

International

Pak govt under pressure to detonate nuclear device

ISLAMABAD, May 12: Just one day after India detonated three nuclear devices, Pakistan's one-year-old government was under pressure Tuesday from across the political spectrum to detonate a nuclear device of its own, reports AP.

Whether it was avowed liberals like former prime minister Benazir Bhutto or right wing religious leaders, the consensus was the same: Pakistan should explode a nuclear device — and soon.

Ms Bhutto suggested the test should be conducted within the month.

The former head of Pakistan's secret service Hamid Gul called for a "matching and powerful" demonstration of Islamabad's nuclear capability.

By midday the Karachi Stock Market plunged 42 points in trading with investors fearing Pakistan would conduct a retaliatory test and almost certainly be slapped with international sanctions.

"There is a widespread perception that Pakistan will go ahead and conduct a test... which could lead to a serious economic embargo against Pakistan," said Farhan Mahmood, a senior stock broker with UBS Global Securities Pakistan Limited in the southern city of Karachi.

The stock market closed Monday at 1514.11, but Mahmood predicted it could plummet to 1350 points over the next two weeks as jittery investors stay away from Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Dr Abdul

Quadeer Khan, the architect of Pakistan's nuclear programme, said that India's test was not a surprise and Islamabad was ready to explode a device of its own.

Quadeer told the state-run news agency that he was waiting for the go ahead from the government.

"We are ever ready and will do what the government decides," he said. "We had been feeling for a long time that India would carry out thermonuclear tests."

A former foreign secretary in Ms Bhutto's ousted government, Tanveer Ahmed Khan told The News, an independent English-language daily newspaper, that India left Pakistan no option but to detonate a device.

"It is quite clear that the Indians have called Pakistan's bluff and we have no way out but to carry out our own nuclear test," the former foreign secretary was quoted as saying.

"But as soon as we do, we should be ready to see the United States coming down on us like a ton of bricks," Khan said.

But even before the United States could urge Pakistan to show restraint, political leaders were warning against bowing to US pressure.

"It is the test of the nation and of the leadership whether it gives in to US pressure," said Gul.

In a statement to the Senate on Monday night, Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub promised

that Pakistan would make its defences "impregnable against any Indian threat, be it nuclear or conventional."

The leader of Pakistan's small, but powerful right wing religious party Jamaat-e-Islami, said "India designs in this region are not for peace, but destruction." He demanded the government conduct a nuclear test "immediately."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was to return to Pakistan later Tuesday from a meeting of regional leaders in Kazakhstan.

However, his Information Minister Mushahid Hussain called for quick international sanctions against India.

Pakistan and India have fought three wars since the Asian subcontinent gained its independence in 1947. The two neighbours came dangerously close to a fourth, possibly, nuclear confrontation in 1990 over the disputed state of Kashmir.

The US cut all military and economic aid to Pakistan in 1990 saying it believed that Islamabad had crossed the nuclear threshold. Since then Pakistan has accused Washington of discriminating against Islamabad, while India forged ahead with its nuclear programme.

"Pakistan has consistently drawn the attention of the international community to India's nuclear aspirations... unfortunately (it) did not receive the attention that (it) merited," Ayub said in his statement.

Estrada calls on opponents to concede defeat in polls

MANILA, May 12: Vice President Joseph Estrada, enjoying a strong lead in the Philippines' presidential race, called on his nine opponents Tuesday to concede defeat like gentlemen, reports AP.

Meanwhile, vote counting, expected to take up to two weeks, slowed further as tallying was halted in a southern province after its governor protested that opposition candidates were receiving no votes.

Estrada, whose support comes mostly from the Philippine poor he entertained for years as an actor in low-budget action movies, said his victory was "already in the bag."

"I hope they'll be gentlemen," Estrada said of his opponents, who include one woman, Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago. "They should concede as soon as possible."

With less than 1 per cent of ballots counted, Estrada had 45 per cent of the vote, according to the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections, a poll watchdog group. His closest rival was former Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim with 23 per cent.

NAMFREL's figures have shown Estrada consistently in the lead, although the positions of other candidates have shifted as it tabulates votes from various regions.

Turnout was heavy in Monday's polls, and there were fewer reports of violence than in recent Philippine elections.

