

BRIEFLY

Gujral to visit Kashmiri village

Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral is to visit a Kashmiri village where nine Muslim protesters were killed by troops on the Islamic holiday of Eid-ul-Fitr, an official said yesterday. AFP reports from Jammu.

The official said Gujral will Tuesday visit Kadrana, some 200 kilometres (125 miles) from here, where soldiers opened fire on a crowd after an attempt to arrest two separatist militant suspects led to violence.

Yeltsin turns 67: Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who turned 67 on Sunday, celebrated the day with his family over a cabbage pie at a country residence, AP reports from Moscow.

Besides the pie, Yeltsin's favourite, his wife Naina said she was planning to make a cake with nuts. But the president "does not like sweet desserts, cakes and pies very much," and these would mostly be for other family members and grandchildren, she told the ITAR-Tass news agency.

Israeli jets bomb S Lebanon: Israeli warplanes blasted suspected guerrilla bases in southern Lebanon on Sunday, Lebanese security officials said, AP reports from Marjayoun.

Israeli fighter-bombers fired two air-to-surface missiles at mountain positions of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrilla group near the village of Aomata in the Apple Province, a Hezbollah stronghold, they said. Aomata is about 15 kilometres (10 miles) southeast of the port city of Sidon.

10 Indians die of infection in Brazil: Ten Indians on a reservation in southern Brazil have died of a viral infection since the end of December, health officials said Sunday. AFP reports from Rio de Janeiro.

Others among the 4,000 Caingangue Indians are infected with the virus, according to a health ministry team that visited the Guarita reservation in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Mandela to visit ROK: South African President Nelson Mandela has said he wants to attend the inauguration ceremony of Kim Dae-Jung as South Korean president later this month, Kim's spokesman said Monday, AP reports from Seoul.

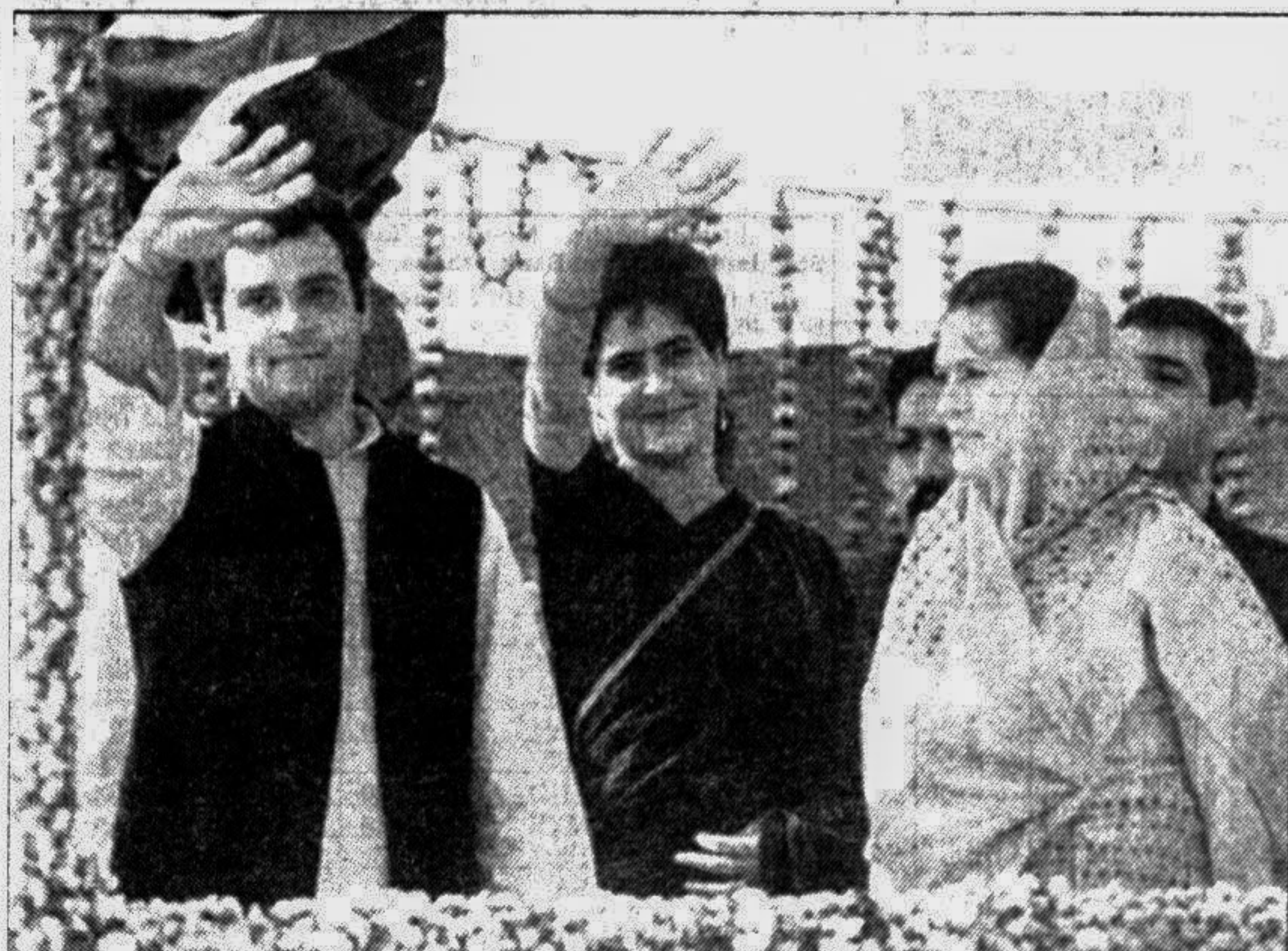
Mandela called Kim Sunday and expressed hope to attend his inauguration on Feb. 25, Park Ji-won, a spokesman for the president-elect, said.

