

International

Depletion of ozone layer over Antarctica may get worse

GENEVA, Nov 8: Depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer over Antarctica is as great this year as during the past three record-setting years and may get worse, according to the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), reports USIS.

Dr Rumen Bojkov, WMO special adviser on ozone issues, said November 6 that the depletion of ozone over the antarctic provides a "reconfirmation" that the destruction of the ozone layer — earth's vital shield against ultraviolet radiation from the sun — is continuing.

Ozone depletion is most rapid and comprehensive over the antarctic each September-October because the extremely low temperatures and specific meteorological conditions of the antarctic spring cause ozone destruction. The most rapid ozone reactions occur at -80 degrees Celsius.

Over the last several years, during the antarctic spring, all of the ozone contained within the area of the polar vortex has been destroyed, an event described as the "ozone hole". The polar vortex extends 22 to 23 kilometres over the South Pole, and is located in the zone of the stratosphere between 16 and 22 kilometres above Earth.

Bojkov pointed out that the term "ozone hole" is actually a misnomer, because the complete destruction of ozone occurs only within the specific area of the polar vortex. Ozone molecules above 22 kilometres remain. Ozone in the earth's atmosphere is found mainly between the altitudes of 15 and 35 kilometres.

Ozone destruction is at its most accelerated in the autumn over the antarctic, but ozone destruction occurs at all latitudes except the equatorial belt. Excessive amounts of ultraviolet radiation can cause eye problems and skin cancer in humans and reduced crop yields.

Ozone destruction is caused by the release of chlorine- and bromine-containing chemicals — the compounds used in refrigeration, aerosol cans, industrial cleaners, pesticides and many other applications — into the atmosphere. Under the 1987 Montreal Protocol and its amendments, governments agreed to phase out the chemicals that destroy stratospheric ozone.

If all countries meet their requirements under the protocol, scientists predict that ozone-destroying chemicals will reach a peak in the atmosphere sometime during the first five years of the next century. After that, their levels are expected to decline, and to reach a pre ozone hole concentration by the year 2070.

That means that after the year 2070, we expect not to observe any more ozone hole events," Bojkov said.

Benazir meets her detained husband Ousted Pak PM accuses Islamists of plotting her downfall

ISLAMABAD, Nov 8: Pakistan's ousted prime minister Benazir Bhutto accused shadowy Islamist forces on Thursday of plotting her downfall, but absolved the military of all blame, reports Reuters.

She said Muslim extremists had been conspiring to overthrow democracy ever since her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto founded the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in 1967. He was toppled by General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq in 1977 and hanged two years later.

There are anti-Bhutto, anti-PPP forces and ex-Zia forces who want to bring a soft Islamic revolution," Benazir said in an interview with Reuters television.

They want to get rid of me because they think that I'm a modern leader and they don't want to see a liberal Pakistan," Benazir, unceremoniously sacked by President Farooq Leghari in the early hours on Tuesday, vowed to fight back, but said elections could only be fair if Leghari stepped down.

The president nominated a caretaker Prime Minister, Meraj Khalid, to run the country until polls set for February 3.

Benazir, 43, said she had no faith in the neutrality of

Leghari, once a close political associate, saying he had acted in a "shabby" manner to grasp power for himself.

"Because I want a fair election, I'm demanding that the president step down and that there should be a neutral caretaker government," she said. "If the elections are not perceived to be fair, there's going to be an agitation."

Leghari cited corruption, nepotism and misuse among a long list of reasons for his decision to remove Benazir's three-year government and dissolve the National Assembly (lower house). Political observers said he could not have acted without the tacit support of the army, but Benazir disputed that view, saying troops who moved into Islamabad soon after her dismissal were only following the orders of the president.

"Let me tell you that the army was not involved," she said. "The armed forces, the present Chief of Army Staff, stayed out of it. He was neutral. He was probably aware of what was going on, but he wasn't going to be intrusive."

Benazir was speaking at the prime minister's official residence, where she was held for

about 36 hours after her dismissal before curbs on her movements were lifted.

She said she planned to leave her opulent official mansion within the next few days for accommodation in Islamabad.

