

International

11 Iranian diplomats arrested

Taliban consolidating position in and around Mazar-e-Sharif

KABUL, Aug 9: Taliban forces were today securing their grip over the former opposition stronghold and key northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif with rival troops scattered in disarray, officials said, reports AFP.

Sources in the beleaguered anti-Taliban alliance admitted the hardline Muslim militia had met little resistance since their spectacular entry into the last Afghan city out of their control.

"There is not much we can do at the moment in the north. Our forces have been scattered everywhere," admitted Asad Ullah, a spokesman for opposition warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam.

He said the Taliban were in full control of large swathes of the north, including areas around Mazar-e-Sharif, the key base of Shabberghan and most of

the strategic district of Sar-i-Pul to the south.

Independent sources told AFP the Taliban had secured "overall control" of Mazar-e-Sharif, and were posted at key junctions, buildings and the turquoise-tiled central mosque at the heart of the city.

They said the Muslim militia had spent the night steadily flushing out pockets of resistance, but said fighting had been limited following Saturday's dramatic fall of the dusty former opposition stronghold.

A Taliban official said the militia were pursuing retreating opposition fighters south of Mazar-e-Sharif, adding that the militia had also secured control of the airport, located around 20 km east of the city.

"We launched another major attack this morning on Dar-i-Pul where a lot of the opposi-

Quick NATO action on Kosovo unlikely

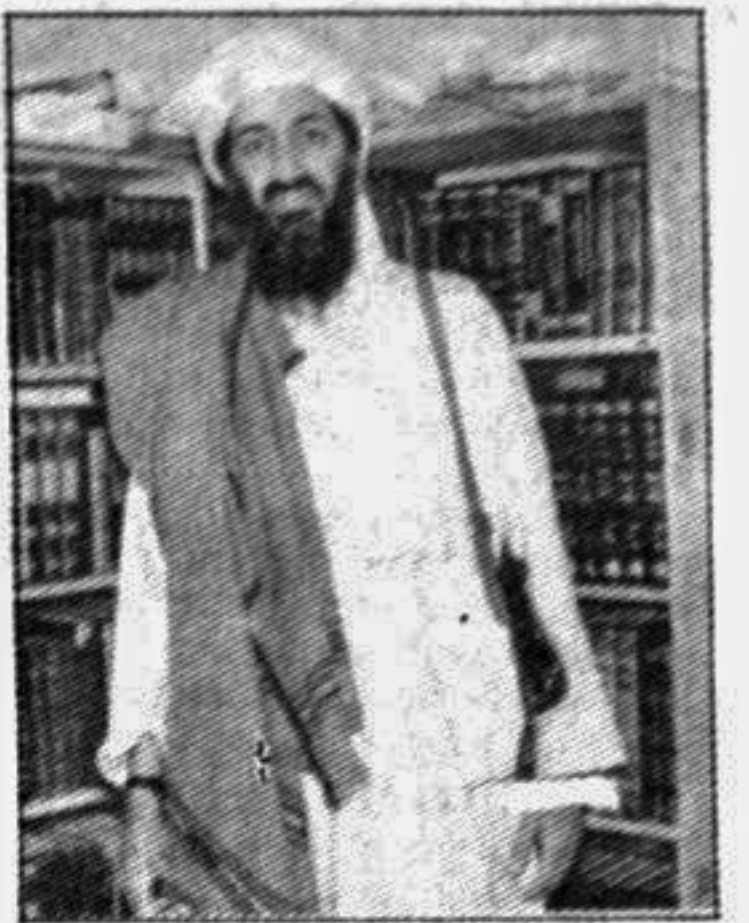
PRISTINA, Serbia, Aug 9: Albanian separatist guerrillas have lost a key base in Kosovo as prospects recede for any quick NATO military action in the Serbian province, reports Reuters.

The Kosovo Information Centre, linked to the leading pro-independence ethnic Albanian party, said on Saturday that Serbian forces swept into the hill village of Likovac on Thursday night after hammering it with artillery for two days.

Serbian troops in a scorched-earth policy against guerrilla strongholds, turned Likovac and nearby hamlets "into a bonfire," the centre said.

It was the latest setback for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which has been driven into remote hills after winning loose control of up to half of the province a few months ago.

NATO has drawn up plans for possible air strikes to check Serbian military operations against Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, but a telephone call between French President Jacques Chirac and US President Bill Clinton on Saturday made quick action look unlikely.



