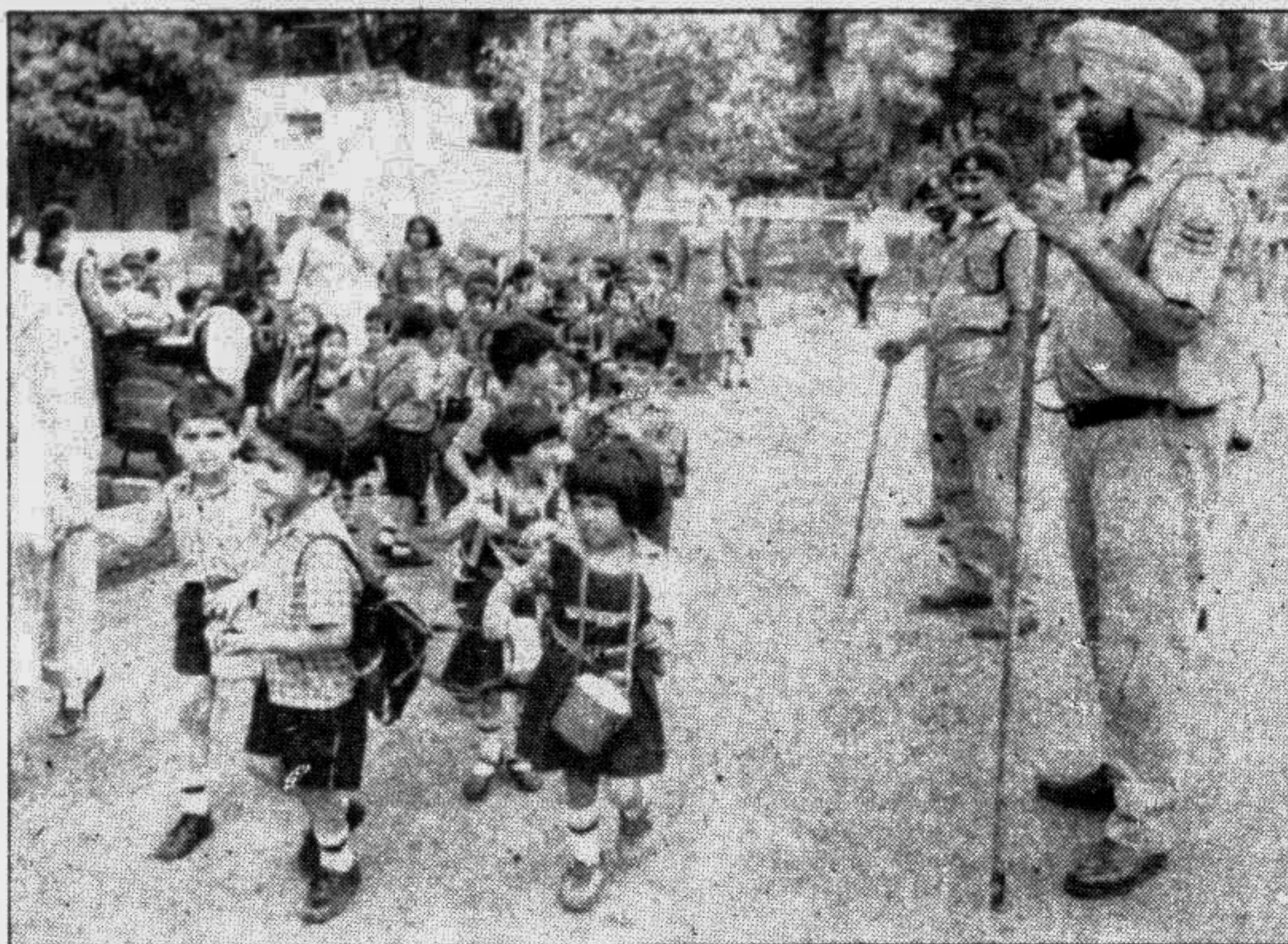
Serbs detain 2 UN officials, a woman

SARAJEVO, July 27: Bosnian Serb forces have detained two UN aid officials and a Muslim woman in eastern Bosnia, an spokesman Major Dacre Holloway said late Tuesday, reports AFP.