India had political reasons to conduct 1st N-tests in 24 yrs

NEW DELHI, May 12: Domestic politics may have been as much a factor as India's security in Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's decision to conduct India's first nuclear tests in 24 years, reports AP.

Less than two months in office, Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata party heads a weak multiparty coalition with no unified direction and little common ground. The desertion of any of his 19 partners could topple his government.

India exploded three nuclear devices Monday, putting it in an exclusive club of nations with proven nuclear weapons capability.

"Domestically, this will be very popular," said political analyst Vinod Mehta. "Vajpayee has been in difficulty ever since taking office. Now people will forget all that."

Opposition parties praised the demonstration of Indian strength and resolve. Former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral of the opposition Janata Dal Party said India's efforts to persuade the nuclear powers to dismantle their arsenals were met with "evasive and high-handed" responses.

Vajpayee has promised to set up a National Security Council and thoroughly examine India's security environment before revising its nuclear policy, which since 1974 had tried to keep to the middle ground of not declaring itself a nuclear power, but neither promising to disarm.

Monday's test came without

the promised public examination — an indication that the government may have felt pressured to make an immediate dramatic move.

Indian N-tests' magnitude was 5 to 20 kilotonnes of TNT

SYDNEY, May 12: India's nuclear tests registered about five on the Richter scale and represented five to twenty kilotonnes of TNT, about the same as the bomb that hit Hiroshima at the end of World War II, seismologists who monitored the tests said here today, reports AFP.

Ken Muirhead, head of the Australian Geological Survey Organisation's nuclear monitoring section, said only one signal registered, which meant all three were triggered simultaneously or two were too small to register.

India conducted three nuclear tests on Monday, exactly a week ahead of the 24th anniversary of the country's first nuclear experiment.

"We gave it a magnitude of between five and 20 kilotonnes of TNT, which was comparable with the Hiroshima A-bomb," Muirhead said.

"That's our estimate and that estimate will improve, I guess, as time goes by and we get additional information from around the world."

Seize opportunity for peace, KSA urges Israel

DUBAI, May 12: Saudi Arabia urged Israel on Monday to seize the opportunity for peace saying circumstances may not be conducive again, reports Reuters.

The official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said the Cabinet meeting headed by King Fahd also urged the United States to step up its efforts to push the Middle East peace process forward.

"The council urged the Israeli government to seize the available opportunity and to answer the call for peace for the sake of the people of the region because the present circumstances may not be conducive again," SPA said, quoting Information Minister Fouad bin Abdul-Salam bin Mohammad Farisi.

The statement did not elaborate, but the Saudi Cabinet was apparently referring to Arab and Palestinian readiness to forge peace with the Jewish state.

"The council urged the sponsors of the peace process, particularly the United States of America... to exert utmost efforts to push the peace process forward and to use the conducive circumstances to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region," it said.

The United States has been trying unsuccessfully to nudge Israel to hand over 13 per cent West Bank land to Palestinians under a self-rule deal which called for a gradual Israeli withdrawal.

Benazir to face warrants issued for her arrest

LONDON, May 12: Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said on Monday she would return to her homeland to face warrants issued for her arrest.

Bhutto told Reuters in a telephone interview she had been left penniless by a court ruling on Monday and accused the Pakistani government of subverting justice to silence her.

A special accountability court in Pakistan issued the no-bail warrants on charges of handing out jobs while she was in power, after she failed to appear before the judge on Monday.

"I consider this to be an absolutely unlawful move against me. I have been out of the country on a lecture tour of America as everyone knows said Bhutto now an opposition leader."

"The court has not served me a notice and then they have taken away all my property," Bhutto said.

But she said she would not be deterred from returning to her homeland by the court's move.

"I will go back and they will see I am not intimidated. I am sure the people will support me," she said.

A court spokesman said the charges were that the former prime minister made illegal appointments to the state airline Pakistan International

Airlines (PIA) and undue promotions and foreign assignments to staff.

"They are charging me with appointing stewards and stewardesses to the national airline. These are people I never even met," he said.

She accused Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government of "engaging in a criminal conspiracy, to forge and steal documents with a view to silencing me."

"The like martial law all over again," she said.

Bhutto said she believed Sharif had taken the action because she had planned to go to Britain's High Court to challenge the moves against her.

"They don't want me to have any money so that I can't do this," she said.

"I don't have a penny to pay my children's school fees and I am not a person who is accustomed to this," she said.

