

Clinton rejects Yeltsin's appeal to ease sanction against Iraq

DENVER, Colorado, Nov 23: President Bill Clinton on Saturday rejected Russian President Boris Yeltsin's appeal to speed up the process of easing international sanctions against Iraq, reports AFP.

Clinton also said more, rather than less, needed to be done to ensure Baghdad possesses no chemical, biological or nuclear weapons as well as long-range missiles.

Referring to a UN report on Iraqi disarmament released earlier Saturday, Clinton said it points out that there are still impediments to their work.

"The most important thing is those (UN arms) inspectors need to be back at work and they need to work without impediment," he said.

Clinton said he told Yeltsin that "the decision about what to do with the UN inspections should be made based on the evidence, the facts and the professional judgement of the UN inspectors."

"Neither the political inclinations of the United States nor of our allies should control those decisions," Clinton said.

During their 45-minute conversation, Yeltsin called for the work of UN arms inspectors to be speeded up and for further diplomatic efforts to build on the deal with Iraq.

Reuter adds: Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said on Saturday his country's crisis with the United Nations was not over but that their three-week stand-off had helped showcase Baghdad's grievances.

"The crisis, in terms of the continuation of the sanctions and the unbalanced position in the UN Security Council, is not over," Aziz told reporters on arrival in Amman from Syria.

"We still have a lot of work to correct the situation which led to our decision of October 29th, he said, referring to Baghdad's decision to expel American weapons inspectors which led

to a tense 23-day showdown with the West.

The Americans, working for the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) monitoring the dismantling of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, were expelled last week but allowed back on Thursday under an agreement brokered by Russia.

Iraq has accused the US members of UNSCOM of spying for Washington under the cover of UN operations. It has called for a more "blanced" inspection team.

The United States says Iraq has systematically obstructed the work of the UNSCOM inspectors, who must affirm that Baghdad's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programmes have been destroyed before tough trade sanctions imposed for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait can be lifted.

"I think Iraq's case has become clear to the world and the members states of the Security

Council," said Aziz, who has led an intensive two-week diplomatic drive through Europe, the Middle East, the United States and Russia to put Iraq's case to the world.

Another AFP report says: The departure of additional US air power to the Gulf in response to the standoff with Iraq has been delayed a day, an air force spokesman said Saturday.

The 347th air expeditionary wing will depart for Bahrain Sunday captain Bryan Hubbard told.

He would not give the reasons for the delay, saying that "as a matter of policy we don't discuss specifics of aircraft movement. However, deployments of this nature always take into account support aircraft, clearances, and a host of other considerations."

Hubbard added, however, that "all host nation approvals have been received for this deployment," ruling out that possible cause of the delay.

Fahd gives Kaaba Sharif's gilaf to OIC summit

DUBAI, Nov 23: Saudi Arabia's King Fahd gave a gilaf (drapery) from Islam's holiest shrine as a gift to an upcoming summit in Iran of the world's biggest Muslim organisation, the official Iranian news agency IRNA said today, reports Reuter.

The richly embroidered cloth which had covered the door of the cube-shaped Kaaba Sharif in Makkah in Saudi Arabia was presented to Iran's representative, at the Jeddah-based Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which groups more than 50 Muslim states.

"The gilaf is to hang over the area where the presiding board of the 8th OIC summit meet, will be seated," IRNA said.

Verses of the Holy Quran are embroidered on the gilaf with gold and silver threads. Artists spent months crafting the eight by four metre cloth which weighs about 100 kg (220 lbs) and covered the Kaaba's door for six months.

Muslims around the world face the holy Kaaba Sharif when they pray.



Students of Al Najah University, members of Hamas, burn US and Israeli flags, during a rally organised by the radical Islamic group Hamas in the West Bank city of Nablus, Saturday. About 1,000 students participated in the rally at the university and burnt a cardboard mock-up of a bus, in reference to Israeli bus explosion. — AP/UNB photo

BRRIFFLY

Anti-Israeli attacks kill 6 Lebanese: Six Lebanese civilians were killed and 15 wounded yesterday in mortar attacks by anti-Israeli fighters in South Lebanon, Israeli military sources said. AFP reports from Kiryat Shmona.

