

BRIEFLY

Arafat to cut short Japan trip:

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will cut short a visit to Japan yesterday to attend an emergency meeting in Cairo of Arab foreign ministers, Japanese officials said. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Arafat arrived in Tokyo on Tuesday on a four-day visit to seek support from Japanese leaders for his peace efforts in the Middle East. He plans to leave Tokyo's Haneda Airport at 10 pm (1300 GMT) last night. "A foreign ministry official told the news agency.

Hashimoto to meet Clinton:

Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto will meet US President Bill Clinton in New York on September 24 and discuss the Okinawa question with him. Chief Cabinet Secretary Seiroku Kajiyama announced yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The meeting will be relatively short due to Clinton's tight political schedule ahead of November's Presidential election. Kajiyama said. Hashimoto will visit New York from September 23 to 25 and is scheduled to address the UN General Assembly on September 24.

UK seeks nat'l seat on ARF:

British Defence Secretary Michael Portillo on Thursday reiterated Britain's intention to have a "national" seat on the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) contribute more effectively to regional security. AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Portillo said that although the European Union is a member of the forum, Britain did not consider its ARF membership through the EU complete without a "national" seat. "We already participate through our membership in the EU, but we are keen to contribute through a national seat," Portillo was reported saying by the Bernama news agency.

2.5pc population rises in Israel:

Israel's population rose 2.5 per cent during the past 12 months to reach 5,716,000, according to census figures published yesterday for the Jewish new year which begins Friday. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Of the total population, 80.8 per cent or 4.62 million are Jewish, 14.6 per cent Muslim (835,000), 2.9 per cent Christian (166,000) and 1.7 per cent Druse (95,000). The population increased by 141,000 or 2.5 per cent during the last 12 month, down from a 2.6 per cent rate of growth the previous year.

1 sentenced to death in India:

A court has ordered the execution of a Hindu butcher who hacked two Sikhs to death with a meat cleaver during sectarian riots that followed the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. AP reports from New Delhi.

Wednesday's death sentence was the first handed down by a court in the rioting. Death sentences are rare in India. At least 2,700 people, mostly Sikhs, were killed in the riots. The violence started after two Sikh bodyguards gunned down Mrs Gandhi while she was walking in her garden in retribution for an army raid on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Sikhism's holiest shrine, to dislodge Sikh separatists holed up there.

Madagascar polls on Nov 3:

An election will be held Nov. 3 to replace the president of this Indian Ocean nation, who announced his resignation last week. The government said Wednesday. AP reports from Antananarivo.

A list of candidates to succeed President Albert Zafy won't be issued until early next month, officials said. Zafy said last Thursday he would step down on Oct. 10. He made the announcement hours after Madagascar's top court upheld a move by lawmakers to force him from office.

Baghdad vows to defend itself US jets move into position for raids against Iraq

WASHINGTON, Sept 12: US warplanes moved into position today for almost certain retaliatory bombing raids against Iraq as Pentagon planners picked targets to hurt Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, reports Reuter.

US Air Force and Navy forces prepared to strike back at the Iraqi military for firing a missile early Wednesday at two US fighters on patrol over Iraq.

After a day of bellicose warnings from Washington, President Clinton told reporters traveling with him on a campaign stop in Arizona late Wednesday that the time for talking had ended.

"We don't want to get into a world war here," Clinton replied when asked about his plans for Iraq. "We want to manage the situation in an appropriate and disciplined way."

He spoke as Pentagon officials sent radar-climbing F-117A "Stealth" fighters and massive B-52 bombers into position to pummel Iraqi targets with missiles and bombs.

In the bowels of the sprawling Pentagon, planners pored over possible targets, ranging from mobile truck-carried radar and missile batteries to command centres in and around Baghdad.

"The determination of the United States in dealing with the problem of Iraq should not be underestimated," Clinton said at a campaign stop in Sun City, Arizona.

He said US pilots policing "no fly" zones over northern and southern Iraq would be protected.

Earlier report says Iraq said today it would defend itself against any US military action and would continue its defiance of US and allied no-fly zones over its territory, reports Reuter.

"Iraq will continue defending its national airspace, Iraqis and the Iraqi armed forces will meet any aggression. This is a natural right approved by international norms and agreements," Information Minister Abd-al-Ghani Abd-al-Ghafur told reporters.