Her three children ran down a corridor to greet her while her own mother Nusrat placed more slowly, still in mourning for her son Murtaza, killed by Karachi police on September 20.

Benazir said she believed that her detained husband, Asif Ali Zardari, would face fabricated charges in connection with the killing of her estranged brother.

AFP adds: Deposed Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto on Thursday met her detained husband Asif Ali Zardari for the first time since the ouster of her government, a close associate said.

The early morning meeting took place at a rest house for officials where Zardari is in custody and lasted three hours, the Benazir aide added.

Benazir received permission for the visit late Wednesday from the three-day old interim government which replaced her administration said the aide,

who asked not to be named.

Benazir left her former official residence here at about 10:00 pm (1700 GMT Wednesday), but had to wait some four hours before meeting Zardari.

There was some "confusion" among policemen on duty at the Sihala Rest House, some 10 kilometres (six miles) from Islamabad, the aide said, adding that the meeting took place after the guards had received official clearance.

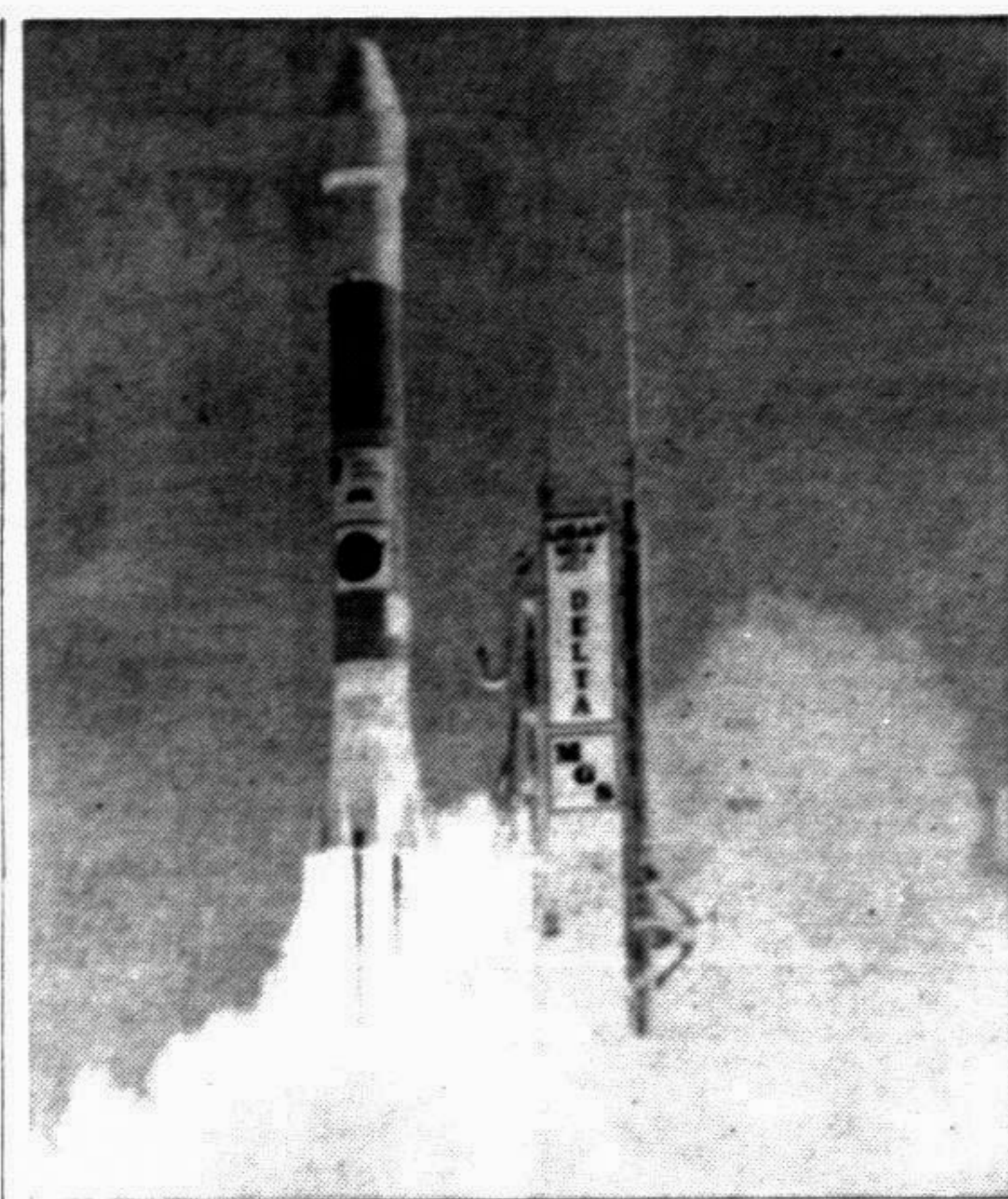
Details of the meeting were not revealed.