12 Japanese wives return to DPRK: A group of 12 Japanese wives of North Koreans left Tokyo on Monday after a brief visit for their first family reunion in nearly four decades, the Foreign Ministry said, AP reports from Tokyo.

It was the second visit of its kind. The first group of wives was allowed to come to Japan from North Korea in November after years of tough negotiations between Tokyo and the communist state.

Philippines govt, rebels conclude deal: The Philippine government and communist rebels have concluded a human rights accord, the first breakthrough in peace talks aimed at ending one of the world's longest Marxist insurgencies, a rebel leader said Monday, AP reports from Manila.

Car crash kills 6 in Malaysia: Four women and two children were killed Monday when their car hit a motorcycle, spun out of control and collided with a speeding vehicle in the opposite lane, the national news agency reported, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.



Sonia Gandhi, right, widow of former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, campaigns for her Congress Party as her son Rahul and daughter Priyanka wave to supporters during a rally in Amethi in the state of Uttar Pradesh, 500 kilometers (300 miles) southeast of New Delhi, Sunday. This was the first time that Rahul campaigned with her mother. Amethi is associated with Rajiv Gandhi as he contested elections from here. Sonia was campaigning for Captain Satish Sharma, the Congress candidate from the constituency and a close confidante of Sonia. — AP/UNB photo

Congress asked to apologise for toppling govt

MADRAS, Feb 2: A rightwing party on Sunday demanded that the Congress Party apologise for pulling down a government based on a report on Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, yet not making it an election issue, reports AP.

The Congress deserves to be punished for thrusting this election upon the people of India on the basis of some sweeping remarks made by the Jain Commission," said Hindu nationalist leader Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The Congress Party withdrew support from the 14-party minority coalition of Prime Minister I.K. Gujral after he refused to fire three ministers from a regional party blamed in Gandhi's assassination.

The regional party, which shared power with Gujral and rules the state of Tamil Nadu, of which Madras is the capital, denied the accusations.

When no group, including the Congress, could cobble together a government, Gujral recommended elections, three years ahead of schedule. The elections will cost the government about 7 billion rupees (175 million dollars). Political parties could spend an equal amount in campaigning.

Vajpayee was speaking at a meeting to kick off an alliance with a regional party, the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (All-India Dravida Progressive Front).

Sonia's campaign will have no impact on Cong prospects: Joshi

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: Sonia Gandhi's campaigning would have no impact on the Congress prospects in the coming Lok Sabha polls and the party's alliance with Samajwadi Party in Maharashtra would benefit the Shiv Sena-BJP combine, state Chief Minister Manohar Joshi said today, reports PTI.

Addressing a meet the press programme at the Press Club of India here, Joshi said Sonia has only a one-point programme of expressing grief over the unfortunate death of her husband and would find it difficult to field questions on national issues.

On the Congress alliance with SP in Maharashtra, he claimed that the development was welcome for the SS-BJP combine as "other section of the people will get consolidated" leading to a higher voter turnout.

