

## 'Cambodian royal family should shun politics'

PHNOM PENH, Feb 22: King Norodom Sihanouk said Sunday he fears Cambodia's monarchy will be at risk if members of the royal family — including his son, deposed co-premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh — continue in politics, reports AP.

The royal family should therefore shun politics, said Sihanouk in a statement faxed from Beijing. He stressed, however, that he would not impose his will on any of the princes.

"If the royal Cambodian family wants the monarchy to survive, it is necessary that its members abstain from politics and from competing with 'strongmen' who do not have princely blood," the king wrote. The king often refers to Cambodian leader Hun Sen — who ousted Ranariddh as his co-premier in a July coup — as "strongman."

Sihanouk left Cambodia for Beijing on Jan 5. The 75-year-old monarch gave no reason for his sudden departure, but spends time in China for medical care. He also retreats to Beijing during times of political crises.

Before he left Hun Sen orchestrated a wave of criticism against him for saying he would pardon Ranariddh if convicted by a military court of smuggling weapons and conspiring with outlaws Khmer Rouge guerillas.

The charges are generally seen as motivated by politics. Ranariddh, now in exile, wants to return to Phnom Penh to prepare for elections scheduled July 26. Ranariddh is seen as Hun Sen's most formidable opponent in the polls.

Hun Sen hinted earlier this month that as long as members of the royal family continue to engage in politics, the country's monarchy will be under threat. "Personally, I don't desire that members of my family participate in politics," said the king, adding that since he was ousted as monarch in a March 1970 coup, "I have been pulled into the mud and humiliated."

The monarchy was restored in 1993, after a UN-supervised election brought Ranariddh and Hun Sen to power in a coalition government.

Sihanouk said that if the monarchy can be preserved, members of the royal family can look forward to possibly being named king, privy councillors and ambassadors.

"It is necessary that we accept our karma and that we be content with that," he said. He went on to say that if Cambodia's politicians wanted to keep members of his family out of politics they could ask the National Assembly to amend the constitution to prohibit it.

"I never opposed a law voted by our National Assembly," he said.

## Annan holds two rounds of talks with Iraqi leaders

BAGHDAD, Feb 22: In a mission to avert a military strike, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan held two rounds of talks Saturday with Iraqi officials. He said he was "rather optimistic" he would win an agreement to open all suspected weapons sites, reports AP.

If Annan's visit fails, Iraqi government media said the fault will lie with Washington. Iraq has suggested that Annan may be bringing an ultimatum to open all sites to UN weapons inspectors rather than a compromise to end the crisis.

Annan, who arrived in the Iraqi capital Friday, said he was hopeful he would President Saddam Hussein, likely on Sunday.

Scheduling such a meeting would be a clear sign that Iraq was prepared to accept an agreement to open eight presidential sites to UN weapons inspectors. Annan said he expected the Iraqis would accept a written document outlining terms of the agreement, which would then have to be endorsed by the United States.

"I expect to get a document," Annan said after the talks Saturday morning. "I am rather optimistic."

Annan began his official meetings at the Iraqi Foreign Ministry. Half of the three-hour session was devoted to a private meeting between Annan and Deputy Prime Minister Tariq

Aziz. Afterward, the full delegations — nine Iraqis and eight UN officials — met for another 90 minutes and then resumed their talks in the evening.

A joint statement said only that the two delegations held a "constructive dialogue."

A member of the UN delegation, former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi, said before the morning session that the situation was "extremely polarised."

Diplomatic sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the length of the private meeting between Annan and Aziz was unusual.

If the talks are successful, Annan was expected to meet Saddam before his departure, tentatively set for Monday. UN officials said no meeting had been set as of Saturday.

Reuters adds, after three rounds of inconclusive talks on Saturday, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is expected to meet Iraqi President Saddam Hussein Sunday in what could be the make or break day for peace.

Annan and Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz broke for the night early Sunday after more than eight hours of talks in the Iraqi capital.

The two were due to meet again Sunday at 0830 GMT to try to defuse a stand-off over access by United Nations teams to

sites suspected of housing chemical or biological weapons, and to avert a US military strike against Iraq.

"We were not expecting a breakthrough from the first moment."

The fact that the talks are continuing is a good sign, a UN official said early Sunday.

"Ten Iraqis are working hard — they are looking at all the questions in their entirety. It is a tedious and long process."

Reactions of others close to the talks ranged from the pessimism of one UN source — who said he was "not confident," the United Nations could overcome obstacles to an agreement — to positive notes from an Iraqi official.