A man and woman working for the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), accompanied by the Muslim woman, were stopped at a checkpoint in Serb-held town of Visegrad, some 30 kilometers (18 miles) northwest of the besieged Muslim pocket of Gorazde, Holloway said.

The Muslim woman is a civilian who is not working for the UNHCR, and apparently her presence was the reason why the Serbs stopped the group.

The trio are currently being held at a barracks in Visegrad where Holloway said they were still 'stuck' late Tuesday. The aid workers are based in Gorazde.



Policemen stand guard outside a school in New Delhi on Wednesday, as security has been stepped up for school children in the Indian capital following the murder of two kidnapped children. — AFP photo

'Pakistan abusing blasphemy law'

LONDON, July 27: Pakistan is abusing blasphemy laws to cover up its persecution of religious minorities and non-conformist Muslims, the human rights watchdog Amnesty International charged here today, reports AFP.

In a report titled "Pakistan: Use and abuse of the blasphemy law," Amnesty said those who fell foul of the law face death.

"One human rights violation after another is piled upon the victims," the report said.

"It starts with arbitrary arrest, continues in blatantly unfair trial, and results in ill treatment in jail and harassment or assassination by citizens upon release.

"And if the person is convicted, the travesty ends in an execution by the state, it said, as death is the only sentence for those convicted of blasphemy.

Christians and non-orthodox Muslims have been the

most frequent targets for blasphemy prosecutions, Amnesty said.

It cited the case of a 13-year-old Christian boy, Salamat Masih, who was arrested for scrawling blasphemous words on the walls of a mosque, when in fact he is illiterate.

Muslim clergymen put pressure on judges by interrupting court proceedings to demand that the defendant be hanged, the report said.

In April 1994, Hafez Faruk Sajjad was stoned to death in the town of Gujranwala after it was broadcast over the town mosque's public address system that a Christian had burned a copy of the Koran, Amnesty said.

Sajjad, a Muslim, was hauled out of jail, stoned and burned while he was probably still alive, and his body was dragged around town from the back of a motorbike, all on the mistaken impression that he was a Christian.

