

International

Mandela meets two top Indian politicians Coalition govt in UP shows first signs of strain

NEW DELHI, Mar 28: A new coalition government in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh showed the first signs of strain after just seven days in power when two key allies began arguing over how the government should be run, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

Manshi Ram, Chief of the BSP, a party of "untouchables" which heads the coalition, Thursday accused its partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), of interference, The Times of India and other dailies said.

The BSP and Hindu nationalist BJP formed a coalition on March 21 in the northern state, home to some 140 million people, after five months of political deadlock in the province.

Under the accord, BSP leader Kumari Mayawati became the chief minister for six months, with the BJP nominating a successor for the next six months.

Ram's warning came after Mayawati was criticised for ordering the transfer of a large number of civil servants and police officers without consulting the BJP.

The government cannot function if such interference takes place," Ram was quoted as saying. "The chief minister has the prerogative of running the government."

The alliance was formed after hung elections last year. The main parties failed to agree on a coalition, forcing New Delhi to step in and run the state before the BSP and BJP finally struck a deal.

Ram also ruled out the possibility of extending his party's alliance with the BJP in Uttar Pradesh to other parts of the country.

Newspapers have quoted BJP leaders as saying that they were trying to enter into coalitions with BSP, which champions the cause of the millions of Hindu "untouchables", right across India.

The BJP, the country's main opposition party, formed a national government after last year's parliamentary elections but was forced out within 13 days after failing to muster majority in the House.

Another AFP report says: South Africa's President Nelson Mandela yesterday met two prominent Indian politicians and the widow of former premier Rajiv Gandhi, a spokesman said.

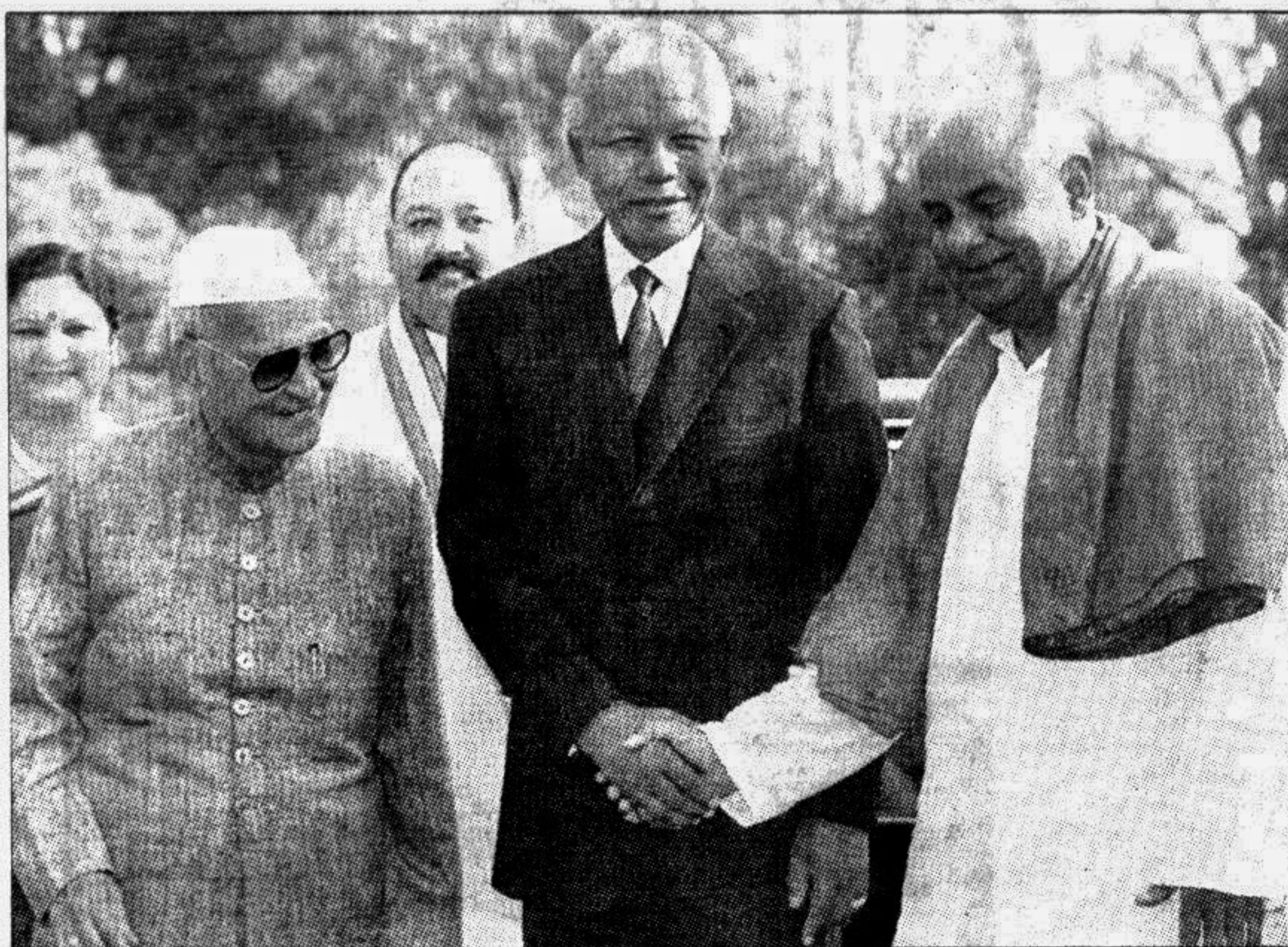
Mandela, who arrived Thursday on a three-day visit, had an hour-long breakfast with the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi at her residence. "It was a private engagement," a South African diplomat said.

