

China alone abstains from voting

UNSC imposes arms embargo on Yugoslavia

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 1: China abstained on Tuesday when the Security Council voted 14-0 to impose an arms embargo on Yugoslavia to force a peaceful settlement to Serbia's troubled Kosovo province, reports Reuter.

Kosovo, which has a 90-per cent Albanian ethnic majority, was the scene of a recent crackdown by Yugoslav police against separatists in which at least 80 people were killed.

But speaking after the vote, Yugoslavia's ambassador Vladimir Jovanovic rejected any involvement by the council in what he said were purely internal affairs.

"There is not, nor has there been, any armed conflict in Kosovo... hence there is no danger of a spillover, there is no

threat to peace and security" and no basis for invoking the mandatory provisions of the UN charter," Jovanovic said.

No international bodies had intervened when police and troops carried out much larger operations in countries "defending themselves against terrorism and protecting their territorial integrity and sovereignty," he added.

The council resolution calls on the authorities in Belgrade and leadership of the Kosovar Albanian community to enter into a meaningful dialogue without preconditions.

It also expresses support for "an enhanced status for Kosovo which would include a substantially greater degree of autonomy and meaningful self-administration."

Kosovo, regarded by Serbs as the cradle of their nation, church and culture, enjoyed autonomy within Serbia between 1974 and 1989. This was revoked by Slobodan Milosevic, then president of Serbia and now president of the rump Yugoslavia state comprising only Serbia and Montenegro.

The resolution requires all states, "for the purposes of fostering peace and stability in Kosovo," to prevent the sale or supply to Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, of arms and all types of related material. The embargo will be monitored by a sanctions committee made up of all 15 council members.

The resolution also calls for action to "prevent arming and training for terrorist activities" in Kosovo a reference to armed

separatist groups receive weapons and money from sympathizers abroad.

The council warns of possible "additional measures" in the absence of progress toward a peaceful resolution of the Kosovo situation.

Russia, a traditional ally of the Serbs, had raised objections to parts of the resolution, sponsored by eight council members — the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Portugal and Sweden.

But Moscow was persuaded to vote for the draft as a result of some minor changes in the text and telephone contacts over the past 24 hours between US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov.

Russian Deputy UN envoy Yuri Fedotov said his delegation supported the resolution on the understanding that "we are not talking about punishing anyone. In particular Belgrade, but rather of specific measures that are designed to prevent any mounting of tensions, to erect an obstacle to external terrorism and foster the political process with a view to a speedy and lasting settlement."

Explaining his abstention, China's Deputy UN representative, Ambassador Shen Guofang, said: "many countries in the region are multi-ethnic. If the council is to get involved in a dispute concerned, it may create a bad precedent and have wider negative implications."



Benazir Bhutto, right, former prime minister of Pakistan and leader of the opposition talks with allied leaders, from left to right, Aslam Beg, Hamide Nasir Chatha and Agha Murtaza Poya during a meeting on Tuesday in Lahore. Allied party leaders started a campaign against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Swimsuit beauty contest dropped: Hindu nationalists forced organisers to drop the swimsuit section of an Indian beauty contest, claiming it violated the country's cultural ethos, a newspaper said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Members of two groups allied to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), attended the show to make sure models were dressed "properly," the Hindustan Times said.

The beauty contest took place in the BJP-ruled western city of Ahmedabad, it was organised by a private company. Such events are common in India.

Rains begin soaking Brazilian state: Torrential rains on Tuesday began soaking much of the northern Brazilian state of Roraima, a day after natives in the fire-scarred region performed rain dances, media sources reported. AFP says from Rio de Janeiro.

The Amazonian natives performed ceremonies aimed at bringing rain to douse blazes started by arson, accident and slash-and-burn farming that have charred an area the size of Belgium in Roraima's Savanna and part of the Amazon jungle.

Months of drought by the El Nino weather phenomenon helped the fire spread.