The minister said there was no backing down from a pledge Iraqi President Saddam Hussein made on September 3.

'Time running out to reach accord on Tibet's autonomy'

WELLINGTON, Sept 12: The Dalai Lama, exiled spiritual leader of Tibet, said today that time was running out to reach an agreement with China on autonomy for his homeland, reports Reuter.

"If the present situation remains for another 10 years, then I think it may be too late," he told the National Press Club in Wellington.

"In all areas the Chinese population is greater in Tibet. Two-thirds of the population is now Chinese, only one-third Tibetan. So another 10 years, and I think really then it would be very critical."

China, which has ruled Tibet on the basis of historical claim since 1950, has refused to negotiate with the Dalai Lama, describing him as a political activist who aims to disrupt national unity.

The minister said there was no backing down from a pledge Iraqi President Saddam Hussein made on September 3.

India faces voices of dissent over CTBT

NEW DELHI, Sept 12: The first voices of dissent over India's refusal to sign a global nuclear test-ban treaty were raised here today, reports AFP.

Two newspaper editorials challenged the all-party consensus opposing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), suggesting India may have got its tactics wrong.

The Pioneer Daily, under the headline "Why India must think again on CTBT," argued that the nation could not afford the financial, environmental or political costs of developing a nuclear arsenal.

The Indian Express while attacking attempts to force India to sign the treaty, suggested that the agreement was a "significant step towards nuclear disarmament."

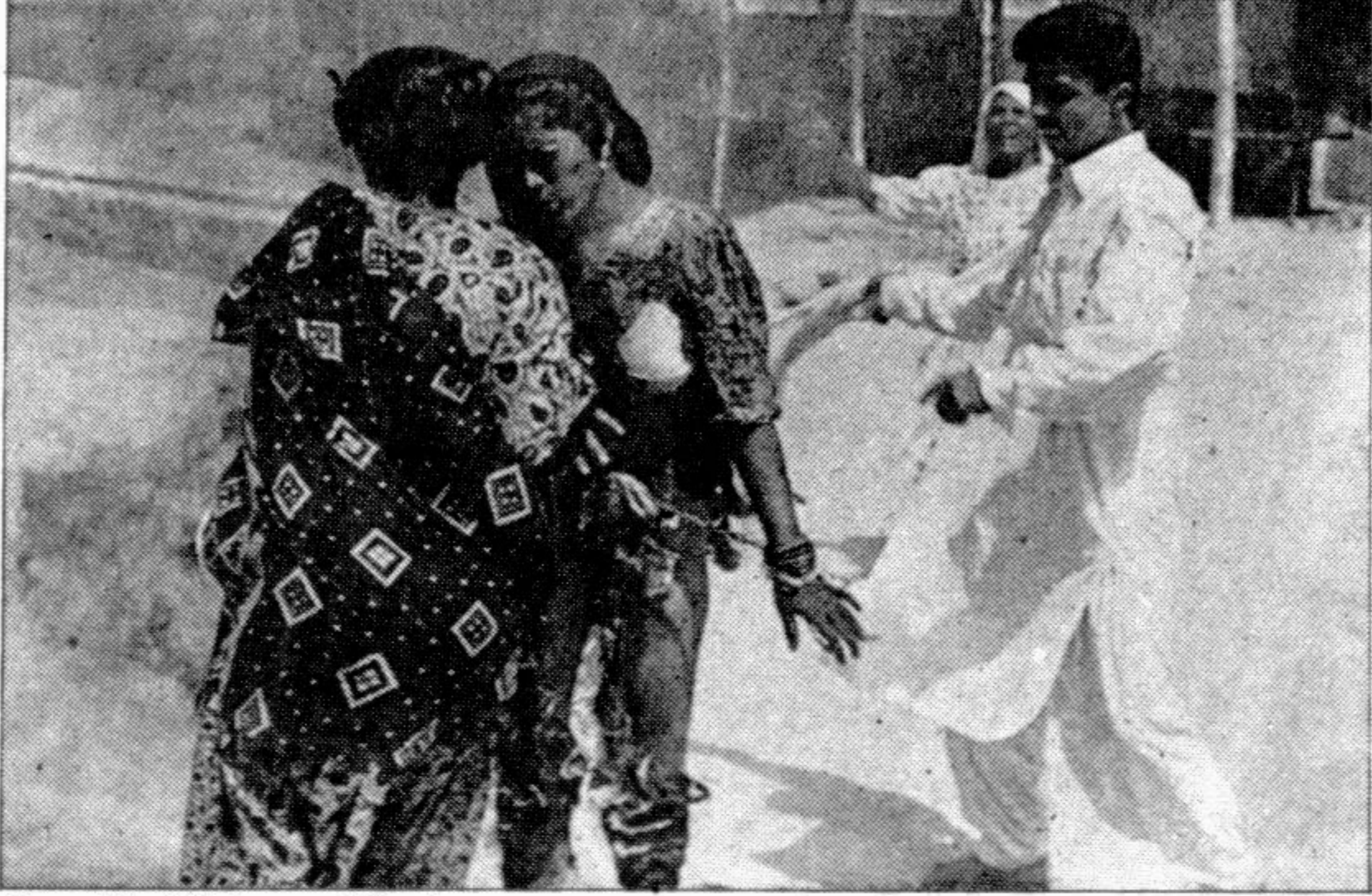
It added: "Even India, bitter though it has reason to be for being put on the rack at Geneva, may find that this incomplete is better than no treaty."

