

International

Gujral's appointment to break stalemate in ties, hopes Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Apr 21: Pakistan today welcomed India's new prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral with the hope that it would mean better relations between the two neighbours, reports AP.

Mushahid Hussein, the prime minister's press advisor, said Gujral was a welcome appointment given his recent conciliatory statements toward Pakistan.

Gujral met earlier this month with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub in New Delhi in an attempt to break a decades old stalemate in their relationship. Gujral was India's foreign minister at the time.

"It is hoped that Gujral will keep his word about positive relations between the two South Asian countries which he frankly stated before becoming prime minister," Hussein said in an interview with the domestic news agency, News Network International.

As well as Gujral's apparent

willingness to patch up their relationship during his meeting with Ayub, Hussein said India's new prime minister visited Pakistan in 1995 and then "had given positive gestures for the resolution of all disputes between the two countries, including Kashmir."

But few people on either side of the border expect any quick solutions to the dispute over the Himalayan state of Kashmir, divided between the two countries when the British left the subcontinent in 1947.

Since then India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir, in 1948 and again in 1965. They fought a third war in 1971 over Bangladesh, or what was then East Pakistan.

Pakistan has lost all three wars against India, which has an army two-thirds the size of Pakistan.

But both countries are believed to possess the ability to make a nuclear bomb and it is feared another confrontation

on the Asian subcontinent could escalate into a nuclear war.

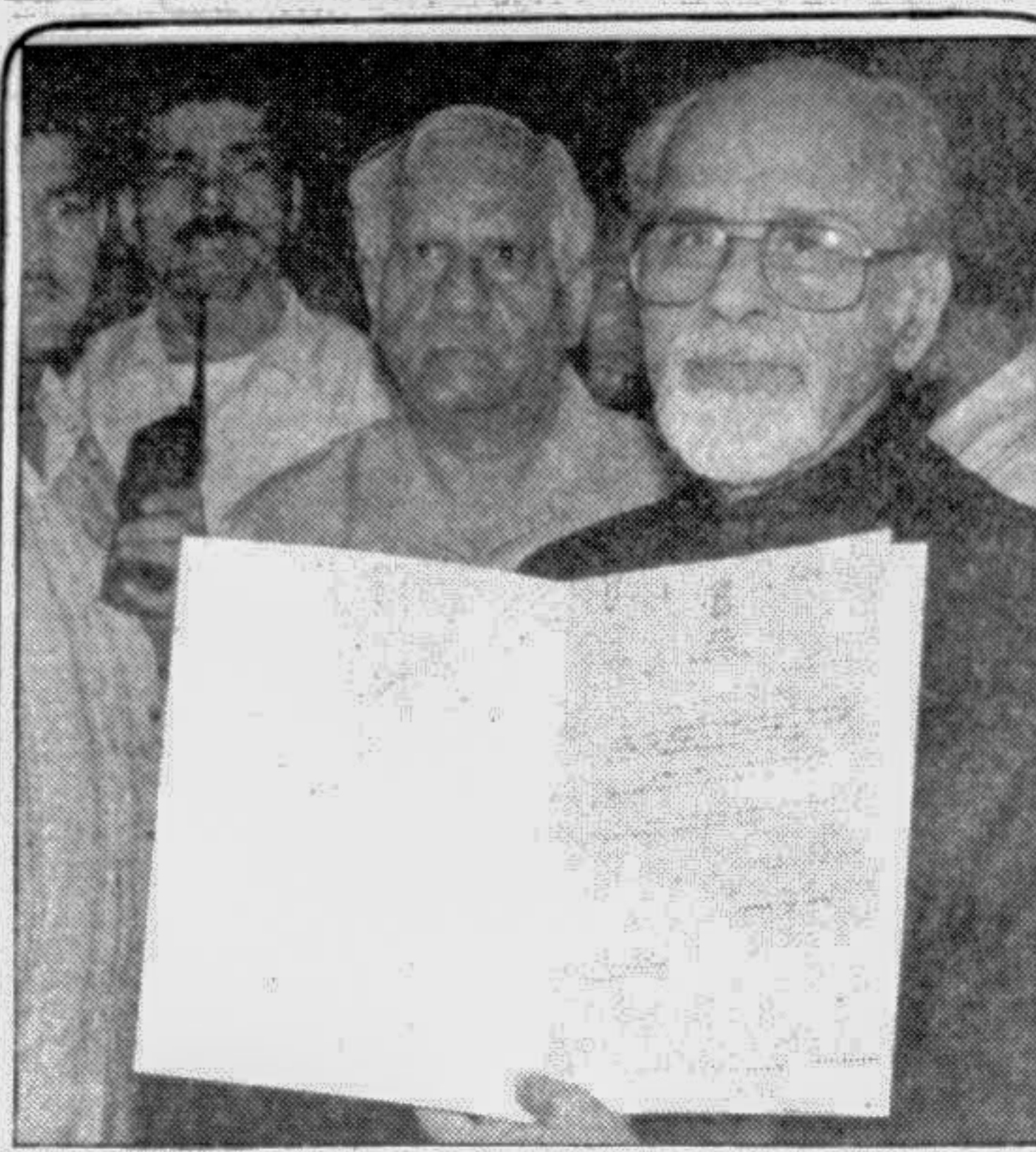
Tensions between India and Pakistan have been particularly strained since 1989 when Muslim secessionists in Indian-run Kashmir launched a bloody uprising.

