

# Hillary urges junta to open talks with Suu Kyi

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Nov 25: US first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton urged Myanmar military regime Monday to open a serious dialogue with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, reports AP.

In a speech at Chiang Mai University, the first lady placed Myanmar worsening human rights situation on the agenda ahead of President Clinton's arrival in Thailand later Monday for a state visit.

The ruling junta in Myanmar, Thailand's western neighbour, has recently stepped up a crackdown on Suu Kyi's pro-democracy movement. The standoff escalated to violence November 9 when a pro-government mob attacked her car with iron bars and rocks. She was unhurt.

Hillary noted that Thailand, Washington's strongest ally in Southeast Asia, had shown an "enlightened example" by providing a haven for students and minority groups fleeing repression in Myanmar.

"We all hope that Burmese refugees will be able to cross back to their homeland soon," she said, "but such an outcome depends on real political dialogue, and that dialogue must be serious and must continue between Suu Kyi and the military regime in Myanmar."

Meanwhile, in Bangkok, exiled Myanmar students delivered a letter to the US Embassy urging Clinton to use his influence with Myanmar neighbours and "clarify the policy of the United States toward the Myanmar dictatorship."

Washington responded to the worsening political climate in Myanmar earlier this year by banning visits by members of the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council and their families. The measures were largely token.

Economic sanctions were threatened if the regime harmed Suu Kyi, but have not been put into effect despite the attack on her car by a mob the State Department said it had evidence was organised by the regime.

Washington has been unable to shift Myanmar neighbours in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, who would be crucial in any successful effort to isolate the regime, to criticise or punish a country they wish to make a member.

ASEAN granted Myanmar observer status earlier this year, but a rush toward full membership — and the diplomatic protection that would confer — has been stalled by Thailand and the Philippines for "technical reasons."

The junta has rejected Suu Kyi's calls for a dialogue since freeing her from six years of house arrest in 1995.

# Taliban jets bomb enemy positions north of Kabul

KABUL, Afghanistan, Nov 25: Taliban jets bombed enemy positions north of Kabul on Monday, reports AP.

At hospitals in the war-weary capital 10 civilians were admitted with shrapnel wounds they received during a blistering artillery duel between the Taliban and its enemies about 16 kilometres (10 miles) north of the city.

Another three people were killed, hospital officials said.

Fresh fighting broke out at dawn Sunday when Taliban soldiers launched a massive counterattack against the anti-Taliban alliance dug in north of the beleaguered capital.

On Sunday the Taliban drove its enemies out of Guldarah, a village smack in the middle of the frontline. This was the first major gain for the Taliban in weeks of fighting.

Since sweeping into Kabul in September the Taliban has been locked in a ferocious battle north of the city against a four-party alliance that halted its advance northward.

The Taliban religious army of former Islamic seminarians control roughly two-thirds of Afghanistan. The mostly Pashtun group of extremist Sunni Muslims has imposed its harsh version of Islam on the country.

Their enemies belong to the country's minority ethnic groups of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazaras, Shiite Muslims and Turkmen. The anti-Taliban alliance is being led by northern warlord Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek and ousted military chief Ahmed Shah Massoud, an ethnic Tajik.

Efforts by the United Nations to broker a ceasefire have so far failed although there was one round of talks in the Pakistan capital last month, but no agreement was reached.

The anti-Taliban alliance want the Taliban to evacuate Kabul before agreeing to a ceasefire, while the Taliban vow to fight to the death to keep control of the city.



A turban flies in the wind as Taliban gunners fire a Russian-made gunner during fighting on the frontlines north of Kabul Sunday. — AFP/UNB photo

# Tamil woman blows herself up in front of police vehicle

COLOMBO, Nov 25: A woman strapped with explosives blew herself up in front of a police vehicle in northeast Sri Lanka today, killing herself but failing to inflict serious casualties on police, officials said, reports AFP.

One constable was injured in the blast in the heart of Trincomalee town, officials said.

The woman was believed to be a member of a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide squad.

"The woman of course died on the spot, but she failed to inflict heavy losses on the police," a local official said. "Only the police driver of the vehicle was wounded."

The attack in Trincomalee, 260 kilometres (160 miles) northeast of Colombo, came as the Tigers observed a heroes' week to commemorate their dead.

Police and security forces have been placed on maximum alert for possible attacks to coincide with LTTE supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran's 42nd birthday on Tuesday.