The mortar rounds slammed into the Lebanese village of Beit Luf in the western sector of Israel's self-declared security zone during exchanges of mortar and artillery fire between Israeli forces and Lebanese guerrillas, the sources said. During the fighting, several mortar rounds also landed just inside northern Israel, but caused neither casualties or damage, they said.

Tigers free 20 civilians in Lanka: Separatist Tamil Tiger rebels have released 20 civilians they captured five months ago on charges of being military informers, an official said Sunday. AP reports from Colombo.

The 17 Muslim and three Sinhalese villagers were released to the International Committee of the Red Cross Saturday. They were among 39 captured by the rebels on July 2, said Harasha Gunewardene, a spokesman for the ICRC. Nineteen were released earlier. The freed villagers will be reunited with their families in eastern Sri Lanka on Sunday, he said.

Hussein forms 40-member senate: King Hussein appointed Saturday a 40-member Upper House of parliament, completing the last formality before convening the newly elected legislature next week. AP reports from Amman.

A royal decree named the Upper House members, who include four former prime ministers, army and intelligence officials, businessmen, tribal leaders, conservative politicians and three women. Hussein also appointed former prime minister Zeid Rifai as speaker of the Upper House, which is similar to Britain's House of Lords and serves as a go-between Hussein and the elected assembly.

Factory fire kills 17 in China: Seventeen people have been killed in a fire in a shoe factory in southeastern China, official newspapers say. Another person who leapt from the building to escape the flames was seriously hurt, AP reports from Beijing.

The fire at the Jinwei Shoe Factory in Wenling city, Zhejiang province, started early Thursday in a ground-floor generator room and quickly ignited piles of flammable shoe-making materials, the Yancheng Evening News said in its Saturday edition, seen Sunday in Beijing.

Flames spread to a first-floor workshop and second-floor dormitory, killing 17 workers who were sleeping after completing their shift at around 3 am, the newspaper said.

Mild quake shakes Japan: A moderately strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.8 jolted northeastern Japan shortly after noon Sunday, the Meteorological Agency said, AP reports from Tokyo.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage from the 12:51 pm (0351 GMT) earthquake, although quakes of similar strength have caused minor property damage in recent years. The shaking at ground level caused by the quake registered 4 on the Japanese scale of 7 in parts of Iwate and Akita prefectures (states) on the northeast of Japan's main island of Honshu.

1 poisoned to death in Japan: One tourist died and another was in critical condition after inhaling suspected poisonous volcanic gas at Mount Aso in southern Japan yesterday, police said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Hiroo Ureshino, 61, from the southern prefecture of Saga, collapsed during a sight-seeing tour at the Nakadake Crater at the altitude of about 1,300 metres (4,290 feet) in the southern main island of Kyushu. He was rushed to hospital but died later, a police spokesman said. Another Japanese man, Shinichiro Ogura, 51, from Kawasaki, collapsed later at a nearby location where Ureshino died, he said.

New Stone Age ruins unearthed: Archeologists have recently unearthed extensive new Stone Age ruins in Xuecheng town, Gaogchun county, east China's Jiangsu province, Xinhua reports from Nanjing.

The ruins, located on the southern shores of Shijiu Lake which borders Jiangsu and Anhui provinces, cover an estimated 50,000 square metres.

5 Russian border guards killed: A Russian sentry on the Chinese border opened fire on six fellow guards Sunday, killing five of them, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. The sixth was badly wounded, AP reports from Moscow.

A suspect, Pvt. Vladimir Maltsev, was arrested later in the day after an intensive manhunt, authorities said. He is suspected of opening fire on his colleagues at about 1 am Sunday with a Kalashnikov semi-automatic rifle. Authorities said the cause of the tragedy in the Chita region, about 4700 kilometres (3,000 miles) east of Moscow, was under investigation.

Myanmar troops seize huge heroin: Myanmar troops raided a house near the Chinese border and seized almost 300 kilograms (660 pounds) of heroin, the largest such haul ever in Myanmar, the state-controlled press reported Sunday. AP reports from Yangon.

Ten people were arrested in the November 11 raid at Kaungkwe village near the border town of Muse, the reports said. Troops also seized two M-22 automatic rifles, nine hand grenades and two vehicles. In addition to the 296.85 kilograms (653.07 pounds) of heroin hidden inside the house and compound, the troops seized 61 kilograms (134.2 pounds) of opium, the reports added. Muse is 800 kilometres (500 miles) northeast of Yangon.