FILE— Exiled Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden is seen in this April, '98 picture in Afghanistan. American officials said they are looking at Bin Laden for involvement in the Friday's Kenyan and Tanzanian US embassy explosions. He has threatened a holy war against US troops and Americans, and is suspected of backing other terrorist acts, including the 1996 attack in Saudi Arabia. — AP/UNB photo



President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Laurent Kabila leaves the Elephant Hills Hotel in Zimbabwean resort town of Victoria Falls, Saturday after six hours of inconclusive talks on the crisis in the Great Lakes region. — AP/UNB photo

Indo-Pak talks India's 'inflexible' attitude reason for deadlock

ISLAMABAD, Aug 9: Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz on Saturday said a deadlock in relations with India stemmed from what he called "inflexible" attitude of the Indian leadership, reports AFP.

He told visiting Canadian opposition leader Preston Manning that the recent talks between prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee failed because of the Indian stance.

Officials quoted Aziz as saying the Colombo meeting between the two premiers during a South Asian summit last month was "fruitless because of the inflexible attitude of the Indian leadership."

He called for an effective engagement of the international community to help resolve the dispute over Kashmir. There could be no "genuine progress" on the issue without such an engagement, he said.

'India wants peace with China, Pakistan'

NEW DELHI, Aug 9: India wants peace with China and Pakistan despite current tensions in the region, Defence Minister George Fernandes said here Saturday, reports AFP.

The comments are his first major conciliatory remarks since May when he described China as India's potential threat number one.

Fernandes, an outspoken Socialist in India's Hindu Nationalist-led coalition government which came to power in March, said: "India does not want a war with Pakistan and has not initiated one."

"There is a deeply-felt longing feeling in the minds of most people to have not just friendship with Pakistan but a special political and economic relationship."

"Despite all the war fought between India and Pakistan, the two countries have more of a dialogue, never mind if that has not taken us anywhere near solving the outstanding issues."

India and Pakistan have fought three wars, two of them over Kashmir, since their independence in 1947. Ties further soured in May when New Delhi conducted five nuclear tests which was replied to with six by Islamabad.

Talks between the prime ministers of India and Pakistan during a South Asian summit last month did not make much headway, and were preceded by artillery duels between the two rival armies in Kashmir, which is claimed by both.

Fernandes, in an address to top defence analysts, and military planners, said: "Even while in the midst of the current tensions, efforts must and will be made to achieve the cherished goal for Indo-Pakistan partnership."

The defence minister also called for a Sino-Indian treaty similar to the one signed by the United States and China earlier this year.

Tourists in India asked not to kiss in public

NEW DELHI, Aug 9: Foreign tourists visiting India have been told by the Hindu Nationalist-led government not to kiss in public, a report said today, reports AFP.

The Asian Age Newspaper quoting "suggestions, advice and instructions" from India's eco-tourism policy guidelines said the tourists were advised to "respect the local etiquette and wear loose clothes."

"Kissing in public is disapproved of."

Indian censors do not permit kissing scenes in movies and the Hindu nationalists, accused by political rivals of being right-wing and sectarian, have called for the control of foreign television channels on the grounds they could undermine the country's culture.

Earlier this month they imposed a controversial dress code for girls school students, ordering them to replace their skirts with long pyjamas. However the government was forced to scrap it following a public outcry.



An Indian soldier looks at a shop which got hit by a Pakistani mortar shell in Tangdar, 155 kms north of Srinagar on Saturday. Residents of the village say this is the first time this village was targeted by Pakistan. It was not even targeted in the 1965 and 1971's Indo-Pak wars. — AP/UNB photo

Myanmar junta eases security around Suu Kyi

YANGON, Aug 9: The military regime stiffened its security detail on the streets around Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's house Sunday after complying with her requests to withdraw the detachment from her property, reports AP.

But security outside her home and in the capital remained light a day after the sensitive 10th anniversary of a nationwide uprising against military rule, which the army eventually crushed by killing as many as 3,000 people.

The anniversary itself passed calmly Saturday without demonstrations anywhere in the country, the government reported. Rumours continued to fly Sunday that pro-democracy activists were gathering to stage spot protests, but none could be confirmed.

Government newspapers said plainly that the peaceful anniversary — which dashed predictions by exiled Myanmar opposition groups of a new uprising — could be attributed to fear.