# Gowda criticised for taking relatives abroad at taxpayer's expense

NEW DELHI, Nov 25: Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda, a self-described "humble farmer's son," was flayed by a Communist partner in his coalition government for taking relatives on official trips abroad allegedly at the taxpayer's expense, reports AFP.

Sitaram Yechuri, a senior politburo member of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) trenchantly criticised Deve Gowda in a television interview aired late Sunday, hinting the premier's family travelled on public money.

"Ideally, we do not want any official, including the Prime Minister, going for official business on behalf of the country to carry a family entourage," he said.

Yechuri said the CPI-M would demand "open and transparent" details of the expenses at the next meeting of the "steering committee," a body made up of different parties supporting Deve Gowda United Front government.

Deve Gowda has attracted controversy by taking several relatives to the G-15 Summit in Harare and the recent World Food Summit in Rome, criticised as "non-events" in the local media.

The prime minister's press adviser HK Dua, a senior journalist, dismissed criticism saying the bills would be footed by individual family members.

Yechuri, however, was openly sceptical.

"We don't know what is their income and we don't know what is their source of income, what is their level of earning and what is their level of living. A humble farmer can have wealthy relatives. Let us see once the payment is made."

Meanwhile a reported move by Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda to ban alcohol across India attracted jibes in newspapers today, which said it would only benefit smugglers and moonshine sellers.

"What have we come to? the courts refer to champagne as 'liquor' and want the bubbly to be served by measure," lamented an editorial in the Times of India.

"Who can then blame Prime Minister Deve Gowda for contemplating prohibition as national policy?"

# BRIEFLY

**19 killed in Indian road mishap:** A bus rolled down into a deep gorge in the mountainous Himachal Pradesh state Monday, killing at least 19 passengers, United News of India reported. AP reports from New Delhi.

The bus run by Himachal Road Transport Corporation, was carrying local commuters from Masnu to Rampur. The areas is 500 kilometres (310 miles) north of New Delhi. United News did not say how the bus fell into the gorge.

**ROK to send back DPRK sailor:** A North Korean navy sailor who drifted into the South's waters in a small fishing boat will be sent home this week, the United Nations Command said Monday. AP reports from Seoul.

Cpl Chung Kwang-sun, 19, will be handed over to North Korea at the border village of Panmunjom on Tuesday, the US led command said. Chung was found four days ago drifting in a one-ton steel boat south of the western sea border last Friday. He initially refused to be rescued, threatening to kill himself with a hatchet if South Korean police boarded his boat. He later agreed to turn himself in.

**US musician drowned in Thailand:** Art Porter, a Chicago-based jazz saxophonist whose underage performances caught the attention of Bill Clinton, drowned Saturday in western Thailand, Thai newspapers reported. He was 35. AP reports from Bangkok.

Porter's boat capsized during an outing in the Kratha Taek Reservoir, killing him and at least two other passengers, the newspapers said. Porter was to perform at the Thailand International Jazz Festival '96, an event commemorating the 50th anniversary of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's reign. The king is a jazz musician and composer.

**UK, China agree on land sales in HK:** Chinese and British officials agreed Monday to release an additional 157.2 hectares (388 acres) of land to meet Hong Kong's needs for development projects in the financial year ending next March 31, the government said. AP reports from Hong Kong.

A statement said the Sino-British Land Commission granted 70.19 hectares (173 acres) for the development of a container port and 76.4 hectares (188 acres) of railway track and related facilities for Hong Kong's 20 billion dirr new airport.

**Puerto Rico blast death toll now 27:** Working under a driving rain, rescuers burrowed deeper into a debris-choked basement Sunday to retrieve more victims of a powerful explosion that killed at least 25 people. AP reports from San Juan.

The search operation picked up speed after crews spent much of the weekend removing tons of debris by hand and bolstering the unstable building in the Rio Piedras shopping district.

**Road mishap claims 9 in China:** Nine people were killed and 12 injured in a 44 vehicle traffic pile up on the new Shanghai-Nanjing highway, the Liberation Daily said yesterday. Reuter reports from Shanghai.

The accident, which occurred on Sunday in heavy fog, is the most serious since the highway opened on September 15, the newspaper said.

# Zairean rebels allow UN to assess aid needs

STUTT GART, Germany, Nov 25: Officials have drafted possible missions for a multinational force to help Rwandan refugees, and it is now up to governments whether to send soldiers to eastern Zaire, the general who led the talks said Sunday, reports AP.

