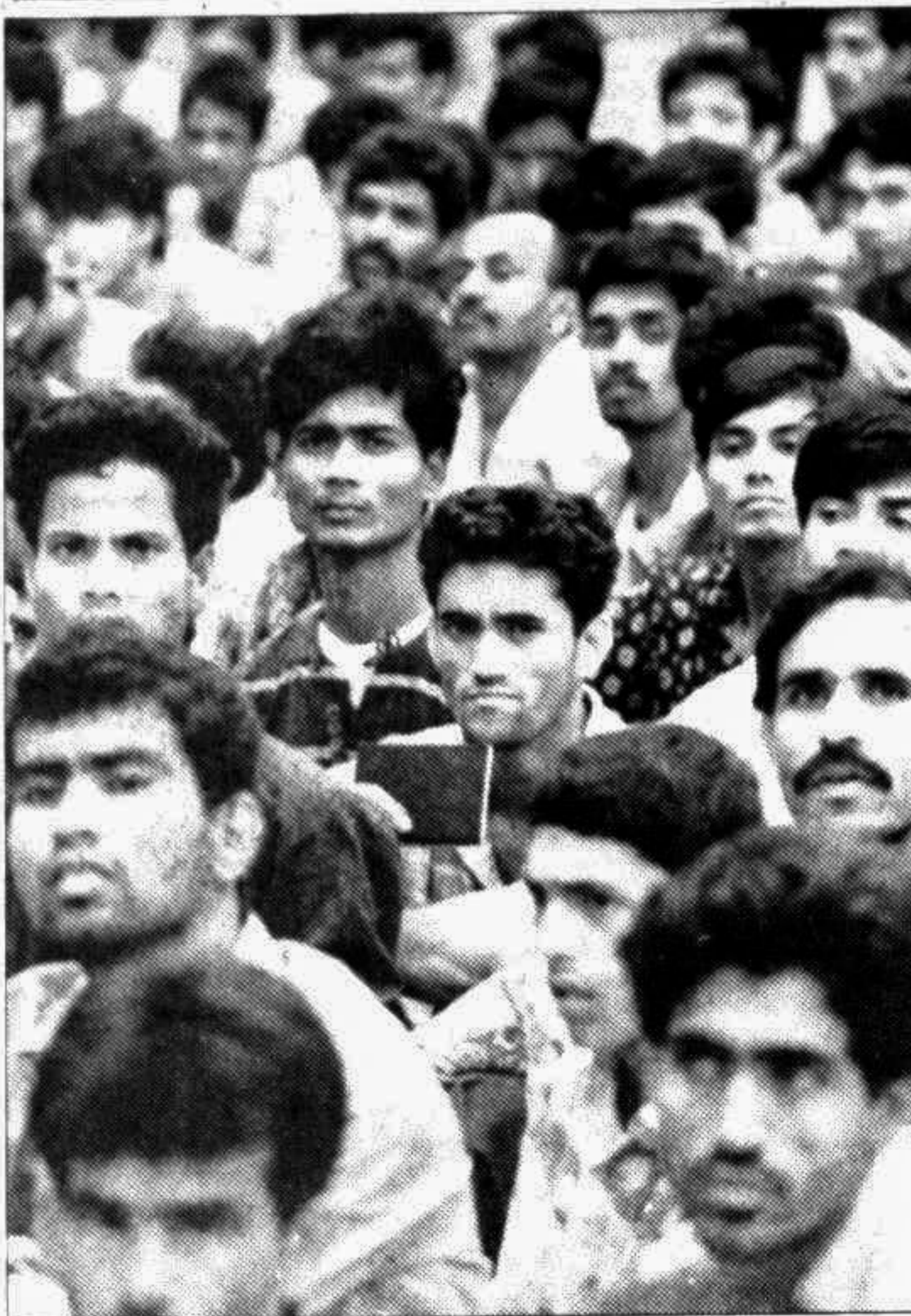


BRIEFLY



An illegal immigrant holds his real passport Tuesday while sitting among 432 illegal immigrants arrested by Thai authorities...

Mahathir gets King Faisal Prize: Saudi Arabia has awarded King Faisal International Prizes to Malaysia's prime minister...

Frank Sinatra improving: Frank Sinatra is making good progress in his recovery from a mild heart attack...

Yeltsin improving: MOSCOW, Jan 15: Boris Yeltsin's doctors say he's recovering well from double pneumonia...

Flood claims 5 in Greece: Torrential rain killed at least five people in central and southern Greece...

Iran seeks closer ties with KSA: Iranian state radio called on Tuesday for closer ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia...

3 Niger opposition leaders detained: Three Niger opposition leaders were detained Tuesday as part of investigations against them...

