

India threatening to attack Azad Kashmir: Pak PM

ISLAMABAD, May 19: The Western world's mild response to India's nuclear testing has emboldened the Hindu-nationalist government there, which now is threatening to attack Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Tuesday, reports AP.

"India is threatening every day... that they will attack (Pakistan-held) Azad Kashmir," Sharif told reporters after a speech at a 50th anniversary celebration for the state-owned Pakistan Radio.

"We are taking this threat very seriously," he said.

Since the Asian Subcontinent gained its independence in 1947, the hostile neighbours, India and Pakistan, have fought two wars over the disputed state of Kashmir — in 1948 and again in 1963.

They fought a third war in 1971 over Bangladesh, or what was then East Pakistan.

They came dangerously close to a fourth military — possibly nuclear — confrontation in 1990, again over Kashmir.

India accuses Pakistan of fomenting violence on its side of the disputed border, where a Muslim-led secessionist uprising has raged since 1989. Secessionists are demanding either outright independence or union with Islamic Pakistan.

Pakistan has denied giving military aid to Kashmiri militants and is demanding a vote by all Kashmiris to decide whether a united Kashmir should join either Pakistan or India.

New Delhi has refused to allow a vote in its half of Kash-

mir.

Last week's nuclear tests by India sparked fears of a nuclear arms race on the Asian Subcontinent, considered a volatile region because of the regional conflicts, most notably Kashmir.

Pakistan chastised the international community for ignoring its earlier warnings that India was preparing to induct nuclear weapons into its arsenal.

Now Sharif says that Pakistan is warning that India is ready to strike Pakistan-held Kashmir, a flash point for another round of fighting.

He repeated his demand that the Western world punish India.

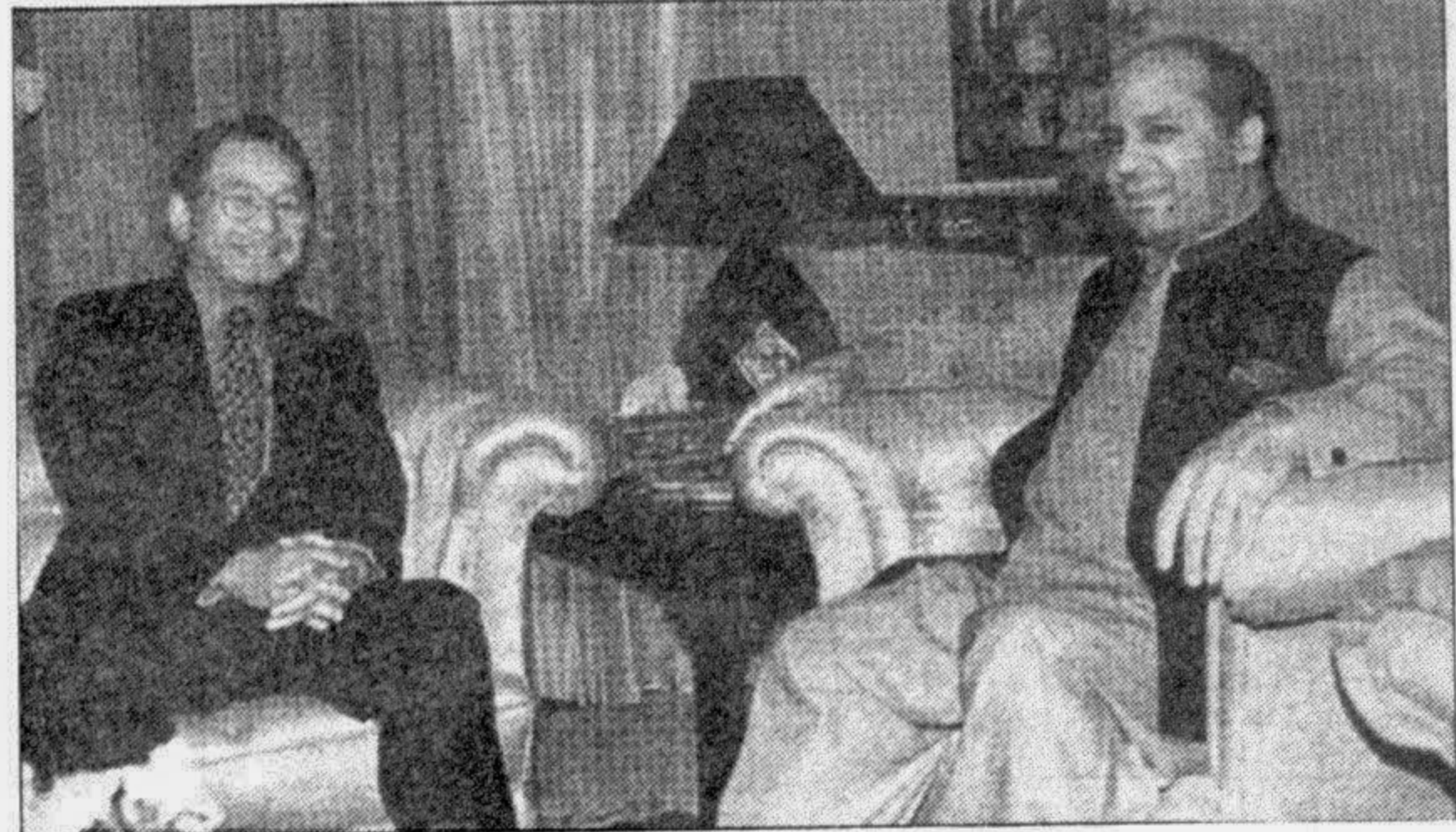
"We have the capability to counter any threat," Sharif warned. "The international community should punish India for its behavior."