Off the Record

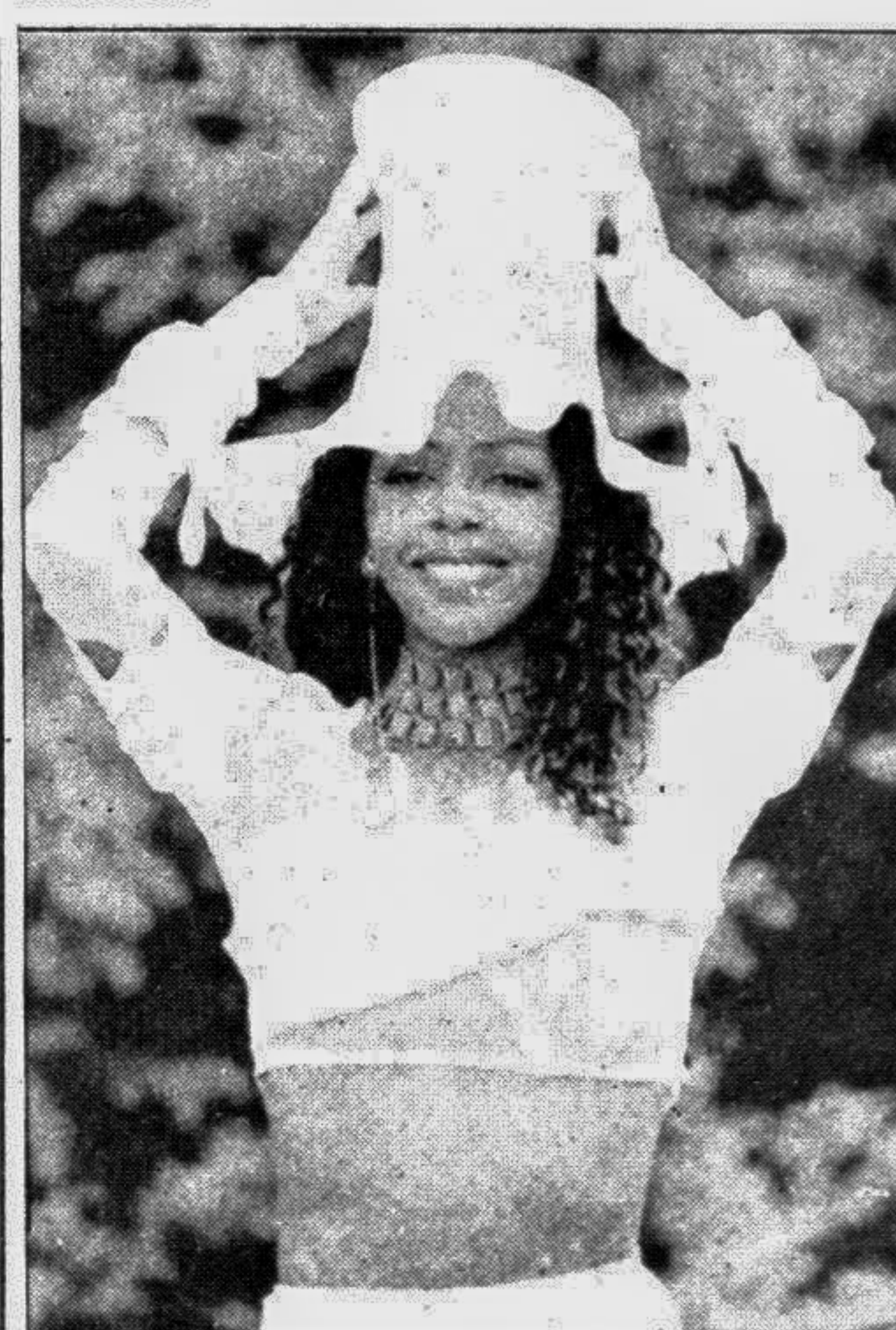
Wonder of Nature

KUWAIT: The birth of a baby girl with four arms has drawn hundreds of curious sightseers to the dismay of her family. Kuwait's Arab Times said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Othman Eid, a Somali, said his family and neighbours were constantly hounded by hundreds of people who came to look at his daughter Amina, born on July 7 in Farwaniya Hospital.

Doctors are studying whether Amina should undergo surgery, the English-language newspaper, which published a picture of the baby, said.

Amina suffers chest problems and her right eye is larger than her left.



A suitable entry perhaps for next year's Royal Ascot fashion stakes, this Turkish-flavoured, see-through fashion item worn by Dunja was presented by a Turkish designer at a fashion trade fair in Dusseldorf on Tuesday. The bustier and striking millinery worn by Dunja are in cotton. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Afghan confce on Oct 23: A conference in Afghanistan has set October 23 to elect a new government leadership for the war-ravaged country, the official Kabul Radio said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

It said the conference in the Western city of Herat, also attended by embattled President Burhanuddin Rabbani, decided on Monday to hold a traditional *loya jirga* — or grand assembly — on October 23 to "elect the country's leadership."

The broadcast, monitored in Islamabad, did not explain whether the grand assembly, likely to be held in the capital Kabul, would elect only a president or a prime minister as well.

Carlos under house arrest: Venezuela's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered former President Carlos Andres Perez freed from jail and placed under house arrest pending trial on corruption charges, the court said, AFP reports from Caracas.