"It's going well said Foreign Minister Mohamed Saeed Al-Sahaf. "We are working on it and we will continue."

Annan said he expects to meet Saddam today but gave no time.

In Washington, senior US officials said President Bill Clinton had approved a plan for air strikes if he was not satisfied that Annan had ensured Baghdad would give free access to UN weapons inspectors.

Washington urged all of its citizens to leave Iraq — just as it did before the 1991 Gulf War when a US-led force ended Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

The Iraqi news agency described the talks as "difficult" in

its report on a meeting by Saddam with the leadership of the Revolutionary Command Council and regional leadership of the ruling Baath Party.

It said Saddam was briefed by Aziz on the talks.

Annan has consistently expressed optimism he can persuade Iraq to accept UN demands to give inspectors unfettered access to eight so-called "presidential sites" but has conceded he may be the last chance to avert war.

In France, a permanent member of the Security Council which opposes military action, Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said.

Annan said he expected to get a document and an agreement out of his weekend diplomacy in Baghdad to take back to the UN Security Council in New York.

A diplomat who attended Annan's briefing said he had made clear any accord would have to include full compliance with UN resolutions and ensure there was no dilution of the role of UN inspectors charged with scrapping prohibited Iraqi weapons — two key American demands.

Baghdad denies having nuclear biological or chemical weapons and triggered the latest stand-off by refusing to give UN teams unrestricted access to the presidential sites.

## Off the Record

### King Edward VII's desk fetches \$ 415,000

NEW YORK: The desk on which British King Edward VII signed his abdication was sold at auction Saturday to anonymous American for 415,000 dollars, reports AFP.

The British monarch renounced his crown in December 1936 to marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson and become the Duke of Windsor.

The George II-Style mahogany desk with green leather top, dates back to around 1775, and its value was estimated at between 30,000 and 50,000 dollars.

The desk was sold by Sotheby's during the fifth session of an 18-stage auction to sell the 40,000 diverse objects amassed by the Windsors.

Many of the most valuable Windsor possessions were auctioned in Geneva in 1987, Fetching about 50 million dollars.

The auction was organised by Mohammed al-Fayed, father of Dodi Al-Fayed, who died with Diana, Princess of Wales, in a Paris car accident last summer.

### Queen hires image-maker

LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is to recruit a media spin doctor in a bid to improve the image of the royal family a press report said Sunday, reports AFP.

The decision to hire a royal director of communications comes in the wake of alarming findings by pollsters commissioned by Buckingham Palace, the Sunday Times reported.

The move was sanctioned at last week's meeting of the family's way ahead group attended by the queen, her husband Prince Philip, Children the Prince of Wales, Prince Andrew and Princess Anne and senior aides.

They considered confidential results from Mori focus surveys commissioned after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales.

The surveys found the royal family to be remote, out of touch, wasteful lacking in understanding poor value for money and badly advised, the paper said.

A place spokesman refused to confirm or deny the contents of the surveys and said it was "speculative" to say a media guru was to be headhunted.

## Pro-Iraq demonstrations erupt in ME states

MAAN, Jordan, Feb 22: Police fired bullets and tear gas Saturday to disperse about 1,000 pro-Iraq protesters, some of whom shot at police or threw stones. At least 20 people were injured in the daylong violence, including three policemen, reports AP.

The riot in the southern city of Maan was the worst violence in Jordan since unrest began over the US threat to attack Iraq. The government sent the army to put down the protest, one of many that have erupted across the Arab world.

On Saturday, pro-Iraq Palestinians demonstrated in the West Bank, and journalists protested in Cairo. Even in Washington, about 3,000 anti-war activists marched to the gate of the White House chanting "No more war."

In Jordan, King Hussein said the demonstrators would be punished.

He called the unrest "shameful" and urged restraint at a time of mounting tension in the region. He criticised Jordanians for their support for Iraq and its repressive government.

"Do they (Jordanians) want us to treat them like some neighbours who have flattened cities on the heads of their people and hit at them with chemical weapons?" Hussein, dressed in a military uniform, asked in a speech on state-run Jordan Television.

Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali told the London-based Middle East Broadcast Corp. that a state of emergency might be announced if the trouble continued.

On Friday, police quelled a smaller pro-Iraq demonstration with gunfire, killing one person. Three people were injured.

Simmering anger against the fatal shooting, and a ban imposed 11 days ago on public demonstration blew up Saturday when about 200 people attacked a police station before dawn and set fire to parts of a state-run bank and an automatic teller machine in the Bedouin city.