Mandela later met opposition leader Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was prime minister for 13 days last year, and Sitaram Kesri, president of the Congress (I) Party, which keeps the present coalition government in power.

The president will have a luncheon meeting with Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda on Friday and follow it with meetings with other Indian leaders.

He will give a press conference Friday and leave for home Saturday. He met Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma Thursday.

On his arrival, Mandela, making his second trip to India in two years, called for a restructuring of the United Nations to make the world body more democratic.



South African President Nelson Mandela (C) is greeted by Indian counterpart Shankar Dayal Sharma (L) and Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda (R) on Thursday at Rashtrapati Bhavan (Presidential Palace) in New Delhi. Mandela, who arrived in New Delhi after attending Bangladesh's independence celebrations, called for the restructuring of the United Nations so that powers are evenly distributed. We don't believe a few countries should undermine what the international community decides," he said.

— AFP/UNB photo

Hundreds of Chinese children being smuggled into HK

HONG KONG, Mar 28: Hundreds of Chinese children are being smuggled into Hong Kong each month and handed over to the government, apparently on rumours they will be allowed to stay in the British colony, local newspapers said today, reports Reuters.

Parents from China now living legally in Hong Kong are paying up to 3,000 (390 US dollars) to have their children, who do not have Hong Kong residency rights, smuggled into the territory, the South China Morning Post reported.

"We can't leave my son in China while both my husband and I are here," one woman queuing at the immigration department with her smuggled 14-year-old son told the Post.

"We've heard that many parents in our hometown are finding ways to smuggle their children to Hong Kong lately... so I thought there would be an amnesty very soon," she said.

But the Hong Kong government has repeatedly said all illegal immigrants, adults or children, will be sent back to China.

Some 487 have been surrendered to Hong Kong authorities this month. Five times the number from November, the Post said.

The tide is rising. The Ming Pao Daily said the number of smuggled children under 14 years of age intercepted by police reached 330 in February, compared to an average of 26 during the first six-month last year.

Police intercepted a boat carrying 10 children, the youngest aged five, on Thursday, Ming Pao said.

Govt, MRTA make progress to end hostage crisis

LIMA, Mar 28: Peru's President Alberto Fujimori said on Thursday the government and Marxist rebels holding 72 hostages were making progress toward ending the 100-day crisis but there were still problems to overcome, reports Reuters.

The men held at the Japanese ambassador's home are set to spend Easter under the gun, but the final negotiating phase seems likely to start early next week, even though, naturally, difficulties still exist, we are getting closer," Fujimori told local television station Panamericana.

Off the Record

She loved to be loved

WOLVERHAMPTON, England: Barbara Fruin liked falling in love and getting married so much, she did it five times by the time she was 29. Four times, she forgot to get divorced first, reports AP.

"I just wanted to be loved," she told Thursday's Birmingham Post, after pleading guilty to bigamy. She wanted cash as well, said two of her husbands who went to police after finding out about each other.