"Even though the democracy princess wanted the people to go out on the streets and create anarchy in the country, the people dare not break the laws of the existing government," said an opinion piece.

Suu Kyi, who recently engaged authorities in a six-day standoff on a road outside the capital, requested Thursday that the security detail posted inside her lakeside compound be withdrawn.

The government announced Saturday it had complied but would continue to assure her safety. The detail is believed by diplomats to be part of extensive surveillance of Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy.

Suu Kyi, daughter of independence hero Aung San, has spent most of the past decade under house arrest or less formal restriction to her home.

On Friday, her party exercised one of its few available powers and refused a government invitation for Chairman Aung Shwe to meet a mid-level Cabinet minister for talks.

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- Myanmar frees 1 foreigner:** Myanmar's military regime has freed a Western man arrested in April and sentenced to five years in prison for collaborating with a student rebel group, official newspapers reported yesterday, AP says from Yangon.
- James Rupert Russell Mawdsley, 25,** who holds British and Australian citizenship, was pardoned Thursday and left Myanmar immediately after barely three months in custody, the New Light of Myanmar reported.
- 3 Iraqis killed in bomb blast:** Three Iraqis, including a four-year-old girl, have been killed in a bomb blast that rocked a residential district of Baghdad, Iranian opposition members said on Saturday, AFP reports from Baghdad.
- Another 13 people were injured,** including two Iraqis, according to Iran's biggest armed opposition faction, the exiled People's Mujahadeen, which blamed the Friday night attack on the Islamic regime in Tehran.
- First woman's daily in Iran:** The first daily newspaper in Iran dedicated to women's issues was launched on Saturday, Reuters says from Tehran.
- The Daily Zan (woman)** is published by Faeezeh Hashemi, a moderate parliamentary deputy and daughter of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's former President and now chairman of the powerful expediency council.
- Four blazes put out in E Russia:** Firefighters have extinguished four blazes in Russia's Far East, one of their few successes in a region scorched by dozens of fires in recent weeks, a news report said yesterday, AP reports from Moscow.
- The fires consumed about 4,000 hectares (10,000 acres)** in the Khabarovsk region before they were doused on Saturday, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. The fires have burned more than 172,000 hectares (425,000 acres) of forest in the Far East this summer.
- 5 shot dead in South Africa:** Five people were shot dead in execution-style killings in the ganglands of the Cape Flats near South Africa's southern city of Cape Town, police said Saturday, AFP reports from Cape Town.
- Three men and two women, aged between 20 and 32,** were found shot dead at close range in a house used as an informal tavern in the Belhar suburb of the Cape Flats.

William and Harry at centre of safety row

LONDON, Aug 9: Britain's Princes William and Harry were at the centre of a safety row Saturday after Harry was photographed abseiling down a 160 foot dam wall without protective helmets, boots or safety line, reports AFP.

The daredevil stunt occurred last Sunday at a dam in the black mountain of Gwent, Wales.

Under the banner headline "madness," the News of the World published front page pictures of 13-year-old Harry abseiling down the dam with only single rope attached to him, as his brother William 16, looked on.

It quoted experts expressing horror at the dangers Harry faced had he stumbled during the descent.

Cuban exile devises plan to kill Castro

MIAMI, Aug 9: A Cuban exile devised a plan to assassinate Cuban President Fidel Castro during his upcoming visit to the Dominican Republic next week, the Miami Herald reports in their Sunday edition, reports AFP.

The attempt was likely when Castro visits the Dominican Republic on August 20-25, but the plan was abandoned after US authorities were alerted to the plot, two Miami exiles with knowledge of the plan, told the paper.

Death toll in Nairobi rises to 153 US will not withdraw diplomats despite threat of terrorism

WASHINGTON, Aug 9: President Bill Clinton has no intention of withdrawing diplomats or troops from global hotspots despite the terrorist bombings at two US embassies in East Africa, reports AP.

Any pullback "would give terrorism a victory it must not and will not have," Clinton said in his weekly radio address Saturday. "We will continue to take the fight to terrorists."

The American death toll from the bombing in Kenya rose Saturday from eight to 11.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the United States "will not be intimidated by terrorists, and we will never forget their victims."