Philippines plans to buy 18 jets: The Philippines plans to buy 18 fighter jets in the next five years...

Illegal trade on rise in Vietnam: The number of cases of smuggling and illegal trade discovered in Vietnam last year jumped by 62.5 per cent...

Major wins 1st important vote in parliament: LONDON, Jan 15: British Prime Minister John Major comfortably won the first important vote in parliament...

China's restaurants charging customers-for not eating food!: BEIJING: New-style restaurants in China are charging customers-for not eating food...

Axeman: MOSCOW: A Russian pensioner hacked six fellow mourners to death with an axe Sunday after his wife's funeral...

Worship freedom declining in Russia: WASHINGTON, Jan 15: Russians enjoy less religious freedom than three years ago...

Journalists demand media freedom in Sri Lanka: COLOMBO, Jan 15: Hundreds of journalists demonstrated in Sri Lanka's capital Wednesday...

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France welcomes Hebron accord

PARIS, Jan 15: France welcomed today the agreement reached between Israelis and Palestinians on the future of the West Bank city of Hebron...

The agreement had been awaited for a long time. France hopes it will be implemented very soon...

The accord, whereby Israel will hand over 80 per cent of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority...

The other provisions of the provisional agreement on autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza should be rapidly put into effect...

The statement said France paid tribute to the tenacity of the negotiators on both sides who managed, despite tension and difficulties, to find common ground...

Also praised were the diplomatic efforts of the United States, which gave an important impetus to the conclusion of the agreement...

Belgrade Mayor sacked for backing student protestors

BELGRADE, Jan 15: Belgrade Mayor Nebojsa Covic has been sacked from President Slobodan Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party...

Covic recently publicly backed student protestors who had joined opposition demonstrations in the capital...

The party's chief in Belgrade, Branslav Ivkovic, was also drummed out of the party...

A third SPS official in Serbia's second city, Nis, was also sacked, it added. Mile Ilic was the city's former party chief...

The decision was handed down by the party's executive committee, the radio said...

Ilic had been sacked from his position as the local party boss six weeks ago after the discovery of numerous cases of electoral fraud in the city...

Eight weeks of mass street demonstrations forced Milosevic on Tuesday to finally recognise opposition victories in Belgrade and Nis in November 17 municipal elections...

Journalists demand media freedom in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Jan 15: Hundreds of journalists demonstrated in Sri Lanka's capital Wednesday, demanding a halt to police harassment and calling for media freedom...

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Jewish settlers blast Netanyahu for Hebron deal with PA

HEBRON, West Bank, Jan 15: Jewish settlers in Hebron accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of selling them out today by agreeing to hand the West Bank city over to Palestinian rule...

Netanyahu has fallen into Yasser Arafat's trap, said Noam Arnon, a spokesman for the 400 militant Jewish settlers living in this city of 120,000 Palestinians...

Moshe Ben-Zimra, another spokesman for the settlers, said that Jews "will stay in Hebron, and will fight to stay here forever"

We will also look into legal ways of fighting against the surrender of Benjamin Netanyahu, he said...

Some 150 leaders of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories held an emergency meeting in Jerusalem on Tuesday ahead of the Netanyahu-Arafat summit which wrapped up the deal on handing over Hebron to Palestinian rule...

They plan to put pressure on ministers and MPs to block a deal, which they fear would lead to the surrender of most of the territories captured in the 1967 Middle East war...

Meanwhile, Israeli troops and police were on alert in Hebron early today in case of protests by Jewish settlers at the accord between Israel and the Palestinians on the future of the city initiated earlier, Israeli radio reported...

The radio said police reinforcements had been drafted in as the army prepared to evacuate 80 per cent of the West Bank city in line with the agreement...

The radio said the troop movements should take place within five days. It said the military wanted to keep incidents to a minimum, and could be redeployed within 48 hours once the green light was given...

Key peace agreements between Israel & Arabs - March 26, 1979: Egypt becomes the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel...

Sept. 13, 1993: After months of secret talks in Oslo, Norway, Israel and the PLO agree on an interim framework for autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip...

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Saudi Arabia deports 77 Indian children

NEW DELHI, Jan 15: Saudi Arabia repatriated 77 Indian children who had been begging and had no travel documents after being abandoned in the Kingdom, police in Bombay said Tuesday, reports AFP...

The children were flown to Bombay late Monday aboard a Saudi Airlines flight, the Indian embassy in Riyadh said...

An investigation is continuing, an embassy spokesman said when contacted by telephone from Dubai...

He said the Saudis informed India's consulate general on January 5 that a total of 77 children were in a Deportation Centre in Jeddah...

Consular officials visited the Deportation Centre immediately to ascertain the identity of these children, he added...