They are demanding either outright independence or union with Islamic Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir is a predominantly Hindu India's only Muslim-majority state.

Editorials in the English-language daily newspapers Monday also welcomed Gujral's appointment.

"There is no doubt that he will work for closer economic ties with Pakistan," The Frontier Post editorial said. But it also cautioned against expecting much on the Kashmir issue.

"It would be naive to expect him to work toward a major shift in his country's policy with regard to Kashmir," it said.



Inder Kumar Gujral shows the communique from President Shankar Dayal Sharma Sunday outside Rashtrapati Bhavan (Presidential Palace) inviting him to form India's next government. Gujral will be the country's 12th premier heading the 13-party United Front coalition with two days to prove his parliamentary majority. — AFP/UNB photo

Gujral: A nobody's candidate

NEW DELHI, Apr 21: New Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral was propelled to power for one basic reason, the country's media said today — because no one backed him, reports AP.

Newspapers said Gujral had been elected to head the United Front's multi-party coalition government because, as a politician with no power-base, he proved the perfect consensus candidate.

The Pioneer newspaper, in an editorial entitled "Right Man, Wrong Job", said his success came because "he was nobody's candidate, not even his own."

"Never before in Indian history has the absence of popular support been such a stupendous political virtue," it argued, that there could be some relief that no branded political muscleman had become premier.

But it pointed out that the Front's dependence upon outside parliamentary support from the Congress (I) Party was a fatal flaw, adding: "the least unacceptable aspirant has been chosen to lead the shaky coalition into the next election which, clearly, must happen soon."

Gujral, a soft-spoken 77-year-old former diplomat who has served as foreign minister

under three governments, was chosen after a series of other candidates within the 13-party Leftist-centrist Front ran into opposition.

The Asian Age, in an article entitled "Over to Mr Gujral", said of Gujral: "He was never been a partyman and he will not change overnight."

But it warned: "Today the fact that he has no base is one of the major reasons for the United Front support. Tomorrow the absence of a base might become a major drawback."

It also predicted that the Front-Congress partnership, mirroring the previous government which collapsed after just 10 months, could not survive in the long term.

Despite his best intentions, even Mr Gujral will find it impossible to manage the contradictions within the Front... wisdom will thus lie in recognising that the available time span is short and utilising it to the very maximum."

The Economic Times dubbed Gujral, a former Indian ambassador to Moscow, as "the man who came in from the cold."

It said his background as a diplomat would help him to deal with his coalition partners and the Congress.



Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat waves to the receiving crowd as he arrives at the Hebron Municipality Sunday. Arafat is visiting the West Bank for the last two days on the occasion of the Muslim Eid-ul-Azha holiday. — AFP/UNB photo

Bomb threats force evacuation of Rly stations, airports in UK

LONDON, Apr 21: Bomb threats forced the evacuation of four mainline London rail stations and two airports Monday morning, snarling the capital's transport system and threatening rush-hour gridlock, reports AP.

Although there were no explosions and no immediate claim of responsibility by the main suspect — the IRA — security alerts dislocated most movement in the heart of London.

"Basically west London and central London are closed" said Royal Automobile Club spokesman Peter Brill. "This is going to be some of the worst traffic chaos that we have seen in London for many years, if ever."

He suggested people walk to work or ride a bicycle.

It was the second major security alert in three days. The Irish Republican Army claimed Friday's explosion and bomb threats, which disrupted highways and rail lines in northern England.

Police said Monday's threats were made by telephone. No explosions were reported as police searched the stations, nearby streets and Luton and Gatwick airports.

The station closures, which severely disrupted morning rush-hour travel, and the closure of Luton airport 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of London and Gatwick the same distance south of the capital, disrupted

travel for many thousands of people.

British Airways said inbound flights to Gatwick were being diverted to other airports and outbound flights were canceled.

Gatwick staff were trying to find a vacant hangar in which thousands of stranded passengers could sit and relax. South terminal duty manager Mike Cook said up to 8,000 people were becoming tired and frustrated.

Road closures in the London area and around airports on Monday had led to a "horrid" rush-hour for motorists, the Automobile Association said.

In central London, traffic was barred from Trafalgar Square, Whitehall, the broad avenue lined with government ministries, was sealed off. Buses, cars and taxis, wedged nose to tail in Parliament Square, strangled the center of Westminster.

King's Cross, St. Pancras, Charing Cross, and Paddington rail stations were closed. Trains were halted outside the stations, canceled or diverted to other stations.

Underground rail stations that tie the main lines to the underground network were closed. Thousands of commuters were forced out onto the streets and added to chaos on the surface, where overloaded buses struggled through the traffic.

Hundreds of officers, assisted by sniffer dogs, searched affected areas.

Outside King's Cross rail station, thousands of commuters milled around on the pavement, waiting to be allowed back into the evacuated train station.

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BRIEFLY

Gas explosion kills 7 in China: An explosion shook a coal mine in Pingdingshan in central Henan province, killing seven people, according to an official report seen Monday in Beijing, AP reports from Beijing.

The April 16 blast hit one of China's thousands of small, often unsupervised mines operated by individuals and township governments, where safety standards are often lax, the newspaper Yangcheng Evening News said Sunday. Each year, thousands of miners are killed by cave-ins, flooding and gas explosions. Last week, the government announced stricter measures to improve mine safety.

Malaysia to boost ties with Iraq: Malaysia seeks to boost relations with Iraq, its foreign minister said Sunday after talks with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, AP reports from Baghdad.

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi described his talks with Saddam as "very important" the official Iraqi News Agency reported. Malaysia wants to expand relations with Iraq in all fields, Abdullah was quoted as saying. He did not elaborate. Abdullah, who arrived here unexpectedly Friday, has met with senior Iraqi officials.

6 of a family slaughtered in Punjab: Unidentified assailants slaughtered six members of a family in Ferozwan district of Pakistan's Punjab province overnight, triggering a protest by residents, police and witnesses said Sunday, AFP reports from Lahore.

A surviving inmate Nathia Masih, told police that three men armed with daggers scaled the walls of his house late Saturday and slit the throats of his mother, father, wife and a daughter and a son when they were asleep. Masih said he was also attacked but managed to flee with serious injuries.