The government on Thursday also allowed Zardari to meet his lawyer, sources said.

The interim government has not said why Zardari has been detained, but a spokesman of Benazir's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) said he was being held under a law allowing preventive detention of suspects considered a threat to public peace.

There was no official confirmation of the PPP spokesman's statement.

The caretaker administration Minister Ishaq Ahmed Haqani said Wednesday that Zardari was in "protective custody" because there was "something against him".



A Delta 2 launch vehicle lifts off from launch pad 17-A on Thursday at Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying NASA's Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft to begin a ten-month journey to Mars after a one day delay due to weather. The Surveyor will conduct its mission from Mars orbit, providing for an extended study of the planet's surface, atmosphere, gravitational and magnetic fields.

— AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Blasts rock govt offices in Sindh

Two bombs rocked government offices in Nawabshah town in ousted prime minister Benazir Bhutto's home province of Sindh on Thursday, but only one person was slightly injured, the state APP news agency said, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

It was the victim, a visitor to the town, was injured when the first bomb went off in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office while people were working inside the building and an adjacent treasury office.

There was another blast nearby as the local sub-divisional magistrate and police chief were examining the site of the first explosion, APP said. Both men were unhurt.

New Pak govt sacks APP chief

Pakistan's caretaker government said on Thursday it had sacked the head of the state news agency Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), accused by journalists' unions of illegal sackings and staff victimisation. Reuter reports from Islamabad.

The APP quoted Information Minister Ishaq Ahmad Haqqani as telling reporters in the Punjab province capital of Lahore that the agency's director-general Azhar Suhail had been removed and a replacement would be named within the next two days.

New cabinet formed in Lebanon

Prime Minister-designate Rafik Hariri announced his new, 30-member Cabinet on Thursday, and key ministers retained their portfolios, AP reports from Beirut.

Hariri retained the finance portfolio and left Mohsen Daloul with defense. Fais Bweiz with foreign affairs and Michael Murr with interior.

CNN wins Cuban permission for Havana bureau

The Cable News Network has won permission from the Cuban government to open a bureau in Havana, AP reports from Atlanta.

If approved by US officials, CNN would be the first American-based news organisation with a full-time presence in the Communist country in 27 years.

The Cuban Foreign Ministry announced the decision Thursday in a brief statement in Havana. No details of the Havana bureau have been set, pending US permission, said CNN spokesman David Talley.

'Int'l force should stay in Bosnia for 2 more yrs'

