

Clinton likely to nominate Bill Richardson as Energy Secy

WILLIAMSBURG, Va., May 10: US President Bill Clinton is expected to announce shortly that he will nominate Bill Richardson, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, to become his Energy Secretary, senior administration officials said.

He's certainly at the top of the list to replace Energy Secretary Federico Peña, said a senior official in Washington. "Things can always change, but I doubt it. We expect him to be the nominee."

Clinton who was in Williamsburg attending the annual strategy conference of Senate Democrats, has not said who he will nominate, aides said a formal announcement may not come for a few weeks.

Richardson, a former member of the House of Representatives from New Mexico had hoped to be picked as Energy Secretary at the start of Clinton's second term in 1997. Instead, he was given the UN job partly because of a reputation for sympathetic dealings with Third World nations.

BJP wants India to switch to presidential system

NEW DELHI, May 10: The main power behind India's Hindu nationalist-led government wants the world's largest democracy to switch to a presidential system for better governance, reports AFP.

Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani has called for a national debate to decide if India should continue with the Westminster parliamentary model introduced to the country after independence from Britain in 1947.

Advani's move has sparked furious protests from the opposition, which suspects the call to be a deep-rooted conspiracy by Hindu nationalists to eventually do away with democracy.

But Advani, a master strategist who is widely considered to be the driving force behind the two-month-old coalition government, refutes the charge.

"The idea is not to reject the present constitution but to improve it," he told members of his rightist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's

Party), which heads the fragile ruling coalition.

Although calls for a change to the presidential system have been made several times in the past five decades. It is the first time a leader of one of India's main parties is rooting for the idea.

Any change in the system of governance would, however, require the backing of two-thirds of the Indian parliament members which the nationalists lack by a wide margin.

The Indian Constitution, one of the most exhaustive in the world and framed in 1950, advocates a parliamentary system of governance — which many believe is responsible for the present political instability.

India — with more than 950 million people and 600 million voters — has had six minority governments since the 1989 election threw up the first coalition government.

Before that, it saw one-party governments under such powerful Congress leaders as Jawa-

harlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

Advocates of the presidential system argue it suits India better.

The critics don't agree. "Advani's attempt is to subvert parliamentary democracy," said a spokesman for former prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral's People's Party. "It is against the ethos of our country's freedom struggle."

"It appears (Advani) is under the influence of the American system." But Advani's call — made twice during the past week — has already sparked a debate of sorts in the media and political parties.

Some believe he is seeking to sidetrack national attention from the failure so far of the Hindu nationalists to provide a stable government despite their election pledge.

"One reason why the BJP leaders have fallen for the presidential system would be their belief that in a direct contest to the presidency they would be in