Fruin, now 31, married her stepfather, Frederick Sims, in 1983, in Crawley in southern England when she was 18, police said. They never divorced, but that didn't stop her from marrying Vincent Morrish in Hove, just 20 miles (32 kilometers) away on the southern coast, in 1986.

In 1988, still married to Sims and Morrish she married Stephen Nicholson in High Wycombe, west of London, after meeting him on a pay-per-call chat line.

He divorced her in 1989, he said, after she had a series of affairs — and after a pregnancy she claimed to get him to the altar never materialised.

She moved to Portsmouth, also on the south coast, and married Adam Curtis, a Navy man, in 1990. She soon ran up 8,000 pounds (£13,000) in debts while he was at sea; she disappeared, and he was left paying the debt.

She married another Navy man, Andrew Grice, and they moved in with his mother in Wolverhampton central England, in 1994 — again, after telling him she was pregnant — and while she was still married to Sims, Morrish and Curtis.

Fruin squandered her life savings on a vacation, he said, and then left him a year later — but not before getting an "abortion" that cost his mother 200 pounds (£320). She told Grice she didn't want the child because it would have been disabled.

Curtis heard that his wife had married Grice through a mutual friend, and got in touch. They sent police after her, and on Wednesday, she pleaded guilty to two charges of marrying Curtis and Grice under false pretences in a Wolverhampton court.

Police were still considering charging her with charges of bigamy because of her marriages to Morrish and Nicholson.

"I suppose I'm blind when it comes to men," Fruin said, after being told that she would be sentenced at a yet to be specified future date. "I just can't help falling for a bit of love and attention."

Her husbands were less sentimental. "I wish — I would have been spared that woman," Nicholson said.

"I'll never be able to trust a woman again," Curtis said. "She has ruined my life."

Grice said he gave up his Navy career for her. "I wanted to be with her for the rest of my life," he said. "She's an evil, deceitful bitch."

Real 'Spiderman'

KUALA LUMPUR: Refused permission to climb the world's tallest skyscrapers, a Frenchman called "Spiderman" went across town Friday and climbed 12 stories up the side of a hotel, reports AP.

Alain Robert, 34, took about 10 minutes to climb from the second-floor swimming pool of the Hotel Melia to the 14th floor as a crowd of 600 spectators below clapped and cheered.

Robert, of Valence, France, was arrested March 20 when he tried to climb one of the 88-story Petronas Towers without permission. Police pulled him through a window on the 60th floor.

Trespassing charges were later dropped and the Malaysian government approved the climb, but managers of the towers said Robert might damage their exterior fittings, which they said are not designed to support a person.

Robert used only his hands and feet to climb, unlike others who have scaled skyscrapers using special equipment attached to tracks for wind-washing cars.

Dressed in blue jeans and a sleeveless white "Hotel Melia" T-shirt, Robert climbed the hotel by clinging to metal window frames, periodically dipping the tips of his tape-wrapped fingers into white tape in a bag hung from his waist.

He turned and waved to the crowd at several points during the climb, and threw T-shirts to them from the top. Passing traffic came to a halt as drivers watched.

"This is nothing actually," Robert told reporters. "I want to climb up the world's tallest building, but so far there is no permission."

Robert said he still hoped the managers of the 451.9-meter-tall (1,483-foot-tall) towers would change their minds.

"I am not heavy — only 48 kilograms (106 pounds), and I am only about five feet (152 centimetres)," he said.

"So far, I have not got the permission, but I am confident we will get it. I want to climb it and give the money for charity, the AIDS foundation."

Robert said he began climbing at age 13 when he was locked out of the family apartment. Since then, he has climbed the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and the Brooklyn Bridge and the Empire State Building in New York City.

"Why do I climb? Because I like it," he said with a shrug. "I get many sponsors and I have managed to combine my hobby with income and doing what I like to do. That is why my life is happy and good."

Indo-Pak high level talks begin No apparent hint of compromise on Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Mar 28: Pakistan's senior diplomat met Indian Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral Friday, marking an end to a three-day gap in negotiations over difference that have brought India and Pakistan to war three times in 50 years, reports AP.

In Kashmir, the Himalayan territory claimed by both countries, shopkeepers closed their stores and streets were deserted in protest against the exclusion of Kashmiris from the talks.