In several West Bank towns Saturday, Palestinians defied a largely ineffective ban by Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority. Protesters threw stones at Israeli troops, who responded with volleys of tear gas and rubber bullets. At least seven marchers were hurt and one arrested.

About 50 journalists demonstrated in the Egyptian capital of Cairo, stomping on hand-drawn American and Israeli flag and setting them on fire.

In Washington, an estimated 3,000 people marched to the front gates of the White House. "Do not bomb Iraq," said the banner leading them. The president did not acknowledge the crowd.



A model wears a see-through knitted dress by British designer Elspeth Gibson at the start of London Fashion Week Saturday. — AP/UNB Photo

## BRIEFLY

### Russia, Cuba sigh N-deal:

Russia and Cuba pledged Saturday to reach a deal soon to finish the first Russian-technology nuclear plant in the Americas, one the nearby United States, citing safety worries, has fought to stop, AFP says from Havana.

Havana and Moscow signed trade accords wrapping up bilateral talks and agreed to sign a pact soon on completing work on the unfinished plant at Juraguá, in Cienfuegos, the official Prensa Latina news agency reported. Prensa Latina cited diplomatic sources as saying a bilateral deal on finishing the plant would be signed shortly.

### Diana fund to set up office in NY:

The charity set up as a memorial to Princess Diana plans to open an office in New York, a newspaper said Sunday, because of the undiminished public response to the death of the princess, AP reports from London.

The Sunday Telegraph said the strength of interest from America has convinced the trustees of the need for an American base and that it was expected to open in New York in late spring. It gave no other details. The report could not be independently confirmed late Saturday when early editions of the newspaper were published.

### Tremor hits Nagano olympic venues:

An earthquake shook the Nagano olympics yesterday, the tremor registered at a moderate 5.0 on the Richter scale by the Japanese meteorological agency, lasted about 10 seconds, AFP reports from Nagano.

Athletes and media people at the olympic venues stopped and stared as objects moved.

### Israeli jets bomb Hezbollah posts:

Two Israeli warplanes fired rockets at suspected pro-Iranian Hezbollah targets in South Lebanon yesterday, security sources said, Reuters reports from Nabatiyeh.

Two Israeli warplanes fired a total of two rockets at targets in the Hezbollah stronghold of Lwazi, east of the southern port of Sidon. There were no reports of casualties. The attack raised to nine the number of Israeli raids on Lebanon since the start of 1998.

### 2 teenagers killed in Uganda:

Two teenagers were killed in crossfire in western Uganda when the army tried to prevent rebels from abducting more than 30 high school students, a state-owned newspaper reported Friday, AP reports from Kampala.

Soldiers firing machine-guns and mortars rescued 22 students after rebels belonging to the Allied Democratic Forces attacked the Mitindi secondary school on Thursday. 322 kilometers (201 miles) west of Kampala, the New Vision reported. One girl and one boy died, the newspaper said and twelve — all girls — were taken by the rebels.

### 1,000 deserters rejoin Lankan army:

More than 1,000 army deserters have responded to an amnesty offer by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the military said Friday, AP reports from Colombo.

"We are quite happy with the response," said Major Kumara Dewage, the defense ministry spokesman. On Sunday, President Kumaratunga asked more than 10,000 army deserters to resume fighting Tamil rebels who demand a separate homeland for minority Tamils.

## Indian actor Om Prakash dead

MUMBAI, Feb 22: Noted character actor Om Prakash, who held sway over movie goers from 50's to 80's with his uproarious brand of comedy, died here yesterday after a massive heart attack. He was 79, reports PTI.

The actor who had featured in over 400 films, was admitted to the Lilavati Hospital at Bandra last Thursday after he suffered a mild attack.

Starting his career as an All India Radio artist in 1937 in Lahore, Om Prakash made his first screen appearance in 'Daast' produced in 1944.

Initially he acted in Punjabi films like 'Madari' and 'B-hayaji', which were big hits. His first major success was 'Azad' where he played the role of a police inspector.

After partition, he shifted to the Bombay film industry to try his luck in the tinsel world.

He became a craze among cinegoers for his roles in 'Khandaan', 'Padosan', 'Pyar Kiye Ja', 'Amar Prem', 'Sharabi', 'Zanjeer', 'Chupke Chupke', 'Julie' and 'Gopi'.

