

International

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. — reports Reuter.

"He's certainly at the top of the list" to replace Energy Secretary Federico Pena, 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 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 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 Jawaharlal 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.

"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."

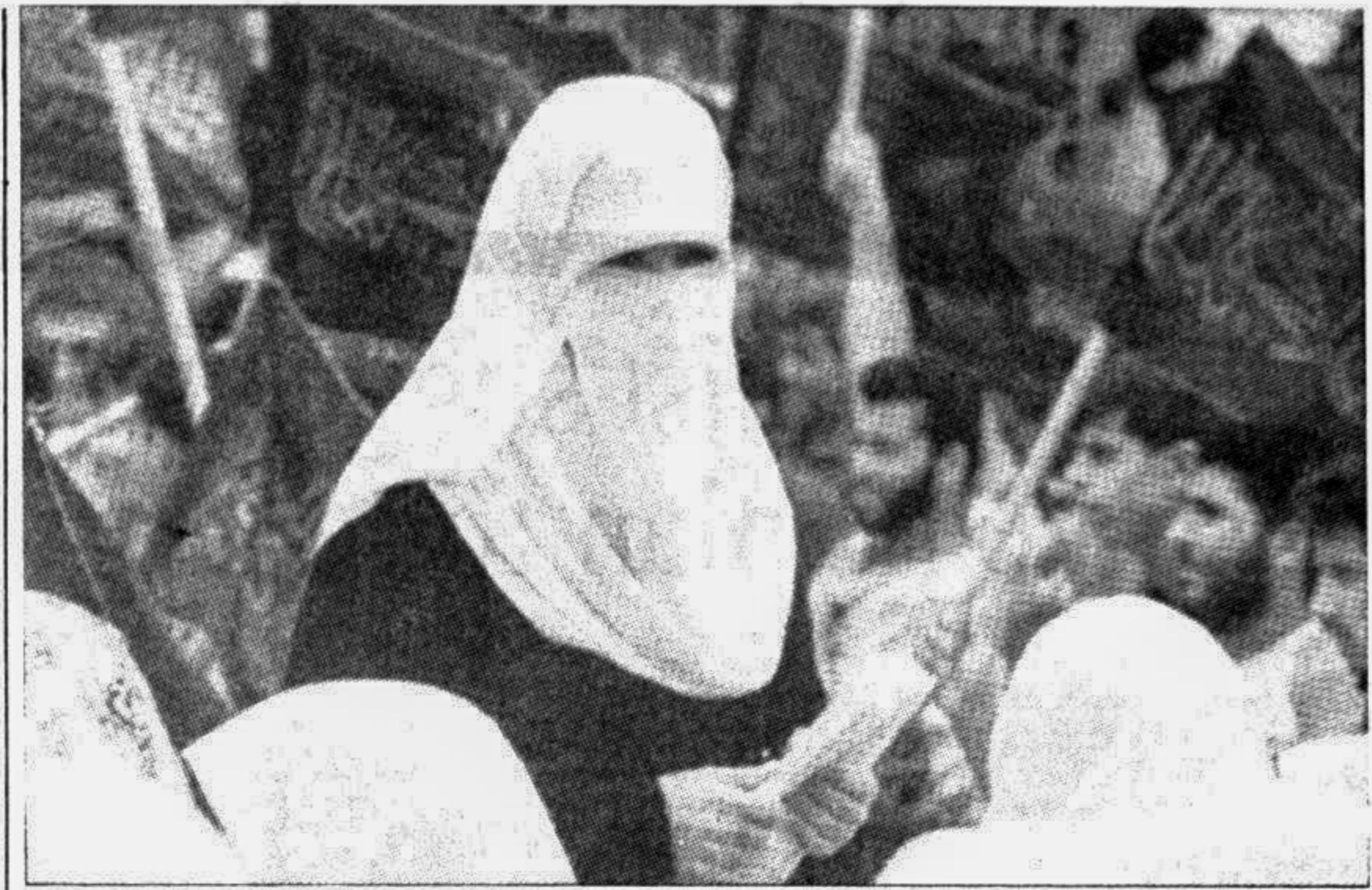
a far more advantageous position than the leaders of any other party because of their popularity and Pan-India appeal," said the Indian Express.

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

BRIEFLY



US Secretary of State Madeline Albright chats with British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook during a photo session for Foreign and Finance Ministers of the G-8 countries at Lancaster House in London, Saturday. Heads of state from the eight participating nations are to travel to Birmingham next week for the G-8 summit.

— AP/UNB photo

Sudan to allow aid shipment to Nuba:

Sudan will allow the shipment of humanitarian aid to the central Nuba region, Sudan's Foreign Minister Mustapha Othman Ismail said Saturday, AFP reports from Khartoum.

Ismail gave the spontaneous and brief interview as he met with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan whose plane was forced by bad weather to land in Sudan on its way from Uganda to Eritrea. The minister gave no details but the official Suna news agency said Ismail and Annan discussed how rescue work was proceeding in central and southern Sudan, a region hit by drought and famine.

Rwanda suspends UNHCR mission:

The Rwandan government has suspended the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) mission in the country, officials said Saturday. AFP reports from Kigali.

The decision effective Friday, was contained in a letter to human rights chief Mary Robinson. UN officials told AFP earlier Saturday that the Kigali authorities had ordered the UNHCR spokesman for Rwanda out of the country for endangering state security. The High Commissioner refused to comment on the reported expulsion of Jose-Luis Herero.

Serbian police close Kosovo's highway:

Serbian police closed Kosovo's main east-west highway on Saturday after fighting with separatist guerrillas in which at least three ethnic Albanians were killed in the last 24 hours, Albanian sources said. Reuter reports from Komorane.

Reporters who visited a fortified Serbian checkpoint at Komorane during the afternoon said police were sheltering behind sandbags and in nearby buildings after coming under fresh attack. The increased fighting erupted as US envoy Richard Holbrooke arrived in Belgrade to try to break the deadlock between Yugoslavia and Kosovo Albanian leaders seeking independence.

Suharto arrives in Cairo:

President Suharto of Indonesia arrived in Cairo Saturday ahead of the start of next week's G15 summit, AFP reports from Cairo.

Suharto, who is on his first foreign visit for several months amid unrest in several major Indonesian cities, made no comment on the situation on his arrival in Cairo. The Indonesian president, who was welcomed at the airport by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, is due to stay on for a two-day official visit after the G15 summit which runs from Monday to Wednesday, officials said.

Sakic considered as war criminal:

The US and Yugoslavia both considered Dinko Sakic, the Croatian commandant of a World War II concentration camp, as a "war criminal," the US special envoy for the Balkans, Robert Gelbard, said here Saturday, AFP reports from Belgrade.

"The US and Yugoslavia share tremendous worries that Sakic is someone we both consider as a real war criminal who has to be tried," Gelbard said. "We believe that he is guilty and needs to receive a very strong sentence but that is for the court to decide," US envoy added.

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 chemotherapy 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.

"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.

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 coicis 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, Russia 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.

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