12 killed in Algeria: Twelve people were killed in Algeria on Thursday and Friday press reports said in Algiers Saturday. AFP reports from Algiers.

Eight villagers were killed overnight Thursday in the hamlet of Oued Zitoune just outside the town of Medea, south of the capital Algiers, Hite Liberté and El-Khabar newspapers reported. In Algiers, two young girls were found Thursday morning with their throats slit in the Casbah or old town, while two others were found dead in the evening in the Frais Vallon suburbs overlooking the city, the papers said.

Hussein to attend OIC summit in Iran: Jordan's King Hussein will attend next month's Islamic summit in Tehran, his first visit to Iran since the 1979 revolution there, AP reports from Amman.

A Royal Palace official said Hussein will head a ministerial delegation to the December 9-11 summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. The official Iranian news agency said Friday that Jordan's ambassador to Tehran, Nouh Salman, informed Iranian officials of the king's planned participation in the conference.

4 of a family found hanged in Malaysia: A couple and their two young children were found hanged in their home Sunday with a note saying, "It's better to be dead than alive," the Bernama news agency reported, AP reports from Kuantan, Malaysia.

60pc Indians feel only fresh polls will end political turmoil

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: More than 60 per cent Indians feel only fresh polls will end the current political turmoil and blame a power struggle in the key ally of the ruling coalition for the crisis, a survey said today, reports AFP.

The poll, published by The Pioneer daily, also indicated many felt the government's main fault, the Congress (I) Party, would not greatly benefit if there were mid-term elections.

The Congress announced it would withdraw its parliamentary backing from the minority coalition unless the government ousted one of its founding members, the DMK Party, after an official probe implicated it in Congress premier Rajiv Gandhi's murder.

The report accused the DMK of backing a Tamil separatist group from Sri Lanka, blamed for the assassination.

Sixty-five per cent of 626 people interviewed in New Delhi and the northern city of Lucknow, capital of India's most populous state, said the Congress threat was sparked by infighting.

Congress chief Sitaram Kesri, 82, has been attacked by a section of the party for alleged weak leadership. Many in the party want Rajiv Gandhi's widow Sonia to take charge, saying she can woo back millions of estranged voters.

Other Congress leaders have also aspired to the top job but

failed to get elected during party elections this year. Hardliners in the Congress have been pressuring Kesri to topple the government and make a bid for power.