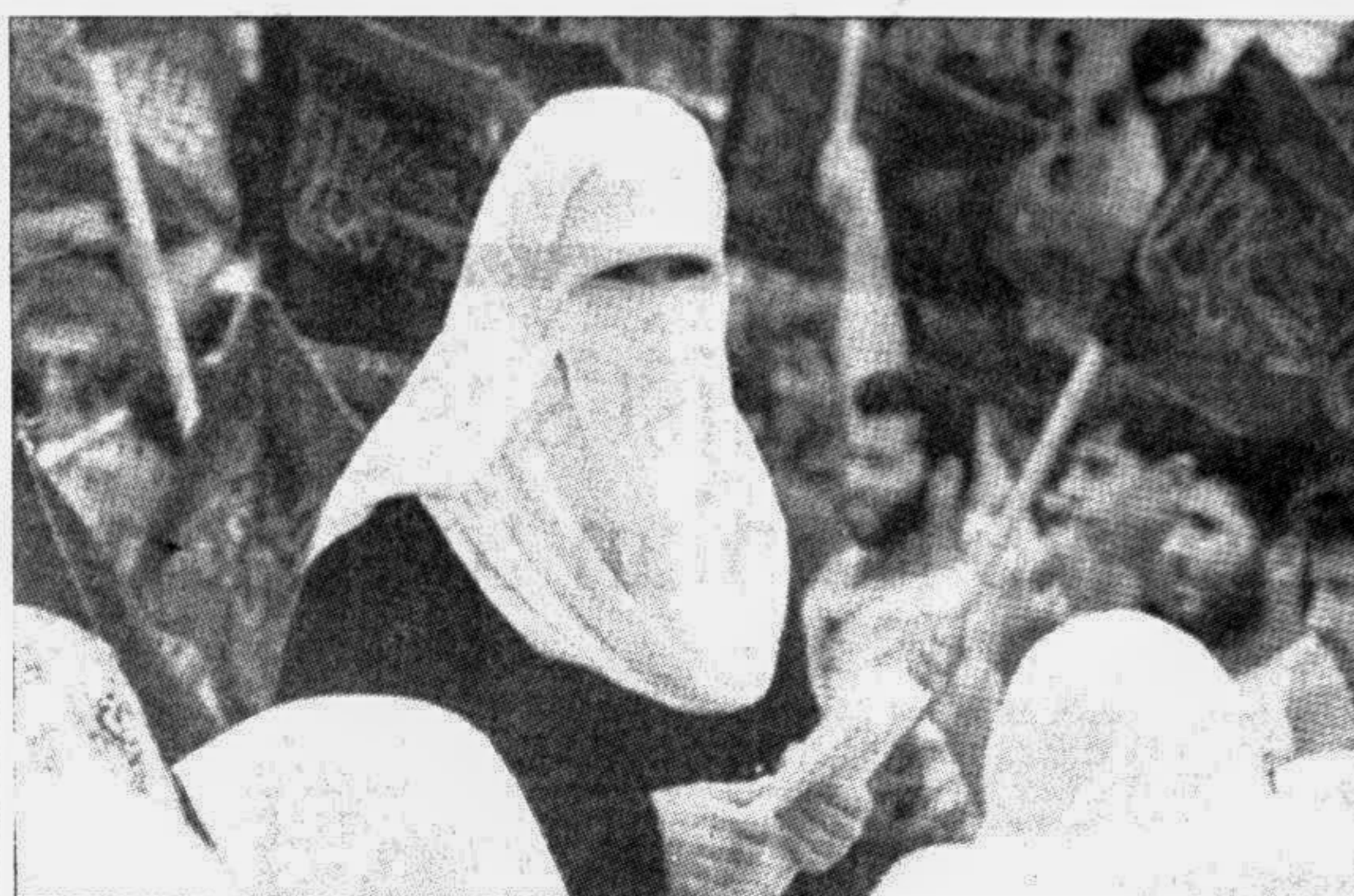
a far more advantageous position than the leaders of any other party because of their popularity and Pan-India appeal," said the Indian Express.

The Westminster model may have been found wanting... but there is no guarantee the (proposed) system would be foolproof," the newspaper said, adding India's prime minister had more powers than even the US president.

Kashmir's Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah had favoured a presidential system even before India went to the polls last February-March amid signs that a hung parliament was most likely.

Constitutional expert Subash Kashyap, however, said the debate proposed by Advani was "not very relevant."

"It is largely politically motivated," he told AFP. "It is a non-issue. In any case both parliamentary and presidential forms of government would be part of the democratic framework."



A veiled supporter of the militant Islamic group Hamas speaks to friends as group leaders denounce Israel and the stalled peace process at a rally in the West Bank town of Hebron Saturday. About 1,000 Hamas supporters attended the rally screaming "Revenge, revenge" and "God is great," blaming Israel for the death in March of its chief bombmaker. The flags read "there is no God but Allah." Dennis Ross, a senior US envoy currently in the area, Saturday cast gloom on the prospects for peace talks in Washington beginning Monday as hoped. — AP/UNB photo

Iran terms Hillary's remarks on Palestinian state as 'soothing words'

TEHRAN, May 10: An Iranian newspaper on Saturday said recent remarks by US First Lady Hillary Clinton advocating a Palestinian state were "soothing words" based on "humanity and rationalism," reports Reuters.

The White House has said the first lady's statement on Thursday was personal and did not reflect the views of President Bill Clinton.

"These soothing words were aired from the White House, the residence of the top most authority of the United States," the Daily Tehran Times said.

"No doubt these words are personal and not from the pro-Zionist administration or the Congress," the English-language paper said in an editorial. "But Hillary's feelings are shared by common Americans and common peoples in the West along with billion of people in Asia and Africa."

"We are sure that billions around the globe will join the chorus with Hillary as it is based on humanity and rationalism," the Tehran Times said.