Delegates from more than 25 countries ended three days of talks at a US military site outside Stuttgart after completing a "framework plan" for the proposed force. Canadian Lt. Gen. Maurice Baril told reporters.

"The scene now shifts to capitals, where governments will decide whether circumstances warrant creating such a force," said Baril, who is to lead the proposed force.

His statement indicated that the civilian and military officials disagreed how many people still need aid, a dispute that has delayed a decision on the force.

He said "our estimate is that there may be as many as 250,000 refugees in known locations in eastern Zaire" and that delegates agreed another 300,000 refugees may be in Zaire but "but their existence has not been confirmed by reconnaissance efforts."

A "large number" of internally displaced people is also assumed to be in Zaire, he said.

More data would need to be gathered on "the location and condition of remaining refugees," through overflights and talks with civil authorities and relief agencies, Baril said.

The most risky option drafted by the planners was protecting humanitarian aid deliveries and returning refugees with "security forces." Others included an airlift of relief supplies to eastern Zaire and setting up a force headquarters as the first step.

"The force's task would be "considerable and complex," Baril said.

Reuter adds from Bakavu: Rebels in eastern Zaire allowed UN officials access to assess aid needs for war refugees but plans for a multinational protection force for the area looked no clearer after strategy talks in Germany.

Western and African military officials who met in Stuttgart agreed on scenarios to help refugees in Zaire but there was no obvious note of urgency in their discussions.

# Mahathir terms Australian media as 'congenital liars'

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 25: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad described members of the Australian media as "congenital liars" saying they paint only negative pictures of him and the country, newspapers reported today, says Reuter.

Responding to questions from Malaysian journalists in Manila on Sunday over negative reports on an aborted conference on East Timor which was held in Kuala Lumpur Mahathir said one Australian newspaper had predicted there would be a bloodbath in Malaysia over protests Against the meeting.

"They (the Australian media) never see anything that others do as correct. Only their way is proper. At times I think they should take a mirror and look at themselves," Mahathir was quoted as saying in a front page report in The Star daily.

# Off the Record

**Great art gift**

NEW YORK: A department store heiress has left 32 works of art worth 150 million dollars to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern art, The New York Times reported Monday, reports AP.

Florene May Schoenborn, who died in August 1995 at the age of 92, was a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art and a longtime friend of William S. Lieberman, chairman of the Metropolitan's 20th Century art department, the Times reported.

Born in Denver, Schoenborn was the daughter of David May Sr., founder of the May Department Stores.

Philippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan, called the collection "a tremendous gift to the city of New York."

"It is yet another step up in the level, quality and distinction in the collection of modern art in the city," he said. "In one fell swoop, these works cover a major chapter in the history of art."

The works include paintings and sculptures by masters like Picasso, Brancusi, Bonnard and Braque, the newspaper said. The Metropolitan will receive 18 paintings and sculptures and the Museum of Modern Art will receive 14.

The museums were notified by Schoenborn's estate last week. An official announcement was expected to be made Monday.

**Millions of years before scientists thought it did**

LONDON: Life may have emerged from earth's primordial slime millions of years before scientists thought it did, a team of international researchers reported, says Reuter.

They said they had found evidence that bacteria or something equally tiny lived in what is now Greenland 3.8 billion years ago — not very long after the planet became fit for life.

"The earliest known fossils — microfossils holes in ancient sedimentary rocks that used to be bacteria — are 3.5 billion years old."

Anything older would have been subjected to tremendous stresses as the earth's crust shifted, so scientists looking for clues to the origin of life have to find chemical traces inside tiny pieces of hard minerals that could resist obliteration.

Gustaf Arrhenius of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla, California and colleagues in Britain and Australia say they found traces of carbon in appetite crystals that seem to have been formed by biological processes.

Using biochemical analysis techniques similar to those used by scientists who found evidence of life on Mars, arrhenius's group said the crystals contained carbon of a type that, as far as scientists know, is only created by living organisms.

"We conclude that the isotopic results reported here give strong evidence for life on earth by 3.85 billion years ago," they wrote in a report in the science journal Nature.

Although this finding, pushed back the horizon for the emergence of life by 300 to 400 million years, it is not entirely unexpected, given also the apparently evolved nature of life-forms at 3.5 billion years ago.