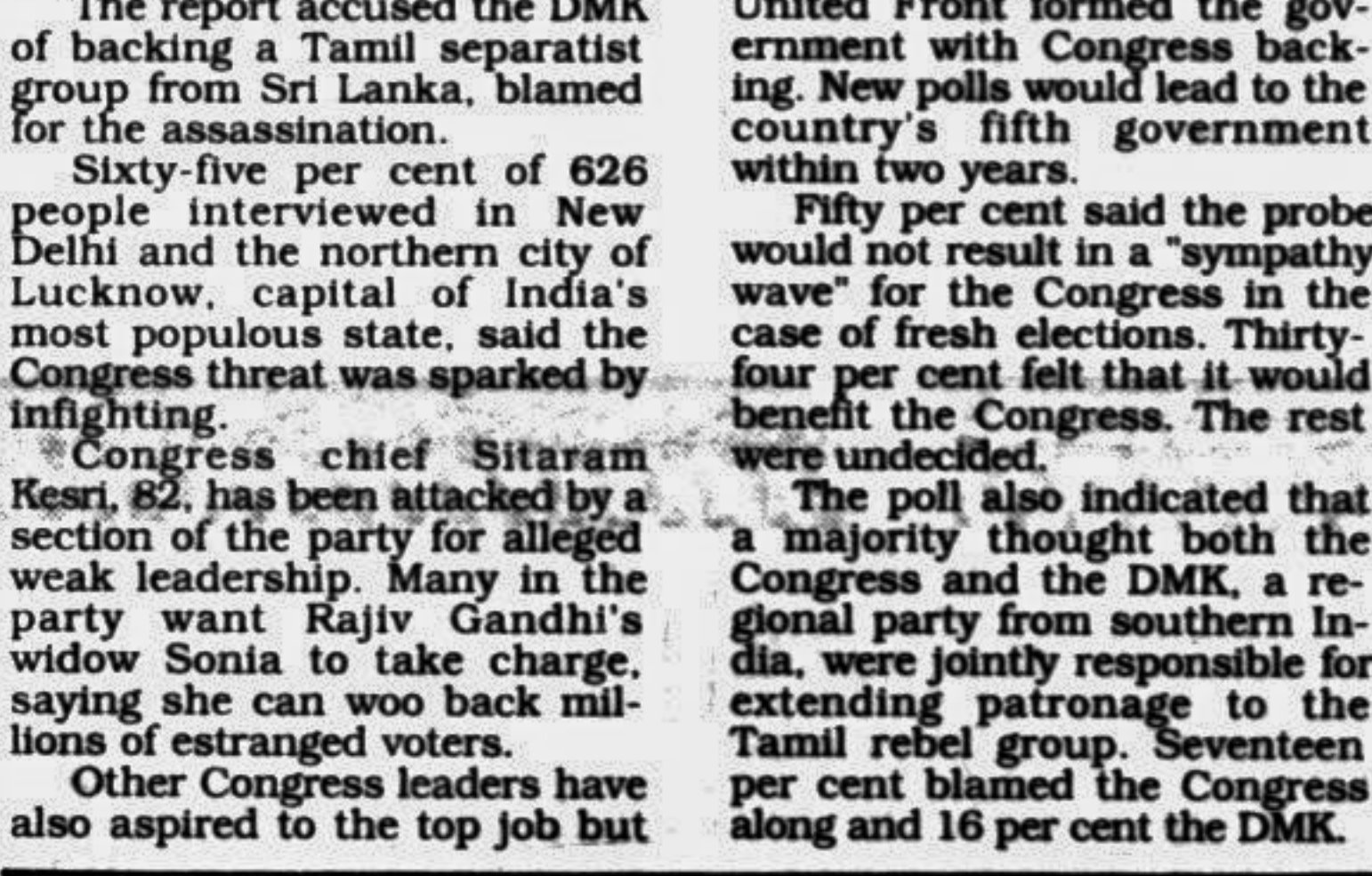
Only eight per cent blamed the crisis on Sonia Gandhi. The reclusive Italian-born widow, a powerful behind-the-scenes force in the party, has not publicly commented on the official probe.

Sixty-six per cent said only fresh polls would end the political impasse. Seventeen per cent said the Congress should join the government to avoid general elections while 14 per cent said the DMK should be dropped to save the situation.

Indian went to the polls in April-May last year. The Congress lost power and the United Front formed the government with Congress backing. New polls would lead to the country's fifth government within two years.

Fifty per cent said the probe would not result in a "sympathy wave" for the Congress in the case of fresh elections. Thirty-four per cent felt that it would benefit the Congress. The rest were undecided.

The poll also indicated that a majority thought both the Congress and the DMK, a regional party from southern India, were jointly responsible for extending patronage to the Tamil rebel group. Seventeen per cent blamed the Congress alone and 16 per cent the DMK.



Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Nsour, right, receives visiting Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz at Amman Airport, Saturday. — AP/UNB photo

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Sikkim CM for nat'l govt at centre

GANGTOK, Nov 23: The Sikkim Chief Minister, Raajan Chaming, has suggested a national government at the centre with representatives from every state, reports PTI.

"The situation warrants a national government as parliamentary form of government has become unstable," he told a conference at his official residence here last evening.

The present happenings in Delhi was "unfortunate," Chaming said adding it would not help the people at large.

Neither it could affect Sikkim also," the chief minister emphasised.

Chaming said he favoured a presidential form of government like the one in USA than the parliamentary form.

UN arms inspectors visit Iraqi sites on 2nd day

BAGHDAD, Nov 23: United Nations arms monitors, including Americans, went to Iraqi sites today on the second day of inspections after a tense three-week standoff, one UN inspector said, reports Reuter.

"We continue our activities from yesterday," the inspector, who asked not to be identified, told reporters.

The UN inspectors on Saturday carried out a day of inspection of Iraqi sites without problems.

Iraq, Syria to resume ties after 17 yrs

DAMASCUS, Nov 23: Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz concluded talks with Syrian officials on Saturday with agreement to boost ties broken 17 years ago between Damascus and Baghdad, reports Reuter.

"Aziz expressed the keen interest of his country and leadership to contribute in the near future in efforts to improve the Arab situation and to work together to revive Arab solidarity," Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shara told reporters.