The Times of India, however, backed the Indian government's opposition to the treaty, which was adopted on Tuesday by 158 of the 173 states with voting rights at the UN General Assembly.

The newspaper, under the headline "Farical finale," argued that the five declared nuclear powers — the United States, Russia, China, France and Britain — would continue to maintain their nuclear dominance by carrying out tests by laboratory simulation.

India, it said had stood up for "sovereignty and autonomy," adding: "It was a sad day for the UN and the international community but a proud day for India."

India denies it plans to make nuclear weapons and fundamentally opposes them but argues it needs to keep the option open to safeguard national security.



An unidentified man (R) tries to save two women from fire who carried out self-immolation in front of the Hyderabad special terrorist courts, Karachi on Wednesday. The two women, Zaibunissa (C) and Hakimzadi (L) doused themselves in petrol and set themselves on fire in protest against a delay in the carrying out of a death sentence of Pakistan army captain found guilty of murdering their brothers four years ago. Both suffered critical burns. — AFP/UNB photo

Caucasus woman ready to give her heart to Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Sept 12: A Caucasus woman ready — quite literally — to give her heart to Russian President Boris Yeltsin if doctors should ever decide he needed a transplant. ITAR-Tass news agency said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Tass said the woman, Zinaida Bolyeva, 46, made her offer at the office of the government party Our Home is Russia in the autonomous region of north Dnestria, close to breakaway Chechnya.

"The Russian President must have a healthy heart and be able to work hard," Tass quoted Bolyeva as saying.

"He has to continue the course of democratic reforms."

Indian doctors on strike

HYDERABAD, India, Sept 12: Hundreds of Indian doctors went on strike on Wednesday to protest the suspension of two female doctors following charges they carried out a virginity test on a young nurse, officials here said, reports AFP.

Officials at the King George Hospital in the port city of Visakhapatnam said some 750 doctors and surgeons boycotted work at the facility demanding the reinstatement of their senior colleagues.

50 Vietnamese refugees stab themselves to stop repatriation

BANGKOK, Sept 12: About 50 Vietnamese refugees from a camp in eastern Thailand were in hospital today after stabbing themselves in protest against plans to repatriate them to Vietnam, police said, reports AFP.

The Vietnamese, from the Sikhui Camp in Nakhon Ratchasima province, who were among 200 refugees scheduled to be sent to Vietnam this week, stabbed themselves in the stomach late Wednesday, the police said.

Hospital officials said that the condition of the refugees was not serious, although several were suffering from intestinal injuries.

It was the third such protest by Vietnamese asylum-seekers in recent months.

AI urges Sihanouk to hold Ieng Sary accountable

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, Sept 12: Amnesty International urged King Norodom Sihanouk on Thursday to hold dissident Khmer Rouge leader Ieng Sary accountable for crimes against humanity committed during the infamous killing fields regime, reports AP.

In a letter to the Cambodian monarch, the London-based human-rights group said that impunity for leaders of genocide and war crimes contributes to such atrocities happening again.