Both US President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair have telephoned Sharif to urge restraint, but Pakistan's prime minister said political pressure at home is mounting.

He also said that the "lackluster" response of the world leaders at last weekend's G-8 summit in Britain has made India increasingly brazen and pushed Pakistan further into a corner.

"We have exercised restraint to show the world that we are a responsible country... we are still watching the world's reaction," he said.

But so far Sharif said what Pakistan has seen has been "disappointing."



Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (R) meets with special Japanese envoy Seiichiro Noboru at the Prime Minister House in Islamabad Monday to discuss nuclear issue. Sharif has said that Pakistan has a capability to conduct nuclear explosion within twenty-four hours. — AP/UNB photo

Indian N-tests US knew, ex-Pak army chief alleges

KARACHI, May 19: A former Pakistani army chief on Monday accused the US and Israel of conspiring to help India carry out its nuclear tests, reports AP.

"Israel and the US have been with India in this. The capability which was demonstrated by India could not be demonstrated without the support of America and Israel," Mirza Aslam Beg told reporters.

Beg said it was out of question that the US did not know about last week's nuclear tests in advance and blasted what he said was an attempt to build "Indian hegemony in the region."

Beg, army chief from 1988 to 1991, blamed the US for not supporting Pakistan in the past. "We have been struck by the snake whenever we have put our hands in the hole," he said.

He urged the government to match its own nuclear test to "check the capability demonstrated by Indians."

BRIEFLY



Former World Heavyweight Boxing Champion Muhammad Ali and his wife Yolanda Williams arrive at the premiere of the motion picture "Godzilla" in New York Monday. — AP/UNB photo

Kuwaiti FM resigns:

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah has resigned, citing differences with the prime minister, a pro-government newspaper reported Monday. The report could not be independently confirmed, says AP from Kuwait.

The newspaper did not say if Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, who is the foreign minister's elder brother, accepted the resignation. The Al-Arabi daily said the resignation was due to differences with Prime Minister Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah on issues such as the budget deficit.

Tripura rebels attack police camp:

Suspected tribal separatists attacked a police camp in the north-eastern Indian state of Tripura and killed a police constable, a senior police official said yesterday. Reuters reports from Agartala.

He said heavily-armed guerillas, believed to belong to the All Tripura Tiger Force, attacked the camp and a nearby village market at Sunderdilla, 55 kms south of the state capital, late Monday. "The guerillas first started indiscriminate firing and then looted the market. They also abducted two traders," police officer Narayan Chakrabarty said.

40 feared abducted in Colombia:

At least 40 people were reported missing Monday from poor neighbourhoods of Barrancabermeja where right-wing paramilitary troops gunned down 11 people this weekend, officials said, reports AFP from Bogota.

Elkin Bueno, Mayor of Barrancabermeja, 540 kms north-east of Bogota, said that as many as 43 people were believed kidnapped by the paramilitary group late Saturday.