But Aziz and Shara said more contacts and discussions were needed before the resumption of diplomatic relations.

Both were speaking at Damascus airport before the departure of Aziz, who is the most senior Iraqi official to visit Damascus since 1980 when ties were cut after Syria sided with Iran in the Iraq-Iran war.

Aziz held lengthy talks with Shara and Vice-President Abdel-halim Khaddam earlier on Saturday but he did not meet President Hafez Al-Assad during his 24-hour visit.

Netanyahu under mounting pressure from his own party

JERUSALEM, Nov 23: Riled by Arabs, isolated on the international scene and distressed by his country's establishment, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is now under mounting pressure from within his own party, reports AFP.

As he has collected enemies, Israeli pundits have begun to wonder how much longer he can hold on. "Who will be the first to leave his sinking ship?" asked public television on Friday.

Netanyahu's troubles, became highly visible on two fronts this month as he received a cold shoulder abroad then returned home only to face a full-blown mutiny in his own Likud Party.

In the United States President Bill Clinton snubbed Netanyahu by not meeting with him, breaking with the usual protocol between US president and visiting Israeli leaders. The American Jewish community also gave him a reserved welcome.

Returning to Israel Wednesday, Netanyahu immediately had to reestablish order among Likud leaders who had been openly plotting to oust him while he was away.

The mutiny was sparked not by opposition to Netanyahu's hardline policies toward the Palestinians but by growing anger over his autocratic style of governing and his refusal to consult Likud ministers or other leaders on key decisions.

Frustrations within Likud came to a head during a party convention earlier this month

at which Netanyahu allies pushed through a decision to cancel the system of internal primaries that had been used to pick the party's candidates for parliament and other posts.

The move was widely seen as aimed at giving Netanyahu firm control over future selection of candidates — a power that would allow him to sideline potential rivals and silence critics.

In a bid to defuse the mutiny, Netanyahu bowed Thursday to demands he form a commission to investigate irregularities at the Likud convention. It was the same method to buy time Netanyahu employed last month when he formed a commission to look into the botched effort by Israel's secret service to assassinate a top Islamic resistance movement (Hamas) leader in Amman.

Israeli PM promises more settlement in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, Nov 23: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday promised more Jewish settlement in east Jerusalem in response to the killing of a religious student by suspected Palestinian militants, reports AP.

Netanyahu spoke at the dormitory of a Jewish religious seminary in the Muslim quarter of Jerusalem's walled Old City, where the slain student lived.

Gabriel Hirschberg, 26, was killed by automatic weapon fire early Thursday as he returned to the dormitory. Another student was wounded in the same attack. Police said the suspected shooting was carried out by Palestinian militants.

"We will bless the memory of Gabi with building in Jerusalem," Netanyahu said. "We will honour the memory of Gabi by out settlement of

Jerusalem and our development and building."

The seminary belongs to Ateret Cohanim, a group involved in buying up property for Jews in the Muslim quarter and other Arab neighbourhoods of east Jerusalem. One of its leaders, Matti Dan, said Sunday that 18 more Jewish families will move into the Muslim quarter by the beginning of the year.

Massive security precautions were taken for the prime minister's visit. Hundreds of soldiers, police and security forces sealed off the Muslim quarter, and armed police surveyed the area from rooftops.

The streets of the Old City, usually thronged with shoppers, were deserted except for the police. All the Arab shops were closed.

Major named spl adviser to William, Harry Queen plans to turn Kensington Palace into Diana memorial

LONDON, Nov 23: In a bid to modernise the monarchy, Queen Elizabeth II plans to move members of her family out of London's Kensington Palace and convert it into an art museum and a memorial to former resident Princess Diana. The Sunday Times reported, says AP.

The newspaper said the move is part of a restructuring that has been under urgent consideration since Diana's death in a Paris car wreck on August 31.

It quoted senior royal sources as saying that the Queen "now accepts that the family has to be further slimmed down to reflect the demands of public opinion."

Although a final decision has not been taken, the proposals are likely to be announced early next year, the newspaper said in early editions available Saturday.

There was no immediate

comment from Buckingham Palace.

The Sunday Times said the queen, who has not yet informed family members of the plan, will herself pay for them to be rehoused and provide pension deals for household staff.

