

International

BRIEFLY

UN envoy arrives in Freetown: UN envoy Francis Okello flew into Sierra Leone's battle-torn capital Wednesday to plan an emergency aid mission...

Landslide claims 3 in China: Three people have been killed and 16 are missing after a landslide swept through a small village in southern China...

Islamic militants jailed in Paris: A group of Islamic militants convicted of involvement in a series of terrorist bomb attacks in Paris in 1995 were sentenced on Wednesday by a court here...

2 soldiers killed in Colombia: A grenade booby trap concealed on a slain soldier exploded when the corpse was removed from an evacuation helicopter...

4 UN workers abducted in Georgia: Unidentified gunmen today kidnapped four employees of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in western Georgia...

Singapore steps up coastal patrol: Singapore has stepped up coastal surveillance amid fears that more illegal immigrants could try to sneak in because of the regional financial crisis...

Kuwaiti Police officers check identification cards at the entrance of the International Kuwait City airport, Wednesday. The Kuwaiti government has increased security measures...

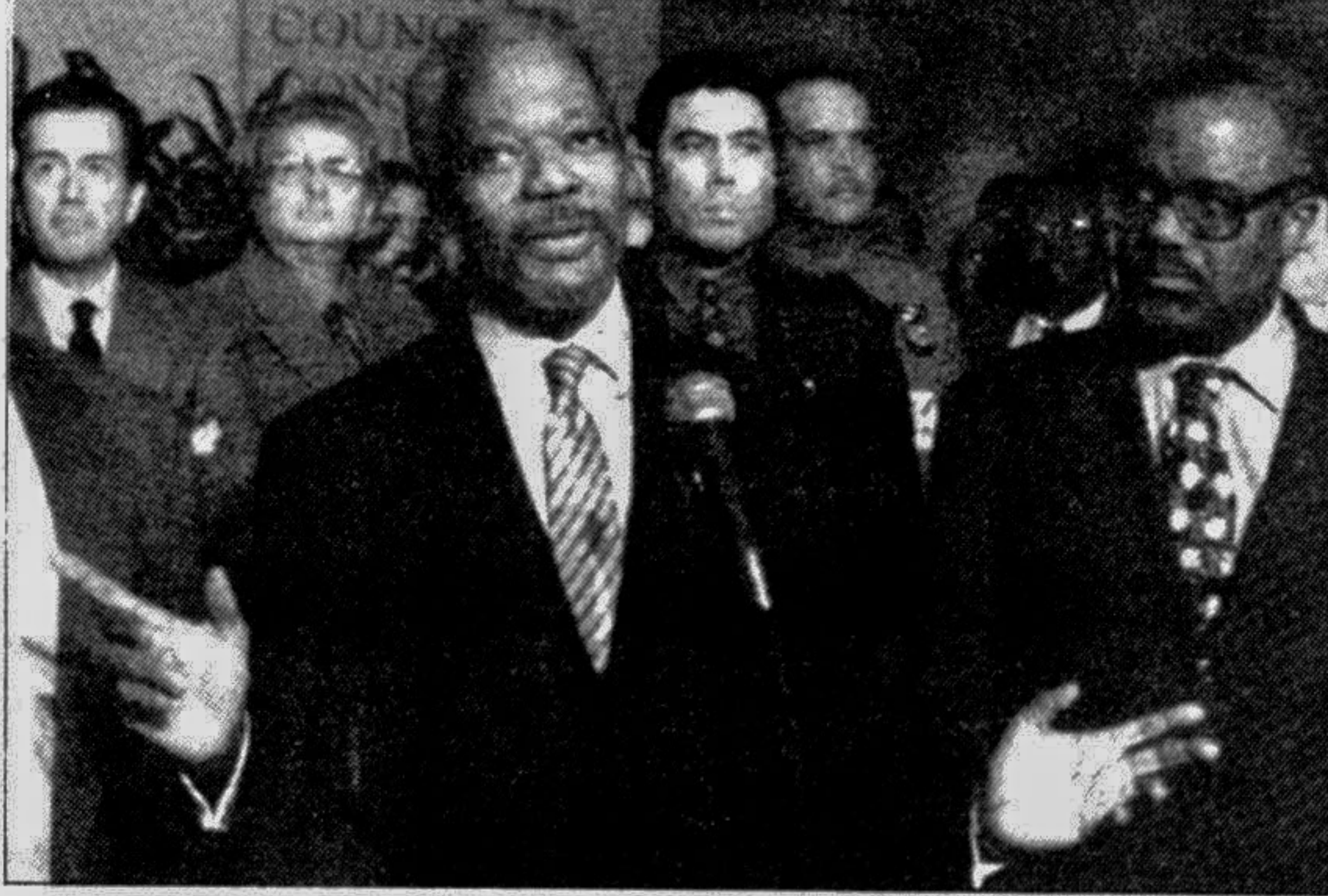
Annan off to Baghdad, terms his mission 'difficult'

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 19: The UN chief heads to a meeting with Saddam Hussein with the full backing of the Security Council but with lingering doubts about what his mission can achieve...