Iran-Iraq open border for pilgrims:

Iran and Iraq have opened a border crossing to permit Iranian pilgrims to visit Shiite Muslim sacred sites in Iraq, an Iranian newspaper reported Monday, says AFP from Tehran.

The cross-border road leading to Karbala in Iraq is open and the first group of pilgrims will leave soon for the holy places," the daily Keyhan quoted an official for the Iranian Interior Ministry as saying in the western Iranian city of Kermanshah. The daily did not say when the road would be opened or if the border between the two countries would henceforth be opened for unrestricted travel.

Ex Japanese PM Uno dies:

Former Japanese prime minister Sosuke Uno, who stepped down after holding office only 69 days in 1989 amid allegations of sexual relationships with *geisha* girls, died yesterday of lung cancer at the age of 75, reports Reuters from Tokyo.

Uno came to power largely because he was unopposed by a stocks scandal that brought down his predecessor, Noboru Takeshita.

Drug money laundering ring broken:

US authorities announced Monday they had broken up a huge international money laundering ring that involved several large Mexican banks and two Mexican drug organisations, reports AFP from Washington.

The arrests of 112 people and seizure of 35 million dollars is the culmination of the largest, most comprehensive drug money laundering case in the history of US law enforcement," the Treasury Department said in a statement. Authorities also seized more than two tonnes of cocaine and four tonnes of marijuana.

US Senate okays bill to increase temporary visas for skilled professionals

WASHINGTON, May 19: The Senate on Monday approved legislation to increase the number of temporary visas available for foreign professionals in an attempt to address a shortage of workers in high-tech fields in the United States, reports Reuters.

The Senate voted 78-20 for the bill which would increase the annual number of H-1B visas available for skilled foreign-born professionals to work for up to six years in US firms or universities.

The ceiling for such visas would increase to 95,000 in fiscal 1998, which ends on September 30, from the current 65,000 level, which was reached recently. "Already in many parts of the country there are not the skilled workers necessary for many of these jobs," Senate Budget Committee chairman Pete Domenici, a New Mexico Republican, said.

In fiscal 1999 10,000 of the

China accuses India of occupying its land

BEIJING, May 19: China today launched yet another virulent attack on India by claiming that New Delhi has occupied 70,000 square kms of Chinese territory and poses new threat to China as well as other neighbours with nuclear weapons, reports PTI.

In a signed commentary, official Xinhua news agency urged India to stop immediately the development of nuclear weapons.

It alleged that after gaining independence, the Indian government kept pushing forward its northern boundary and occupied some 90,000 sqkms of Chinese territories.

Describing the MacMohan Line as illegal, the commentary alleged that in October 1962, the Indian government continued to pursue its policy of expansionism and started a large-scale war on invasion against China.

Driven beyond the limits of forbearance, China's border troops fought back in self-defence, it claimed and said that even under those circumstances, China ceased-fire and withdrew troops on its own initiative and called for resumption of negotiations to seek a peaceful end to the border conflicts.

Criticising Prime Minister A B Vajpayee for alleging a China threat and giving other excuses to conduct underground nuclear tests, the commentary said that the recent actions by India have not only threatened China, but also neighbours as well.

This cannot be more clearly shown than when Vajpayee said after the nuclear explosions that India had become a nuclear power state, it said and misinterpreted his assertion that India would use its nuclear capabilities only in self-defence to mean it would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons when necessary.

British peers urge govt to recognise India as N-power

LONDON, May 19: Some members of the British House of Lords have urged their government to recognise India as the sixth global nuclear power, saying that the present outcry over the country carrying out nuclear tests, though justified, were negative as the west had constantly turned a blind eye to security concerns of the world's largest democracy, reports PTI.

"Is it much worse to have six nuclear powers in the world when you already have five," asked Lord Kennet, during a debate by British peers over the weekend on the Indian nuclear tests, adding that if Britain had objections to this, the only answer was to strive for total elimination of weapons of mass destruction as had been proposed by India.

His suggestions evoked support from Tory peer, Lord Archer of Sandwell and Lord Jenkins who suggested that Britain should strive towards convening a fourth special session on disarmament at the UN General Assembly and that new Labour government should put into practice their election manifesto calling for total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The peers though unanimous in their condemnation of India for carrying out nuclear tests, voiced that the established nuclear powers themselves did not have "clear conscience" as they had blocked India's genuine efforts towards total nuclear disarmament.