Road mishap claims 18 in Thailand: At least 18 people were killed and 90 injured in a road accident in northeastern Thailand yesterday, a hospital official said, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Fifteen people were killed when a speeding truck crashed into two passenger buses on a highway in Sikhui district of Nakhon Ratchasima, 259 kilometers (160 miles) northeast of Bangkok. Three more people died later after being admitted to Pak Chong district hospital, the official said, adding 30 of the injured were in a serious condition.

Advani seeks 'political crisis'

NEW DELHI, Apr 21: Bharatiya Janata Party President LK Advani, today said the country was going through a curious phase of political uncertainty and called for general elections to end the crisis, reports PTI.

"The cost of instability and non-governance would be many times more than the cost of the elections at the present juncture," he told industry captains here.

Addressing the national conference and annual session of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Advani said a political consensus should be hammered out for the growth and development of important sectors such as infrastructure, population control and education.

Referring to the current political situation, Advani said as an opposition member I have been critical of what's going on in the country in the past ten months and has described it as the theatre of the absurd. But he would call the happenings in the last few days the theatre of macabre where sacrificial goats are being offered.

He said the country was capable of achieving eight per cent GDP growth but cautioned against the tendency to formulate economic targets exclusively without taking into consideration the needs of the common man.

Peres seeks PM's resignation Netanyahu escapes govt corruption charges

JERUSALEM Apr 21: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu escaped government corruption charges Sunday despite suspicions over his actions, Israel's attorney general announced, reports AP.

"We have decided to close the file for lack of evidence, Eliakim Rubinstein said.

However, Yossi Sarid and several other left-wing opposition legislators announced that they will appeal to the Supreme Court to force the attorney general's office to review its decision.

Opposition Labour Party leader Shimon Peres called for Netanyahu to resign because of continuing suspicions over his role in the "bibigat" scandal.

Peres demanded early elections and announced a national petition campaign.

Rubinstein also announced that Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi whom police recommended be charged over alleged influence peddling in the appointment of an attorney general, has been spared indictment.

But Arien Deri, head of the powerful Shas religious party in Netanyahu's right-wing ruling coalition, is to face further questioning and will most likely be indicted, the attorney general said.

The prime minister's chief of staff, Avigdor Lieberman, will also face further investigation, the attorney general added.

Although the premier was not charged, Rubinstein said. The very fact that these allegations have been sounded creates a cloud of suspicion and an unhealthy atmosphere, but one that does not amount to grounds for filing an indictment.

Reuter adds, Israeli opposition leader Shimon Peres called for Benjamin Netanyahu's resignation on Sunday even though prosecutors decided not to charge the prime minister in a corruption scandal.

"There's not enough evidence to put the prime minister on trial but there is enough evidence to place the prime minister again before the judgement of the people", Peres told Israel radio, demanding new elections.

Labour leader Peres defeated by Likud leader Netanyahu in an election last May.

Manmohan, two others get Nikkei Asia Prizes

TOKYO, Apr 21: A Korean scientist, a Filipino music scholar and a former Indian finance minister have been named winners of the second annual Nikkei Asia Prizes, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Japan's largest business daily and sponsor of the awards, announced Monday, reports AP.

The prize for technological innovation will go to Dr Hyung Sup Choi, 76, a former minister of science and technology in South Korea, for his promotion of science and technology in his home country and for assisting other Asian countries.

Dr Jose Maeceda, 80, a professor emeritus at the University of the Philippines, was named winner of the prize for culture for his research in ethnomusicology, covering not only his native Philippines but all areas of Southeast Asia.

Receiving the prize for regional growth will be Dr Manmohan Singh of India, Singh, 64, was cited for his efforts in helping reform India's economy while serving as finance minister from 1991 to 1996.

Diplomatic efforts fail to bring DPRK into talks

NEW YORK, Apr 21: US and South Korean efforts to convince North Korea to join peace negotiations appeared stalled as diplomats of the three countries failed to resolve differences over conditions for the talks, reports AP.

A US official, speaking on condition he not be named, said representatives of the three countries met for three hours Sunday. But he said no decision had been made whether the heads of the three delegations would meet Monday.