Mrs Clinton made her remarks in a satellite hookup from Washington to a conference in Geneva bringing together young Arabs and Israelis.

Her statement was seized on by Jewish and Arab Americans as a signal from the White House, but spokesman Mike McCurry was adamant it was not.

"That view expressed personally by the first lady is not the view of the president," he said.

The first lady said, "I think that the territory the Palestinians currently inhabit, and whatever additional territory they will obtain through the peace negotiations, should be considered and evolve into a functioning modern state."

That state would be "responsible for the well-being of its people and is seen on the same footing as any other state in terms of dealing responsibly with all of the issues that state governments must deal with."

Law and order situation in West Bengal best in India: Basu

CALCUTTA, May 10: West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu tonight claimed that the law and order situation in the state was best in the country, reports PTI.

Reacting to Union Home Minister LK Advani's comment at New Delhi asking the West Bengal government to take stern action to check killings of opposition party workers in view of the Panchayat polls slated for May 28, Basu said they should have talked to the state government before making such a comment.

"We know their culture. Let them do what they can, the veteran Marxist said here. Advani's comment follows the complaint made by Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee to the home minister to protest against the killing of 12 political workers in the state."

Banerjee had raised the issue at the meeting of the coordination committee of BJP and its allies here yesterday.

ME peace talks cancelled

WASHINGTON, May 10: Middle East peace talks scheduled here today have been cancelled because of "differences" that remain between Israel and the Palestinians, the White House confirmed late Saturday, reports AFP.

The president's invitation to Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat to initiate final status negotiations in Washington today was conditioned on an understanding on all the issues," the White House said in a statement issued after US envoy Dennis Ross met with Netanyahu in Israel.

Based on Ambassador Ross's discussion yesterday, differences remain. Ambassador Ross returned to Washington yesterday and will report to the president and to the secretary of state," the statement said.

A White House spokesman said Ross was expected to meet with Clinton today.

AP adds: A senior Israeli official said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was angered by a US ultimatum to accept the deal and by remarks made earlier this week by the US first lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, in support of an independent

Palestinian state. US President Bill Clinton had set a Monday deadline for Israel to accept an American compromise plan, which calls for an Israeli troop pullback from 13 per cent of the West Bank. In return, Clinton had promised to begin talks Monday in Washington on a permanent peace settlement, something Israel has pushed for.

The US envoy, Dennis Ross, failed to break any new ground during two hours of talks with Netanyahu Saturday night. Talks Friday between Ross and the prime minister also failed to produce progress.

Netanyahu's aide, David Ben-Zion, said the two men would meet again Sunday and reiterated that a Monday summit in Washington would not be possible.

"There is no way that we can finish discussions and arrive at any kind of a solution by Monday," Bar Ilan told The Associated Press.

The White House issued a statement Saturday night saying "differences" remained following Ross' discussion Saturday and that he would return Sunday to Washington.

"White House deputy press secretary Joe Lockhart told reporters that Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had an 'open invitation' to come to Washington on Monday," but with Ross returning to Washington Sunday it doesn't look like it's going to happen."

Ross probably will not brief Clinton until Monday, he said. The senior Israeli official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said by demanding acceptance of the plan, the United States had "violated a long-standing agreement that only Israel can decide on its security needs."

Arafat has accepted the American plan, and Ross met with him Saturday in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Afterward, Ross said he would continue to search for ways to gain Israel's approval.

"There are differences that remain — the differences aren't large, but they do remain," he said.

The Palestinians said they still plan to be in Washington on Monday and warned that a continued deadlock could lead to violence.

India has evidence of strong Chinese presence in Myanmar

NEW DELHI, May 10: India has "crucial evidence" of a strong Chinese naval presence in Myanmar and Chinese vessels are visiting islands near the Indian coast to monitor signals, traffic, a daily said today, reports AFP.

The Pioneer newspaper quoted unidentified Indian officials as saying they had proof that at least 42 Chinese naval engineers and operations officers had been deployed in seven Myanmar (Burma) naval bases in the Bay of Bengal.

They said the bases, including the Coco Islands, the Halangyi Islands and the Ayerwady Naval Station, were located near India's east coast.

"Senior officials said the Chinese have been building up the pressure by sending vessels

to intercept Indian signals communications," the Pioneer said, adding that the latest sighting occurred in March.