In New Delhi on Thursday, police used water cannons and bamboo riot sticks to disperse hundreds of demonstrators trying to march toward the Pakistan Embassy to protest Pakistan's support for Muslim separatists in Kashmir.

The renewal of high-level talks signalled an easing of tensions after changes of governments in both countries. But neither has given any hint of compromise on their mutually exclusive claims to Kashmir.

Pakistan Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed paid a courtesy call on Gujral to begin his four-day mission in India, and was to start formal talks later Friday with his counterpart.

Pilots of Air France's domestic wing on strike

PARIS, Mar 28: Ground personnel from Air France's domestic wing staged the latest in a series of wildcat strikes Friday, causing cancellation of several flights at Paris' Orly airport, the airline said, reports AP.

The strike, which as the French began the long Easter weekend, will cause "very strong disturbances" in Air France Europe's flight schedule, spokeswoman Fabienne Brebessen said.

It was not immediately clear how long the strike would last, but the airline's pilots already have called a 48-hour strike for Monday and Tuesday.

The unions have been protesting the airline's restructuring. Air France Europe is merging with its parent company, the state-run Air France, later this year.

The pilots and navigators of Air France Europe, formerly known as Air Inter Europe, will have their paychecks cut with the restructuring and some jobs may be eliminated.

The head of state-owned Air France warned the company's pilots earlier this month that the strikes planned for March and April will cost the airline 1 billion francs (178 million dollars).

8th day of protest continues in West Bank US mediator meets Netanyahu to save ME peace process

JERUSALEM, Mar 28: Special US mediator Dennis Ross met Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday night in an attempt to save the collapsing Israel-Palestinian peace process, as Israel — anticipating fresh violence — sent troop reinforcements to the West Bank, reports AP.

Ross arrived in Jerusalem from Morocco, where he met for two hours Thursday in Morocco with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The American envoy faced a cool reception in the region. The Palestinian legislative council accused the United States of bias, and joined calls for Palestinians to take part Sunday in protests against Israeli land expropriations.

"The goal of my mission is to take account of the situation in the Middle East for the president and the secretary of state and to give them a report at the end of this week," Ross said after meeting with Arafat.

Arafat said that Israel's construction in disputed east Jerusalem was "a real crime against the peace process."

Near the West Bank town of

Ramallah, hundreds of Palestinians threw stones at Israeli soldiers on the eighth day of protests against Israeli construction in disputed east Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as a future capital, Israeli troops fired tear gas and rubber bullets, and Palestinian police moved quickly to disperse the protesters.

Concerned that the violence would spread Sunday, Israel deployed more troops around Palestinian cities in the West Bank.

"We will not wait to see how things develop," said the armed forces chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak. "Therefore, there are forces there."

Ross was to meet late Thursday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem.

The gaps between Israelis and Palestinians appeared far more difficult to bridge than the last time Ross visited the region, when he brokered Israel's January military withdrawal from most of the West Bank town of Hebron.

The tensions between the Palestinians and Israelis have

US researchers find muted gene linked to cancer

WASHINGTON, Mar 28: Two teams of researchers working independently have identified a mutated gene that fosters aggressive forms of brain, breast and prostate cancer, reports AP.

Discovery of the gene may lead to a test to help identify cancers that are fast growing and which should be treated

with stronger therapy, researchers said in studies published Friday.

In its normal form, the gene acts as a tumor suppressor. But the scientists said that when it is mutated, the gene is found most often in cancers that are difficult to treat and are often lethal.

Though the finding advances an understanding of brain, breast and prostate cancer, the researchers said it will offer no immediate help to cancer patients.

"This is an exciting discovery, but we don't want to exaggerate it," said Dr. Ramon Parsons of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York. "It will require a lot of work before it has clinical applications."

One team that identified the gene was led by Parsons and Michael Wigler of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York. They named the gene PTEN and their study is published Friday in the journal Science.

Another team led by Peter Steck of the MD Anderson Cancer Centre in Houston isolated the same gene at about the same time and named it MMAC1, for mutated multiple advance cancers. Steck's study is to be published in April in Nature Genetics.

The researchers found that the gene was missing or mutated in a high percentage of brain, breast and prostate cancers, but there is some evidence that it is also a factor in other cancers.

Both Parsons and Steck said when the gene is functioning normally,

Arafat pulled out gun during banquet?