If a meeting takes place Monday, North Korea is expected to announce whether it will accept an invitation to attend four-way peace talks aimed at forging a new security arrangement to replace the 1953 armistice which ended fighting in the Korean War. China would also attend the negotiations.

That would be a major setback to US and South Korean diplomatic efforts, which had appeared on the verge of a milestone in a four-decade effort to resolve tensions on the divided Korean peninsula.

US officials refused to identify the remaining obstacles.

But in Seoul, Yonhap Television reported that the discussions Sunday focused on North Korea's demand for the United States and South Korea to pledge massive food aid as a condition for the Communists to join the talks.

The United States has refused to link food aid to North Korean acceptance of the four-way talks. South Korea wants the North to attend the talks first and promises increased food aid afterward.

The US official said the chief American negotiator, acting Assistant Secretary of State Charles Kartman, was not taking part in Sunday's discussions.

Kartman left for Washington on Saturday and was not expected to return to New York until North Korea was ready to give an answer.

The campaign to bring North Korea to the conference table appeared in jeopardy Saturday after the North refused to attend preliminary talks for a second straight day.

North Korean officials told the other two delegations that they were still waiting for instructions from their government in Pyongyang on whether to agree to attend four-way talks on a new security arrangement to replace the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War.

China also would attend the talks under a formula proposed last year by President Clinton and South Korean President Kim Young Sam.

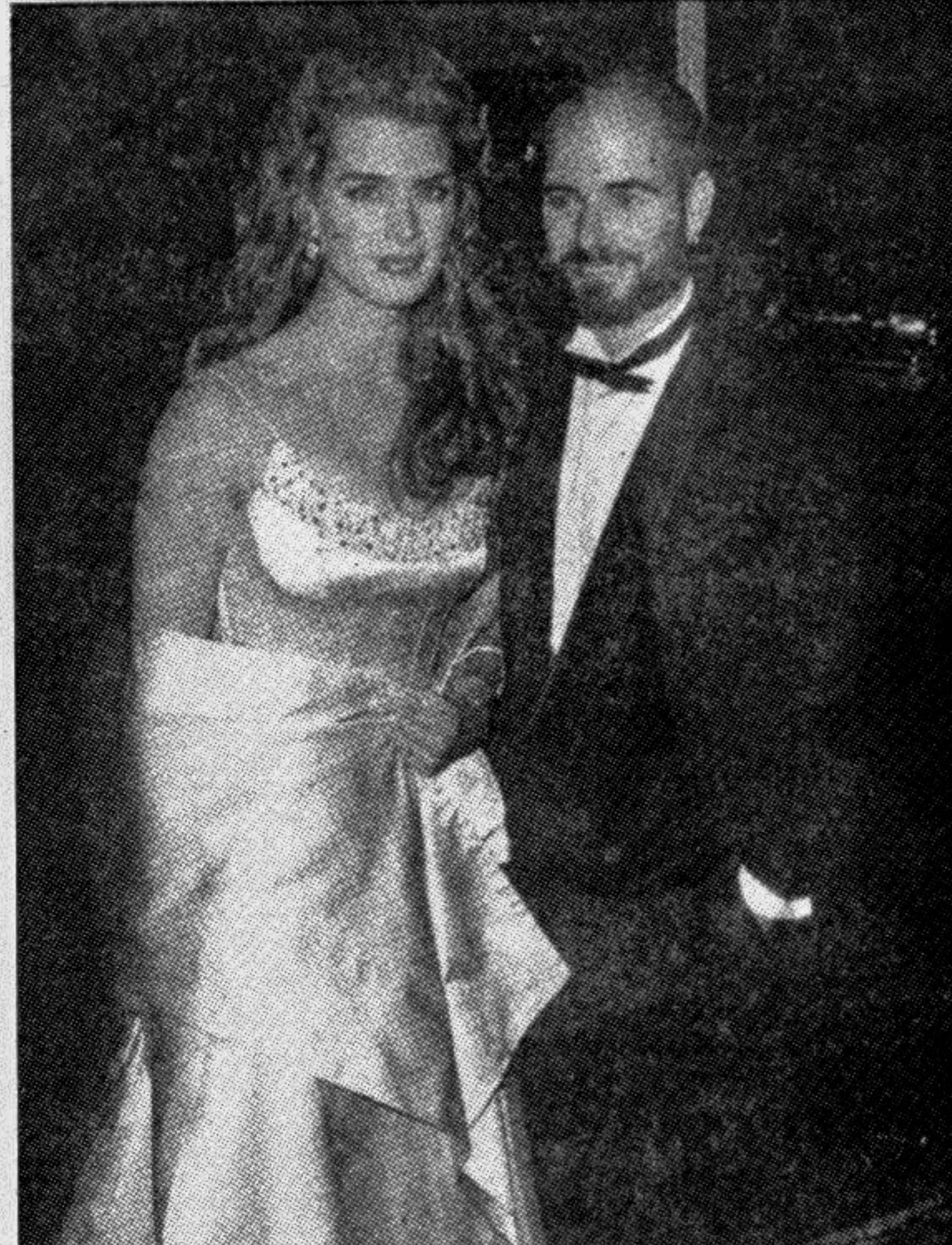
Ruling LDP suffers setback in Japanese local governor's poll