Islam is a commitment to live in peace, says Hillary

WASHINGTON, Feb 2: First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton hosted an Eid-ul-Fitr ceremony at the White House Thursday in honour of the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, reports USIS.

Speaking to guests who had traveled from throughout the country to attend the ceremony in the ornate and historic Indian Treaty Room, Hillary praised the "steadfast values of loyalty and faith" which underpin Ramadan and the Muslim faith.

"We must never lose sight of those universal values," she said. "The Quran teaches that Islam is a commitment to live in peace. It says, 'Peace — that is what we must pursue in our own hearts first... We have so many blessings that we can be thankful for.'"

Hillary was preceded by Lena Afifi, a ten-year-old girl from Glendale, California, who explained with great simplicity and charm how fasting during Ramadan helped teach her to control her temper and sympathise with the poor. Every year, she said, she and another girl explain to their classmates what Ramadan means.

Newspaper publishes picture of white car which chased Di



LONDON, Feb 2: A British tabloid Monday published stills of a white car which was captured on video speeding away from the Ritz Hotel in Paris in Pursuit of Princess Diana's Mercedes minutes before it crashed, reports AP.

The Mirror said the four-door Citroen AX saloon featured in the footage could be the mystery white car which French police have been looking for since the August 31 crash that killed Diana, friend Dodi Fayed and chauffeur Henri Paul.

Investigators have been hunting for a white, Fiat Uno, which the Mirror says may now be the "wrong" car.

The video was shot by an Australian couple on vacation in Paris who were unaware of its importance until after they returned to their home in Adelaide, the paper said.

Kloe Papazahariakias and Viad Borovac told The Mirror that the Citroen was one of a number of cars which raced after Diana as she left the Ritz

with Fayed. "Everything happened so quickly," The Mirror quoted Papazahariakias as saying. "The Mirror published details of what the video footage showed on Saturday, but did not publish pictures of the car or name the two Australians until Monday's edition."

The paper said the couple had decided to go to the Ritz Hotel, which was owned by Dodi Fayed's father, Mohamed Al-Fayed, to have a drink on the night of August 31.

When they arrived, the couple saw a black Mercedes outside the hotel and found out that the crowd of photographers outside were waiting for Diana.

The newspaper said that Papazahariakias provided a running commentary as she videoed events outside the hotel.

When the photographers realized that the black Mercedes outside the front entrance of the hotel was a decoy and that Diana and Dodi had left by a back exit, several cars, including the white Citroen, span full circle around the Place Vendome and speed away in pursuit.

"I got it all. They're chasing Princess Diana." The Mirror quoted Papazahariakias as saying as she shot the footage.

Iranian vice president welcomes talks with Israel

JERUSALEM, Feb 2: Iranian vice President Nasoumeh Ebtekar was quoted in an Israeli newspaper interview published Sunday as saying she supports some form of dialogue with people of the Jewish state, reports AP.

"I support a dialogue between Israelis and Iranians, but it is still too early to discuss a dialogue on a political level," Masoumeh Ebtekar was quoted as telling the Yediot Ahronot newspaper.

The interview, the first an Iranian leader has given to an Israeli newspaper in nearly 20 years, was conducted in Davos, Switzerland, where Ebtekar is participating in the world economic summit.

It was a marked change in Iranian leaders' usual tone toward Israel. At the same conference just the day before, Iran's foreign minister ruled

out relations with Israel. "Since we do not recognise Israel, therefore I cannot recognise there would be any opening toward Israel," Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi said Saturday.

Ebtekar, one of several Iranian vice presidents, said that even though Iran officially rejects the Israeli-Palestinian peace process that policy was being reconsidered "in certain circles."

"We realised this is a very complex and delicate problem, and we don't want to take a dogmatic position on it," she said.

Her comments pointed to a further moderation of positions by the Iranian government in the wake of President Mohammad Khatami's call last month for improved relations between Americans and Iranians.

Storm aftermath Thousands still without power in Quebec

MONTREAL, Feb 2: Some 50,000 residents of southern Quebec were still without power Sunday, almost a month after a devastating ice storm struck eastern Canada, authorities said Sunday, reports APF.

The 19,000 households without electrical power should be reconnected by the end of the week, Andre Caille, President of the provincial power authority Hydro-Quebec, told a press conference.

The people still shivering in the dark live mostly in rural pockets south of here, where more than 1,500 people, helped by 300 army troops, were working to restore transmission lines.