COLOMBO, Mar 28: A Sri Lankan legislator today insisted PLO leader Yasser Arafat did pull out a revolver during an official banquet here, despite denials from Palestinian officials, reports AP.

Tamil legislator Dharmalingam Siddharthan said he was surprised to see a press release by the Palestinian Mission in New Delhi denying Arafat pulled out a gun at the banquet hosted by President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"I am surprised at the denial," Siddharthan said. "I was seated at the same table with the two presidents when Arafat pulled out the revolver from under his olive green bush coat."

President Kumaratunga had just announced to her guests at her tightly-guarded temple residence on Monday the Palestinian leader no longer carried a gun, when Arafat proved her wrong.

"Both presidents took it lightly," Siddharthan said, adding he took exception to the PLO mission in Delhi belittling him in its press release Thursday.

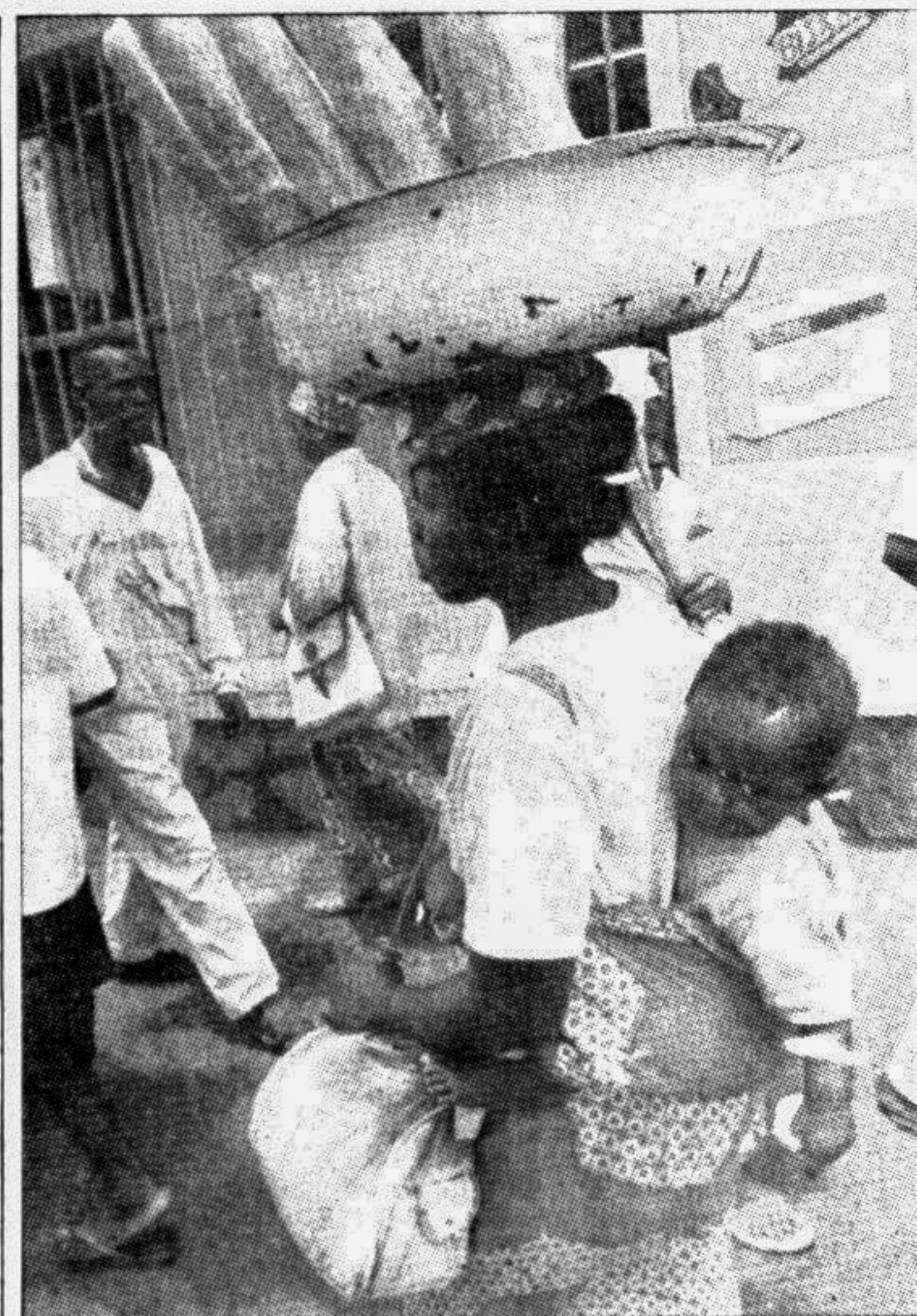
high-risk investment schemes. Public rage over the funds, in which nearly every family lost money, soon escalated into anti-government protests.