It said the palace, which has been a royal home since it was bought by King William II in 1689, will be converted into a permanent memorial to Diana and a museum to house pictures from the queen's Royal Collection.

The Sunday Times said the museum would charge an entry fee and the money would be used to reduce the royal family's dependence on state funds for running other palaces.

Royals now living at Kensington Palace include the queen's sister, Princess Margaret, and various cousins, including 95-year-old Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester.

the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Duke and Duchess of Kent and Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.

Princess Margaret likely will be offered alternative accommodation in St. James's Palace where Prince Charles has his London home, The Sunday Times said.

AFP from London says: Former Prime Minister John Major has been named special adviser to Princes William and Harry to help them settle a "legal wrangle" over the estate left by their mother, Diana Princess of Wales, the Sunday Times reported.

Major who had already agreed to act as intermediary between Prince Charles and Princess Diana when their marriage ran into difficulty, "has agreed to protect the interests of the two royal prince in sensitive negotiations over the will left by Diana," the paper said.

Army to be used to ensure security around tourist sites in Egypt

CAIRO, Nov 23: The Egyptian Army is to be used to ensure security around tourist sites following the massacre of 62 people by Islamic militants earlier this week in Luxor, Interior Minister Habib Al-Adeli said Saturday, reports AFP.

"Coordination will take place between the Interior Ministry and Defence Ministry to take advantage of the operational capabilities of the armed forces so as to ensure the security of mountain, desert and border regions where tourists sites are situated," Adeli told the parliament.

It is for the first time the army has been used in the fight against militants since Islamic groups launched a violent anti-government campaign in March 1992.

AP adds: The government launched a new security strategy for Egypt's archaeological sites Saturday, following the Islamic militant massacre of 58 tourists at an ancient temple.

The plan includes more financing for "security, specialised anti-terrorist training for police, more sophisticated weaponry and increased civilian participation, according to the Arabic Al-Akhabr Al-Youm newspaper.

Monday's shooting attack was the deadliest in a five-year militant campaign to oust the secular government of President Hosni Mubarak and install strict Islamic rule. The total death toll was 68, including the six gunmen, who were killed during shootouts with police, and four other Egyptians — two of them policemen.

The attack threatens to devastate Egypt's 3 billion dollars tourism industry, the mainstay of its economy. Thousands of tourists worldwide have already cancelled trips to Egypt.

Mubarak on Tuesday visited the scene of the attack, at the Temple of Hatshepsut in the southern city of Luxor, and declared security there "a joke."

He immediately formed a special security committee, which recommended the strategy announced Saturday. He also revamped his security forces, firing Interior Minister Hassan el-Aly, who had supervised the nation's police.

NASA devises plan for risky spacewalk to save sat

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, Nov 23: The Space Shuttle Columbia kept a respectful distance from a tumbling satellite as NASA devised a plan for two astronauts to go out an grab the out-of-control craft in a risky spacewalk, reports AP.

"We sure have a lot of work ahead of us," Mission Control informed the six-member crew.

"Time to roll up our sleeves."

It's the most than five years since astronauts last hauled in a satellite with their gloved hands. It took three men to capture that satellite, which was three times the size of this one and never meant to be touched in space.

While this spacewalk would be easier, it's dangerous nonetheless.

NASA managers said they would decide Sunday whether to have astronauts Winston Scott and Takao do the attempt. The daring rescues during an already scheduled spacewalk Monday night.

Scott and Doi trained before Columbia's flight to seize the Spartan satellite, a 5-foot (1.5-metre) cube that weight 1 and a half tons on earth. But no one expected it to be spinning, so the men practiced catching only a relatively still spacecraft.

