

US deports six Iraqis as a security risk

LOS ANGELES, Mar 12: Six Iraqis who took part in a failed CIA-backed effort to overthrow Saddam Hussein were ordered deported from the United States as a security risk — a decision they say could mean their execution, reports AP.

US immigration Judge D D Stigraves denied political asylum to the men, who were among thousands of refugees evacuated to the United States from northern Iraq after Saddam crushed opposition forces there in 1996.

"There are reasonable grounds for regarding the applicants as a danger to the national security to the United States," the judge wrote Monday.

In Washington, state department spokesman James P Rubin said US officials had made no decision on how to respond to the order.

"The department of justice — in coordination with other agencies — will obviously be deciding what to do with them," he said Wednesday.

Much of the ruling — including the judge's reasons for agreeing with the immigration and naturalization service that the men are a threat to the United States — was sealed, even from the defence lawyers, for what Stigraves said were security reasons.

The men have said that US officials consider them double agents actually working for Saddam.

Defence lawyers can appeal or try to get the men deported to a country other than Iraq.

"I don't believe the federal government will deport our clients to Iraq because it would be a public relations nightmare, because our clients are dead if they are deported," said defence lawyer Niels Frenzen.

Many of the witnesses who testified against the men during hearings last year did so in private, outside the presence of the defence.

Immigration courts do not follow the same rules as other courts. Defendants, for instance, are not automatically given the presumption of innocence. Nor do they have the right to hear evidence against them.

The defence was given 55 pages of the 147-page decision, Frenzen said.

"We know that our clients have been found to be security risks, but we don't know the reasons why," Frenzen said. "We were hoping the decision would shed a little light on the nature of the charges, but we remain completely in the dark."

The Iraqis were members of either the Iraqi National Congress or Iraqi National Accord, whose members were Shi'ites and Kurds bitterly opposed the Saddam. These groups were backed by the CIA as part of a reported 20 million US effort to overthrow or weaken Saddam after the 1991 Gulf War.

AFP adds: The top UN weapons inspector, Richard Butler, is to hold talks in Baghdad from March 22-26, the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) for disarming Iraq said Wednesday.

2 Shi'ite Muslims killed in Punjab

LAHORE, Mar 12: Unidentified gunmen killed two Shi'ite Muslim activists in Pakistan's violence-wracked Punjab province, police said Thursday, reports AP.

The victims, both members of the extremist Movement for Shi'ite Law, were playing cards late Wednesday night when the gunmen burst into their shop and opened fire, police said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the killings in Ferozwalla, 25 kilometres (15 miles) southwest of the Punjab capital Lahore, but police blamed Sunni Muslim militants.

Most of Pakistan's 140 million people are Sunni Muslims who live in peace alongside the country's minority Shi'ite Muslim community.

But more than 300 people have died in the past year in Pakistan in clashes between extremist groups from both sects.

Most of the sectarian violence has taken place in the Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province



Brandi Sherwood, right, crowns Miss Massachusetts, Shawnee Jebbia, as the new Miss USA on Tuesday in Shreveport. Jebbia will represent the United States in the Miss Universe pageant. — AP/UNB photo

Pakistan complains to India over spate of bombings

ISLAMABAD, Mar 12: Pakistan has summoned Indian diplomats to the foreign ministry to complain about a string of bomb attacks that left almost 40 people dead, a foreign ministry spokesman said Thursday, reports AP.

"A formal protest was lodged Wednesday," said Nadeem Kiyani, a spokesman for the foreign ministry in Islamabad, adding that Pakistan had no response yet from New Delhi.

Local newspapers in New Delhi quoted foreign office spokesman Pawan Verma as saying the Pakistani allegations were "entirely false, baseless and malicious."

Pakistan made the protest after police in eastern Punjab province arrested at least two men who confessed to plotting recent bomb attacks on behalf of Indian intelligence, Kiyani said.

On Tuesday, a bomb ripped through a train in the Punjab capital Lahore, killing 10 people and wounding more than 80. A day earlier two separate bomb blasts killed 13 people and wounded another 50.