Bhutto, dismissed twice as prime minister on disputed charges of corruption and misrule has denied every allegation of corruption levelled at her by the government and media.

She says Sharif's government is making her a scapegoat for Pakistan's faltering economic performance and reputation as one of the world's most corrupt countries.

Fresh fighting in Afghanistan

KABUL, May 12: As opposition soldiers battled advancing Taliban troops in the north, fighting erupted between rivals within the alliance over control of their northern stronghold of Mazar-e-Sharif, said international aid workers and Taliban officials Tuesday, reports AP.

Soldiers loyal to Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum and Shiite Muslims belonging to Hezb-e-Wahadat — both members of the anti-Taliban alliance — were reportedly fighting on the outskirts of Mazar-e-Sharif said aid workers, who didn't want to be identified, even by organisation.

The fighting was reportedly heavy, although there were no immediate reports of casualties.

In March fierce fighting between Dostum and rival Shiite Muslims battered Mazar-e-Sharif, some 300 KM north of Kabul, and forced most international aid workers to leave.

Some aid organisations have since returned, but both the United Nations and the International Red Cross have refused to allow their expatriate staff to return to the city.

A spokesman for the Shiite Muslims in northern Afghanistan, Syed Ahmed, denied the claims of fresh fighting and said that the alliance still was trying to disarm the many factions inside the beleaguered city.

UAE likely to buy F-16s

WASHINGTON, May 12: The United Arab Emirates is expected to announce today the purchase of F-16 warplanes worth some 6 billion dollar as part of a 10-year arms procurement programme which will cost about 15 billion dollars, reports Reuters.

The deal with Lockheed Martin Corp. (LMT) is expected to be announced after high-level talks at the White House. It follows a UAE's December order from France's billion deal.

The UAE's procurement plans also include the possible purchase of additional Hawks — a popular training aircraft made by British Aerospace (BAE) — and a pending tender for ocean capable patrol boats in a programme known as Liwa.

"We could make a decision on the Liwa programme next year," the UAE's Armed Forces Chief of Staff Sheikh Mohammad bin Zaid al-Nahayyan told Reuters in an interview in Washington.

He will be part of the UAE delegation, lead by his brother Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khalifa.

Clinton trying to overcome Israeli objections to ME peace talks

WASHINGTON, May 12: Trying to overcome Israel's rejection of US terms for Mideast peace talks, President Bill Clinton directed Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to meet here Wednesday with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reports AP.

The terms — including a pullback from 13 per cent of the West Bank — have not changed, administration officials said Monday. Where there evidently is room for bargaining is how a withdrawal of Israeli troops may be implemented.

In Jerusalem, Israeli radio and officials reported that Netanyahu would offer a new proposal under which Israel would withdraw from 9 per cent of the West Bank over a 12-week period and hold an additional 4 per cent of the area in reserve.

The United States would be allowed to determine when it should be handed over. The timing would be based on how Palestinian authorities com-

plied with a series of obligations to crack down on Palestinian militants, end hostile propaganda against Israel and revise references in their covenant that call for the destruction of Israel.

Clinton decided to try again after meeting with Albright, national security adviser Sandy Berger and US mediator Dennis Ross. He said he regretted the peace talks were not opening Monday as planned.

Netanyahu already was due in Washington to make his case to American Jews and Congress. He will fly here Wednesday morning, a half-day ahead of schedule, to see Albright.

In Jerusalem, the prime minister said that "at the end of the day, in matters of security, it is Israel that must decide, and I think this is the view shared by, frankly, the people of America and I would like to believe also the government of the United States."

Cambodian troops capture Khmer positions along Thai border

PHNOM PENH, May 12: Cambodian government troops have captured Khmer Rouge positions along the Thai border, confiscating two tanks and an armoured personnel carrier from the guerrillas who fled westward, military officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

"We occupied Chaom Sangam at 2 pm yesterday," said Gen. Chea Mon, calling the border pass, "the last position of the Khmer Rouge," along the mountain range on Cambodia's northern border with Thailand.

The Khmer Rouge have been in disarray since late March when more than 1,000 guerrillas started defecting to the government because of dissatisfaction with Khmer Rouge leader Ta Mok's harsh rule and refusal to open peace talks with the government.

The defectors, supported by government troops, drove Ta Mok's loyalists out of his base in Anlong Veng last month.