Others would have Annan appoint a new group of inspectors, possibly including some from the UN Special Commission...

Annan was leaving New York on Thursday and planned to spend the night in Paris, where he would meet with French President Jacques Chirac...

He is expected back at the United Nations by early next week.



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, left, speaks to reporters following UN Security Council consultations, Wednesday. Annan said he received support from the 15-member body for his trip to Baghdad...

Off the Record

Spring babies make taller men!

LONDON: A person's height may be determined by the time of year they are born, according to an Austrian study published Thursday in the British scientific magazine Nature...

They told Nature that they had found the pattern by studying the heights of 507, 125 military conscripts measured when they were 18 years old.

The survey reveals clear evidence for a dependence of body height at age 18 on month of birth.

This gland produces the hormone melatonin, the concentration of which is known to vary according to the intensity and wavelength of light which, of course, has a strong component of annual variation.

Spice Girls no match for Indian temple

NEW DELHI, India: A top Indian classical dancer asked the government on Wednesday to ban a performance by the Spice Girls at an archaeological site famed for its erotic sculptures...

The British pop group's performance this November in the central Indian town of Khajuraho will 'marginalise the delicate spiritual context in which the temples were constructed nearly 1,000 years ago'...

Archaeological authorities have barred even Indian classical dancers from performing at the temples of Khajuraho, Chandran said.

Kaunda charged, faces life sentence

LUSAKA, Feb 19: Former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, 73, was charged in court on Wednesday with concealing information about last October's failed coup in the southern African country...

Kaunda, who ruled Zambia for 27 years from independence in 1964, was charged with his security chief, Moyses Kaulungombe, on the charge of misprison of treason.

Neither was asked to plead and the hearing was adjourned until February 27.

Kaunda and Kaulungombe are the first to be charged. If convicted, they could face up to life in prison.

US has no plan to use N-weapons US citizens call for peace with Iraq, end of sanctions

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 19: Marchers carrying child-sized coffins rallied in downtown San Francisco on Wednesday, calling for peace with Iraq and an end to sanctions that have crippled its economy since the Gulf War...

as if only Saddam and buildings are in it — and no people," said Jandali, a Muslim woman wearing the religion's traditional scarf.

The coffins symbolised the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children who have died during the seven years of economic sanctions, protesters said.

Jane Welford, a Berkeley gardener, carried a cardboard coffin decorated with a hand-painted dove and a single lily.

"Sanctions have been an on-going war against the Iraqi people," she said.

Although the administration concedes no policy change, a clear adjustment in language is emerging in response to concerns raised in Moscow...

Ameena Jandali, a 37-year-old El Cerrito resident, carried a hand-lettered sign that said, "Airstrikes Kill Children."

GNU seeks fresh peace talks with Myanmar junta

THUKYAKWEE, Myanmar, Feb 19: The ageing leader of the rebel Karen National Union (KNU) is seeking fresh peace talks with Myanmar's military rulers to end a 50-year war...

Amid flagging morale, desertions and mutiny, self-styled general Bo Mya told Reuters late on Wednesday he was ready to negotiate.

"I hope I will have an opportunity to go to Yangon again soon," the 71-year-old rebel told Reuters in an interview in unusually conciliatory tones.

"I was informed that SPDC (Myanmar's ruling State Peace and Development Council) has to clear some internal problems first before they will begin talks with us."

Clinton's closest advisor appears before grand jury

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: Long-time presidential confidant Bruce Lindsey testified before a grand jury in the Monica Lewinsky investigation...

federal grand jury for questioning. The White House adviser's testimony was interrupted for about 45 minutes as he and his attorney appeared before US District Judge Susan Holloway Johnson.

Lindsey, who has been with Clinton since the early days of Clinton's political career in Arkansas, spoke at least twice last summer with former White House staffer Linda Tripp...

One White House official said earlier that Lindsey had not refused to answer any questions through midday Wednesday. There had been reports that he might invoke executive privilege...

It was Tripp who brought the allegations of a presidential affair and cover-up to light after secretly taping her conversations with Lewinsky about an alleged sexual relationship with Clinton.

"I'm not going to talk about my testimony," Lindsey told reporters as he left the courtroom after a more than 5-hour visit.