Sary has been a leading member of the Khmer Rouge for decades but recently split from the guerrilla group and is negotiating peace at the head of several hundred guerrillas. Khmer Rouge hardliners accuse him of embezzling 16 million dollars from the group.

The government is moving toward meeting Sary's demand for amnesty in exchange for peace, hoping the hardline faction loyal to Pol Pot, the group's historic leader and Sary's brother-in-law, will be fatally weakened.

Cong (I) leaders to meet amid renewed call for Rao to quit

NEW DELHI, Sept 12: India's historically dominant Congress (I) Party, dogged by a series of corruption scandals, will discuss the issue here on Friday amid renewed calls for former premier PV Narasimha Rao to resign as party chief, reports AFP.

The Congress Parliamentary Party is expected to discuss the Party's worst electoral debacle in its entire 111-year history during the April-May general polls and press for Rao's removal as party president, sources said.

The meeting, demanded by six senior Congress leaders and members of the policy-making Congress working committee, accused the beleaguered Rao of leading the party to disaster in a strongly worded letter on Wednesday.

The Congress has been in a state of continuous decline since 1994. It has been trounced in most of the Provincial elections in 1994 and 1995 and its citadels in the south and the west have fallen, the letter said.

"Political corruption is today a central issue agitating our people. A series of scandals in recent months and allegations involving some Congress leaders and former prime ministers has done incalculable damage to the party's image."

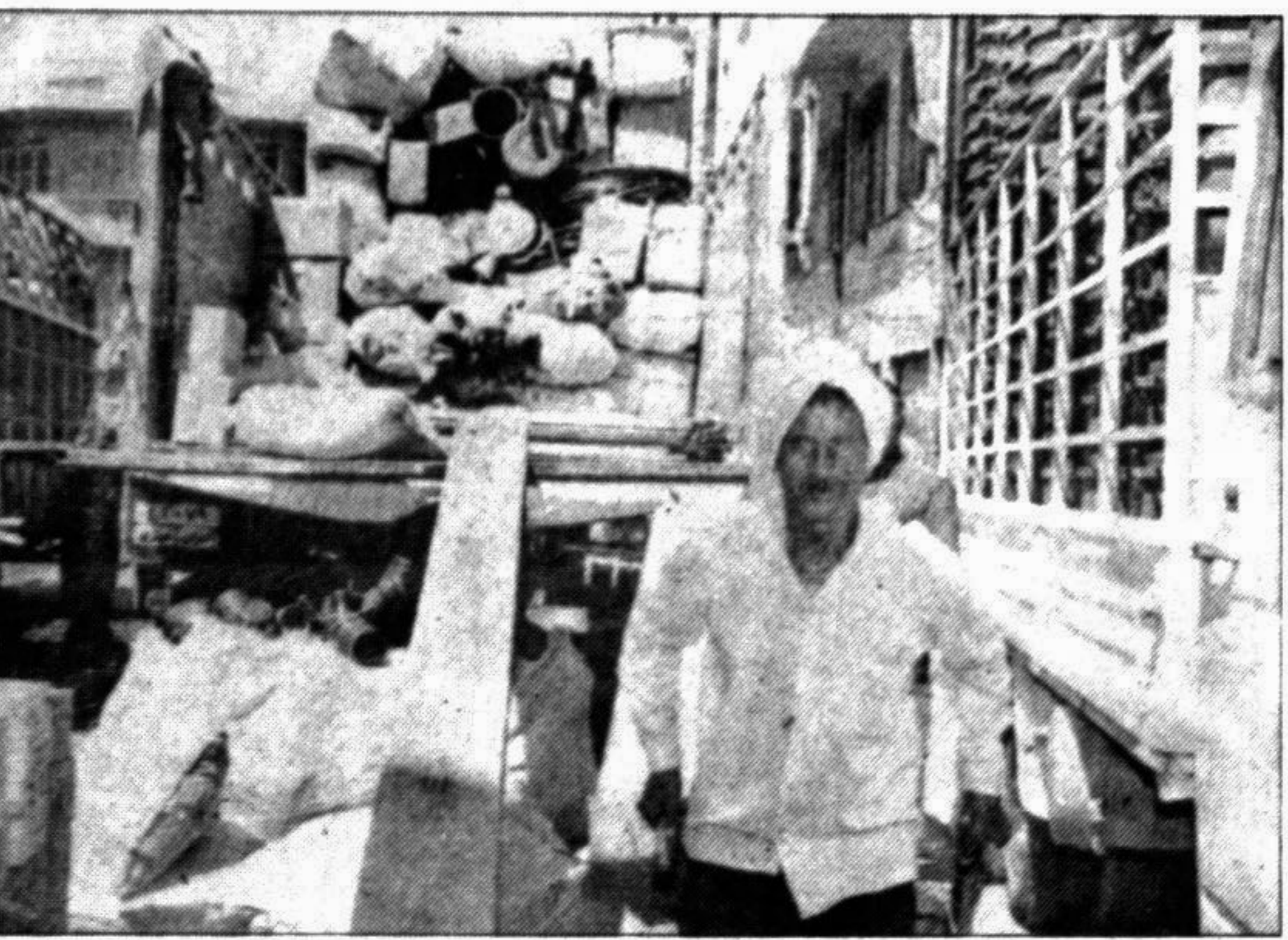
The dissidents, led by former members of Rao's cabinet including Rajesh Pilot and Ghulam Nabi Azad, also stepped up the heat on Rao to relinquish his leadership.