The peers cautioned the British government in taking what they called "hasty actions" on imposing trade and military sanctions and counselling that British trade and industry should be consulted before going ahead with any step in this direction.

Baroness Williams of Crosby drew the attention of the British government to India's long record of constantly seeking peaceful outcomes. "Indeed many of us admired Indian government precisely because of its record of constantly trying to find peaceful answers to difficult questions."

A large number of peers who took part in the debate, wanted to know whether Britain would join the outcry in the West and follow the Americans and Japanese in imposing sanctions. Lord Moyanlian, the Opposition Leader in the House, spoke against trade sanction on India saying it would be unwise.

Lord Desai, a peer of Indian origin, also counselled the government against doing anything untoward about imposing sanctions on India.

India's atomic bomb to cost Rs 1 cr per piece

NEW DELHI, May 19: India's atomic bomb will cost less than one crore rupees per piece to make and weaponisation of the armed forces would not pinch the treasury, Krishnagopala Iyengar, former chief of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), has said, reports PTI.

Speaking to members of the Indian Science Writers' Association here yesterday, Iyengar said that big figures quoted for creating a nuclear deterrent have no basis.

He also corrected the impression that the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in Mumbai, the flagship of DAE, had been giving more importance to weapons research at the cost of producing nuclear electricity.

While BARC has some 6000 scientists, not even two per cent were involved in this activity, Iyengar said adding that work on bomb design was a continuing activity at BARC since 1971, it was not a story of stops and gaps.

The only gap was during the emergency (1975-76) and after that. But with the shifting of Raja Ramanna, then director of BARC, to the Defence Ministry, the project was renewed with vigour.

Justifying last week's underground tests as a necessity — Iyengar said there was nothing ethnically wrong in India keeping nuclear bombs ready for its own defence.

Arafat, Albright hold fresh talks: No breakthrough

JERUSALEM, May 19: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has failed in another round of diplomacy to break the deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, reports Reuters.

"I cannot say that we have a breakthrough. On the contrary, we are working very hard to overcome the differences," State Department spokesman James Rubin said in London after Albright held surprise talks with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

Rubin insisted Washington would not water down its central proposals for ending a 14-month impasse. Palestinian officials said it was now up to President Bill Clinton, who concluded a European visit Monday, to decide on the next US move.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, back from the United States where he met Albright last week — while shoring up congressional support against US administration pressure on Israel — called for a "flexibility of thinking" by all parties.

However, the right-wing leader gave no sign he was about to bend on the core issue of the further handover of territory in the West Bank to the Palestinians.

At a hastily called news conference in Jerusalem, Netanyahu quickly shot down an Israeli radio report that he had accepted a key Albright proposal to give the Palestinians another 13 per cent of the West Bank under interim peace deals.

"That is not true," said Netanyahu, who drew fire from Israeli ultra-nationalists over the report. Israel has offered nine per cent, saying the deeper pullback envisaged by Washington would jeopardise its security.

He stressed that redeployment had been the third item on his negotiating agenda with Albright — after Israel's demand for "concrete fulfilment by the Palestinians of their commitments" and talks on a permanent peace settlement.



US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright shakes hands with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (R) before a meeting at a London hotel Monday. — AP/UNB photo

Diana's estate sues US co

LOS ANGELES, May 19: Princess Diana's estate and her memorial fund filed suit Monday to stop the Franklin Mint from selling an assortment of dolls, plates, jewellery and other memorabilia bearing her name and likeness, reports AP.

It was the first such lawsuit filed since Diana's car crash death on August 31, 1997. Attorneys Mark Lee and James Cameron accused Franklin of ignoring trademarks and intellectual property rights and virtually stealing from the estate.

The lawsuit was filed in Los Angeles because the Mint's owners live in Beverly Hills.

"Like vultures feeding on the dead, defendants are profiting from the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, by commercially exploiting her identity without permission and falsely implying that their actions are sanctioned and/or will benefit her estate or the fund," the lawsuit said.