"I feel pretty confident that

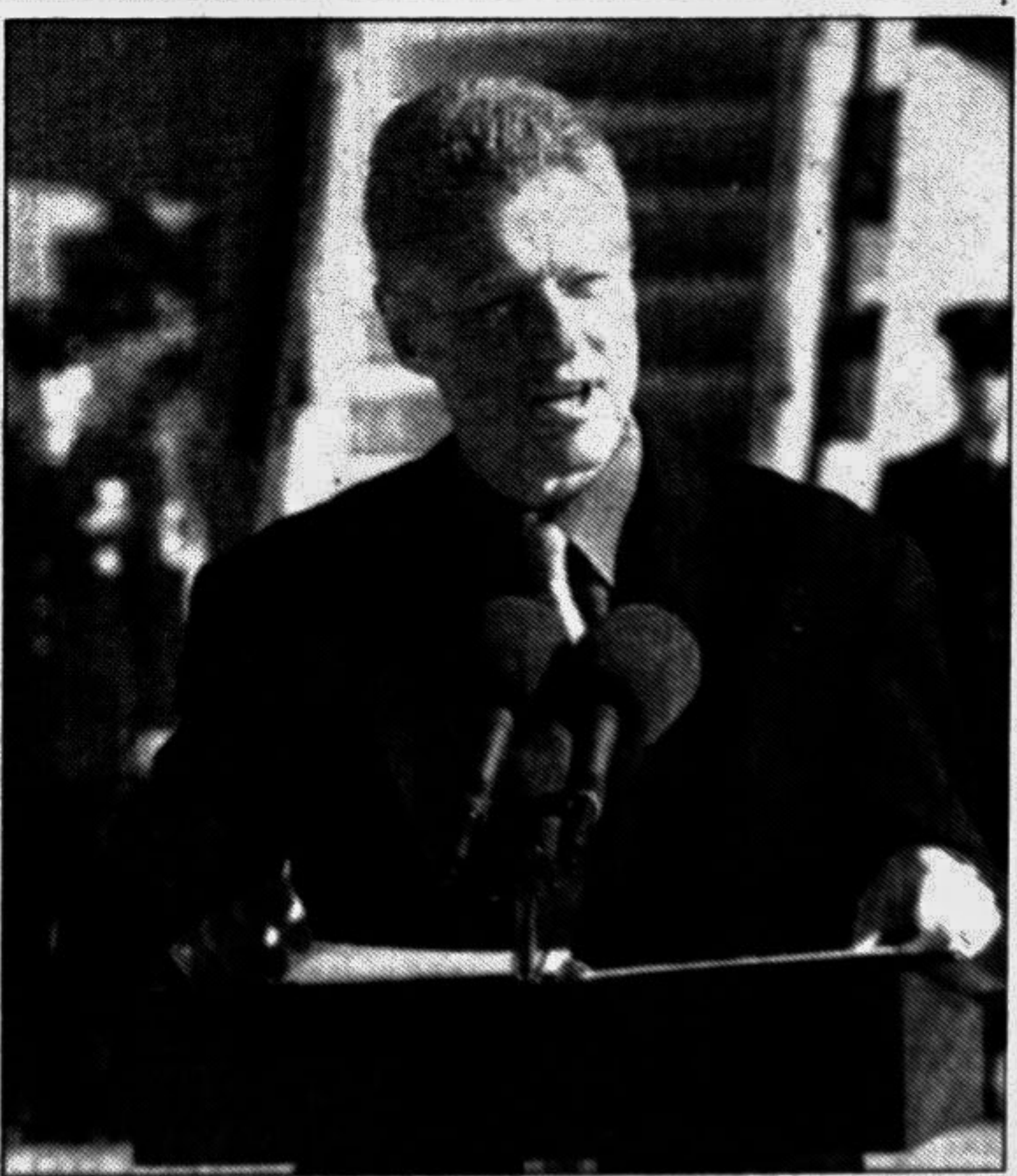
we can pull it off and pull it off safely," Scott said in a broadcast interview Saturday night.

After meeting earlier in the day, managers were leaning heavily in the direction of the rescue attempt, even though it would mean scrapping most of the space station-building tests that had been planned for the six-hour excursion. Those tests already have been delayed a year; they were supposed to be conducted last November by two other astronauts, but a jammed hatch on Columbia forced a cancellation.

Another option being considered by NASA: Using Columbia's 50-foot (15-meters) robot arm to snare the satellite in the unlikely event it stops spinning so fast.

Columbia's crew accidentally sent the 10 million dollars Spartan into a spin on Friday.

For reasons still unclear, the satellite failed to make a slow turn as expected following its release. When astronaut Kalpana Chawla tried to latch onto the satellite again with the robot arm, the craft began tumbling an estimated 2 degrees a second — too fast for her to snag. Columbia backed 25 (40) to 50 miles (80 kilometres) away from the satellite.



President Clinton delivers a statement on APEC after his arrival at Denver International Airport on Saturday. Two Air Force honour guard stand at the stairs leading from Air Force One in the background. — AP/UNB photo