The Hindu Daily today quoted a source as saying that Rao loyalist and party heavy weight Vithal Narahari Gadgil had conveyed to Rao last week that it will be better for him to step down.

The 76-year-old leader is in the eye of several corruption scandals including alleged involvement in a 100,000-dollar fraud case, a giant bribery scandal and accusations that he bribed four MPs to save his government. Rao has denied all allegations saying they were politically motivated.

Congress spokesman Ved Prakash, however, said Friday's meeting was aimed at "self-inspection" and in no way endangered Rao.

"It is Narasimha Rao who has highlighted that corruption, which has been plaguing our country for more than 40 years, should be eradicated," he said.



An Iraqi Kurd pulls materials in Baghdad Wednesday, to be exported by trucks to Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein issued a general amnesty to Iraqi Kurds and lifted the embargo imposed in their region. — AFP/UNB photo

Tigers hijack civilian bus, kill 11 passengers

COLOMBO, Sept 12: Tamil Tiger guerrillas hijacked a civilian bus in eastern Sri Lanka today and sprayed passengers with bullets, killing at least 11 and wounding 27 others, officials here said, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) boarded the bus at Arantapala in the district of Ampara and carried out the massacre and escaped after exploding grenades, officials said.

The Tigers commandeered the bus to a lonely stretch of road and then opened fire on the passengers, officials said adding that six of the injured were in a serious condition and air lifted to a better equipped hospital.

Tiger guerrillas have been accused of killing 29 Sinhalese and four monks in February 1987 and four months later slaughtering 45 novice monks who were traveling in a bus.

Tamil Tigers have been accused of attacking civilians of the majority Sinhalese and minority Muslim communities in a bid to drive them out of the eastern region where the rebels claim is their traditional homeland.

More than 59,000 people have been killed in the LTTE's protracted separatist campaign in the past 23 years.

Reuters adds: Tamil Tiger rebels attacked a state oil depot in Sri Lanka's eastern Batticaloa district early on Wednesday but there was no damage to oil tanks, military officials said today.

Bildt challenges Karadzic to defend genocide charges

BELGRADE, Sept 12: Top Bosnian peace official Carl Bildt on Wednesday challenged indicted war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic to defend himself against genocide charges at an international tribunal, or be branded a coward, reports AFP.

Speaking here after talks with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, Bildt said if he (Karadzic) believes in what he is doing, then he should go to The Hague and defend himself.

"Otherwise his rhetoric is just the rhetoric of a coward," he said.

Karadzic, who stood down as Serb president and leader of the ruling Nationalist SDS Party in Serb-controlled Bosnia in July under heavy US pressure, as "in one way or another on his way to the Hague," said Bildt.

The one-time psychiatrist has been indicted, along with his army commander General Ratko Mladic, on genocide charges stemming from the alleged massacre of at least 3,000 Muslim men of draft age following the July 1995 capture of the eastern enclave of Srebrenica by Serb forces.

Bildt said he had no idea where Karadzic was currently holed up, but added that "his political days are over since some time back I would guess he's sitting somewhere writing bitter poems and plotting."