Russia, US sign accords: Russia and the United States Tuesday signed two agreements to strengthen cooperation in using and managing atomic energy, Xinhua reports from Moscow.

Russian Atomic Energy Minister Yevgeny Adamov and US Energy Secretary Federico Fabian Pena discussed a broad range of matters concerning atomic energy before signing an agreement to cooperate on the development and transformation of production in atomic energy industry cities, and a memorandum on cooperation in the use of plutonium removed from atomic energy installations.

The two ministers discussed the implementation of a 1993 contract under which Russia will sell the US within 20 years, 50 tons of uranium removed from nuclear weapons.

\$12m Japanese aid for Palestinians: Japan has decided to extend a sum of 12 million US dollars to the Japan-Palestine development fund of the United Nations Development Programme to support the Palestinians including the refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, and Lebanon, who face economic hardship, Japan's UN mission said on Tuesday, Xinhua reports from United Nations.

The assistance is intended to support various projects including employment creation and technical cooperation.

Japan's UN mission said with this contribution, Japan's assistance to the Palestinians since 1993, amounts to approximately 352.8 million dollars.

US, Canada launch fresh talks: US and Canadian officials on Tuesday launched new talks aimed at resolving a long-standing and increasingly thorny bilateral dispute over Pacific salmon catches, Reuter reports from Washington.

The officials — six per side — joked and posed for pictures at the start of negotiations at the State Department but made no substantive comments.

Earlier, State Department spokesman James Rubin said the meeting would focus largely on organisational issues.

Colombian rebels hold 5 aliens hostage: Four US citizens, an Italian and three Colombians held hostage by leftist rebels are well, rebel chief commandant Romana said Tuesday, AFP reports from Bogota.

"They are perfectly healthy. They have received clothing and medicine," said Romana, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) local commander.

But, he added, "We cannot guarantee their security because of army bombing runs in the region."

China's govt shakeup plan in trouble: China's plan to radically slim its bloated bureaucracy has run into problems, the Communist Party's newspaper said Wednesday, hinting that the plan might provoke back-stabbing among officials, AP reports from Beijing.

"In a few units, some problems have cropped up that require taking note of and that demand a high degree of attention," the newspaper said.

The newspaper gave no specifics. But it noted that the reforms are certain to affect officials' positions and said they need to be taught to put the country's interests ahead of their personal concerns.

6 workers killed in S Lebanon: Six Lebanese construction workers were killed on Tuesday in the bloodiest single attack against civilians in South Lebanon in over four months, Reuter reports from Marjayoun, Lebanon.

The six men were killed and a seventh was severely wounded when a roadside bomb planted by unknown assailants exploded near the pickup truck they were travelling in inside Israel's South Lebanon Occupation Zone, pro-Israeli militia sources said.

Some progress made to revive ME peace talks: Albright

WASHINGTON, Apr 1: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on Tuesday "some progress" had been made in recent days to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and the United States wanted to keep the momentum going, reports Reuter.

But Albright said a just-completed diplomatic mission to the region by US special envoy Dennis Ross had come nowhere near a breakthrough, and the United States and countries in the region remained frustrated by the stalemate.

Albright's comments, at a White House news conference, toned down a State Department assessment on Monday that the peace process in "dire straits," and signalled that Washington planned to keep up its mediating role for the time being.

Israeli media have speculated recently that the United States, exasperated by the year-long standstill in the talks, might pull out altogether.

Ross briefed Albright on Tuesday after returning overnight from the region, where he had talks with Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian leaders on latest US ideas for moving forward.

"There has been some progress as a result of his most recent trip but really it's not nearly enough, I think, for us to say there has been a breakthrough," Albright said.

"Obviously it is important that there has been some movement but we also have to make very clear that there is a level of frustration both here and in the Middle East because the stalemate has gone on," she added.

"So we want to keep making sure that the process moves forward and that the gaps are narrowed."

The US proposals carried by Ross centered on a new Israeli troop pullback in the West Bank — in return for tougher measures by the Palestinians to curb guerrilla violence.