TOKYO, Apr 21: The ruling Liberal Democratic Party suffered a setback Sunday in a local Japanese governor's election with its candidate being beaten by an opposition-backed rival, reports AP.

Sukeshiro Terata, a 56-year-old former journalist backed by the New Frontier Party, became the first non-LDP governor in the northern prefecture of Akita in 42 years.

Terata garnered 291,589 votes against 263,481 for P-rival Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's LDP-backed candidate, Norihisa Satake, 49, according to final returns released Monday.

Satake lost the race despite active campaigning by Hashimoto LDP Secretary-General Koichi Kato and other key party figures.



Picture dated January 12, 1997 of US actress Brooke Shields and her compatriot fiancée, tennis star Andre Agassi arriving for the awarding ceremony of the Peoples Choice Awards in New York. The couple were reportedly married in a private ceremony in Monterey, California on Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

16 Bangladeshis dumped in Germany highlights odyssey of illegal migrants

KOENIGS WUSTERHAUSEN, Germany, Apr 21: Their odyssey hit a dead end on an autobahn outside Berlin, where 16 men from Bangladesh, some barefoot and frostbitten, were found abandoned, reports AP.

Germany is accustomed to waves of refugees, but the story of the Bangladeshis made headlines after they were dumped on a frigid winter morning by smugglers who prey on human desperation.

Despite rising unemployment and anti-foreigner sentiment in western Europe, many on the outside will still try anything to get in, for a chance at a better life.

Now that the Iron Curtain is gone, western countries are spending millions on beefed-up patrols and high-technology to stem the tide of unwanted migrants.

In turn, more and more would-be migrants from eastern Europe, Asia and Africa are paying thousands of dollars to smuggling rings for a better chance of reaching their destination.

The more they pay, the better the service over the border, said Juergen Reimann, director of the German border patrol office in Frankfurt an der Oder, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of Berlin, on the Polish border. "There are even guarantees: You get three attempts and we guarantee one will be successful."

The Germans hope to put a dent in the flow with the capture of a Turk described as Europe's most-wanted people smuggler, Mulis Pinarbisis, who was taken into custody April 8, and his gang are alleged to have smuggled at least 90,000 Kurds into Germany over the years.

Germany's border with Poland is among Europe's most heavily patrolled, but Interior Minister Manfred Kanther wants reinforcements: An additional 1,500 guards to stop illegals and smugglers headed

west.

More than 500 were arrested in a military hone on Germany's wooded borders with Poland and the Czech Republic where most of the traffic is concentrated. But many still get through.