Carlos, who is 72, took advantage of a law that allows defendants older than 70 to await trial at home. Carlos is expected to move Tuesday to the home of his wife Blanca De Perez.

His Interior Minister and cell mate, 69-year-old Alejandro Izaguirre, was also released. The two were ordered imprisoned on May 18 in connection with an alleged diversion of 17.2 million dollars in funds from a secret state account.

Yemen lifts overnight curfew: The Yemeni government on Tuesday lifted the overnight curfew which came into effect more than two months ago because of the civil war, the Interior Ministry said, AFP reports from Sanaa.

"The curfew has been lifted because the reasons which caused it have been removed," the ministry said quoted by the official news agency Saba.

The war ended on July 7 when Northern forces loyal to President Ali Abdallah Saleh defeated a southern bid at secession. Curfews were imposed at the start of the conflict in early May.

Date for Aristide's return sought: Ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide said Tuesday that a "date certain" must be set for his return to Haiti and for the departure of the de facto military leaders of the Caribbean nation, Reuter reports from Port Au Prince.

"The wait for democracy must not endure any longer," Aristide said in a statement released in Washington. "A date certain for my return and for the departure of coup leaders must be set in order to sustain the hope of the nation that democracy will be restored."

US welcomes Russian decision: President Clinton on Tuesday welcomed Russian President Boris Yeltsin's pledge to withdraw troops from Estonia, describing it as part of "the vibrations of peace," flowing from the Israel-Jordan agreements, AFP reports from Washington.

"As you know, this has been one of the principal objectives of American policy, so that now for the first time since the end of World War II, on the last day of August there will be no more Russian troops in Germany or anywhere in Eastern Europe," Clinton said.

Clinton, flanked by Jordan's King Hussein and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, spoke during a White House press conference for the Middle East leaders.

New govt in Gambia named: Gambia's new President Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh reopened the West African country's borders and airport on Tuesday and named a government drawn equally from soldiers and civilians, Reuter reports from Banjul.

"I would like to inform just now the news conference that the borders, airport and seaport open today," he told reporters.

Jammeh said that for 30 years Gambia had suffered from injustice and corruption and foreign aid had benefitted only a few. He promised a commission of inquiry into past corruption cases.

62 killed in Turkish violence: Fifty-one Kurdish rebels and 11 Turkish soldiers have been killed so far this week in clashes between Turkish troops and separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the southeast of the country, officials said Tuesday, AFP reports from Ankara.

The fighting took place in the Hakari, Sirnak, Bitlis and Diyarbakir regions, according to the police authorities in the latter region.

More than 400 people — soldiers, policemen, rebels and civilians — have been killed in the region this month, according to an AFP count based on official figures, and more than 13,650 people have died since the PKK launched its rebellion in August 1984.

Heavy fighting in Tajikistan: 12 troops die

DUSHANBE, July 27: Islamic rebels killed 12 government soldiers and captured 10 more in one of the heaviest battles of recent weeks in the troubled Central Asian nation, the ITAR-Tass news agency said Wednesday, reports AP.

A "major armed clash" took place near the village of Khat, about 200 kilometers (125 miles) east of the capital of Dushanbe, the agency said, citing unidentified government military sources. The sketchy report did not say when the fighting occurred.

The militants have launched regular hit-and-run attacks, mostly in the south of the country.

Attacks on Jewish, Israeli targets mar high hopes for peace

JERUSALEM, July 27: Despite stunning breakthroughs with Jordan and the Palestinians in the past year, a spate of attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets around the world underscored for Israelis that peace is not quite at hand, reports AP.

Jordan's King Hussein and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin capped their dramatic pledge of friendship Tuesday with condemnation of terrorist attacks, saying they threaten the march to peace in the Middle East.

Rabin's adviser on terrorism, Yigal Pressler, on Wednesday urged international cooperation to stop the violence. "The world must wake up," he said. "If the world unites, I think we can put an

end to these attacks." Yet another bombing Wednesday in London raised fears that groups opposed to the budding peace process were stepping up their fight.