Lee said executors of the estate and representatives of Franklin Mint held a series of meetings beginning less than five days after Diana's death. Cameron said he refused to give the Mint permission to produce Diana products because they would not give the estate quality control over the items.

After I told them that was not acceptable, they went right ahead and did it," Cameron said in a phone interview.

Telephone message requesting comment was left at Franklin Mint offices in Pennsylvania. There was no immediate response.

Beijing admits giving money to Democratic Party fund

WASHINGTON, May 19: As officials in Beijing acknowledged for the first time that Chinese money went to Democratic coffers, House Speaker Newt Gingrich said that President Bill Clinton should postpone his trip to China until the Justice Department determines whether two US companies gave sensitive missile information to Beijing in 1996, reports AP.

At the same time, Gingrich's spokesman said Monday that the Georgia Republican may set up a special committee to look into administration actions in granting the export of satellite technology to China.

The comments came as The Christian Science Monitor reported that a state-owned Chinese aerospace company acknowledged a senior executive gave nearly 100,000 dollars to Democratic Party fund-raiser Johnny Chung in 1996. The admission marks the first time that officials in Beijing have said Chinese funds, even if not directly tied to the communist government, went to Democratic coffers.

In urging Clinton to delay his planned visit to China in June, Gingrich led a parade of Republicans seizing on reports that some foreign money funneled to the Democratic Party that year came from the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

Iraq to seek Pope's aid for lifting of UN sanctions

ROME, May 19: Iraqi Foreign Minister Tarek Aziz said late Monday that he would seek the aid of Pope John Paul II for the lifting of United Nations economic sanctions against his country, reports AFP.

"I will ask the Holy See to be more active in supporting our request for the withdrawal of sanctions," Aziz said in an interview with the Italian news agency ANSA.

There was no indication late Monday that Aziz, who arrived in Rome from France Sunday on a European tour, had an appointment with the Pope.

Off the Record

Miracle baby

LOS ANGELES: A two-day-old infant found buried alive over the weekend appears to have survived his ordeal, reports AFP.

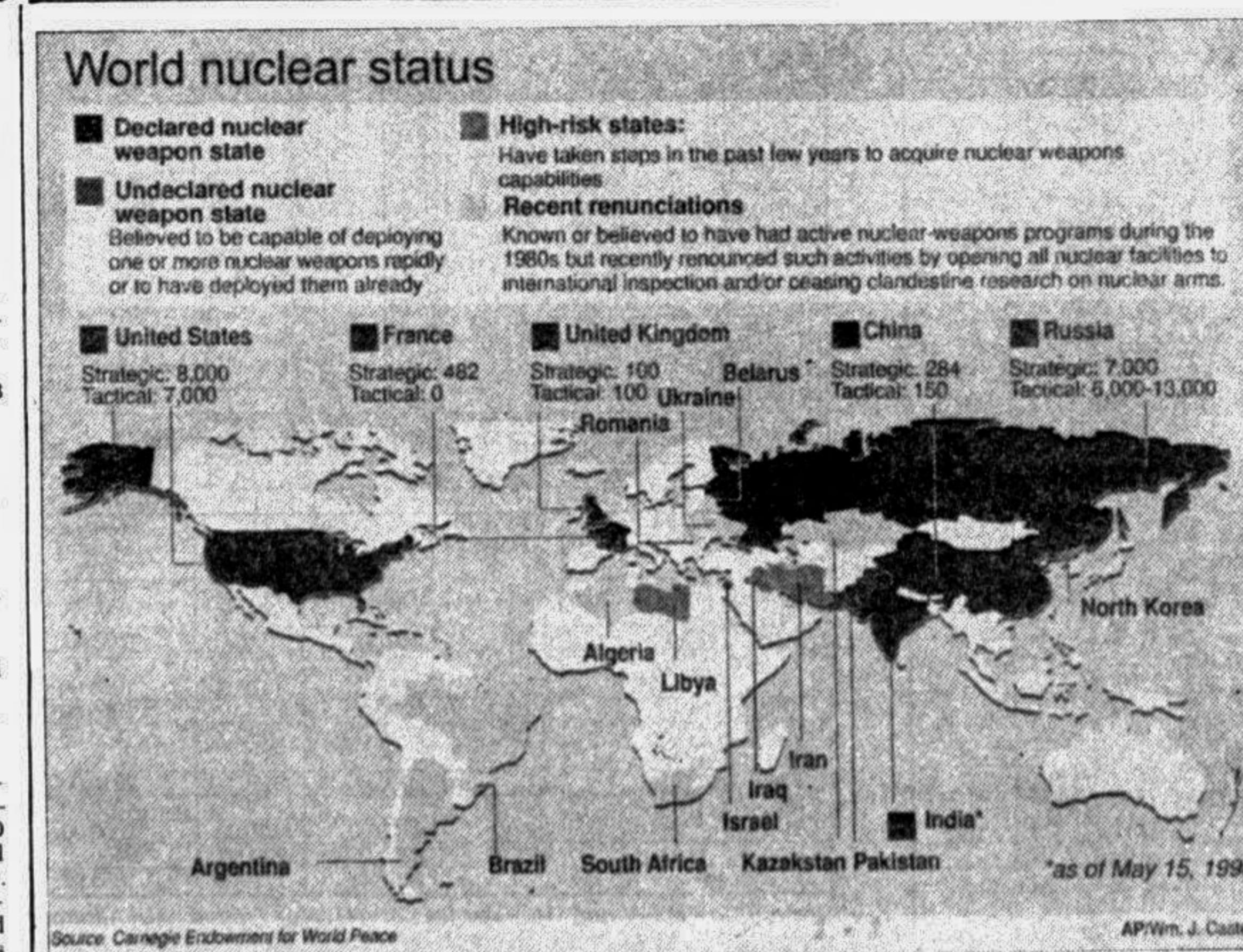
"I think it's a miracle. He has all the normal neurological activity we would expect in a newborn," said Ricardo Liberman of the Huntington Memorial Hospital near Los Angeles, where the baby was being treated.