One smuggling route from Asia goes through Moscow and Minsk to Poland, then across either one of the two rivers — Oder and Neisse — on Germany's eastern border.

The migrants have slowed plans of European Union nations to drop passport controls, Britain, an island nation that can more easily protect its borders, refuses to sign the plan because of the millions of illegals already residing in other EU countries, where there are few controls.

The Dutch, saying asylum-seekers should not be treated as prisoners, lets them walk away from processing centers while their requests are being re-

viewed.

Italy's government has proposed a law allowing 30-day detention of asylum-seekers.

North Africans who elude the Spanish coastal police use Spain as a stepping-stone into the rest of Europe, in the same way Turkish and Middle Eastern immigrants slip through Greece's many islands.

The problem of unwanted economic migrants is a familiar one throughout the world.

But for many of the world's poor, western Europe remains the goal, and criminal bands have sprung up to capitalize on that dream.

Some organize runs in leaky boats on the long Mediterranean coastlines that form Europe's southern flank. Often the migrants take their lives in their hands.

In late March, a boat carrying Albanians trying to escape unrest in their homeland sank after colliding with an Italian warship that was part of a

blockade to halt Albanian refugees. Eighty people were reported missing.

In January, 152 people from Turkey, Iraq, Iran, India, Pakistan and Senegal were rescued by the Italian coast guard from a leaking Turkish ship. They are awaiting deportation.

In late December, authorities arrested 114 people, mostly from south Asia, after they waded ashore at Napflion, Greece. Dozens of others managed to elude arrest.

The land route can also be dangerous.

In January, 143 refugees — men, women and small children from Iraq, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka — were found freezing in a barn near the village of Cervenky Kamen in Slovakia. They were dumped by smugglers who told them they had reached Germany, authorities said.

The culprits usually disappear, leaving these poor people on their own," said Bernard Priezel of the Immigration Of-

ice in Bratislava.

The 16 young men from Bangladesh who were abandoned near Berlin said they paid 4,000-6,000 US dollars each to smugglers for the trip to Germany.

After reaching Poland, they tramped for hours through the snow before dashing across the frozen Neisse River on Dec. 30, half of them losing their ragged shoes along the way. Once across, they were met by a white truck and driven for 21-2 hours before they were ordered out along the autobahn.

Picked up by German authorities, they were taken to a hospital in the Berlin suburb of Koenigs Wusterhausen for treatment of frostbite. Five had to have toes or fingers amputated.

Under a law passed in 1993, refugees caught entering Germany by land can be sent straight back on grounds that they could have sought refuge in a peaceful neighboring country.

The Bangladeshis could still qualify for political asylum in Germany because they were far from the border when they were caught. While their cases are being decided, they join thousands of other illegals at detention centers across Germany.

Amarjit Singh, a 28-year-old Sikh mechanic from India, is one of those awaiting a decision on his case at a center in Eisenhuettenstadt.

Singh said he faced police beatings back home, but conceded his biggest problem back in Punjab was a lack of jobs. "I was looking for four years," he said in a recent interview. "There's no work."

German border officials believe their beefed-up efforts are showing results. More than 27,000 people were caught illegally entering Germany in 1996, the Interior Ministry says. That was almost 9 per cent fewer than last year.

But the number of smuggled migrants caught last year rose

11 per cent to almost 7,400, indicating that gangs are playing a bigger role in evading border patrols, Reimann said.

Germany is helping Poland tighten its borders, donating almost 100 million marks (dfls 66 million) for equipment such as carbon dioxide detectors to find stowaways in trucks and sealed containers. Poland also plans to put 1,000 more guards on its eastern border with Belarus and Ukraine.

Polish officials say most of the 3,200 people who applied for asylum in Poland last year were caught en route to Germany. That was up from 842 in 1995.

But two-thirds of the cases were dropped last year because the applicants disappeared.

The problem is that after several days they simply leave the refugee centers and try to storm the German border again," said Krzysztof Lewanowski, a deputy director at Poland's Interior Ministry.