Washington believes that a deal in these two issues will "unlock the Middle East peace process" and set the stage for negotiations on the ultimate status of Palestinian self-rule territories in Gaza and the West Bank.

State Department spokesman James Rubin declined to say on Tuesday exactly where the sticking points lay, but Israeli has said in the past that for security reasons it cannot pull back from more than nine per cent of the West Bank.

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had not sent Ross home empty-handed, but did not elaborate.

Rubin told reporters in Washington that "Ambassador Ross's work has improved the situation to the extent that, in the various areas where there have been gaps, some indications now exist that some of those gaps can be bridged."

But, he added, "the peace process is not on track, and the gaps have not been bridged, and Ambassador Ross and the secretary will now determine what the next steps will be."

Blasts claim 3 lives in Karachi

KARACHI, Apr 1: Three bomb explosions rocked Karachi Tuesday killing three people and injuring 28 others, police said, reports AP.

No one claimed responsibility for the blasts, the most recent in a series that have rocked Pakistan's economic hub in recent weeks.

The first explosion occurred in the ice cream shop soon after it opened, killing one person and injuring 12. The shop was destroyed by what police bomb expert Mo'in Uddin said was a time device containing 200 grams (seven ounces) of explosives.

The second explosion ripped through a shopping mall about two kilometers (one mile) away 20 minutes later, killing another person and injuring 12 more. One of the injured died in a city hospital later Tuesday.

Police said the shopping mall bomb was planted under a vendor's cart outside.

"There was a massive explosion and people ran for cover," said shopkeeper Abdul Karim.

Many shops were damaged, but casualties were limited because most businesses had not yet opened.

Benazir demands fresh polls under interim govt

ISLAMABAD, Apr 1: Former premier and leader of the opposition Benazir Bhutto has demanded fresh elections under impartial interim government as she charged the Nawaz Sharif ministry with massive corruption and said it has no right to rule as all its policies have failed, reports PTI.

The law and order situation has deteriorated to such an extent that people have confined themselves to their homes and they think that the government is incompetent and the fresh elections should be held under the supervision of an interim government, Benazir told Voice of America in an interview.

She also insisted the interim government should be impartial while stressing that the caretaker governments in 1990 and 1996 were biased.

The prime minister has no right to rule the country any more as all his policies during the last one year have failed, she told a mammoth rally at Gujranwala on Monday.

She said the Sharif government had become nervous after the successful rallies of her parties in Faisalabad and Gujranwala and it has become more vindictive towards her and her family.

She warned in the interview that the present government was moving towards absolute dictatorship and that is why they have framed false cases against me and they do not tolerate opposition.

Benazir said she was ready to go even to the jail but would never compromise on principle and added: "I am a daughter of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who had laid down his life but did not compromise with dictators... so will do his daughter."

She accused the Sharif government of compromising with India on the Kashmir issue by giving preference to free trade links with New Delhi and vowed her party would not allow the government to do anything against the interest of the country.

When asked whether she intended to launch a movement against the present government, she said the recently launched Pakistan Awami Ittehad (PAI) has already started a campaign.



Families and friends of leftist prisoners wait near a jail in Ankara where they took five guards and prison officials hostage on Tuesday. In a concerted action leftist prisoners in five jails took nearly 40 prison guards and prison officials to push the return of fellow prisoners to a western Turkish jail. — AP/UNB photo

Pakistan rules out resumption of dialogue process with India

ISLAMABAD, Apr 1: Pakistan yesterday virtually ruled out any possibility of resumption of dialogue process with India without a "specific and substantive" negotiation on the Kashmir issue, reports PTI.

"It is difficult to start talks with India unless Kashmir is put on agenda," Pakistan Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan told Pakistan Television (PTV) during an interview.

Khan also said "Pakistan would resume dialogue with India if New Delhi responded positively to our stand for specific and substantive negotiations on Jammu and Kashmir."

Emphasising that Kashmir is a "territorial dispute" between the two countries, Khan reiterated Islamabad's oft-repeated demand for a plebiscite in the valley.