A car bomb exploded outside a building housing Jewish organisations in North London just after midnight, injuring five people. Hours earlier, a car bomb heavily damaged the Israeli Embassy in the city, injuring 14.

No one claimed responsibility for either bombing, but Rabin blamed the embassy attack on Islamic extremists.

Also Tuesday, the death toll from a July 18 explosion that demolished a Jewish community center in Argentina rose to 95. And authorities in Panama said a bomb caused

the July 19 crash of a commuter plane which killed all 21 people aboard, including 12 Jews.

An anti-Israeli group in Lebanon indirectly claimed responsibility for both of those bombings.

Violence also continued in the Mideast on Tuesday: — A Palestinian working for the Israeli police was shot and killed in the West Bank. The assailants were believed to be Palestinian gunmen.

— An Israeli soldier killed by the radical Hezbollah group in Lebanon Monday was laid to rest. Israeli troops fanned out of their "security zone" in southern Lebanon to search for the guerrillas responsible.

Rabin called on the world to fight what he termed an in-

ternational Iranian-backed terrorist network.

"I have no doubt that extremist Islamic terrorism... will try to increase its activity in order to threaten those who support and make peace," Rabin said.

Hussein also condemned the attacks as having "nothing to do with Islam, nothing with my religion."

Still, the violence did not completely dampen the euphoria accompanying the end of Jordanian-Israeli hostility.

As if to show that peace is really on the way, Hussein granted Israel Television a short but ice-breaking interview.

"This is a unique day in my

life, a day one has dreamed about, hoped for, for all our peoples and for their future," the Jordanian king said, his eyes sparkling.

Israeli lawmakers shared his emotion.

"It is impossible not to feel it in the depth of our hearts. I wept," said Rabin Cohen of the left-wing Meretz party.

Addressing Congress jointly with Rabin, Hussein declared: "The state of war between Jordan and Israel is over."

"How God it feels to hear those words again," marvelled Ehud Yaari, Israel Television's normally impassive commentator.

Even the Israeli opposition, generally skeptical of Rabin's peace policies, was moved.

"We are all happy to see

Muslim, Tamil groups to hold balance in Lankan polls

BATTICALOA, July 27: On the front line of Sri Lanka's ethnic war, campaigning is feverish for next month's national election. Loudspeakers blare from mosques seeking votes for Muslim party, Tamils canvas door-to-door for their own parties, reports AP.

More than ever before, the minorities who dominate this east coast region believe that they may hold the decisive balance between the two big Sinhalese blocs when voting ends August 16.

The seats captured by Tamil and Muslim groups will matter in the event of a hung parliament, which is very likely, said Bertram Bastia-

mpillai, a professor of Politics at Colombo University.

Campaigners here have a common theme: The Sinhalese have not done enough to end the 11-year-old ethnic war that has cost more than 33,000 lives.

Tamils are 18 per cent of this island's 17 million people, and Muslims comprise 7 per cent.