The newborn, his umbilical cord still attached, was discovered late Saturday by a woman, Azita Milanian, as she was jogging with her three dogs.

First the dogs detected the infant's scent; then Milanian said she spotted a tiny leg poking from the ground.

The baby's body temperature had fallen to 26.6 degrees Celsius and he was listed in critical condition at the time he was discharged in about 10 days.

As police sought the baby's mother, several dozen people offered to adopt him.



Indian tests focus UN attention on disarmament efforts of N-powers

UNITED NATIONS, May 19: India's bid to push its way into the nuclear club has focused attention on disarmament efforts of the United States and the other states whose status as nuclear powers has remained untouched by global arms control agreements, reports AP.

"I think our senses have been lulled a little bit with regard to the nuclear danger," Secretary-General Kofi Annan told reporters Monday in Cleveland, Ohio. "But I think what has happened in India has woken everybody up."

Annan said the five self-declared nuclear powers — the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China — must take stock of their positions because "you cannot have an exclusive club who have the nuclear weapons and are refusing to disband it and tell them now not to have it."

"The nuclear powers need to set an example for other nations," Annan said he had appealed to leaders of India and Pakistan to sign the international nuclear test ban treaty to ensure "that this will be the last one."

India and Pakistan have refused to sign the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty because they do not require the nuclear powers to dismantle their arsenals.

In New York, the UN under-secretary-general for disarmament, Javantha Dhanapala, said Monday the nuclear states should fulfill their pledges, made in 1995, to begin negotiations on treaties to ban production of weapons-grade material and renounce use of nuclear weapons on non-nuclear states.

Dhanapala also urged the Russian Duma to expedite ratification of the 1993 START II treaty, which would cut Russian and US nuclear arsenals to 3,500 warheads on each side. The treaty was ratified by the US Senate in 1996.

Dhanapala, a Sri Lankan, said last week's nuclear tests in India — and the prospect that Pakistan may respond with its own testing had raised concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

"But he said it was "also important to urge the nuclear weapons states... that they must honor their commitments with regard to nuclear disarmament."

Dhanapala was referring to agreements undertaken by the nuclear states in 1995 in order to convince India and other developing countries to agree to an indefinite extension of the non-proliferation agreement.

In return for extending the treaty, the five nuclear states agreed to a package of arms control goals, including completion of Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, adopted in 1996, and a system of annual meetings to review progress toward the goals.

"There is considerable disappointment on the part of non-nuclear weapons states (about) the fidelity of the nuclear states to the commitments made in 1995," said Dhanapala.