Twelve American citizens, all victims of the Kenya bombing, were hospitalised — 10 embassy officers and two private citizens. Of the 12, 10 were to be flown to Ramstein Air Base in Germany. Five injured Kenyan employees of the embassy were to join them on the trip.

The eleven American fatalities compared with seven US terrorism victims worldwide for all of 1997.

There was no immediate assessment of a claim of responsibility by a group calling itself the Army for the Liberation of Islamic Shrines. Statements were circulated Saturday claiming the bombings for the Army for the Liberation of Holy

Shrines. Neither name has been used before, and it was unclear whether they represented different groups.

Another report from Nairobi adds: Investigators began a painstaking search Saturday for clues to the terrorist bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, while American and Israeli rescue crews and sniffer dogs took over the hunt for survivors in Nairobi.

As of late Saturday, the number of dead from the blasts totaled 148, including 11 Americans. Victims and survivors were still being discovered in the ruins.

Thirty hours after Friday's attack, an Israeli team drilled through a wall at the Nairobi embassy and pulled out a man from an adjacent building that had collapsed. He was weak, a cut on his forehead exposed his skull and he had a broken leg, Red Cross spokesman Tom Maina said. The rescue encouraged the search teams to drill through the night.

With some 4,257 people injured and 154 people still missing from the Nairobi blast, medical facilities in Nairobi were overwhelmed. Some victims were taken to hospitals 30 miles (50 kms) away.

Eight people died in the Tanzanian bombing; no American were killed there.

A report from Dar Es Salaam adds: A day after a powerful bomb nearly destroyed the embassy building in a quiet tree-covered neighbourhood, employees returned Saturday to salvage equipment and documents. At least with people were killed and 65 injured and officials gave up hopes of finding any one alive under the debris.

Barred by US authorities from speaking to reporters, the employees refused to give their names or even speak about their ordeal.

Tanzanian police cordoned off the area with makeshift crime scene yellow tape that had been borrowed from a utility company.

Prime Minister Frederick Sumaye, who surveyed the scene Saturday, said police were awaiting the arrival, possibly on Sunday, of an FBI team to start investigations.

AFP from Nairobi adds: The death toll in the bomb attack on the US embassy in Nairobi has risen to 153, Kenyan and US officials said yesterday.

The last official toll of 121 given out Saturday night by the Kenyan government did not include the victims at the US embassy, embassy spokesman Bill Barr said.

He said 11 Americans and 21 Kenyan employees at the embassy had been killed in Friday's devastating blast.

Jordan's King Hussein marks 46 yrs on throne

AMMAN, Aug 9: Jordan's King Hussein celebrates 46 years on the throne Tuesday in the United States, thousands of miles from his country, on the eve of a second round of chemotherapy for cancer of the lymph glands, reports AFP.

The Middle East's longest serving ruler was crowned in 1952 when he was only 16 and his country was still recovering from the 1948 Arab-Israeli war which broke out on the creation of the state of Israel.

Since then, the 62-year old king has survived numerous assassination attempts and proved wrong those who said he would not last, earning him the reputation of "blessed by Allah."

Today, the monarch describes the struggle with cancer, his second encounter with the disease which cost him a kidney in 1992, as his "new battle."

Strongly influenced by the policies of his grandfather, King Abdallah who was assassinated in Jerusalem in 1951 for having held secret contacts with Zionists, King Hussein swore to realise his dream.

Peace seemed to have been achieved in 1994 when Hussein defied his opponents at home, in Syria and elsewhere in the Arab world by signing a peace treaty with Israel.

But Rabin's assassination in November 1995 shattered the dream.



UN Secretary General Kofi Annan talks during the opening ceremony of a five-day World Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth in Lisbon's FIL Congress centre Saturday. — AP/UNB photo

Bus mishap claims 17 in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Aug 9: Seventeen people were killed and 20 injured in two road accidents, a Pakistan Saturday, the official Associated Press of Pakistan news agency reported, reports AFP.

Thirteen people were killed and 20 injured when a passenger bus collided head-on with a van at Nowshera in the north west frontier province, it said.

Four people riding on the roof of a bus were killed in the city of Faisalabad in Punjab province after they hit a tree branch, the agency said.

On Friday, 37 people were killed in two road accidents.

China battles to plug breach in key Yangtze River dike

BEIJING, Aug 9: Chinese soldiers and civilian volunteers struggled to plug a major breach along a key Yangtze River dike Sunday as the flood-swollen waterway continued to rise, reports AP.