Much of the insurgency that started in the south has moved north, making banditry and general lawlessness almost a way of life here.

An argument between two families near the southern town of Fier left 20 people dead Thursday, illustrating the danger in a country where many people now seem to be armed.

Hurma Rredhi, a local reporter quoting police and hospital officials, said three Gypsies were killed Thursday morning when the argument between a Gypsy and another family began at Levan, a village just south of Fier.

The Gypsy family took revenge later in the day, and a



A Zairean woman with her child on her back carries the bread she sells as she walks in Kinshasha on Wednesday. Delegations from Kinshasha's transitional government and Laurent-Desire Kabila's rebel movement attended the start of the first international conference in Lome, Togo, organised by the Organisation of African Unity, aimed at bringing an end to Zaire's warring factions.

— AFP/UNB photo

Albanian parliament okays limited amnesty for escaped prisoners

TIRANA, Mar 28: Hoping to curb the violence and banditry that has convulsed Albania the past month, Parliament passed a law authorising a limited amnesty to escaped prisoners, reports AP.

Justice Minister Spartak Ngjela, an opposition member of Premier Bashkim Fino's caretaker government, submitted the legislation Thursday, which grants amnesty to about 700 convicts who had three years or less to serve.

Parliament, controlled by President Sali Berisha's Democratic Party, unanimously approved the amnesty, state television reported.

Civilians have looted armories around the country and prisoners have escaped from early all of the country's prisons in the unrest that started after the January collapse of

shootout killed another 17 people. Other details were not immediately available.

A 6-year-old boy also died Thursday, one day after men fired machine guns at the passenger bus he was riding in. One man had died instantly in Wednesday's attack.

The climate of lawlessness jeopardises European aid shipments needed to stave off famine. More than 180 people have died so far and hundreds have been injured since the year began.

Count Jan de Marchant et d'Ansembourg, the head of a European Union delegation that arrived Wednesday, said the Albanian government has asked for EU help in securing the main airport and the ports of Durres and Volora to facilitate aid shipments.

"I think it's obvious that Al-

bania does need protection even for the humanitarian aid, and this is what we're working for," he told reporters.

He said any European force would be between a few hundred and a few thousand troops, adding details were still being worked out.

In Vienna, the 54-nation Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe decided to send a mission — coordinated by former Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky — as soon as possible to "provide advice and assistance" in the fields of democratisation, the media and human rights as well as election preparation and monitoring.

In a memorandum to the UN Security Council in New York, the OSCE also said it would "explore other possibilities" for assistance, including monitor-

ing the collection of weapons looted from Albanian armories.

OSCE officials said, however, that the operation was contingent on Security Council approval.

Later Thursday, Italy recommended that the UN Security Council approve sending a European force to Albania to protect humanitarian aid deliveries and help the government recover from a nationwide upheaval.

In the south, gunfire by rival Albanian gangs on Thursday forced the Red Cross to suspend plans to bring a truck carrying nine tons of food and other supplies across the Greek border.

Fino has made restoration of law and order a priority of his caretaker administration. He has said stability is necessary if early elections are to be held in June.

The insurgency has sent nearly 12,000 Albanians fleeing to Italy, which has set up a naval blockade to keep more Albanian vessels from reaching Italian ports. Italy is sending back would be refugees it deems dangerous. Military flights carried 109 people back Thursday.

In Tirana, heavily armed police and pro-Berisha vigilantes patrol the street of the capital after the 7 pm curfew.

Berisha's Democratic Party still controls the Interior Ministry and secret police. Armed vigilantes that cruise the capital with impunity are thought to be Democratic Party supporters.

It is very dangerous. There are too many people with guns, including some of our 'people' we don't even know," said one police officer as he cruised the streets in an unmarked car.