A foreign ministry statement said the three blasts "were part of a well orchestrated terrorist plan" carried out by India's Research and Analysis Wing or RAW.

There were four separate bomb attacks last month, which Pakistan also blamed on India. New Delhi has denied involvement in those four blasts,

which killed 16 people. Hostile neighbours India and Pakistan have fought three wars in the past 50 years and the border between them re-

mains one of the world's most tense. The two sides routinely exchange accusations of supporting violence.

Ruling party wins polls in Denmark

COPENHAGEN, March 12: Denmark's Social Democrat-led government won the narrowest of election victories on Wednesday, winning one seat more in parliament than the opposition non-socialist bloc, official figures showed, reports AP.

With 100 per cent of mainland votes counted, Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen's government, including the support it relies upon from the extreme left, won 88 seats in parliament.

Rasmussen said late Wednesday that the government would continue in power, and that he would officially inform Queen Margrethe II on today.

The opposition, headed by Liberal leader Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and consisting of the liberals, conservatives, centrists and extreme right, were together credited with 87 seats.

Four seats from Denmark's territories of Greenland and the Faeroe islands are not included in the official results, but reports indicated that they would not change the overall result.

Brigadier-General Espinosa succeeds Major-General Choung-Jun Ahn of the Republic of Korea who has served as head of mission since March '97 and is returning to his national service.

Brigadier-General Espinosa, who started his career in 1963 as a military cadet in the Chilean Academy, graduated as staff officer at the Army War College in Chile in 1978. He commanded the sixth artillery regiment, the artillery school and in his present rank the army garrison of the VI and VII regions.

Between 1989 and 1990 he served as military attaché in Seoul. Since 1994 he has been in charge of the engineers command of the army and of the military labor corps. He has had previous United Nations peace keeping experience as a military observer in the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation.

BRIEFLY

King Fahd leaves hospital: King Fahd of Saudi Arabia has left the hospital and his health is "satisfactory," the royal palace said in a statement released early yesterday, AP says from Riyadh.

The king was admitted to the hospital on Monday with inflammation of the gall bladder. King Fahd left the hospital "after undergoing the necessary tests and care," said the statement quoted on Saudi television. The results of these exams are reassuring and his health is satisfactory.

Student gets 2 life terms in India: A medical college student who killed a freshman and cut up his body because he refused to take orders was sentenced to two life terms in jail by a judge in southern India, newspapers reported Thursday, AP says from Madras.

The judge also sentenced John David to seven years imprisonment on Wednesday for trying to destroy the evidence by packing the body parts in bags and putting them on long distance buses, the reports said.

Moderate quake hits Japan: A moderate earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.3 shook northeastern Japan early Thursday, but there were no reports of damage or injuries, AP says from Tokyo.

The quake was centred 40 kilometres below the seabed off Japan's Pacific coast, about 370 kilometres northeast of Tokyo, the Meteorological Agency said. The tremor struck at 4:27 (1927 GMT) and was recorded in eight prefectures (states) in northeastern Japan, the agency said.

10 Filipinos die after eating raw fish: Ten people have died and 46 taken sick in the central Philippines after eating raw fish infected with tiny worms, a newspaper reported yesterday, AP says from Manila.

The deaths were reported in two neighbouring towns by Lake Bito in the province of Leyte after residents ate uncooked, vinegar soaked fish, the Philippines Star said, citing health authorities. The fish were contaminated by rare microscopic worms eaten by the fish, the paper said.

Liz Taylor hospitalised again: Elizabeth Taylor was hospitalised briefly with severe back pain just two days after requiring a 10-day stay for a fracture in her back, her publicist said, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Miss Taylor, who was released from Cedars-Sinai Medical Centre on Sunday, was readmitted to the hospital Tuesday afternoon for more testing, Shirine Ann Cohn said. Miss Taylor returned to her Bel-Air home Wednesday afternoon. She was still in a lot of pain.