The problem is, they added, that scientist believe that just a few million years before the earth was hit by a bombardment of meteorites so severe that it should have sterilised the planet.



Miss Vietnam 1994 Nguyen Thu Thuy (l) congratulates newly crowned Miss Vietnam 1996 Nguyen Thien Nga at the final of a National Beauty Contest held in Hanoi Sunday. Nga, 21, is student of Ho Chi Minh City's Foreign Trade University. — AFP/UNB photo

# Miss World shocked at protests in Bangalore

ATHENS, Nov 25: The Greek winner of the Miss World contest Irene Skliva spoke late Sunday of her sadness at the protests which plagued the contest, held for the first time in India in the southern city of Bangalore, reports AFP.

"Two people committed suicide this so sad," said Skliva, 18, in an emotional voice during a telephone interview from Bangalore with the Greek media.

But she said that far from hiding the real problems in India, the contest had revealed them.

Skliva said several of the contestants had received telephone threats while in India, she said. Some of the beauty queens were told whoever wins will be killed."

Skliva described the moment when her victory was announced. When I heard the name Greece I thought it was an illusion, a dream I was having all alone," she told the Athenian TV Station Mega.

She has pledged to dedicate herself to looking after handicapped children throughout her reign as Miss World.

# US committed to protect ROK from DPRK's attack

WASHINGTON, Nov 25: The United States would deploy "overwhelming force" to protect South Korea from an attack from the North, which it wants to keep free of nuclear weapons, a top US official said Sunday, reports AP.

"We have a treaty commitment to South Korea," President Bill Clinton's National Security Advisor Anthony Lake told NBC television.

"We have made it very clear to the North Koreans that an attack on South Korea would be met by overwhelming force from the United States," Lake said.

Asked if the United States would sustain efforts to keep North Korea free of nuclear weapons, Lake replied "yes," and "yes I am" to the question of whether he thought North Korea's nuclear programme would remain frozen.

The United States hammered out a 1994 agreement with North Korea under which it froze its suspect nuclear weapons programme in exchange for two light water nuclear reactors and oil deliveries until the reactors are built.

One Clinton policy success "is that the North Korean nuclear programme is frozen, under international supervision," he added.

# Communists attack new govt concessions

MOSCOW, Nov 25: Chechen rebel leaders who signed a weekend peace deal with Moscow after President Boris Yeltsin ordered a full troops withdrawal from the separatist region, cautiously claimed victory on Sunday, reports Reuter.

"We did not aim at gaining a military victory over the Russian Army, which is big and has nuclear missiles," said the head of the Chechen rebel government, Aslan Maskhadov.

"We fought to have no Russian soldier on our territory so that our citizens were not killed and I think we have achieved this," he told a news conference at a Moscow hotel.

The secluded hotel in the centre of Moscow was guarded by heavily armed police. In the conference room there were Chechen fighters with pistols slung on their hips.

Maskhadov was effectively the top military commander of Chechen fighters who successfully fought Russian forces for 21 months from December 1994, when Yeltsin sent troops to break the north Caucasus region's independence drive.

Meanwhile, Russian Communists launched a fierce attack on Sunday on new government concessions to Chechen rebels, calling them treacherous moves which would break up Russia in the same way as the Soviet Union.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who signed the new peace agreement on Saturday, defended President Boris Yeltsin's dramatic decision to withdraw the last Russian troops from the breakaway region after two years of war.

However, he accepted a Communist call for a special debate next Friday on what party leader Gennady Zyuganov denounced as a "treacherous plan" worked out by Yeltsin's close entourage without consulting key ministers or the legislature.

The Communist-dominated State Duma, lower house, has little power to overturn government policy.

# Jiang to visit Delhi Thursday

NEW DELHI, Nov 25: Asian giants China and India, arch-wrestling rivals for decades, will revert to a simple handshake here Thursday when Chinese President Jiang Zemin pays a historic visit to his neighbour, reports AFP.

However, behind the smiles, say Indian commentators, there lies a continuing unease as the world's two most populated nations learn to live together after decades of mutual mistrust.

Commodore Uday Bhaskar, assistant director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) here, said the visit, the first to India by a Chinese president, was highly significant.

But, despite the "stabilising" relationship between the two countries, Bhaskar did not expect breakthroughs from Jiang's meetings with Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma and Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda.