Six Bangladeshi children jailed in Delhi set to back home soon

NEW DELHI, May 12: Six Bangladeshi children jailed here for their parents for the past eight months are set to return home soon with Indian welfare authorities confident of obtaining a remission in the prison term of the adults, reports India Abroad News Service.

The Delhi Juvenile Welfare Board has petitioned the capital's Lieutenant Governor Vijai Kapoor to reduce the jail sentence of the parents so that the children, all under six years old, can be sent to Bangladesh.

Board Chairman B.S. Gehlot told IANS that he had been assured that this would be done. Kapoor's Principal Secretary, Magsaysay Award winner Kiran Bedi, is taking a personal interest in the case, he disclosed.

The children would be able to return to their country some time this month, he said. Gehlot said that there was an urgent need to send the children back as he doubted that they were with their real parents.

The adults were convicted under the Foreigners Act for entering the country without valid travel documents. They were alleged to be taking the children to become camel race jockeys in

the Gulf. Violation of the law is punishable with a one-year jail term and a fine of Rs. 1,000 (about \$25).

They were nabbed by the Delhi Police in September 1997 along with ten other children. Ten of them were sent back to Bangladesh early this year on the initiative of non-governmental organisations in India and Bangladesh. They were part of the about 50 Bangladeshi children repatriated in three separate groups.

Vietnam struggles to deal with drought

HANOI, May 12: Neon lights are out and water conservation is in as Vietnam struggles to deal with a drought that officials say won't be over soon, reports AP.

Rains are expected this month, but many parts of the country are so parched that it will take steady precipitation to ease the crisis, local press reports said Tuesday. Some have had no significant rain since November.

20th century will end with 6 billion world population

WASHINGTON, May 12: The 20th century began with a world populated by 1.6 billion people and will end with 6 billion inhabitants with most of the growth occurring in poor countries, demographers estimate, reports AP.

The Population Reference Bureau, a non-governmental and nonprofit research organisation, said Tuesday that most young people in or near childbearing age live in developing countries and those who do tend to have more children.

Ninety per cent of young people in or near the early childbearing ages of 15 to 19 live in developing countries, it said in an annual stocktaking of the world's people.

In the most fertile part of the world, middle Africa, 18 per cent of women of early childbearing age give birth each year, the bureau said. In Western Europe, only 1 per cent do. In the United States the rate is 5 per cent and in Asia it is 4 per cent.

Early childbearing speeds population growth by cutting the number of years between generations, said Carl Haub, senior demographer at the bureau.

"When we ask what the fu-

Countries blast India for N-tests

TOKYO, May 12: Some countries condemned India on Tuesday for its first underground nuclear tests in 24 years, and recalled their ambassadors or threatened to freeze its economic aid, reports AP.

But others, including China, Asia's nuclear powerhouse and India's northern neighbor, remained quiet about the unexpected challenge to the world's efforts to ban all such tests.

On Monday, Washington called India's first nuclear explosions since 1974 "a very, very negative development," one that came only one month after a US official had personally urged New Delhi to try to ease tensions in South Asia.

Pakistan, which has fought three wars with India and openly supports rebel groups fighting for independence in Kashmir, India, said the tests would draw Islamabad into a nuclear arms race.

In Japan, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan and New Zealand, people woke up Tuesday to front-page headlines or news broadcasts about the three underground nuclear tests that India conducted Monday near the border of Pakistan, its

heavily armed arch-enemy. "India Stuns World With 3 Nuclear Tests," screamed the giant headline atop the Independent newspaper in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, India's neighbour to the east.

"This is in total defiance of the will of the international community," Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer told Australian Broadcasting Corp radio.

At a time when the world was really filled with hope... that we were seeing the end of the nuclear arms race, that dream has been shattered by India," New Zealand Prime Minister Jenny Shipley told breakfast television.

Both countries recalled their ambassadors from New Delhi.

In Japan, Siddharth Singh, India's ambassador to Japan, was summoned to parliament where Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi told him the tests "could harm the stability" of South Asia.

Obuchi urged India to stop developing nuclear arms, and Cabinet ministers agreed to meet to discuss suspending Japan's development aid to In-

dia. Japan is India's largest donor.

Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, who travels to England this week for a summit meeting of group of seven leaders, said he plans to propose joint actions against India, Kyodo News reported.