The ice storm, which hit

January 5, toppled about 100 pylons and more than 20,000 wooden power poles.

Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard said 50 emergency centres would remain open in the region for the 1,000 people who are staying there and the 5,000 to 6,000 dropping by for meals.

At the peak of the crisis on January 9, more than one million people were without power, and Montreal looked like a ghost town.

AP adds: Thousands of homes in eastern Canada have spent nearly a month without power after a fierce ice storm, and officials say the blackout could be the first of many more this winter.

Hun Sen brushes off threat to boycott polls

KANDAL, Cambodia, Feb 2: Cambodian leader Hun Sen on Monday dismissed as insignificant threats by opposition leader Sam Rainsy to boycott the July polls, saying his absence will not affect the electoral process, reports AP.

At a visit to a chicken farm west of Phnom Penh, Hun Sen predicted that at least 32 political parties will participate in the upcoming elections — more than enough to prove the country is a pluralistic democracy.

"Whether he takes part or not is up to him," said Hun Sen, one day after Khmer Nation Party President Sam Rainsy threatened to pull out of the elections if preparations continue to favour Hun Sen's Cambodian People's party.

Sen Rainsy was angered because Hun Sen's government decided to officially recognise a breakaway faction of the KNP, giving the rebels the right to use the party's name and logo.

Hun Sen ousted his co-premier Prince Norodom Ra-

nariddh in a July coup, shattering a tense dual premiership installed after UN-brokered elections in 1993.

The prince's royalist Funcinpec party had won those elections, but Hun Sen took a share of power by threatening renewed civil war.

Hun Sen and his CPP, which ruled Cambodia in the 1980s as a one-party communist state backed by Vietnam, are again in control of the country despite military resistance by Ranariddh supporters along the border with Thailand.

Hoping to regain international legitimacy and foreign aid cut following his power grab, Hun Sen has called for new elections later this year.

The cash-strapped government is seeking 21 million dollars in aid for the polls, but several potential donors have said that they will tie conditions to their aid, including the return of Ranariddh who has been in exile.

KSA won't allow its territory to attack Baghdad Iraqi citizens begin military training to defend US attack

BAGHDAD, Feb 2: Iraq has begun training its citizens to defend against an American attack, with men from their teens to their 70s forming ragged lines, chanting anti-American slogans and learning how to stand at attention, reports AP.

While Iraqis drilled and American officials laid groundwork for a military strike, Russia, France and Turkey set out Sunday on fresh diplomatic efforts to resolve the standoff over UN weapons inspections.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf also accused American and British leaders of "a cheap kind of

rhetoric" aimed at creating a phony crisis over UN weapons inspections. Al-Sahhaf, speaking at a Baghdad news conference, said Iraq was cooperating with the inspectors. He also called for UN technical evaluations about Iraq warheads, which began Sunday, to go ahead in a calm way in order to verify the facts.

The United States has threatened military strikes because of Iraq's refusal to allow UN weapons inspectors unfettered access to "sensitive sites," such as presidential compounds. Iraq says such inspections would violate its sovereignty.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia will not allow its territory to be used to attack Iraq, a senior Saudi official said Sunday, complicating US efforts to get full cooperation from all countries in the region.

Even UN Security Council approval of an attack would not change the Saudi position, the Saudi official told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Saudi Arabia will not allow any strikes against Iraq, under any circumstances, from its soil or bases in Saudi Arabia, due to the sensitivity of the issue in the Arab and Muslim world," the official said.



Iraqi civilians give their names Sunday to an Iraqi soldier to start military training Monday. Amid threats of US military intervention, Russian diplomats are making another effort to end the crisis between Iraq and the UN over allowing UN arms inspectors into sensitive sites like President Saddam Hussein's palaces. — AP/UNB photo

Jyoti Basu aspires for nation's top job

CALCUTTA, Feb 2: In the autumn of his life, Communist patriarch Jyoti Basu sees himself as just a ballot away from his ultimate political ambition — to become the next Prime Minister of India, reports India Abroad News Service.

Basu, 83, has ruled West Bengal state for over 20 years at the head of a left coalition led by his Communist Party of India (Marxist), which once looked to China for ideological directions.

With India probably headed for another coalition government after next month's national election, Basu sees the ballot provide him with yet another window of opportunity to become the only communist leader in the world to lead a democratically elected national

government. Basu already holds the distinction of heading the longest running elected state government in India.