Earthquake shakes India: An earthquake of moderate intensity hit a western state in India near the site of a river dam early Thursday, officials said, AP reports from Bombay.

No damage was immediately reported from the Koyna Dam after the quake hit the southern parts of Maharashtra state at 01:24 hours (1954 GMT Wednesday), officials said in Bombay, the state capital. The epicenter of the quake was 16 kilometres (9 miles) from the dam, United News of India news agency reported. The quake had a magnitude of 4.2 on the Richter Scale, it said.

US woman gets 6-yr jail in Peru: A young American woman charged with trying to smuggle cocaine out of Peru in her suitcase was sentenced to six years in prison by a Peruvian court, AP says from Lima.

Jennifer Davis, 20, of Danville, Illinois, slumped in her chair as the judge read the sentence but kept herself in control, her lawyer Emilia Fishman said. Reporters were not allowed in the courtroom.

EU preparing to absorb 11 eastern neighbours

LONDON, Mar 12: The European Union is preparing to absorb 11 neighbours but its strategy to unite East and West Europe is bringing relations with Turkey to a frosty low, reports AP.

Leaders of the 15 EU nations were to meet in London on Thursday with colleagues from 10 East European nations and Cyprus to discuss policies on drugs, organised crime and pollution.

The EU will also seek support from its neighbours for sanctions agreed on by the United States, Britain, France, Russia, Germany and Italy to punish Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic for last week's crackdown on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, said British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.

But absent from the conference will be Turkey — a loyal NATO ally whose efforts to join the EU have been rebuffed since its first request in the late 1980s.

The EU planned Thursday's summit to soften the rejection but keep Ankara close to the family of European nations.

Ankara, however, finds no solace in that and wants EU membership or nothing.

The EU, although it has offered to deepen economic relations, has rejected Turkey's membership, saying Ankara is not ready politically or eco-

Sharif wants early summit with new Indian PM

ISLAMABAD, Mar 11 - Even as Indian President K.R. Narayanan invited Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Atal Behari Vajpayee to demonstrate his support, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said he wanted an early summit meeting to resolve problems between the two countries, according to India Abroad News Service.

In an interview with the Dubai newspaper Khaleej Times, Sharif said, "We should sit down and talk and resolve outstanding issues... Kashmir being the number one issue, we should try to resolve it first. Otherwise, there are no problems."

He emphasised time and again that as far as Pakistan was concerned, its position remained the same. This was so despite the break in the dia-

logue with India initiated by him and his counterpart I.K. Gujral, for which he blamed India.

But he in turn sought "some gestures" from India in Kashmir, in terms of withdrawing some troops and observing human rights -- what has, in fact, been a constant Pakistani theme. Since President Narayanan had not formally asked the BJP to form a government when the interview was conducted yesterday, Sharif made it clear that he was willing "to do business" with whoever came to occupy the prime minister's chair in India.

Sharif said he was touched to receive an invitation from the Guru Nanak University in Amritsar to come to the city on April 21 to receive an honorary doctorate, but he was not sure whether he would be able to accept the invitation.

The significance of Sharif's call for an early summit could not be missed, especially on the same day the Prime Minister and officials of his government, including some from the Foreign Office, held India responsible for a succession of bomb blasts in the last two days in which 22 people were killed and more than 70 injured.

A Foreign Office spokesman said, "Conclusive evidence in the possession of the government of Pakistan clearly points to the fact that these terrorist acts were masterminded and executed by the Research and Analysis Wing of the Indian intelligence."

During the half-hour interview with Khaleej Times editor S. Nihal Singh, Sharif answered a number of questions on Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan's relations with the Gulf countries.

Kashmir issue Russia ready to mediate between India, Pakistan

MOSCOW, Mar 12: Russia Wednesday said it was ready to mediate between India and Pakistan in resolving the long-standing Kashmir issue if both sides expressed their interest, reports PTI.