India's new Defence Minister George Fernandes has sparked a storm by terming China as India's number one threat. He has accused it of building up naval bases on Myanmar's territory and of helping Pakistan to develop a surface-to-surface missile.

China has denied being a threat to India. Fernandes toned down his remarks but said there could be no "let-up" of troops deployed in the Indo-Chinese border.

Fernandes also accused Beijing of stockpiling nuclear weapons and extending military airfields in Tibet to India's north during the past six

months, adding that China was also training Myanmar's Army. India and China fought a brief border war in 1962, leading to a virtual freeze in ties for 14 years. Relations have been on the mend and several high-level visits exchanged. Last month, the People's Liberation Army chief General Fu Quanyou came to India for talks.

India says China still holds 40,000 square kilometres of its territory in Kashmir. China lays claim to a swathe of Indian territory in the far eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Fernandes is a long-standing critic of China and of the military junta in Myanmar and one of the most vocal Indian supporters of Tibetan independence.

India for effective guidance of globalisation process

CAIRO, May 10: India Saturday stressed that the process of globalisation required careful and effective guidance and said the regulation of government and market are must if future shocks are to be avoided, reports PTI.

Minister of State for External Affairs, Vasurndara Raju told ministers from G-15 countries here that the grouping can take satisfaction that it had drawn the attention of developed countries on these issues in the past and added international community has at last woken up to the need for pre-

ventive, early warning and remedial mechanism with regard to such crisis.

She cautioned that only few can escape financial destabilisation and economic declaration if one major region suffered a meltdown. The grouping needed to take far-sighted view for complementing their efforts at trans-regional cooperation the minister added.

Referring to WTO, she said the G-15 summit beginning on Monday should send signals to WTO ministerial and GATT commemorative meetings later this month.

20,000 Cambodian refugees being evacuated to new camp in Thailand

BANGKOK, May 10: Some 20,000 Cambodian refugees, mostly Khmer Rouge dependents, are being evacuated to a new camp in the northern Thai province of Si Sa Ket for better control and security reasons, the Bangkok Post reported today, says Xinhua.

The newspaper said Thai military officials had begun relocating those refugees from a makeshift camp about eight km from the border to a nearby camp.

Lankan troops kill 8 LTTE rebels

COLOMBO, May 10: Government soldiers shot dead eight Tamil Tiger rebels in three separate clashes in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, a military official said Sunday, reports AP.

Soldiers killed six rebels on Saturday near Mankulam, 245 kilometers (153 miles) north of the capital, Colombo, military spokesman Maj Kumara Dewage said.

Mankulam is a rebel stronghold located on a vital roadway which the military is trying to wrest from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In a separate incident in the same area, soldiers shot dead a rebel, Dewage said in a statement.



Israeli singer Dana International celebrates her victory in the Eurovision Song Contest at the Birmingham Indoor Arena Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

US pressure on Milosevic for talks with Albanians

BELGRADE, May 10: Warning of the danger of a wider war in the Balkans, the two top American envoys for the Balkans paid a surprise visit to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and increased the pressure to negotiate an end to the turmoil in the restive Kosovo province, reports AP.

Milosevic has so far refused independence and has rejected foreign mediation for any talks with the Albanians, who have smarted under police and army rule since being stripped of broad autonomy in 1989.

As Serbia faced fresh sanctions over its refusal to negotiate, the envoys and Milosevic met Saturday for 4 1/2 hours, apparently without making significant progress. The previously unannounced visit by Richard Holbrooke and US envoy for the Balkans Robert Gelbard showed pressure is mounting on Milosevic to open negotiations.

Holbrooke, who brokered the 1995 peace in Bosnia, said Kosovo's deteriorating situation had led US President Bill Clinton and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to send him to the federal capital of Belgrade. He is to return Monday for more talks with Milosevic.

Holbrooke declined to comment on the talks, saying only that he would meet the leaders of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians on Sunday, and then travel to neighbouring Albania where he will talk to top officials there.

He said he would shuttle briefly to Tirana "because that's very much part of the problem and therefore part of the solution, I hope."

Yugoslavia has been accus-

ing neighbouring Albania of arming, training and otherwise supporting its brethren, ethnic Albanians who are a majority in Kosovo, the Serbian southern province.