After the first United Front coalition government was formed in India following the May 1996 election, Basu said in a television interview that his party had made a "historic blunder" in not agreeing to be part of the government. The CPI(M) apparatchiks had then decided that it would not join the 13-party government but render it support from outside and thus overruled Basu, who favoured joining it.

This was after Basu's name figured as a consensual choice of the coalition partners to head the government. It was only after Basu had turned down the offer on his party's di-

rection that the choice fell on H D Deve Gowda, who was till then a rank outsider to the prime ministerial stakes.

Nearly two years later, the wheel has come full circle. Basu's name as a prime ministerial candidate is once again doing the rounds. Basu has himself expressed his desire in an interview to Ganashakti, the mouthpiece of the CPI(M). But the difference this time is that his party ideologues may not be unwilling to back his candidature, although the official line is "we are opposed to projecting an individual".

Officially the party is not only keeping mum on the issue but even issuing disclaimers as it does not want to upset other partners of the United Front coalition several of whose lead-

ers also are prime ministerial aspirants. In fact, in internal documents the party has virtually admitted its mistake in not having allowed Basu to be prime minister in 1996.

However, much as Basu would like to be prime minister if the United Front Bretures to power, he has equally vehement detractors who have pledged to ensure that he does not become prime minister. Chief among them is Mamata Banerjee, the CPI(M)'s bete noire, who has declared that "we won't allow Jyoti Basu to become the next Prime Minister".

"Basu is daydreaming. He wants to be the next Prime Minister. I have taken a vow to defeat him, his party at the hustings," Banerjee told The Week magazine in an interview.

2 minority activists gunned down in Karachi

KARACHI, Feb 2: Unidentified assailants gunned down two members of a militant minority party in Karachi, police said Monday, reports AP.

The two activists with a faction of the Mohajir Qami Movement, which represents Indian Muslims who immigrated to Pakistan 50 years ago, were traveling by car through the southern port city's eastern district Sunday when the attack occurred, police said.

Members of the MQM said the gunmen tailed the car in a separate vehicle, and then opened fire on the two men when they stopped at a traffic intersection.

The slain activists were members of the Haqiqi faction of the MQM, which split several years ago following an internal power struggle. No one took responsibility for this attack, but Haqiqi faction leaders blamed the rival Altaf faction, named for the group's leader, Altaf Hussain, who lives in self-imposed exile in London.

'Scandal will pass without forcing Clinton out of White House'

WASHINGTON, Feb 2: The sex scandal swirling around President Bill Clinton will pass without forcing Clinton out of office, the lawyer for Monica Lewinsky, the former White House intern at the center of the furor, predicted on Sunday, reports Reuters.

"It'll go away, it'll pass. The president will remain in office," William Ginsburg said on NBC television's meet the press' programme.

"He'll do a good job, we all hopefully have around economy, keep our jobs, and I think everything is going to be fine," he added.