Former Miss America says Clinton had consensual sex with her 15 yrs back

WASHINGTON, Apr 1: A former Miss America said on Tuesday she had consensual sex with Bill Clinton 15 years ago when he was Arkansas Governor and decided to reveal it now to stop Clinton's enemies from saying he forced the encounter, reports Reuter.

Elizabeth Ward Graecen, 37, a Russellville, Arkansas native who entered in the syndicated television programme "Highlander," said in a New York daily news interview: "I had sex with Bill Clinton but the important part to me is that I was never pressured."

Graecen described her one-time fling with Clinton as a "very bad error in judgment," and said she decided to come forward to rebut charges in the Paula Jones case that Clinton had sexually assaulted her.

Jones alleges that Clinton exposed himself to her and asked her for oral sex in a little rock hotel room in 1991, when he was Arkansas Governor and she was a low-level state employee. Clinton has denied her accusations.

Jones' attorneys on Tuesday went to an appeals court to try to get in her suit information about former White House intern Monica Lewinsky and any relationship she might have had with Clinton. A grand jury hearing testimony on the Lewinsky case also resumed meeting in Washington DC.

"In her daily news interview, Graecen said her tryst with Clinton took place in little rock in 1983 — a year after her reign as Miss America when he and she were married to others.

"We had an intimate evening. Nothing was ever forced."

India urges rich nations to spend more to protect environment

NEW DELHI, Apr 1: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of India urged rich nations Wednesday to spend more money to protect the environment, reports AP.

To ensure that poor nations can develop, the countries that can afford to do so must increase research into how the environment can be protected, Vajpayee told delegates at a meeting of the Global Environmental Facility, a conservation programme funded by 155 countries, the United Nations and lending institutions such as the World Bank.

The donor and recipient nations in GEF are meeting in New Delhi to discuss how to spend 2.75 billion dollars earmarked for protecting the environment in developing countries.

The funds, cleared in February, were the first replenishment for the GEF, founded in 1991, since donors pumped in 2 billion dollars in 1994 to help conserve biodiversity in poor nations, reduce the risk of trapping greenhouse gases, protect international waters from pollution and fight deforestation.

Ranariddh welcomes govt move against Khmers

PHNOM PENH, Apr 1: Prince Norodom Ranariddh supported efforts Wednesday by the government to finish the Khmer Rouge, but remarked that his own efforts to do so led his arch-rival to topple him in a coup last year, reports AP.

Ranariddh reflected on the irony in an interview with the associated press at the Hotel Le Royal, where he has stayed since returning to Cambodia on Monday after nine months of exile to prepare for elections July 26.

"Let's say simply, everything I did for national reconciliation is wrong and everything someone else does is right," he said, speaking carefully about what is clearly a sensitive subject.

Outside, hundreds of riot police were quelling clashes between his supporters and backers of Cambodian leader Hun Sen. Conscious of his security, the prince's advisers forbade him from going to the balcony and waving to the crowd.

Ranariddh spoke softly about the tense situation in Angkor Veng, the jungle headquarters of the last Khmer Rouge faction. Last week, mutineers rebelled against the leadership and, supported by Hun Sen's army, appear to have the last die-hards on the run.

16 rebels killed in Lankan fighting

COLOMBO, Apr 1: Sporadic fighting between government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels have left 16 guerrillas dead in northern Sri Lanka, the military said Wednesday, reports AP.

Twelve rebels died Tuesday, when soldiers advancing on the guerrilla-held northern town of Mankulam attacked rebel bunkers, said Maj. Kumara Dewaga, a military spokesman.

Mahkulam, 245 kilometers (150 miles) north of the capital, Colombo, sits astride a key highway that the government has been trying to capture for nearly a year.

On the same day, soldiers ambushed and killed four rebels in the nearby Kilinochchi district, said Dewaga.

There were no casualties on the government side in the clashes. There was no immediate rebel comment on the fighting.