Ethnic Albanians, 90 per cent of Kosovo's 2 million people, seek independence from Serbia, which together with the province of Montenegro comprises what is left of Yugoslavia.

Algerian troops kill 5 militants

ALGERIA, May 10: Five armed Islamic militants were killed by Algerian Security Services at Sidi Hadjree in southeastern Algeria, the security services announced, reports AFP.

In Algiers, a home-made bomb exploded in a cafe in the working class Bab el Oued district of the city, injuring 15 people, according to security forces. Earlier, witnesses said no body was hurt in the attack.

The evening newspaper Le Soir meanwhile said that two civilians were killed and seven others wounded Thursday in a double bomb attack in Boudjira, near Dellys, on the coast east of Algiers.

The Algerian Army has launched a major sweep in the area, considered dangerous because of the presence of armed Islamic groups fighting the military-backed government.

Morning newspapers on Saturday reported that 20 people were wounded, three seriously, in a bomb blast west of the Algerian capital.

Herbal injection for cancer treatment

BELJING, May 10: China has developed an injection form of anti-cancer treatment based on the principles of traditional Chinese medicine, the official Xinhua news agency claimed Saturday, reports AFP.

Clinical experiments have shown that the new drug is effective in treating cancers of the lungs, liver and stomach, and causes fewer side-effects than chemotherapeutic drugs," the Xinhua report said, while stopping short of talking of a total cure.

The treatment is said to kill cancer cells and fight metastasis while regulating and enhancing the body's immune system.

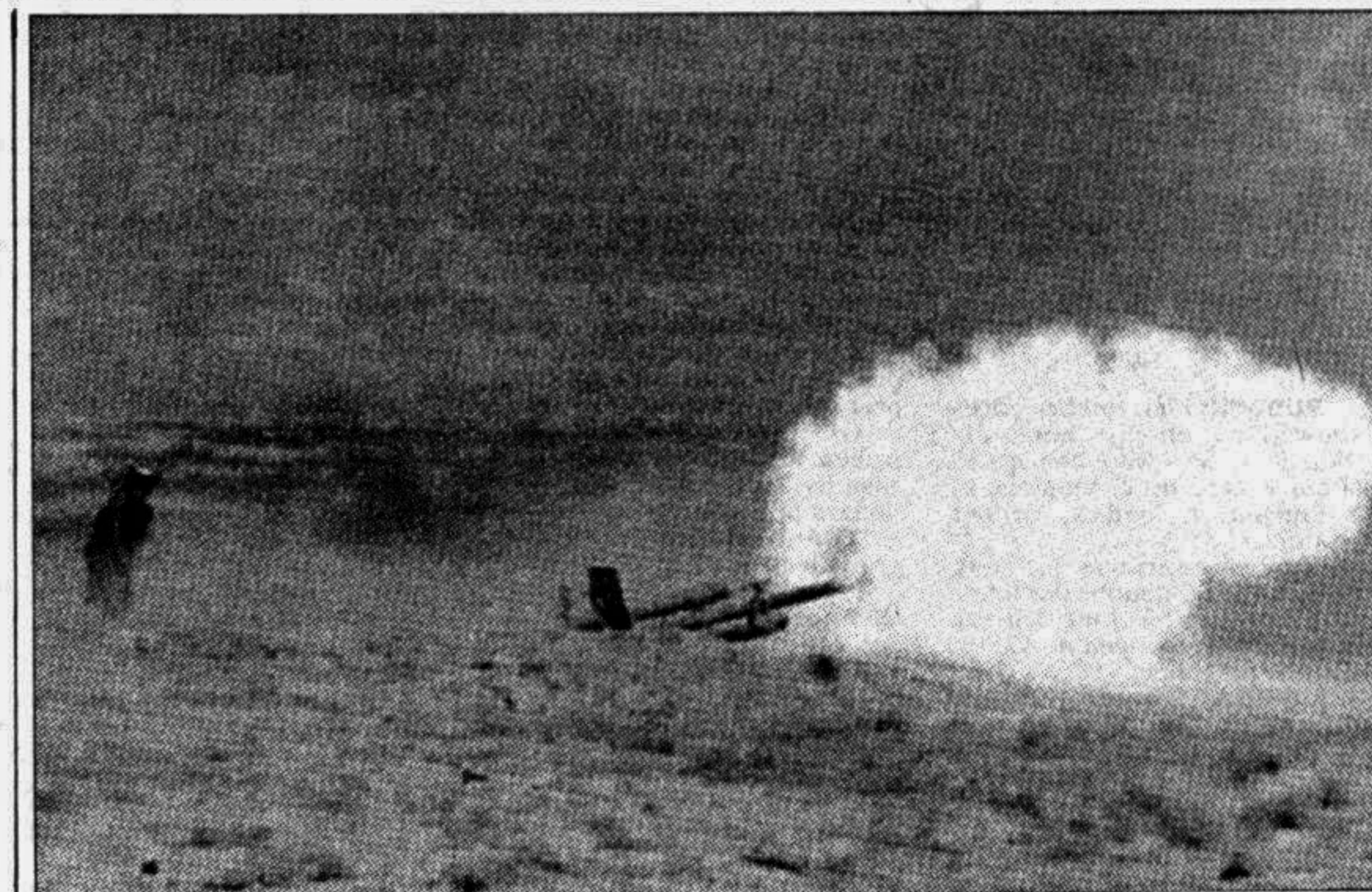
"The state administration of traditional Chinese medicine announced here yesterday that this research achievement leads the way to producing medicine for 50,000 cancer patients annually," Xinhua reported.