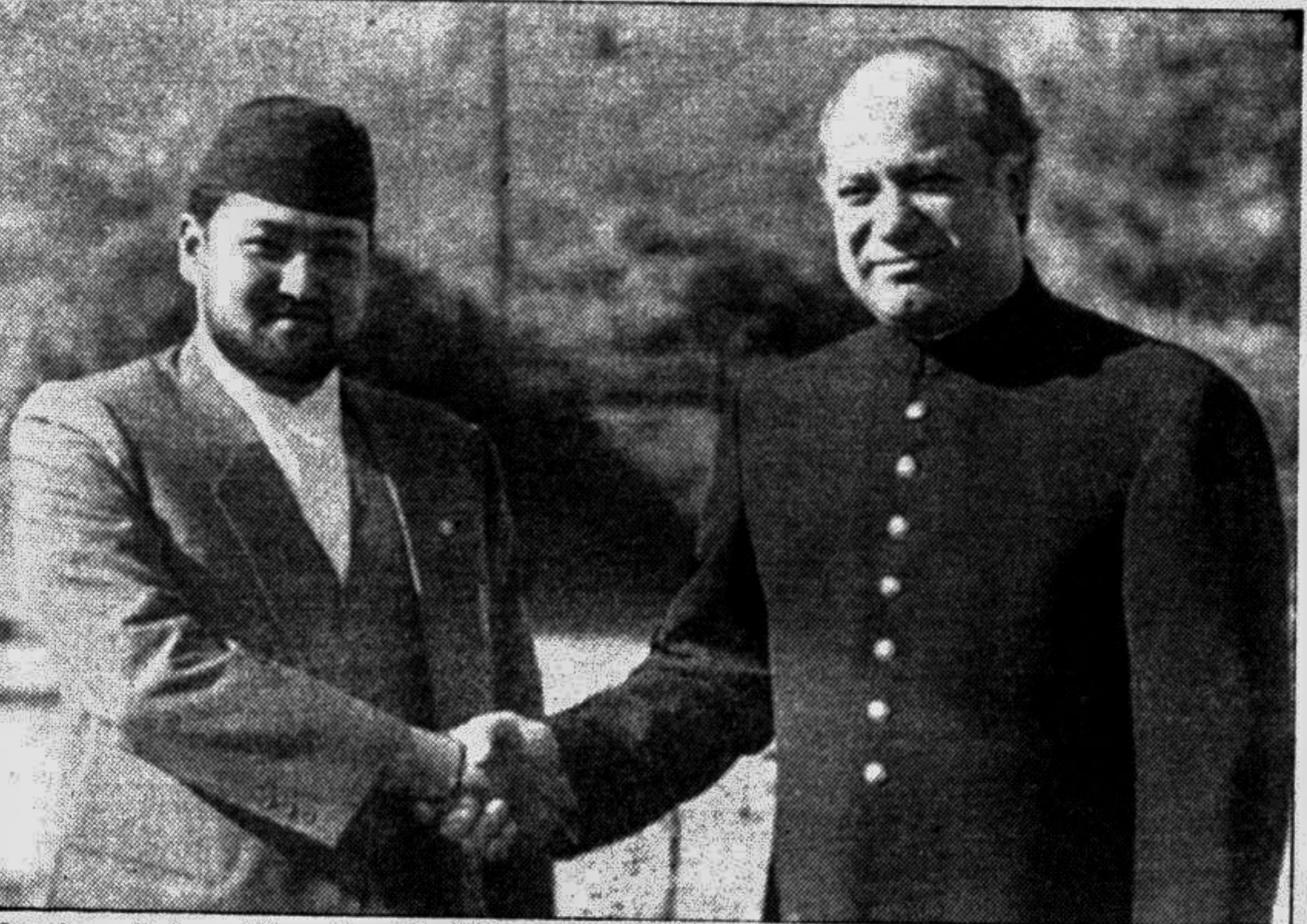
The information surfaced before the grand jury investigation involved that issue.

Govt claims breakthrough in investigation

CHENNAI, Feb 19: The Tamil Nadu government yesterday claimed to have achieved a breakthrough in the investigation into the 14 serial bomb blasts which killed 50 people at Coimbatore and unearthing a deep-rooted conspiracy behind the explosions...

Declining to divulge details, as the investigation was at a delicate stage, the officials said the highly sophisticated explosive device, weighing 50 kg and placed in an abandoned car in a residential locality here had been defused.

Some of the 'conspirators' were beyond the borders of the state, and the state police had mounted a massive operation to nab them.



Nepalese Prince Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev (left) is greeted by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday at his house in Islamabad. The Prince is on a seven-day official visit to Pakistan.

Bid to implement self-rule accords Top Palestinian, Israeli negotiators hold talks

HERZLIYA, Israel, Feb 19: Top Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met for more than two hours in US-sponsored talks on Wednesday to hammer out agreements on implementing self-rule accords, officials said.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat and his Israeli counterpart Danny Danon met at the residence of US Ambassador to Israel Ned Walker at Herzliya near Tel Aviv, Erakat told AFP.