AP adds UN war crimes investigators located human remains Wednesday at the last mass grave site they will excavate before winter sets in.

The grave at a collective farm overlooking the Drina River that forms the border with Yugoslavia, is believed to contain the bodies of some of the hundreds of unarmed Bosnian Muslims killed while trying to escape the fallen city of Srebrenica.

The remains were discovered while workers were doing preliminary digging to establish the grave's perimeter, said John Givens, a spokesman for the investigators working for the war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

There has been speculation that as many as 1,000 people could be buried at Plica.

Protest march in India against hosting Miss World

BANGALORE, Sept 12: Members of the All India Democratic Students Organisation, All India Mahila Sanskrit Sangathan and all India Democratic Youth Federation today took out a march through the busy streets of the city to protest against the hosting of the Miss World contest in Karnataka, reports PTI.

The protestors later submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister, JH Patel, in which it said the most painful and shocking incident related to the conduct of the pageant was his attitude and utterances regarding the pageant. You have not only gone all out to support it, but even also made certain unwarranted remarks, it said.

Iran's incursions into Iraq helped spark Kurd conflict

DUBAI, Sept 12: Iran's incursions into Iraq this summer drew little notice but helped spark the region's latest conflict, which has effectively undermined Tehran's influence, reports AP.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein cited Iran's support for one Kurdish faction as the reason he sent his army into northern Iraq to help a rival Kurdish group.

Since then, the conflict has taken several twists and turns, not all of them to Iran's liking. Iran's official Tehran radio said tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurdish refugees had entered Iran and were straining relief resources, although border guards said fewer had crossed.

Iran also has lost the measure of control it had gained in the region through its support for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the group that was routed by the rival Kurdish Democratic Party with Saddam's help.

"It seems from a distance that the Iranians didn't see this one coming, otherwise they would have bolstered the PUK more," said Philip Robins, a Middle East expert at Oxford University in England.

Robins said Iran had been building its presence in northern Iraq for nearly two years to show the United States that any arrangement in the region would have to take Iran into account.

"Potentially, Iran has lost quite a lot," Robins said in a telephone interview.

There may be one bright spot from Iran's perspective. Iran was never happy with the Kurdish "safe haven" established in northern Iraq by the US and their allies after the 1991 Gulf War.

Iraq and Turkey have restive Kurdish minorities of their own and feared the "safe haven" could evolve into a Kurdish state that could become a permanent base for rebels to launch attacks, the prospect of an independent state now seems far-fetched.

For decades, Iran and Iraq have fought a proxy war with the Kurds, backing rival factions when it was advantageous, cutting them loose when it wasn't.

Iran's cross-border forays into northern Iraq caused barely an international ripple in July and August, but Saddam's action drew immediate international attention and raised the stakes.

Iran's UN ambassador, Kamal Kharrazi, said in July that Iran needed, take action because Iraq was "not in a position to exercise effective control over the northern part of its territory." Iraqi villagers in the northeast said Iran began shelling on August 16, and sent troops in afterwards.

Then, fighting between the two major Kurdish factions broke out August 17, ending a fragile ceasefire among the factions and setting the stage for Saddam to launch his troops into the north.

With Saddam in effective control of the north, Iran will find it more difficult to exercise influence in the region.