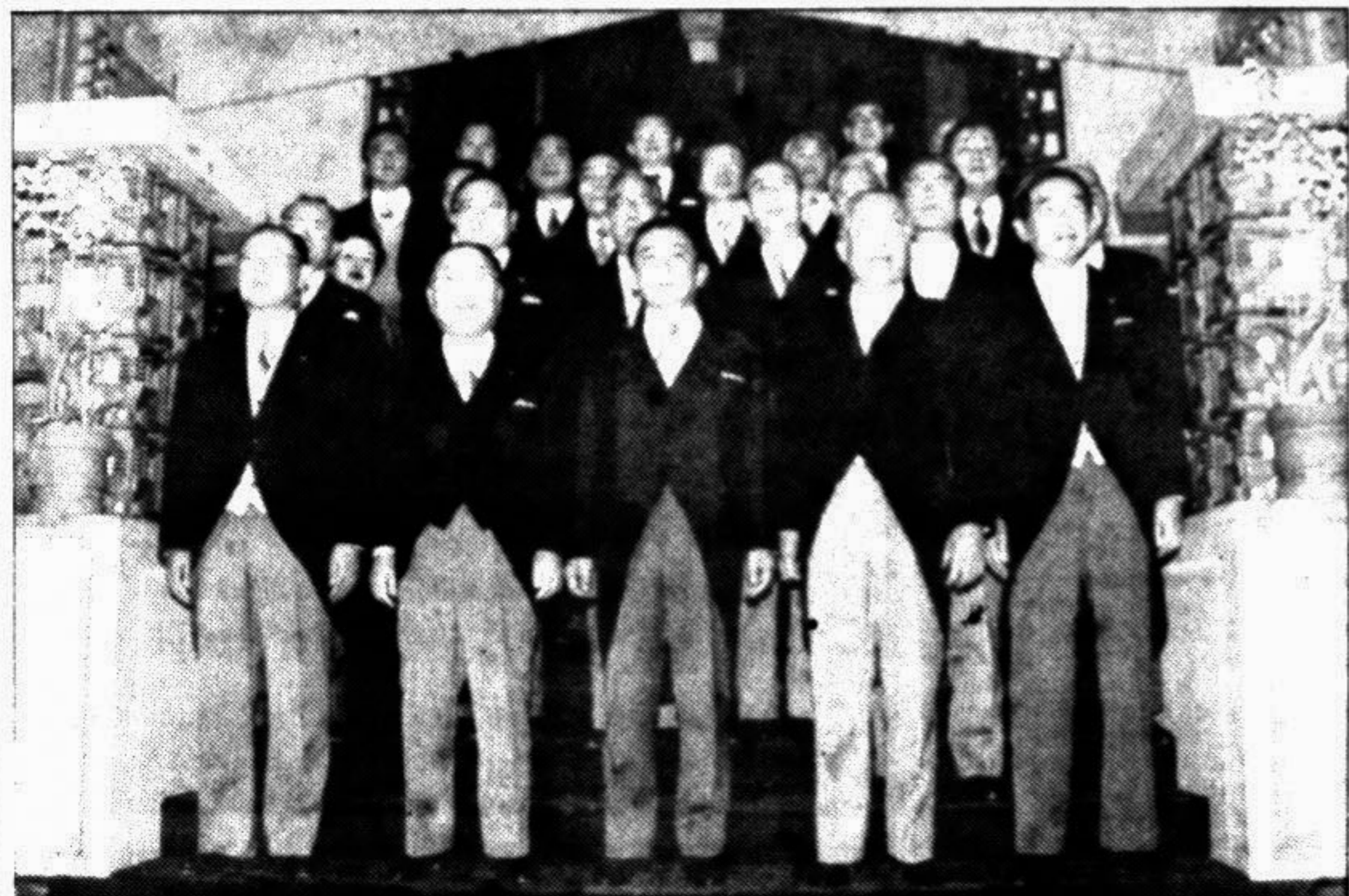
SARAJEVO, Nov 8: An international peacekeeping force should stay in Bosnia for at least two more years, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic was quoted as saying here Thursday, reports AP.

Bosnian Radio said Izetbegovic asked for the force to stay in talks with NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and the other two members of the joint Bosnian Presidency, Kresimir Zubak and Momcilo Krajcinik.

It was necessary "to ensure the conditions for the return of refugees, assist in the arrest of persons sought for war crimes, oversee the proper progress of municipal elections and monitor disarmament," Izetbegovic was quoted as saying.

Solana said earlier that a decision on how to replace the 47,800-member NATO-led peace Implementation Force (IFOR) would be taken in the next few weeks.

"We are considering different options and we'll discuss these options in the council in Brussels in the coming days," Solana said when questioned by reporters.



Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto (C front) poses for photographers with his newly appointed Cabinet members including Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Takao Fujimoto (L), Chief Cabinet Secretary Seiroku Kajiyama (2nd L), Finance Minister Hiroshi Mitsuoka (2nd R) and Management and Coordination Agency Director General Kabun Muto (R right) after their first Cabinet meeting at the premier's official residence Friday.

Refugees in Zaire dying of thirst UN envoy heads for central Africa on peace mission

NICE, France, Nov 8: A UN envoy headed to central Africa on a peace mission Thursday after getting backing from Zaire's ailing leader for a multinational force to aid more than a million refugees fleeing ethnic warfare, reports AP.