## 3 pro-Ranariddh men executed in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Feb 22: Three more supporters of deposed co-Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh have been executed by forces loyal to Cambodian leader Hun Sen in the country's northwest, human rights workers said Sunday, reports AP.

The three victims — the wife of a resistance soldier, his 17-year-old son and a family friend — were killed extrajudicially by Hun Sen's forces in Banteay Meanchey province Thursday night.

The killings followed a series of threats. They appear to have been retaliation because the soldier left the army's 12th Division following the July coup that ousted Ranariddh to join the resistance, the rights workers said.



Jennifer Thangauelu, left, marches through Lafayette Park with other protesters to the White House Saturday in Washington. The march was to protest a possible military action against Iraq. The president, who was inside meeting with members of his national security team, did not acknowledge the crowd. US Park Police arrested six people for demonstrating without a permit, but said the crowd was otherwise orderly. — AP/UNB photo

## BJP suffers political setback as governor dismisses UP govt

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: India's main Hindu nationalist party Saturday suffered a major political setback when they lost control of the nation's largest state in the midst of a parliamentary election, reports AP.

The Bharatiya Janata Party government in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh was dismissed by the governor after two key allies withdrew their support.

The withdrawal of the Democratic Congress Party and another small group from the government left it 16 seats short of a majority in the 425-seat legislature.

The events in Uttar Pradesh, a state which has the 85 — the largest contingent — lawmakers in the federal parliament's powerful lower house of 545

members, came a day ahead of the second phase of voting in a general election.

Groups opposed to the Bharatiya Janata claimed that the desertion could translate into loss of votes for the party that many pre-election surveys had predicted could win the largest number of seats in Parliament. The Bharatiya Janata maintained that it would not affect their performance.

But the Bharatiya Janata's candidate for the prime minister's office, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, announced he was beginning a fast until death to protest against the dismissal of the government.

State Governor Romesh Bhandari installed Jagdambika Prasad, leader of the Democratic Congress Party as

the new chief minister of the state. He would have to prove his majority in the legislature by Tuesday.

Prasad claimed support of 240 members in the legislature. The deserting parties alleged that the Bharatiya Janata was trying to engineer a split in their ranks and of running the state government on the dictates of a Hindu fundamentalist group, the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh or the National Volunteer Corps.

The Bharatiya Janata Party has, in the run up to elections, tried to distance itself from Hindu fundamentalists and appear as a liberal party that was not against minorities, especially the Muslims, who form nearly 12 per cent of India's 930 million people.

## Politicians playing on people's fears to win votes in the south

COIMBATORE, India, Feb 22: A week after bomb blasts roared through this southern mill town, killing 54 people and setting off Hindu-Muslim rioting, candidate C P Radhakrishnan grabs a microphone and plays on voters' fear, reports AP.

"If elected, I will crack down on terrorists," Radhakrishnan, running for parliament on the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ticket, shouted from the back of a truck winding through a Hindu-dominated residential neighbourhood Saturday.

That their hometown would see the worst violence of the current campaign has baffled many in Coimbatore, 2,400 KM south of New Delhi.

Hindu-Muslim clashes are rare anywhere in southern India, where Muslims generally make up a smaller part of the population than in the north. Coimbatore residents say religious differences were recognised but meant little before politicians began meddling.

About 5 per cent of Coimbatore's 1.23 million people are Muslims, nationwide, Muslims are 11 per cent of nearly 1 billion Indians.

Radhakrishnan's BJP, the front runner in the election for parliament that will be seated next month in New Delhi, has worked to raise its profile in Tamil Nadu, long dominated by leftist parties.

He didn't refer directly to Muslims in his exhortations to women beating clothes clean against rocks in their front yards, or lining up for rice at

the dry goods stores. But since the 13 explosions the weekend before, the word "terrorists" has become synonymous with Muslim extremists.

Police investigating the bombings have arrested and questioned hundreds of people linked to Muslim fundamentalist groups, though it remains unclear who was behind the attacks that killed people seemingly at random — Hindus and Muslims, shoppers, school children store clerks. They took place on the day BJP president L K Advani was to have addressed supporters in Coimbatore; he was not yet in the city at the time.

Voting scheduled in Coimbatore Sunday was postponed to February 28 after the bombings. India's parliamentary elections were staggered over six days beginning February 16 to give security forces time to reinforce trouble spots.

Abdul Khaled Muthuvali, an Imam said Coimbatore's troubles began when the BJP held its first organisational meeting here in 1985.