Walker presented both sides with a US summary of the differences between the joint committees working on interim issues, Erakat said.

Erakat and Naveh held talks in Washington last week with US officials on ways to revive the peace process after 11 months of stalemate but failed to achieve progress.

The sides will each present the summary to their political leaderships and come up with proposals to bridge the differences at meetings next week, Erakat added.

But Erakat said on Monday that the United States was expected to present within the next two weeks a new initiative to break the deadlock on key issues, particularly further Israeli troop withdrawals from the West Bank.

Edmund Hillary vows to return to Nepal

AUCKLAND, Feb 19: The first man to conquer Mount Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary, vowed to return to Nepal as he recovered from a near fatal bout of pneumonia, but said he was going to take things easy for a while, reports AFP.

Hillary, 78, was rushed into intensive care in Christchurch Hospital last week when he came down with pneumonia while aboard the cruise liner Marco Polo in Antarctica.

Basu may become 1st communist PM of world's largest democracy

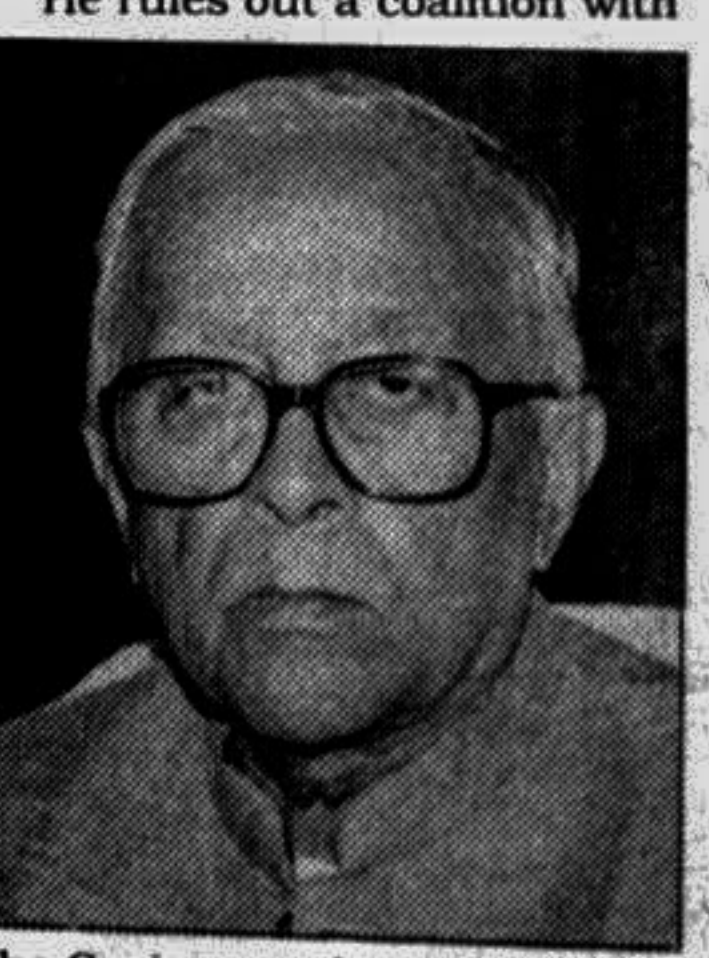
CALCUTTA, India, Feb 19: After ruling the Indian state of West Bengal for more than 20 years, Jyoti Basu is hoping for a change of scene, and a shift to New Delhi as the country's first communist Prime Minister, reports AFP.

While he campaigns for his Communist party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) in Calcutta before Sunday's polls, both his rivals and allies are focusing on the role Basu could play at the national level come the end of elections next month.

If that happens, Basu 81, could become premier — two years after turning down the job.

The fragile, multi-party front, keeping in mind his experience of running a coalition in West Bengal for two decades, had wanted Basu as prime minister after 1996 hung elections.

But his party — which still reveres Stalin and is opposed to joining governments it cannot dominate — declined.



Jyoti Basu, former West Bengal Chief Minister, is seen at the Congress, which abandoned the front government in November but whose support may be needed. But he adds: 'What will happen after the elections, I do not know.'

West Bengal's 70 million people believe in him to such an extent that he has not been challenged since becoming chief minister in 1977. No elected communist administration anywhere in the world has matched that feat.

Basu concedes, however, that his government does not have enough independence to work 'towards a socialist or communist timetable.'

Rioting continues in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Feb 19: Some 6,000 people rioted in the Indonesian city of Kendari stoning shops and other businesses, reports said today, says AFP.

No further details were immediately available. It was the latest in a series of riots to rock the province amid increasing tension over soaring prices, shortages of basic goods and mass unemployment.