UN investigator accuses N Ireland police of abuses

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 1: A UN investigator has accused police of harassing defence attorneys in Northern Ireland and called for an independent inquiry into the 1989 slaying of a lawyer who defended IRA suspects, reports AP.

Special investigator Param Cumaraswamy also urged the Royal Ulster Constabulary to respect the right of a suspect to have a lawyer present during interrogations.

In his 37-page report on Northern Ireland's judiciary, Cumaraswamy, a Malaysian jurist, also urged reinstatement of the right to a jury trial.

He also criticised emergency regulations on electronic surveillance as too vague and called on the government to install recording devices in detention centers and make the tapes available on request.

The report was prepared after an 11-day fact-finding mission to Britain and Northern Ireland last October to investigate the "independence of judges and lawyers."

In the report, Cumaraswamy found that the Royal Ulster Constabulary "has engaged in activities which constitute intimidation, hindrance or improper interference."



Russian ice dancers Anna Semenovich and Vladimir Fedorov perform during the compulsory dance competition at the World Figure Skating Championship Tuesday in Minneapolis. — AP/UNB photo

KSA starts putting up fire-resistant tents for Hajj pilgrims

DUBAI, Apr 1: Saudi Arabia has started putting up thousands of fire-resistant tents for this year Hajj pilgrims following a blaze last year which killed 343 people, reports Reuter.

The 10,830 tents have been fitted with 42,000 water sprinklers to avert a repeat of the 1997 blaze which swept through a desert tent camp, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said on Tuesday.

It said Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah on Monday toured the area in Mena — which is about 11 km from Makkha where the tents are being erected.

Mena, where last year's blaze struck, is situated below Mount Arafat.

Crown Prince Abdullah was given a demonstration of the tents' resistance to fire and shown other precautions, which include an underground storage tunnel that holds one million cubic metres of water, it said.

Saudi Arabia plans eventually to provide the fire-resistant tents to all the two million pilgrims who perform Hajj every year but says the first phase being implemented this year would only cover 25 per cent of the targeted area in Mena.

The kingdom, which houses two of Islam's holiest shrines in Makkha and Medina, has vowed following last year's fire and previous tragedies, including stampedes, to work on improving safety measures during Hajj.

"Fire is without doubt the most important thing which concerns and frightens us. This could happen by fate, mistake or intention," Interior Minister Prince Nayef said at a news conference on Monday in Makkha.

"Therefore civil defence patrols have been stepped up and we pray that God the Almighty will spare us from a fire during the Hajj this year," he said.

Some 625,000 square metres of fire resistant cloth made from fibre glass has been used to make the tents, SPA said.

A German firm supplied the material after a competition involving 34 international firms, Housing Minister Prince Mutib told Crown Prince Abdullah during the inspection, SPA reported.

Saudi Arabia chartered planes and used Saudi cargo planes to transport the tents from abroad, he said.