Raymond Chretien left in the early morning on a private UN jet from this southern French city. On Wednesday, he met President Sese Seko Mubutu at his nearby villa over looking the Mediterranean.

Chretien was headed first to Nairobi, after a fueling stop in Cairo. He later planned to travel to both Zaire and Rwanda, according to an official at the Canadian Embassy in Paris, Louise Chalifour. Chretien is Canada's ambassador to the United States and a former ambassador to Zaire.

On Wednesday, Chretien told reporters he had accomplished what he came to France for: A commitment from Mubutu, to try to maintain peace on the ground in Zaire so a multinational force can go into the central African nation as soon as possible.

The force would have two ob-

jectives, Chretien said. First, it would try to get immediate aid to the refugees, who are threatened by disease and starvation. And second, it would seek the eventual return of the refugees to their camps or homes.

More than a million Hutus fled Rwanda's civil war in 1994 to Zairian refugee camps, fearing vengeance from an advancing Tutsi army for the slaughter.

Instability reigned in the camps and Hutu militias began using the refugee areas as bases for cross-border raids into Rwanda. Last month, Hutus joined Zairian soldiers in attacks on ethnic Tutsis living in Zaire.

Chretien said he would try to talk to Rwandan officials in Kigali and see on what terms it would take its refugees back.

Meanwhile, after wandering for days through Zaire to avoid border warfare, Hutu refugees are trickling back to their homeland and recounting horrors all too familiar in troubled central Africa.

A handful straggled in to Rwanda on Thursday, their bare feet torn from walking on

the volcanic rock that covers the region.

They said dozens of their compatriots died of thirst back in eastern Zaire, and others were surviving by sucking water from roots.

UN spokesman Ray Wilkinson said 336 Hutu refugees had returned to Rwanda since Monday, two days after rebels seized the key Zairian border city of Goma.

The Rwandan Hutus fled to refugee camps in Zaire when a Tutsi-controlled government took power in 1994, ending a Hutu-led massacre that killed a half-million Rwandans, most of them Tutsis.

But fighting that surged three weeks ago along the Zaire-Rwanda border prompted many of the 1.1 million refugees to flee area camps, creating a refugee crisis.

The rebels called a ceasefire earlier this week after driving Zairian forces from positions along the border.

The United Nations and world governments, meanwhile, are frantically trying to figure out how to get food and water to the refugees.

Hashimoto appoints new cabinet

TOKYO, Nov 8: The following are Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's new Cabinet appointments, following his reelection by Japan's parliament. All are from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). (Retained from previous cabinet), reports Reuter.

Prime Minister—Ryutaro Hashimoto (R)
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries—Takao Fujimoto
Chief Cabinet Secretary—Sei roku Kajiyama (R)
Construction—Shizuka Kamel

Education—Takashi Kosugi
Finance—Hiroshi Mitsuoka
Foreign—Yukihiko Ikeda (R)
Health and Welfare—Hiroshi Kozumi
Home Affairs—Katsuhiko Shirakawa

International Trade and Industry—Shinji Sato
Justice—Isao Matsuura
Labour—Yutaka Okano
Post and Telecommunications—Hisao Horinouchi
Transport—Makoto Koga

Directors-General of Government Agencies (State Ministers)
Defence—Fumio Kyuma

Economic Planning—Taro Aso

Environment—Michiko Ishii
Hokkaido/Okinawa Development—Jitsuo Inagaki
Management, Coordination—Kabun Muto
National Land—Kosuke Ito
Science and Technology—Riichiro Chikaoka

Earlier report adds: Japan's lower house formally re-elected Ryutaro Hashimoto Prime Minister yesterday.

Hashimoto was re-elected by lawmakers at a special parliamentary session and his victory was announced to the House by Speaker Soichiro Ito. Hashimoto will head a minority government expected to be formed later in the day.

In October 20 general elections, Hashimoto's conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) increased its standing in parliament's dominant lower house but fell short of an overall majority, winning 239 of the 500 seats in the Chamber.

Hashimoto plans to govern with the support of independents and in a loose alliance with his old coalition partners.