After the children were given proper travel documents, the Saudi authorities deported these children on a flight from Jeddah to Bombay on January 13, he added...

In Bombay, police said the children most of them girls aged between six and 14 years, had gone to Jeddah in 1996 for a Muslim religious festival and were accidentally separated from their parents...

Their parents had to give up the search for the missing children and returned home before the expiry of their visas, United News of India said, adding the Saudis later found them begging on Jeddah's streets...

The children, from the economically backward district of Murshidabad in India's east, have been temporarily housed in a state-run facility in Bombay...

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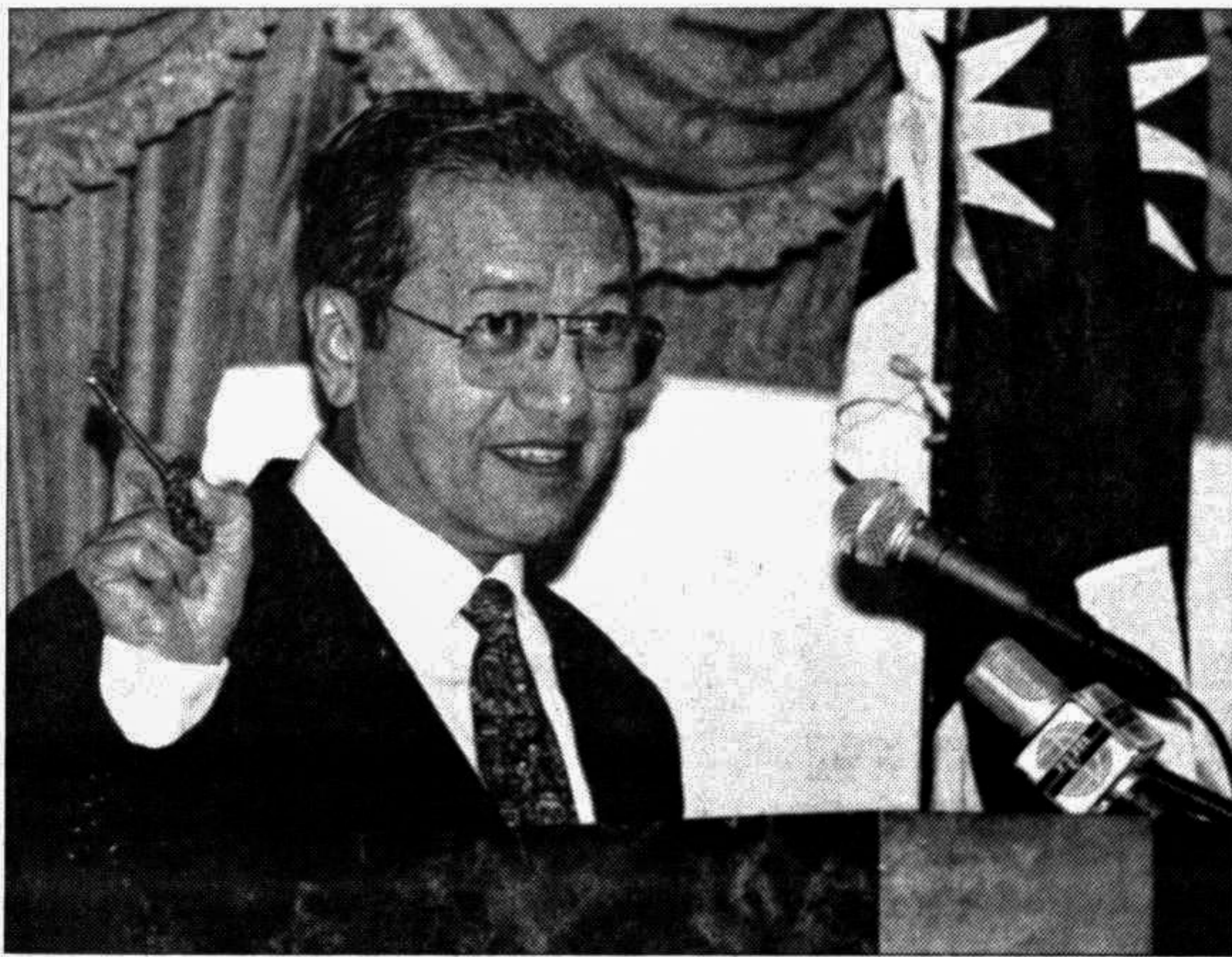
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Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad holds the key to the city of Beverly Hills, CA, he received from the city's mayor before speaking to entertainment leaders Tuesday at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Mahathir is promoting his Multimedia Super Corridor, a venture that would create a multimedia and entertainment empire that would stretch from Malaysia to Southeast Asia.

Journalists demand media freedom in Sri Lanka

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Off the Record