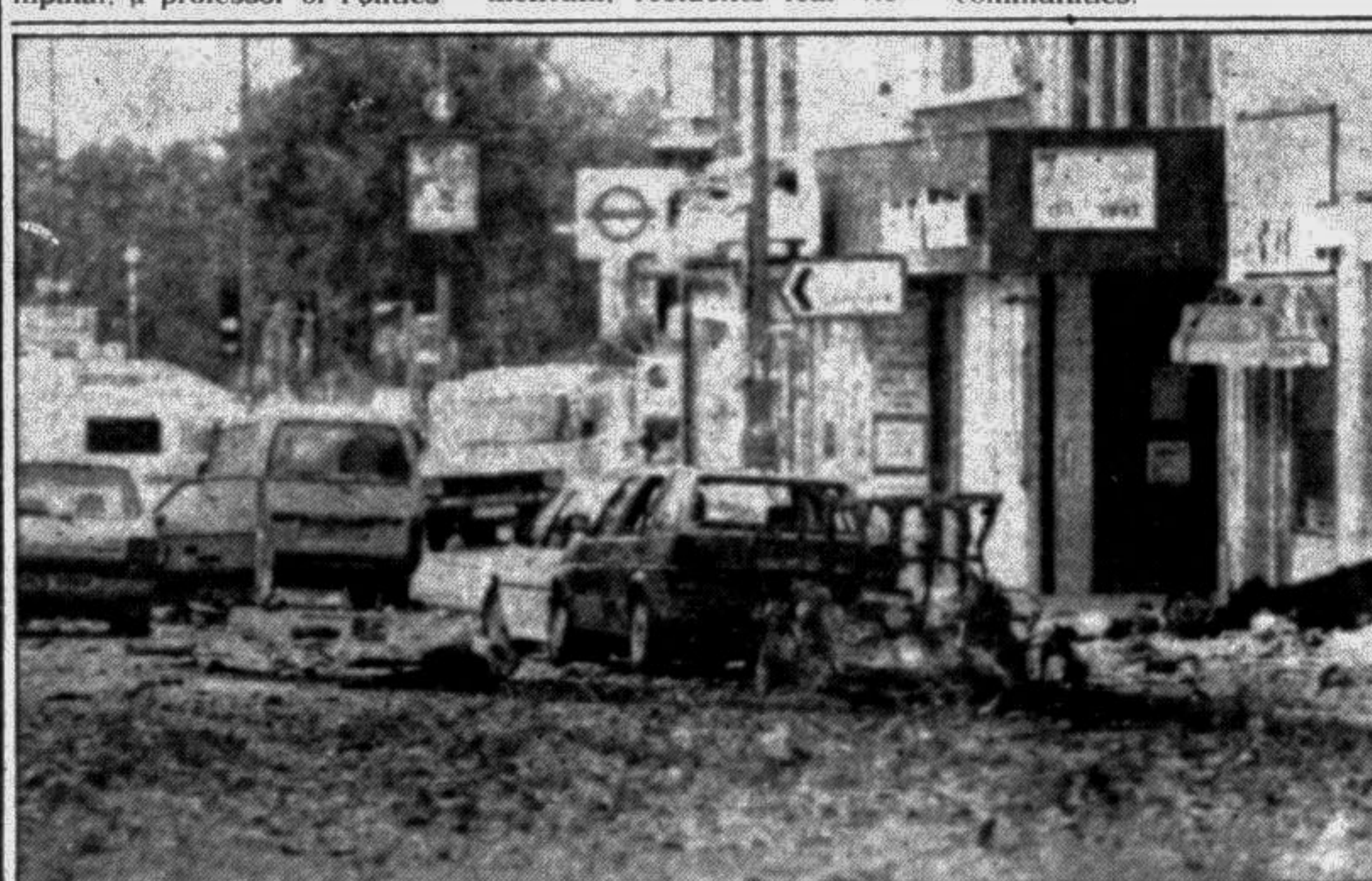
In Batticaloa, vans and cars decorated with colourful banners and party flags race through the streets. Party symbols and names have been painted in white on roads, while posters with pictures of candidates appear even in remote villages.

As the campaign gains momentum, residents fear violence by the LTTE.

In the north and east, 31 of parliament's 225 seats are at stake, which could provide a powerful platform for the minorities to address their grievances.

After 17 years in power, the governing United National Party (UNP) is facing its most serious challenge from the People's Alliance, a coalition of opposition groups led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga is seen as indecisive on how to end the war with Tamil guerillas. The alliance's rising star, Chandrika Kumaratunga, is seen as a 'ray of hope' by both the minority communities.