77.5 pc Palestinians support peace with Israel PA, Jordan agree on control of Jerusalem holy sites

JERUSALEM, Nov 8: A struggle between Jordan and the Palestinians for control of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem has been resolved, the Palestinian minister of religious affairs said Thursday, reports AP.

Hassan Tahboub said Jordan will retain control of Jerusalem's holy sites pending the outcome of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on the final status of the city.

The Palestinians will be responsible for sites outside Jerusalem's municipal boundaries.

Tahboub said the agreement was reached during a meeting in Jordan of officials of the Jordanian and Palestinian Islamic Trusts.

The properties involved include schools, cultural centers, housing and mosques — including Jerusalem's Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques, one of Islam's holiest sites.

Since the establishment of Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Al Aqsa has had two presiding muftis, or chief clerics.

Since Israel captured east Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967, it has continued to recognise Jordan's role as

guardian of the Muslim holy sites there. That claim was challenged by the Palestinians, who want east Jerusalem as a capital of a future state.

Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on the final status of Jerusalem are supposed to be completed by 1999, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the status of the city, itself, is not negotiable.

The Palestinians have often said they want Jerusalem as their capital.

AFP adds: A majority of 77.5 per cent of Palestinians support the peace process with Israel, a poll conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC) said on Thursday.

Fourteen per cent of the respondents said they were opposed to the peace process, while 8.5 per cent had no opinion, according to the poll received by AFP.

A total 68.4 per cent said they were satisfied with the way President Yasser Arafat was leading the Palestinians while 20.8 per cent called his performance "average" and 6.1 per cent said "poor."

But respondents were made divided over the Palestinian Authority (PA) itself.

Court asks police to register Ghinva's complaint

KARACHI, Nov 8: The Sindh High Court Thursday ordered police to register a complaint from the widow of Murtaza Bhutto, the slain brother of deposed premier Benazir Bhutto, in connection with her husband's killing, reports AFP.

It upheld a petition filed by Ghinva Bhutto after Murtaza was killed in a shootout between police and his guards here on September 20, in which she accused police of refusing to register her complaint.

Seven of Murtaza's colleagues were also killed in the shootout and Ghinva's lawyers have told a judicial tribunal probing the incident that some senior police and intelligence officials were involved.

The court ruled that the "the respondent (relevant police officer of the area) is directed to perform his legal obligation and register the first information report."

Tigers launch attack against military

COLOMBO, Nov 8: Tamil tiger guerrillas launched an attack against military defences in northern Sri Lanka, killing an officer and a soldier for the loss of three of their own men, the Defence Ministry said today, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) staged the assault against army bunkers in the district of Vavuniya on Thursday, the ministry said, adding that six soldiers were wounded in the fighting.

The attack came a day after an identical strike in the northern peninsula of Jaffna in which six soldiers and a rebel were killed.

Police foil bid to kill ex-president of Turkey

ISTANBUL, Nov 8: Police on Thursday said they arrested four people who allegedly were plotting the assassination of a former president and a lawmaker, reports AP.

The suspects, a woman and three men, planned to kill Kenan Evren, the general who led a 1980 coup and later became president for a seven-year term, police said.

An attack was also planned on Dogan Gures, a retired military chief of staff who is now a legislator of the ruling Islamic coalition government. Anti-terrorism police, saying they acted on a tip, arrested the suspects in the Mediterranean coast town of Marmaris.

Off the Record

Another man without title

WASHINGTON: Former Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, who said if he lost he would be just another man without a title, proved it on Thursday, reports Reuter.

He left his Watergate apartment complex this morning with a bundle of clothes under his arm and took them to the dry cleaners across the street like other residents in the foggy bottom area of Washington.

The former senator, who had been surrounded by staff for most of his political life during 35 years in Washington, then bought a couple of coffees at a nearby restaurant and gave one to his wife, Elizabeth. Then the couple walked their miniature schnauzer dog, leader, around the neighbourhood.

Dole was driven off later to have pictures taken with his staff now dismantling his campaign headquarters across town.

Fairy tales fair

CHENGDU: World-famous Sichuan province, Yuan Ke, has published more than 209 collections of fairy tales, reports Xinhua.