In an interview to the official news agency Itar-Tass, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin said Moscow was ready to assist in the process of normalisation of relations between New Delhi and Islamabad, including the "question of Kashmir."

He, however, added, that Russia could mediate only "if both sides express their interest in it."

Karasin, who was in Islamabad last week for consultations, disclosed that the possibility of the Russian mediation in resolving this "longstanding problem" was also discussed during his talks with the Pakistani leadership.

Annan to propose Israeli troops withdrawal from S Lebanon

JERUSALEM, Mar 12: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan will bring a proposal for an Israeli troop withdrawal from south Lebanon when he visits the region later this month, a television report said Wednesday. A UN spokesman denied there was such a plan, reports AP.

The reports by Israel's Channel 2 Television said Annan's five-point plan was likely to be accepted by both Israel and Lebanon, as well as by Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon.

"If we are presented with proposals that are in line with our security needs, I will certainly take great interest in them," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

Israel has occupied a strip of south Lebanon since 1985 in an effort to prevent cross-border incursions. Its troops are engaged in battle with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrilla group that seeks to drive Israel out of Lebanon.

The so-called "security zone" has proved costly for Israel. More than 100 soldiers were killed in combat or accident-related duty there in 1997 alone, and public debate over whether Israel should get out of Lebanon has grown.

Netanyahu has said he would pull out of Lebanon if the Lebanese government would agree to deploy troops in the area and disarm Hezbollah.

Lewinsky's lawyer hails possibility of Clinton's testimony

WASHINGTON, Mar 12: Monica Lewinsky's lawyer, saying her legal bills probably exceed 100,000 dollars, welcomed the possibility that President Bill Clinton might testify before the US Grand Jury investigating the possibility that she and the president had an affair and he tried to cover it up, reports AP.

"We welcome the truth, and we would do anything to get this over," lawyer William Ginsburg said Wednesday of reports that Clinton's advisers and the independent prosecutor's office have had preliminary talks about a possible presidential Grand Jury appearance.

Ginsburg, however, said in an interview that he cannot project when his own client might testify, as he and independent counsel Kenneth Starr continue to battle in court over whether she should be given full immunity in exchanges for testimony.



President Clinton joined in the East Room of the White House Wednesday with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan during a ceremony to celebrate International Women's Day. — AP/UNB photo

BJP sends draft of policies to partners

NEW DELHI, Mar 12: Hindu nationalists likely to lead India's next government want economic self-reliance and nuclear weapons, but will keep away from divisive religious issues that have tarnished their Bharatiya Janata Party's image, a newspaper reported Thursday, reports AP.

The party, known as the BJP, sent a draft of the policies by which it plans to govern to the partners it will need to form a coalition government. The Pioneer reported, in the proposed "common agenda," the BJP pledged to continue the economic reforms started seven years ago, but with emphasis on *swadeshi*, or self-reliance. The Pioneer reported.

The party wants to develop Indian industries by treating them on par with foreign companies, which have special tax concessions. It also wants to invite foreign companies only in areas where India does not have expertise.

The BJP's nuclear stance was also reportedly part of the agenda. Previous Indian governments are believed to have pursued nuclear weapons, but have said only that they must keep their nuclear option open because of the threat they see in China and Pakistan.

General elections held earlier this month and last month left no party with the 273-seat majority needed to govern

alone in the 545-member lower house of parliament. Because the BJP won the most votes, the president is soon expected to ask the party to form a government.

Tibetans march from Portland to Vancouver

PORTLAND, Oregon, Mar 12: A small group of Tibetan expatriates and their supporters are marching from Portland to Vancouver, British Columbia, to raise awareness about the Chinese occupation of their homeland, reports AP.

"The oppression must stop," said Jigme Topgyal, president of the Northwest Tibetan Cultural Association. "I urge people to ask their government to do something."

Topgyal, who moved to Portland in the 1960s, is part of a 160-member Tibetan community in the Portland and Vancouver, Washington area, one of the largest in North America.

The group launched its 560-km march Tuesday with a rally in downtown Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square, which drew about 100 people.