The wreck of the car bomb that exploded early on Wednesday is visible (R) among the debris in front of the London offices of Jewish and Israeli organisations in North Finchley, North London. The bomb injured five people, only hours after a powerful car bomb wrecked Israeli embassy building in central London on Tuesday. — AFP photo

Ghali won't support observer status for Taiwan at UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 27: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali will not support observer status at the United Nations for Taiwan, his spokesman said Tuesday, reports AP.

China is strongly opposing any effort to give observer status to Taiwan, which was ousted from the United Nations in 1971 in favour of the Beijing government. Up to then, Taiwan had held the Chinese seat and had veto power on the Security Council as a permanent member.

Beijing considers Taiwan an integral part of China and says any U.N. discussion on the issues represents an infringement on China's sovereignty.

"U.N. observer status in the General Assembly is a function of the General Assembly and the secretary-general is not going to recommend that under any circumstances," Sills said.

Forest fires force 3000 to flee homes in Canada

VANCOUVER, July 27: More than 3,000 people were forced to flee their homes on Tuesday as forest fires raged out of control in Canada's westernmost province, reports Reuter.

Between 3,000 and 4,000 rural residents were evacuated around the resort community Penticton in the Okanagan valley of southeast British Columbia about 240 miles (385 km) west of Vancouver, officials said.

Sweltering weather has made the rugged interior of the province tinder-dry. More high temperatures and wind were forecast for Tuesday.

The blaze near Penticton is the biggest of nearly 170 in the province.

Great minds at Rockefeller Varsity caught in mystery

NEW YORK: The great minds at Rockefeller University work mainly to unlock the mysteries of science and medicine. But now they're caught in another mystery: Who is the potential killer among them? reports AP.

During one week in early June, someone spiked the coffee with a potentially lethal chemical, turned on valves releasing deadly gas, set a fire and made anonymous death threats to two scientists. All of the incidents took place in the school's 15th-floor lab, which is headed by world-renowned scientist Robert Roeder.

After June 10, the incidents stopped. No one, including the threatened scientists, Luz Matsumoto and Magda Carvalho, was seriously hurt.

University employees have declined to discuss the matter, saying they were advised to keep quiet.

Police believe the culprit is a scientist engaged in the lab's highly competitive genetic research.

The person is smart and apparently insanely jealous of the women's work, said a police source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"This is not the work of a janitor," the source said. "It's the work of a mad scientist."

Rao suggests early elections

NEW DELHI, July 27: Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao said on Tuesday that general elections scheduled for June 1996 will be brought forward and asked party members to prepare for early polls, reports Reuter.

"Parliament completes five years in June (1996) but he said elections will be held some four months before," ruling Congress Party spokesman Chandulal Chandrakar told reporters after Rao delivered an address to party deputies.

India's last general election was held during May and June of 1991. Chandrakar said Rao had suggested the earlier date because of high temperatures during these months.

Rao, who heads the Congress Party as president, urged the deputies to also prepare for crucial state assembly elections later this year.

"After that parliament elections would not be far. The people are looking to the Congress as they don't think any other party worth considering," a party statement quoted Rao as saying.

Rao also strongly supported electoral reforms. "I am entirely in agreement with the election commission to stop malpractices," he was quoted as saying.

India's Chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan has been leading a campaign for state funding of polls with strong administrative measures to reduce vote rigging, crime and corruption.

Rao also announced a vigorous drive to enroll new members to the Congress Party. Chandrakar said: "Parliament and state-level deputies will kick off the drive on August 9 which will cover 50,000 villages initially," he said.

Khmers oppose military aid to Cambodia

BANGKOK, July 27: Khmer Rouge guerrillas said today they had the right to seek foreign military aid to protect their provisional government against attack, reports AP.

Nominal Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan in a guerrilla radio broadcast monitored in Bangkok urged the United States, France, Australia and "certain other countries" to halt military aid to Phnom Penh.

There was no indication from whom the Khmer Rouge intended to seek military assistance. Their former backers were parties to the 1991 Paris peace accords which said there should be no further aid to the Cambodian factions.