And Itcho Ito, the mayor of Nagasaki, where 70,000 people died after the US atomic bombing on Aug. 9, 1945, flew to Tokyo to lodge a protest at the Indian Embassy. There, other demonstrators milled around the building chanting anti-nuclear slogans.

In South Korea, which needed a nuclear accord four years ago to slow the arms buildup of Communist North Korea, Seoul had no immediate comment on India's tests.

But South Korean newspapers gave them prominent coverage, including editorials analyzing the possible implications.

"We cannot help but express our concern that the resumed nuclear tests in India may raise tension in the region and rekindle a nuclear arms race," the national daily Munhwa Ilbo

said in an editorial. "We demand that the countries of the world stop all nuclear tests and weapons development."

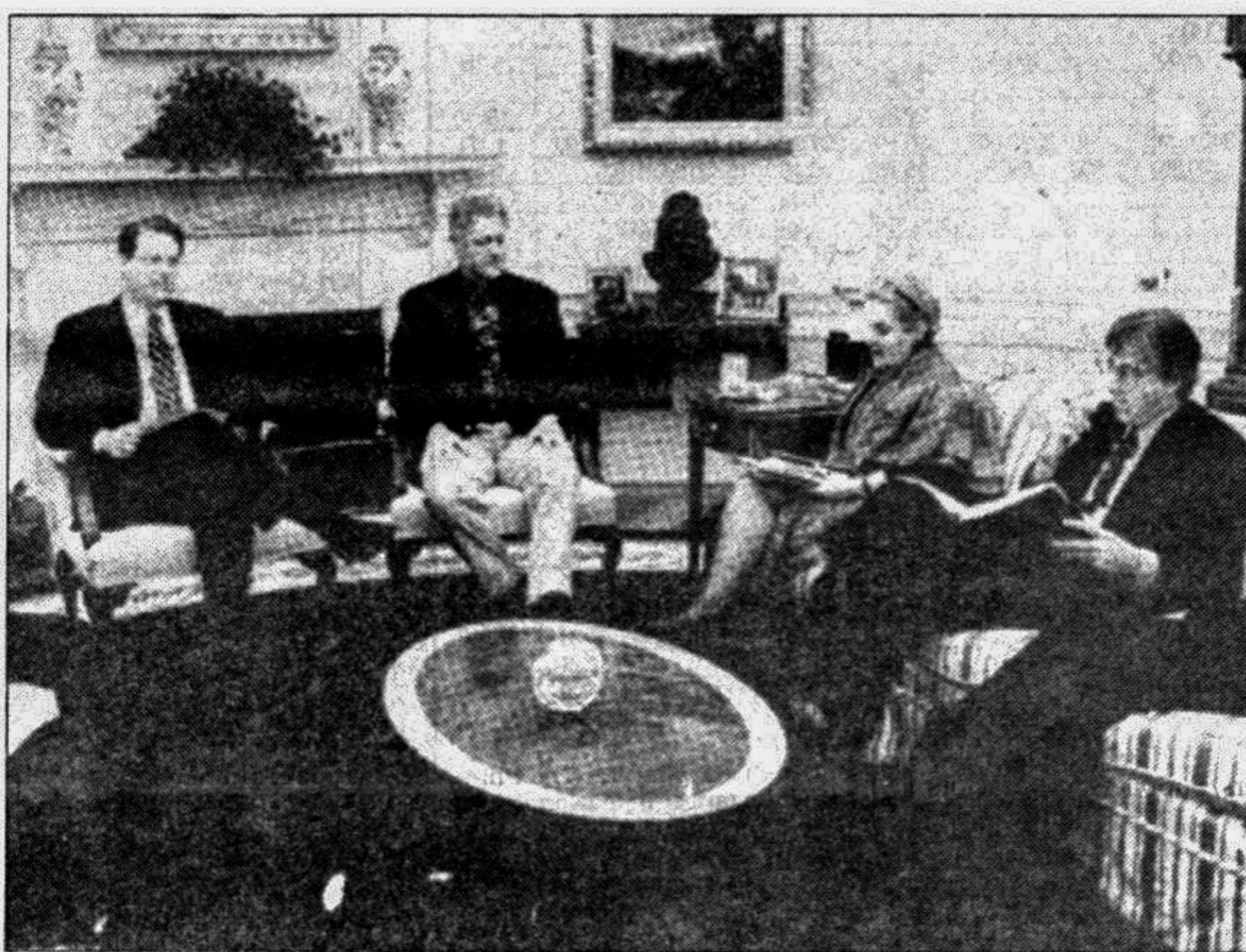
In Hong Kong, a South China Morning Post editorial said the tests ordered by India's new Hindu nationalist-led government confirmed earlier predictions that it would be bad news for India and neighbours such as Islamic Pakistan and China.