Many carried Tibetan and Mongolian flags and signs proclaiming "Boycott China's goods," "Independence for Tibet" and "Release the Panchen Lama."

ment and then prove itself in a vote of confidence.

The agenda aims to please all the parties in the disparate coalition led by the BJP. The Pioneer said. The allies, who range from diehard socialists to free-market centrists are worried that the BJP might throw out multinational companies, scrap laws giving special rights to Muslims and Christians in this predominately Hindu state and build a Hindu shrine at a site where a mosque once stood in Ayodhya, 300 miles (480 kilometres) east of New Delhi.

Six years ago, Hindu radicals tore down an ancient mosque in Ayodhya, triggering nationwide riots that left more than 2,000 people dead. An extremist group that backs the BJP is raising funds to build a temple at the site, but the BJP has softened its stand on the issue.

The draft agenda does not mention such issues as rebuilding the temple or scrapping special privileges for a Muslim-majority state in India — two issues that dominated its debates for years. The other parties had asked the BJP not to insist on these issues.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the prime ministerial choice of the BJP, was trying Thursday to get letters of support from his allies as demanded by President KR Narayanan before being asked to form the government.

Asteroid may conceivably hit Earth in 2028

WASHINGTON, Mar 12: An asteroid will pass close by the Earth in the year 2028 and could conceivably hit us, astronomers warned on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

They said the asteroid, which had not been seen before, would pass as close as 30,000 miles (43,000 kms) to the Earth. While chances of a collision are small, it would not be out of the question.

"Chances are it will miss," Dr Brian Marsden of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) said.

Even if it were on a path to hit Earth, technology might be available by the capable of deflecting the asteroid, he said.

"What would be scary is if it were three days from now or three weeks or even three years, thirty years is just right because it's far enough in the future," Marsden said in a telephone interview.

"If it were going to hit us, and that's a big if, we would have time to plan to do something about it."

The asteroid, which is estimated to be a mile (1.6 kms) in diameter, has been named 1997 xf 11. It was discovered by Jim Scotti of the University of Arizona.

Latest observations show it will pass as close as 30,000 (42,000 kms) miles from the centre of the Earth.

"It was quite startling to find that the nominal orbit that we were using brought it as close as we did. I have not seen anything like that," Marsden said.

Even if the asteroid passed by at 200,000 miles away (320,000 kms), that would bring it inside the moon's orbit. Marsden said calculations showed the asteroid would be closest at 1:30 pm eastern day light time (1830 GMT) on Thursday, Oct 26, 2028.

Clinton's call to combat violence against women

WASHINGTON, Mar 12: US President Bill Clinton, marking International Women's Day with his wife Hillary, ordered the US government Wednesday to expand efforts abroad to combat violence against women, reports Reuter.

At a White House East Room ceremony with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Clinton said the United States would provide 10 million dollars to strengthen partnerships with governments and non-governmental organisations to help them fight violence against women.

"All too often, we know violence limits the choices open to women and young girls, damaging their health, disrupting their lives, obstructing their full participation in society," he said.

Clinton also said he was ordering steps to combat "the inhumane practice of trafficking of women."