Experts at the Zhejiang College of Traditional Chinese Medicine spent 20 years developing the injection, known as "Kang Lai Te". It is extracted from the herb semen coix and applied in the form of intravenous drip or injection, the report said.

The anti-cancer injection, which was put into serial production in August 1997, has been granted patents in China, the United States, Russian and the Philippines, it added.

Previously Chinese scientists have only claimed that Chinese traditional herbal medicines can help modern medicine in prolonging the life of cancer victims.

"Previously, traditional Chinese medicine tonics used to fight cancer could only be taken orally, and it was thought that traditional Chinese medicine could only play an auxiliary role in treating cancer," Xinhua said.



Taliban soldier fires heavy artillery towards opposition positions, Saturday at the front-line, 20 km north of Kabul. Intense fighting broke out between Taliban militia and Masood's fighters with many exchanges of heavy artillery and rockets. — AP/UNB photo

Pak riot police trying to stop Muslim-Christian clash

FAISALABAD, Pakistan, May 10: A mob of Muslim extremists armed with sticks and bricks attacked thousands of Christian mourners, who had gathered Sunday to bury a bishop, who killed himself to protest a death sentence given to a Christian accused of insulting Islam, reports AP.

Riot police fired rounds of tear gas shells at the mob, who screamed slogans in favour of Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws and demanded the immediate execution of Ayub Masih — the Christian man accused of blaspheming Islam.

The mob set fire to five shops and beat dozens of Christians and several policemen before being stopped, eyewitnesses said.

Tension had been mounting in this northeastern Pakistani city where an estimated 10,000 minority Christians had converged to say their final farewells to Bishop John Joseph, who shot himself in a

courthouse last Wednesday.

Joseph's death was to protest the death sentence imposed on Masih under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which makes it a capital offense to insult Islam.

Inside the cathedral of St Peter and Paul in Faisalabad Christian leaders condemned the blasphemy law and shouted their praise for the Roman Catholic Bishop Joseph.

His body was buried in the sprawling compound outside the church amid the sound of weeping and wailing from the thousands who had gathered to say their final farewell.

A mob of Sunni Muslim extremists had gathered in a bazaar, not more than one km from the site of the burial in Faisalabad, screaming slogans in support of the blasphemy law and demanding the execution of Masih.

Under the shadow of heavy security, thousands of Christian mourners streamed in processions to the church, carrying

banners demanding the abolition of the controversial law and condemning the alleged persecution of Christians in the Islamic nation.

The gates of the church were also manned by armed Christian volunteers.

"The blood of Bishop Joseph will pave the way for a revolution," read a banner. Joseph, 65, was the chairman of a Human Rights Commission established by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan.

Some Christian leaders accused the administration of stopping the mourners from coming to the church.

A Christian lawmaker, Johnson Michael, accused Pakistan's government of bowing to Islamic extremists and demanded the repeal of the blasphemy law, which provides for the death penalty for anyone who insults Islam or Islam's Prophet, Mohammed (SM).