Taliban deny arresting Saudi terrorist

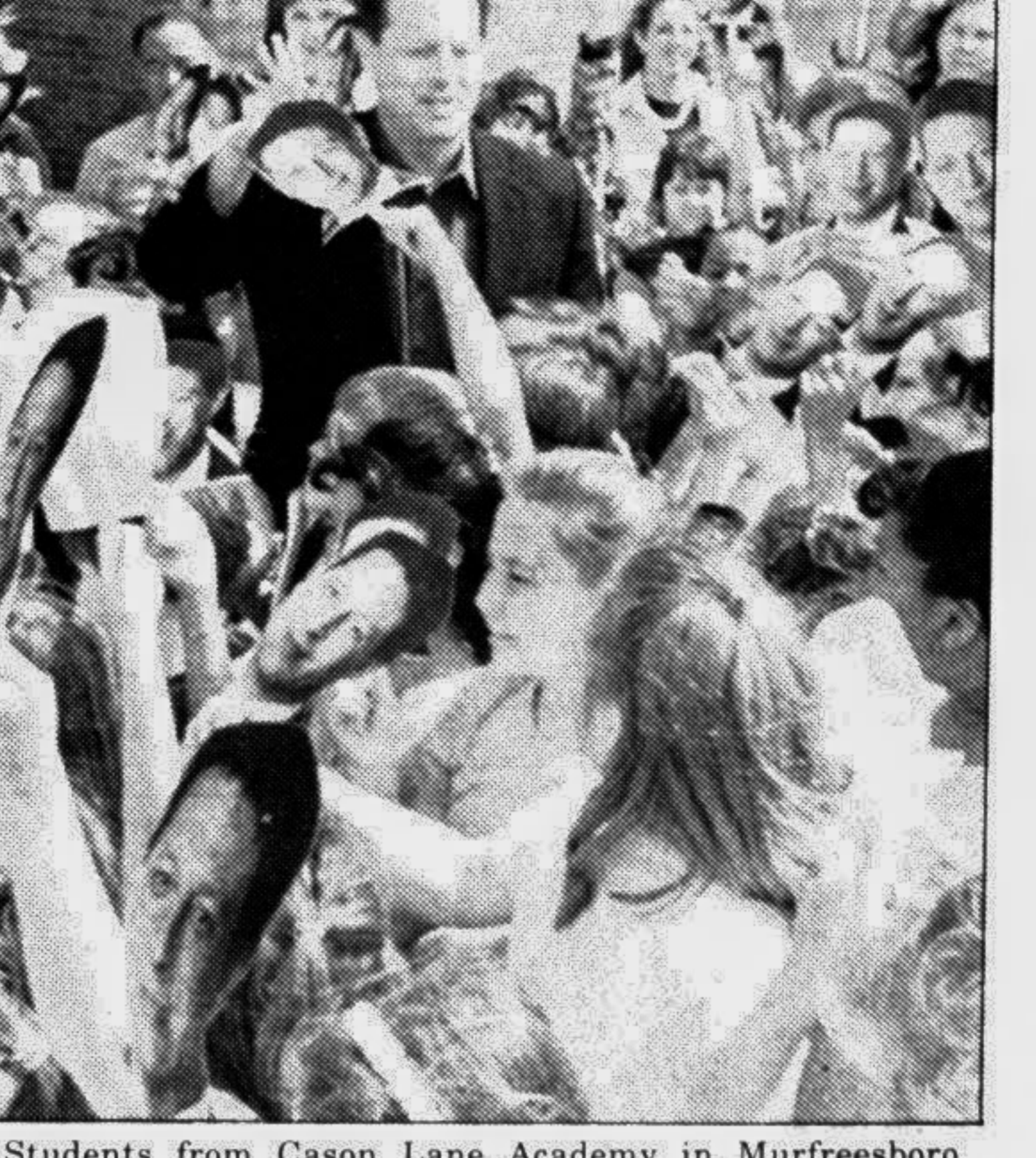
ISLAMABAD, Apr 1: Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban militia Tuesday denied press reports that suspected Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden had been arrested, reports Xinhua.

Abdul Hakim Mujahid, the newly appointed Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan, said in a telephone interview that Osama was still in Kandahar, Taliban's stronghold in southern Afghanistan as a guest of Taliban authorities.

He also denied reports that US commandos had arrived in Afghanistan for the arrest of the 41-year-old Saudi multimillionaire.

When asked whether the United States contacted the Taliban about Osama, Mujahid said American authorities made a complaint in New York that Osama had issued a decree for the killing of Americans but "we dispelled the impression."

Taliban spokesman Hakim Akhund said in Kandahar by Telephone that Osama, who is wanted both in Saudi Arabia and the US "very much safe" and spending his life independently.



Students from Cason Lane Academy in Murfreesboro, Tenn, wish Vice President Al Gore a happy 50th birthday while holding Gore masks on Tuesday before his departure from Nashville back to Washington. Earlier, Gore had breakfast with his parents in their hometown of Carthage. — AP/UNB photo