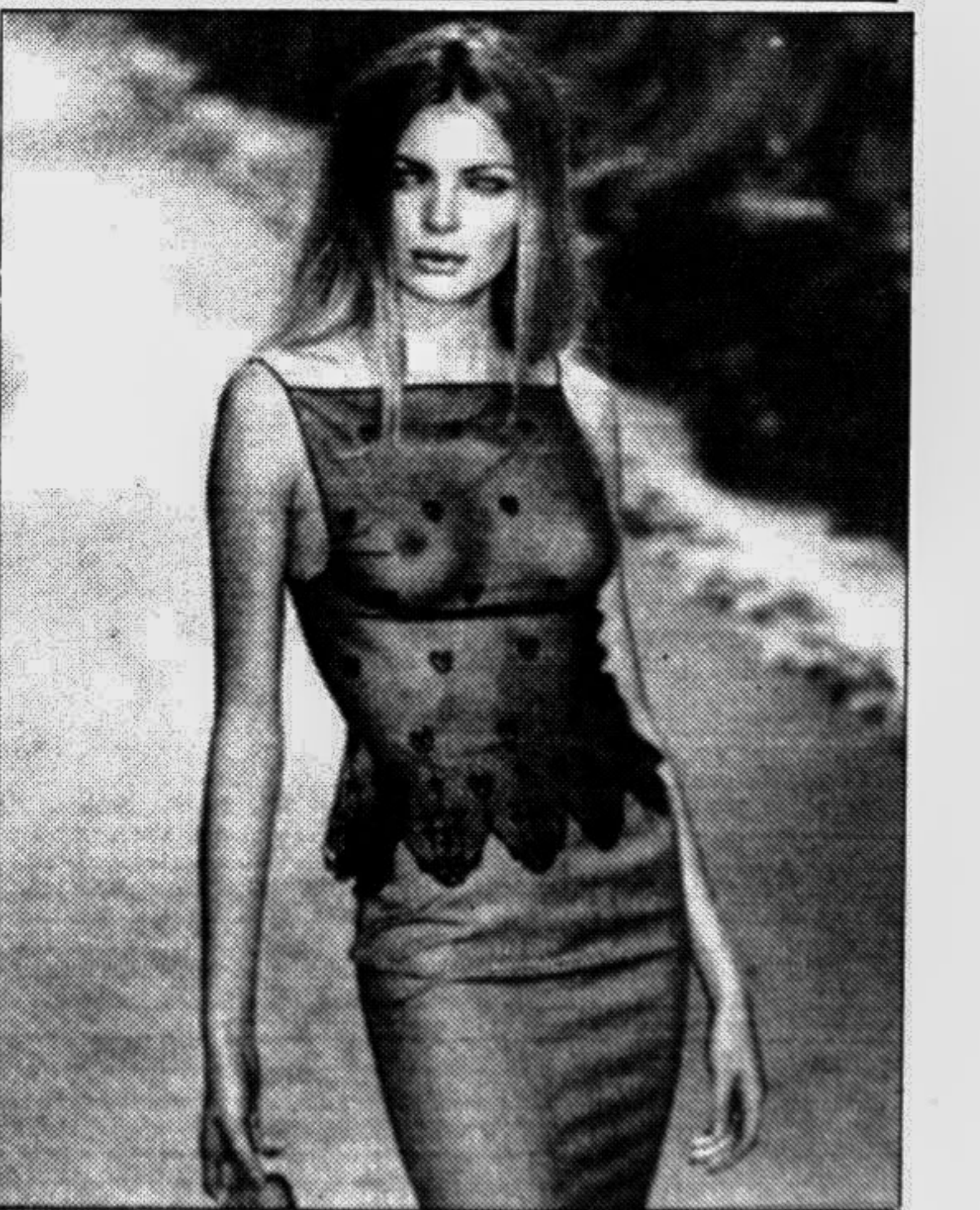
Hillary said the problems was such that more than one million women are trafficked every year in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere around

the world. "These women and girls are desperate for economic opportunity," she said. "They think they're applying for jobs as babysitters, waitresses and sales clerks. Many think they are following their dreams and instead, they find themselves in a nightmare, sold as part of an international trade in human beings and forced into modern-day slavery."

Angola formally legalises UNITA rebel movement

LUANDA, Angola, Mar 12: Angola formally legalised the one time rebel movement UNITA on Wednesday, taking the delayed 1994 peace accord one step closer to fulfillment by the new April 1 deadline, reports AP.

The action was taken by the council of ministers, said Deputy Interior Minister Higino Carneiro.



A model sports a see-through embroidered, top, with a grey suit designed by Stella McCartney for Chloe's '98/99 fall-winter ready-to-wear collection presented in Paris Wednesday. — AP/UNB photo