His work over the past five years has totalled seven million Chinese written characters. Yuan, 80, was born in Xinfan county in southwest China's Sichuan province. His first book of fairy tales was printed in 1947. In 1950, he compiled the country's first book on ancient fairy tales of the Han nationality, the majority of the Chinese people.

His works have been translated into many foreign languages, including Russian, Japanese, English, French, Spanish and Korean.

War against birds

CAGLIARI, Italy: Sardinian fishermen said Thursday they have declared war on tens of thousands of cormorants which have invaded Lake Cabras and started feeding off the fish stocks, reports AFP.

"If the region doesn't give us the order to slaughter them and control them, 80 boats will take to the water to hunt them," the fishermen's union said in a statement.

They say the huge flocks of birds have led to losses of five billion lire (3.2 million dollars) since they arrived a few weeks ago on the eastern lake on the Mediterranean island.

Under a 1979 European directive cormorants are a protected species.

On October 26, thousands of fishermen protested outside the European Parliament in Strasbourg to protest the laws, saying the birds have emptied rivers and lakes of fish stocks.

Clinton, shaping new cabinet, casts 'wide net'

WASHINGTON, Nov 8: With gaping holes in his staff and Cabinet, President Clinton pledged to "cast a wide net" for his second-term team, suggesting that he may land a Republican or two, reports AP.

Even as Clinton made the promise, US Transportation Secretary Federico Pena told the White House Thursday that he was resigning — making him the fifth Cabinet secretary who plans to leave. Three more could announce similar plans soon, and the president might lose half his Cabinet.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who formally resigned in a White House ceremony Thursday, told the Associated Press: "The time simply has come for someone else to pick up the baton."

Chief of Staff Leon Panetta will announce his resignation any day now, and North Carolina businessman Erskine Bowles is the clear front-runner to replace him. Clinton's decision is expected soon; aides hoped it would be made in time for a Friday news conference. Three advisers, speaking on

condition of anonymity, said Clinton and Bowles discussed Thursday the prospect of Bowles taking the job, and the businessman asked to think about it overnight.

Bowles, former deputy White House chief of staff, is reluctant to replace Panetta — and is proposing certain conditions regarding the sweep of his authority that may not be acceptable to Clinton, a senior official said. "The price might be too high," said the aide, who did not know the precise conditions.

Other candidates included Deputy National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, whose name is mentioned for several posts, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and political adviser Harold Ickes. Rubin has said he doesn't want the job.

Christopher led the charge of Cabinet officials leaving the administration. Officials have said four others plan to resign: Defence Secretary William Perry, Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary, Commerce Secretary Mickey Kantor and Pena. Perry confirmed day-old re-

ports about his resignation, telling reporters in Denver, "I signed up for one term, and that's ending."

O'Leary and Pena were

nudged out of office. The others are leaving on their own. An administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed Thursday that Pena

would resign.

Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros, the focus of investigation involving payments he made to a former mistress, is virtually certain to leave. White House officials say. Labour Secretary Robert Reich could be next, if he decides to return home to Boston. Education Secretary Richard Riley, who enjoys Clinton's strong support, may also decide to leave.

That means Clinton could easily lose half of his 14-member Cabinet, and as many as eight.

Also Thursday, another key official, Walter Mondale, said he was leaving as US ambassador to Japan and returning to Minnesota.

The White House played down the turnover, though Clinton was turning over an overseas trip next week to give him more time to work on the vacancies.