"From that time on, they twisted Hindus against Muslims," said Muthuvali. He is working with other imams to provide food and housing for Muslims whose businesses were destroyed in the post-bombing rioting and trace those who disappeared in the confusion that weekend. Many Muslim families have fled, locking up their homes in Koetaimebu, Coimbatore's mostly Muslim ghetto.

Koetaimebu's Muslims acknowledge extremists among them may be behind the blasts, but say they could just as likely be the work of Hindu fundamentalists trying to start trouble.

H Raja, general secretary of the BJP in Tamil Nadu, calls Koetaimebu a "hot bed of Islamic fundamentalists (who) want to eliminate infidels — that is, those who do not believe in Allah."

Such rhetoric makes taxi drivers balk at entering the neighbourhood and Muslims fear attack by Hindu mobs. It's hard to imagine a threat emanating from the houses and apartments crowded into Koetaimebu, whose poverty contrasts sharply with the modern new buildings rising elsewhere in the city.

V. Padmanabhan, a Hindu and president of the town's chamber of commerce, says extremists on both sides are blinded to reality by fear. Muslims, he said, believe they must fight the BJP because it would make them second-class citizens if it gained power, though he insists the party would treat all Indians equally.

As for Hindus, Padmanabhan said, they should realise that a small minority of Muslims cannot wipe them away. That's baseless. But the fear of the minority is real.

Coimbatore could suffer if the violence continues and investors begin to look for a safer place for their money.

For now, the town is booming. Surrounding fields provide cotton for factories spinning out everything from thread to finished shirts, much of it exported.

## Two Iranian workers shot dead in Karachi

KARACHI, Feb 22: Two Iranian construction workers were gunned down on Saturday in southern Karachi, Pakistan's largest city wracked by relentless sectarian and ethnic killings, reports AP.

Several hours later a bomb exploded outside a Shi'ite Muslim mosque in the heart of the city, killing one person and injuring two others.

No one took immediate responsibility for the daylight shooting or the bombing that occurred shortly before midnight, police said.

There was no evidence to link the two incidents said police, except that both targeted Shi'ite Muslims.

About 200 people were attending a memorial service for a Shi'ite Muslim leader, who had died several weeks ago in an accident, when a bomb planted outside the mosque gate exploded, police said.

One person nearby the gate was killed and two others were injured, although it wasn't known how seriously.

Meanwhile police released few details about Saturday's shooting of two Iranian labourers in the posh Clifton area where they were working on an overpass.

In the last one year eight Iranians have been killed in Pakistan, all reportedly by militant Sunni Muslims who say Iran, a country of mostly Shi'ite Muslims, is financing radical Shi'ite groups in Pakistan.

Iran has denied the charge. Fellow workers said the two Iranians were taking a break

when a motorcycle, followed by a taxi, pulled up and several men opened fire.

AFP adds, a powerful bomb exploded outside a Shi'ite mosque in Karachi early Sunday injuring several people, hours after two Iranian engineers were murdered in the city, police and witnesses said.

## Belarus denies making arms deal with Iran

MINSK, Feb 22: The Belarus foreign ministry Friday denied a report in the United States this week that it was preparing a deal to sell military equipment and spare parts for tanks to Iran, reports AFP.

Citing CIA sources, The Washington Times on Tuesday said Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko would sign the secret agreement when he travels to Iran next month.

"Currently, Belarus and Iran are not looking at a deal of any sort in the military and technical field," the ministry said in a statement cited on national television.

According to the paper, US officials had said they feared Belarus would become a conduit for Russian weapons technology to Iran.

There is little distinction between Russia and Belarus and it's clear Belarus is acting as Russian proxy in this," a US defence official said, cited by The Washington Times.

## One of Cold War's most secret documents released

NEW YORK, Feb 22: One of the Cold War's most secret documents — the CIA's scathing internal investigation of the 1961 Bay of Pigs debacle — is finally out, and there is little wonder why the spy agency has guarded it so jealously, reports AP.