"China and India are two big countries living rather uncomfortably together, for political, military and strategic reasons," Bhaskar said.

"As two major neighbouring nations, it's very unlikely they will evolve a close relationship like the United States and Canada."

"In a strategic sense, I think it's unlikely there can be any other formulation between them."

Bhaskar noted the "cherry-picked relationship" of the two countries, confirmed by a bitter border war in 1962, had begun to improve after the 1988 landmark visit to China by then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, followed by a 1993 "peace and tranquility" agreement.

But he argued that China, with a population of 1.2 billion, and India with 950 million, were poles apart in their political philosophies while China's military superpower status, as well as its links with Pakistan, made warmer ties difficult.

"There are sharp differences in the political systems — he said.

# Hijackers struggled with pilot as he tried to land jet safely

MORONI, Comoros Islands, Nov 25: The hijackers pushed flight attendants aside and stormed the cockpit, beating the co-pilot and forcing him out. As passengers listening in terror to the air pirates, at least one of them apparently drunk, spewed threats over the jet's public address system, reports AP.

"They said, 'We escaped from prison. We are against the government. We are hijacking the plane. We have an explosive. If anybody moves, we'll explode it,'" one passenger recalled.

As the hijackers battled the captain for the controls and the engines shut down for lack of fuel, the Ethiopian jetliner careened into the sea in a violent crash that managed to avoid an even bigger catastrophe.

Fifty-two people survived the crash of the Boeing 767, but boaters pulled corpse after corpse Sunday from the plane's shattered, submerged fuselage, which lay just off the palm-lined beach in the Indian Ocean, the tail still riding above the waves.

The death toll was 123. The survivors included the pilot and co-pilot, and two of the three hijackers, who were arrested.

Capt Leul Abate had pleaded with the hijackers to let him land the jet safely at an airport in the Comoros Islands capital of Moroni.

"He wanted to go there, but they wouldn't let him," co-pilot Yonas Mekuria told The Associated Press from his hospital bed, where he was being treated for cuts and bruises.

"I guess they understood it," the co-pilot said of the fuel shortage. "But they didn't give a damn."

Tourists in bathing suits watched boat crews retrieve bodies Sunday from the broken jet, rocking in the sapphire waves off the Comoros Islands, a small island chain between east Africa and Madagascar. Search crews covered the corpses in white sheets and ferried them to the palm-lined shore.

The hijackers, believed to be Ethiopian, commandeered the flight shortly after it took off from the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa on a flight to the Ivory Coast city of Abidjan.

Armed with an axe a fire extinguisher and a device they claimed was a bomb, the men demanded that they be flown to Australia — but wouldn't let the pilot stop to refuel.

The men stormed the cockpit, forcing out the co-pilot. As passengers listened in terror, they made threats over the jet's public address system. Ethiopian passenger Bisrat Alemu said.

One hijacker seemed drunk, and waved a bottle of whiskey that he apparently had taken from a cart of duty-free goods on the plane, the co-pilot said.

For three hours, Abate guided the jetliner on his own and tried to reason with the hijackers, asking that he be allowed to land in the Seychelles or the Comoros Islands to refuel.

Finally, the pilot went on the public address system himself to announce that the jet was running out of fuel.

One engine had stopped, and the other would shortly, the pilot told the passengers. He was going to try to ditch the plane in the sea.

The hijackers fought the pilot for control of the aircraft in the last minutes aloft, the co-pilot said. "They were interfering with procedures, grabbing at the instruments. They snatched the radio from the jack."

Back in the cabin, Bisrat said "People were screaming. Some were praying."

"We knew we were going to land in the sea. We already knew that we were going to die," said NB Surti, a passenger from Bombay, India.

Survivors said a wing clipped the water. Then the body of the plane slammed into the sea, bouncing and flipping at least once before it broke apart.