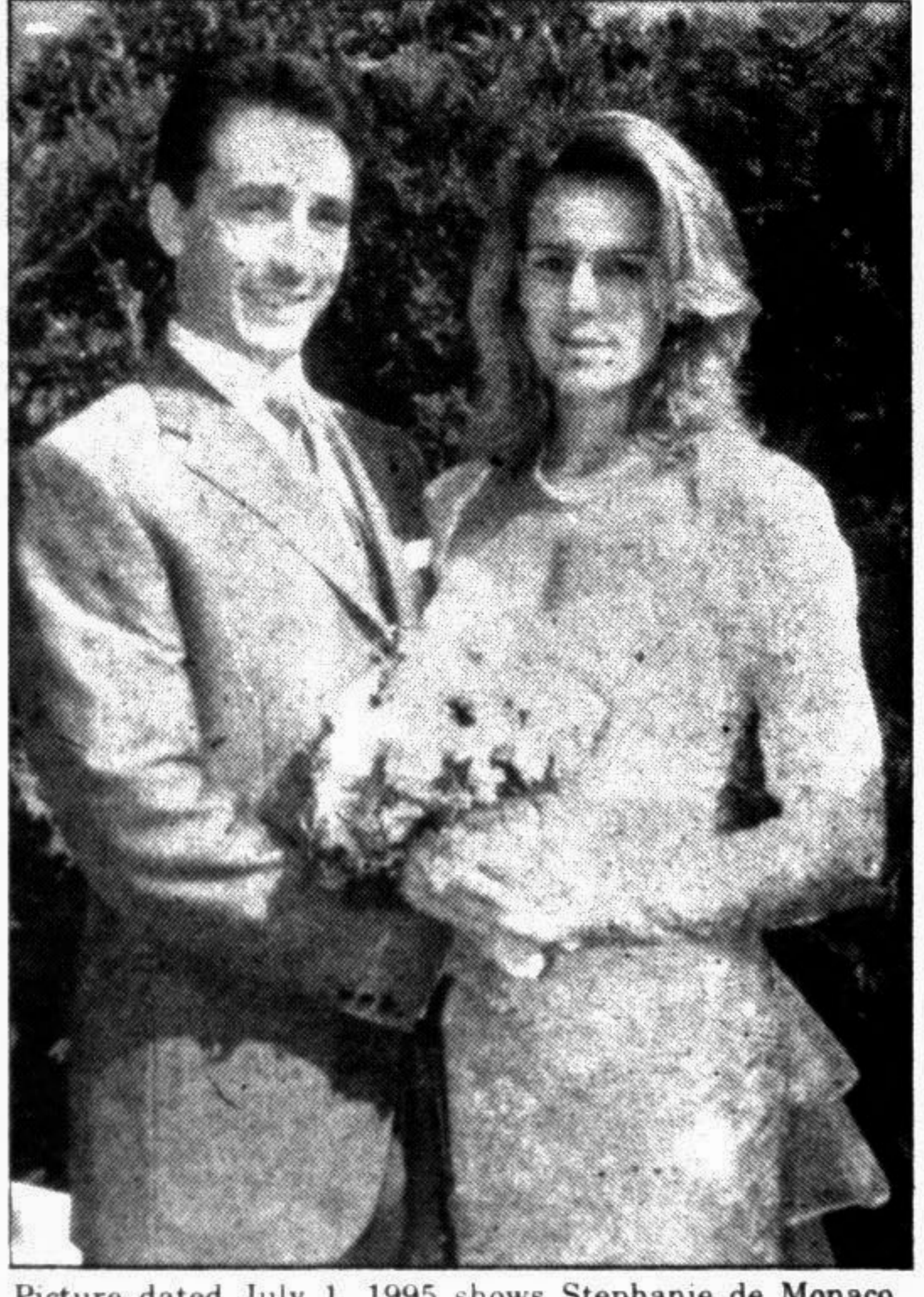
Another report says, largely submerged in the escalating confrontation between the United States and Iraq is the role Iran had in touching off the fighting.

Violence marks anniversary of Pinochet's coup

SANTIAGO, Chile, Sept 12: Army officers toasted Gen. Augusto Pinochet on the 23rd anniversary of his bloody military coup as marchers mourned the victims of his regime and clashed with police Wednesday, reports AP.

The events underlined the deep polarisation that continues within Chilean society despite the country's return to civilian rule in 1990, when Pinochet stepped down while retaining control of the army.

The march in Santiago ended in thick clouds of tear gas as police dispersed the mostly young demonstrators, who threw rocks and Molotov cocktails. Demonstrators also set off a right-wing political party's office.



Picture dated July 1, 1995 shows Stephanie de Monaco and her husband Daniel Ducruet posing for photos after their wedding at the Monaco Palace. The princess' lawyer in Paris, Thierry Lacoste, confirmed to AFP Wednesday that the 31-year-old younger daughter of Prince Rainier III and the Late Princess Grace aimed to divorce Ducruet. Photos of Ducruet with a Belgian exotic dancer Fifi Houteman, whose last claim to fame was winning the "Miss Topless Belgium" title in December, appeared in European papers two weeks ago, bringing fresh shame onto the House of Grimaldi. — AFP/UNB photo