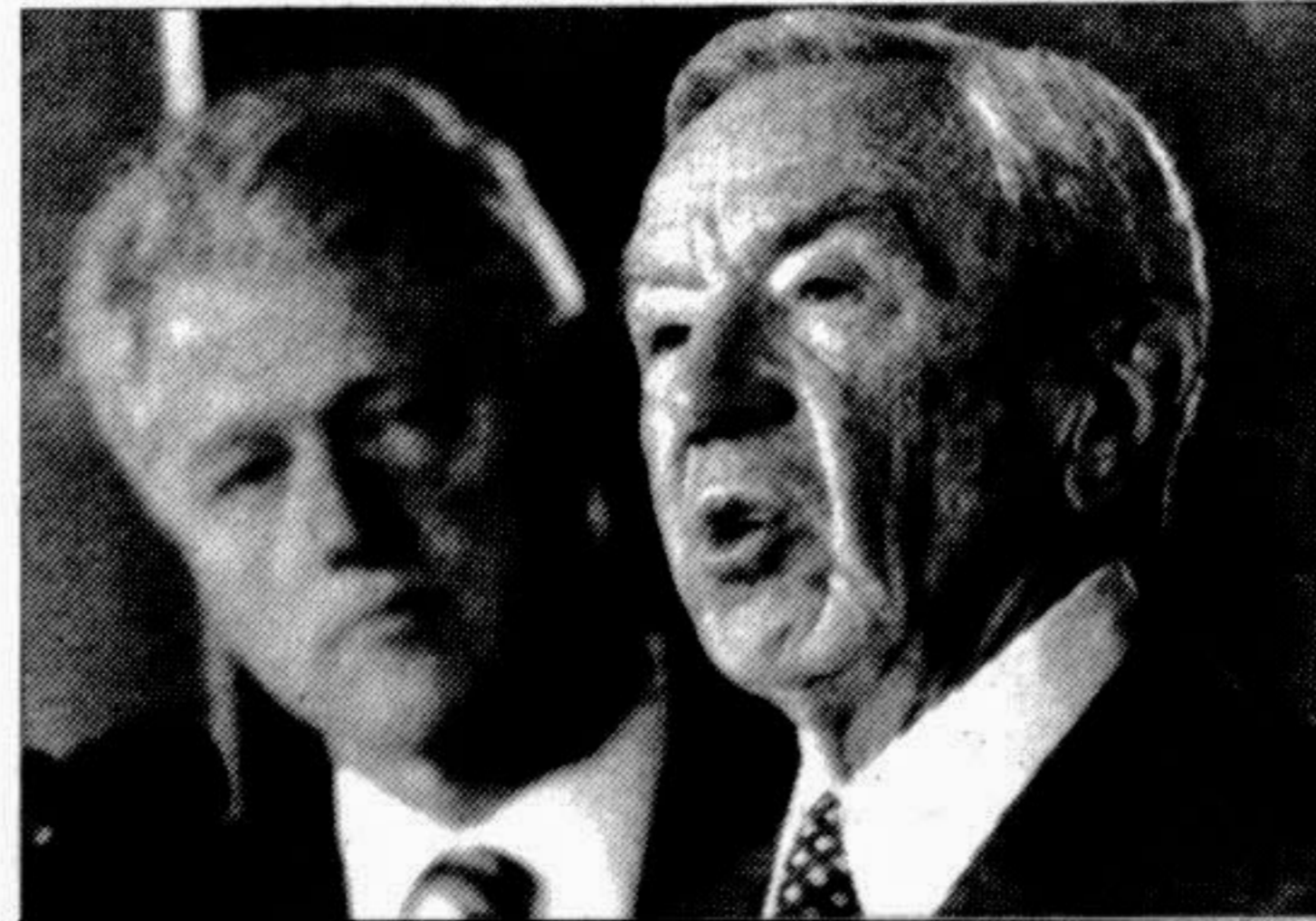
"You're seeing the natural churning of personnel as administrations go into a second term," press secretary Mike McCurry said.

Clinton was meeting with the Cabinet on Friday, and could formalise some of the resignations at the news conference. The first new Cabinet members will not be announced before next week, aides said.

In a ceremony honouring Christopher, the president told reporters, "With all these places where we have vacancies, I want to cast a wide net."

His landslide victory proved that Americans want Republican and Democrats to work together, the president said. "I will be looking in all these personnel decisions... across a broad span of American people," he said. The remarks referred to his goal for political, racial, ethnic and gender diversity in the Cabinet, aides said.

Retired Army Gen. Colin Powell and Sen. Dick Lugar are mentioned as potential Republican successors to Christopher. William Cohen is a prospect to replace Perry at Defence. Clinton suggested in 1992 that he would put a Republican in his Cabinet, and never did.



US Secretary of State Warren Christopher (R) speaks as US President Bill Clinton (L) looks on during a press conference at the White House on Thursday announcing his resignation.

— AFP/UNB photo