But many Asian governments gave no official reaction Tuesday, and in some countries even the media didn't seem alarmed.

In the Philippines, where a national election was held Monday, and in Thailand, stories about India's tests didn't make the front pages of the top-selling daily newspapers.

In China, state-run television used its nationwide noon broadcast Tuesday to report that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had called the explosions in India a violation of an international understanding on halting such tests.

But Chinese newspapers only carried brief Xinhua news agency stories from New Delhi reporting the tests.



President Clinton meets with his administration officials in the Oval Office of the White House Monday to discuss the Mideast situation. From left are, Vice President Al Gore, the President, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross. Trying to overcome Israel's rejection of US terms for Mideast peace talks, the President directed Albright to meet today with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. — AP/UNB photo



Philippines House Speaker Jose de Venecia, the chosen successor of President Fidel Ramos, kisses his wife Gina after they cast their ballots in the Philippines national elections in their local district of Pangasinan, Philippines, Monday. De Venecia is the closest rival to presidential candidate Vice-President Joseph Estrada who is expected to win by a large majority. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Gingrich to travel to Israel:

US House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich, who has criticised President Bill Clinton's Middle East peace efforts will travel to Israel at the end of May, his spokesman said on Monday, Reuters reports from Washington.

The spokesman said Gingrich would go to Israel with a US congressional delegation. The Georgia Republican also planned to visit Jordan, Bosnia and Italy for a meeting with Pope John Paul, the spokesman said. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had called for a summit to bring together the Palestinian and Israeli leaders in Washington on Monday but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declined to attend.

Yeltsin makes debut on Internet:

Russian President Boris Yeltsin makes his debut on the Internet yesterday to field questions about a summit of world leaders in Britain later this week, Reuters reports from Moscow.

But his new Cabinet, finally in place after weeks of political turmoil, will be wrestling with the many economic problems at home that still hamper Russia's efforts to be treated by the West as an equal on the world stage. Yeltsin flies on Friday to the English city of Birmingham for the annual gathering of the Group of Eight (G-8) main industrial nations in the English city of Birmingham.

Pollard was an Israeli spy:

Israel officially acknowledged for the first time Monday that Jonathan Pollard, a Jewish American sentenced to life imprisonment for espionage in the United States in 1987, was indeed an Israeli agent, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Pollard was an Israeli spy working for an intelligence agency called the "Scientific Liaison Bureau," a statement from an official commission headed by Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh said. The former US naval analyst captured in 1985 has long demanded such an acknowledgment from the Israeli government to facilitate his early release.

Israeli Arab was convicted eight years ago on spying charges for providing Iraq with photographs of Israel's army bases and its nuclear reactor, Supreme Court papers revealed Monday, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The case of Munir Fathi Sayed had been kept secret but the Supreme Court decided Monday to release several details when it voted in favour of a government request to deny Sayed early release. A prison parole board had decided to grant Sayed early release for completing two-thirds of his 13-year sentence.

Iran urged to secure newsman's retrial:

An international watchdog group for journalists on Monday urged Iran's president to secure a retrial for a journalist sentenced to death for espionage and sexual offenses, AP reports from Paris.

Reporters Without Borders reacted "with consternation" to Sunday's decision by the Iranian Supreme Court to turn down an appeal by Morteza Firooz, 40, former editor of the English-language Iran News. The group called on President Mohammad Khatami, considered a reformer, "to use his influence in order that a new trial, just and balanced," take place in the presence of lawyers and international observers.

Police beat up doctors in Nicaragua:

Several physicians were hurt Monday when police beat a number of people, including a pregnant woman, during protests by doctors striking for higher pay, AFP reports from Managua. A human rights group criticised the police action as excessively violent. Several physicians were hurt and 11 were still in custody late in the day, according to the Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights (CENIDH), which noted that police beat a pregnant demonstrator, who was also arrested.