Kenya on verge of civil war

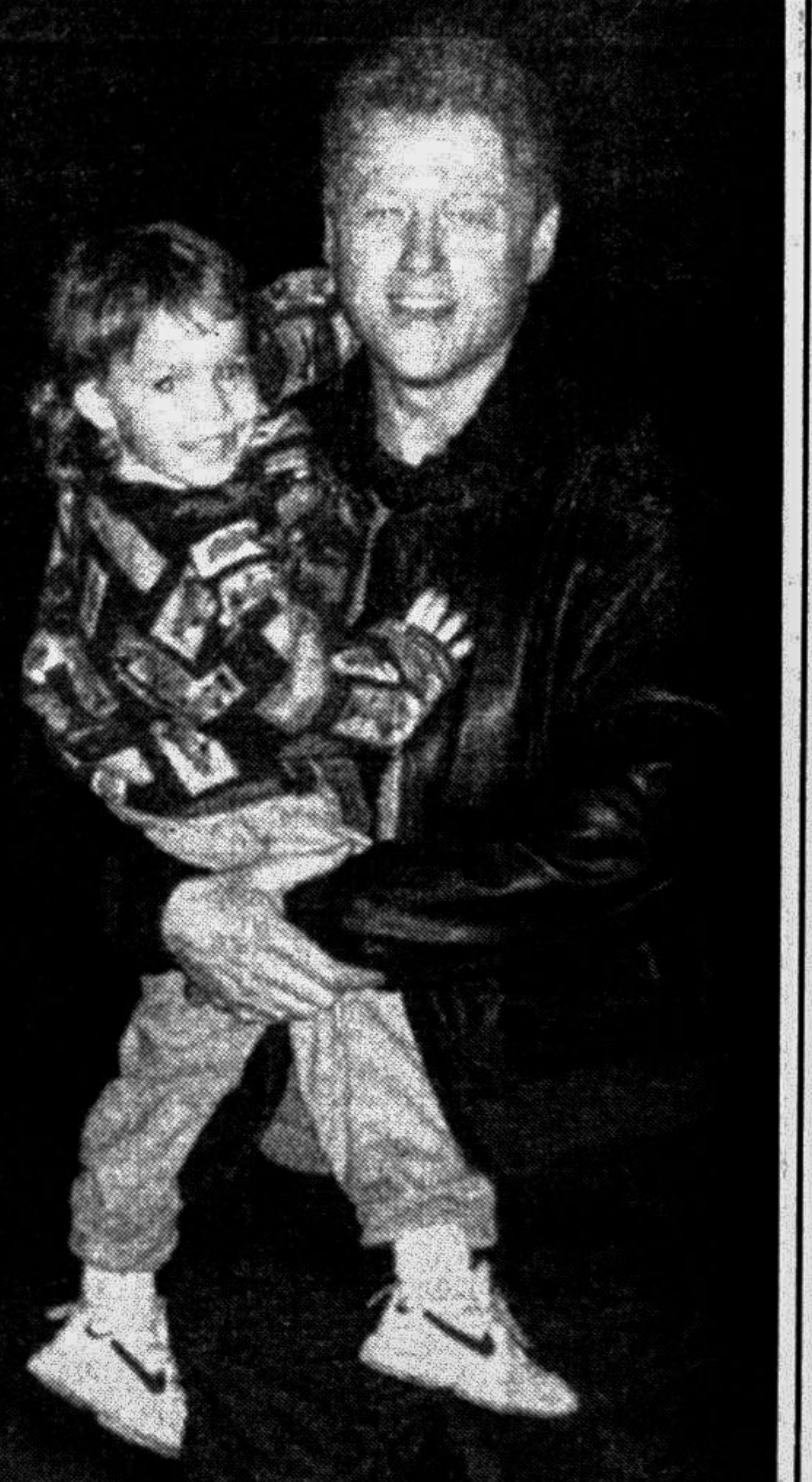
NAIROBI, Feb 2: A prominent Kenyan dissident is warning that Kenya is on the verge of civil war as tribal clashes spread in the rift valley, reports APF.

Koigi Wa Wamwere, a member of parliament in the 1970s and a long-time political prisoner, told The Daily Nation in an interview published today that he would urge Norwegian authorities not to return some 20 Kenyans who are appealing deportation orders after having their pleas for asylum rejected.

Wamwere, who later lived in exile in Norway for some years, will give evidence before an Oslo court.

"I will go and advance the argument that these refugees should not be returned home because Kenya is on the verge of a civil war expected to be triggered by the ongoing genocide, he told the Nation.

Off the Record



President Clinton holds his nephew Tyler Clinton as he arrives back at the White House after spending the weekend at Cap David Sunday. Tyler is the son of the president's brother, Roger Clinton. — AP/UNB photo

Ancient papyrus unearthed

CAIRO: Canadian archaeologists have unearthed some 2,000 papyrus scrolls that date to the era when ancient Rome and Greece ruled Egypt, the country's chief archaeologist said Sunday, reports AP.

Gaballah Ali Gaballah, head of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, told The Associated Press that the scrolls found in Egypt's Western Desert date to the fourth century or earlier and provide information about the political and social life of the period, he said.

"It is the most important find of papyrus belonging to the Roman and Greek periods in decades," Gaballah said. He said the scrolls were in good shape.

Canadian and Egyptian archaeologists recently announced that they had unearthed a Roman town built during the reign of Emperor Nero in an area called Esmet el-Kharab, near the Dakhla Oasis, 550 kilometers (340 miles) southwest of Cairo. Nero ruled from AD 54-68. Egypt was a Roman province from about 30 BC to AD 395, when Byzantine rule began and continued to about AD 640. Gaballah said that some of the papyrus were religious documents that could shed light on early Christianity. Others include marriage and business contracts, he said. Gaballah also said that some of the manuscripts revealed that people in the area may have been Manichaeism, or followers of a religion founded by a Mesopotamian prophet known as Mani in the third century.