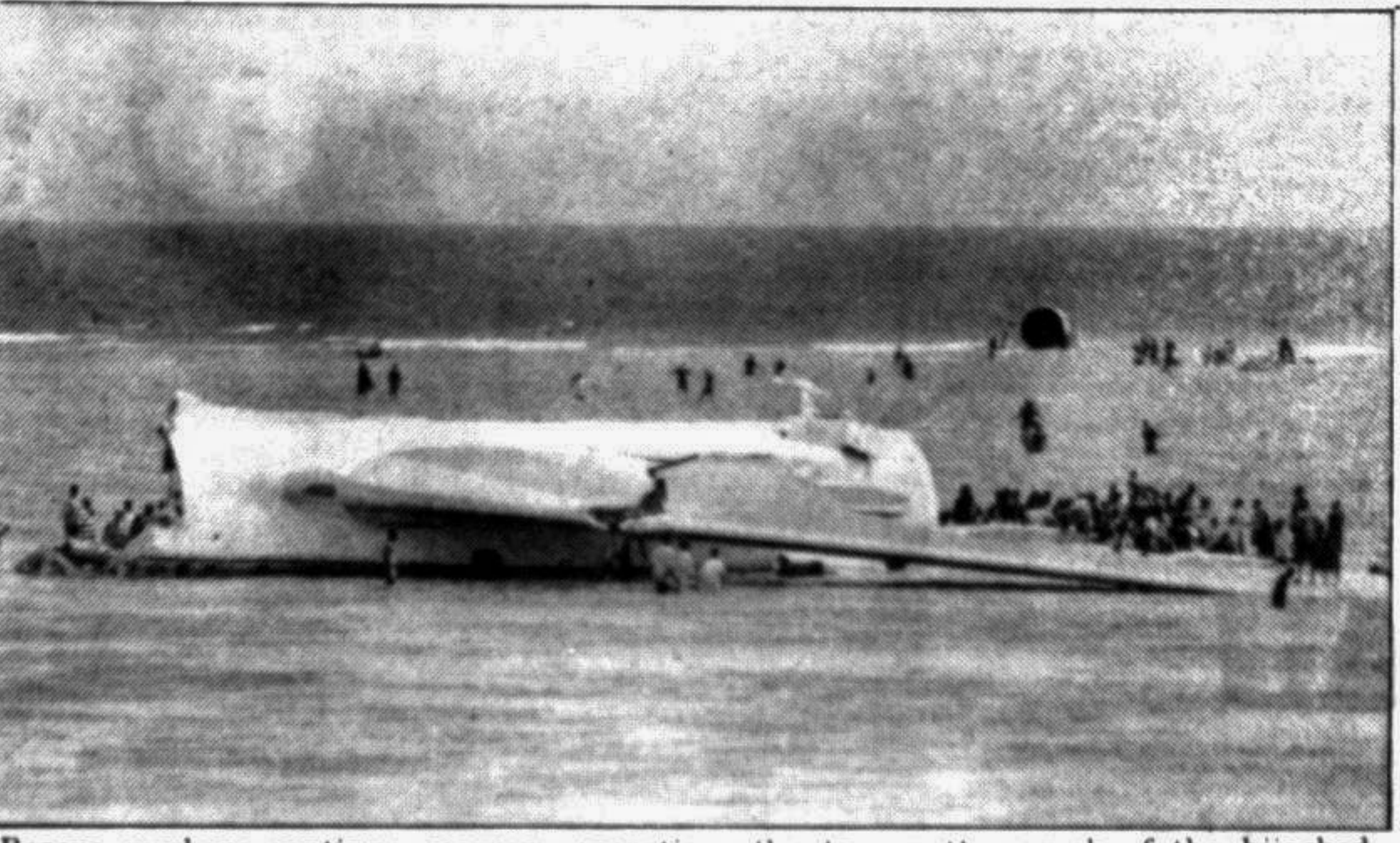
"The first bump was really gentle. Then the second one was really hard," said passenger Frank Huddle, the US consul-general in Bombay, India.

The third one was even harder, like a 70 mph (110 kph) auto accident," he said. "The last one was like an earthquake."

Since the pilot had managed to bring the airliner down so close to shore that tourists and island residents were able to reach the survivors quickly. When Surti struggled out of the water filling the aircraft, rescuers had already surrounded the jet.

A group of people already were in the water diving among the scenic reefs when the crash occurred, and rushed to scene to help with rescue efforts.

Foreign embassies and Ethiopian Airlines said the passenger list included people from United States, Europe, Asia and Africa. Antal Annus, the Hungarian ambassador to Kenya, was among those aboard. It was not clear whether he survived.



Rescue workers continue recovery operations Sunday on the wreck of the hijacked Ethiopian airliner as it rests on a reef of the Indian Ocean Comoros Island where it crashed Saturday with 175 passengers and crew. Rescuers have found 55 survivors and 72 bodies with 48 people still missing. — AFP/UNB photo