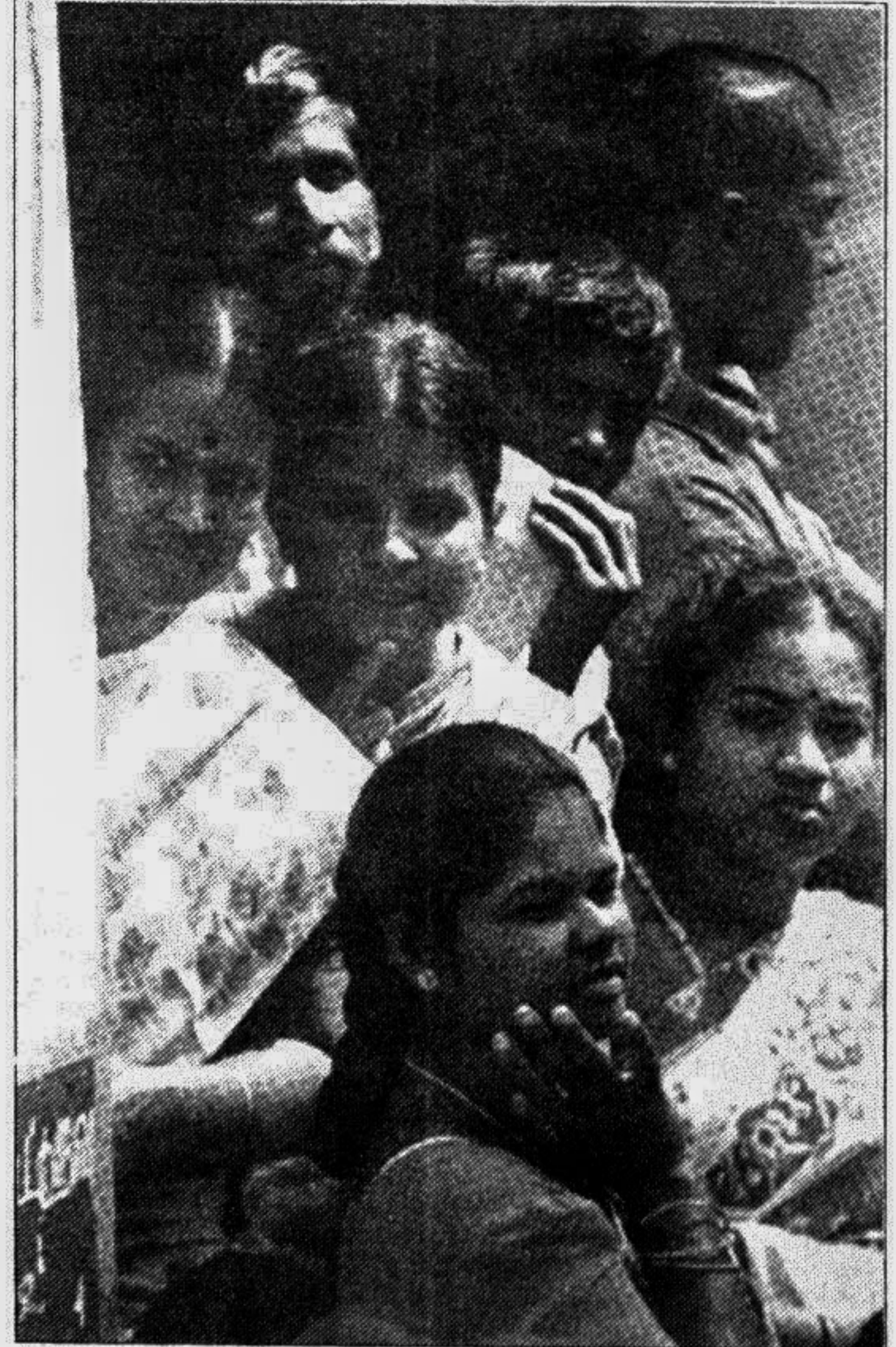
The 150-page report, obtained after more than three decades in the CIA director's safe, blamed the disastrous attempt to oust Fidel Castro not on President John F Kennedy's failure to call in air strikes, but on the agency itself.

The CIA's ignorance and incompetence, as well as its arrogant attitude toward the 1,400 Cuban exiles it trained and equipped to mount the invasion, was responsible for the fiasco, said the report acquired by The Associated Press on Saturday.

"The choice was between retreat without honour and a gamble between ignominious defeat and dubious victory. The agency chose to gamble, at rapidly decreasing odds," the report said.

The document criticized almost every aspect of the CIA's handling of the invasion: misinforming Kennedy administration officials, planning poorly, using faulty intelligence and conducting an overt military operation beyond "agency responsibility as well as agency capability."

Few of the CIA personnel helping train the exiles for the invasion spoke Spanish, yet "the agency reduced the exiled leaders to the status of puppets,"



Indian women step from their homes to look at BJP candidate C P Radhakrishnan campaign through the streets of the southern Indian city of Coimbatore Saturday. — AP/UNB photo