A lack of expertise and proper equipment were slowing efforts to fill a hole in the dike that has flooded a 4-square-kilometer area of Jiujiang city since bursting on Friday, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Eight river boats have been sunk in the breach to try to block it, along with several truck loads of stone, soybeans, rice and various other materials, the agency said.

Residents have constructed a 90 meter long temporary levee behind the breached dike to contain the flooding, with another 3,000 metre long dike raised behind it as an extra precaution, Xinhua said.

The Jiujiang hole is one of the most serious breaches so far in the approximately 30,000 km of dikes in the Yangtze region that authorities worry could collapse after weeks of rain and flooding.

A flood crest, the fourth this year, was heading towards Jiujiang after roaring through upstream sections of the river in

Hubei province on Saturday, Xinhua said. Water levels at Wuhan, an industrial centre in Hubei with 7 million inhabitants, have been rising slowly since Saturday, it said.

If those waters rise too high, authorities plan to open sluice gates and possibly dynamite dikes to divert water into the flood plain in central Hubei province in order to relieve pressure on water logged dikes and save cities further downstream.

About 330,000 people have been evacuated from the Jingjiang area, leaving behind homes that will be covered by water if the last-ditch order to flood from China's Cabinet is given.

For that to happen, water levels on the Yangtze would have to reach the record high of 45 meters at Shashi city, north of the flood diversion area, Xinhua reported. Waters were within centimeters of the level, Xinhua said.

The area was last used to divert the Yangtze in 1954, when floods killed more than 30,000 people. A curfew has been thrown over the area, and security forces have been ordered to remove residents reluctant to leave behind their homes and belongings.

Vajpayee govt bracing for fresh troubles

NEW DELHI, Aug 9: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government had bought temporary respite in the war of nerves with a key southern ally, but was bracing for fresh troubles lurking round the corner, reports India Abroad News Service.

In what was described as a major breakthrough, Vajpayee had managed to persuade four southern states to reach a tentative accord on the knotty Cauvery river water sharing dispute which had cast a shadow on the longevity of his over four-month-old government. However, an unforeseen danger emerged from an unlikely quarter with a once staunch ally threatening to walk out of the 17-party ruling alliance.

Moreover, a confrontation was seen to be brewing between Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and an influential right-wing Hindu associate.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which translates as World Hindu Council, hit out at the government for its failure to check attacks by Kashmiri extremists on Hindus in the state and said it would allow Home Minister L.K. Advani six months time to check militant activity in the state.

"We want to give him (Advani) another six months to prove himself," senior VHP leader Giriraj Kishore told reporters, adding that Advani was on "test". The VHP leader did

not conceal his dislike for Advani when he challenged the widely held view that Advani had masterminded the Ayodhya temple crusade which led to the demolition of the Babri mosque and propelled the BJP's meteoric rise in the past decade as a Hindu nationalist party.

Political analysts said the VHP criticism of Advani should worry the BJP as the outfit is an influential constituent of the pan-Hindu coalition from which the BJP draws ideological inspiration.

VHP chief Vishnu Hari Dalmiya had earlier written to the Home Minister to express dissatisfaction with the government's failure to prevent the massacres of Hindus by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir state.

The BJP was also embarrassed when the party's alliance government in the western state of Maharashtra sparked off a political furore over its rejection of the findings of a judicial probe into Hindu-Muslim violence in the state capital Mumbai following the December 1992 Babri mosque demolition.

The main opposition Congress party and other anti-BJP parties wanted the Maharashtra government of the BJP and the Hindu supremacist Shiv Sena to be sacked after the Srikrishna Commission of inquiry into the Mumbai riots indicted the Shiv Sena of instigat-

ing the violence in which hundreds of Muslims were killed and their homes torched by frenzied mobs.

Jumping to the rescue of the Maharashtra government, the BJP pointed out that the party was not in office at the time the violence took place. It even questioned the utility of the probe and said that this was not the first time that the findings of a judicial investigation were rejected by a state government.

The silver lining for the BJP was the agreement on the Cauvery dispute under which the chief ministers of the adjoining states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Pondicherry broke a seven-year-old stalemate. This was expected to mollify former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalalitha's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) which had threatened to desert the ruling coalition on the issue.

"I am not sure about her personal views, but this settlement reflects the opinion of all political parties (in Tamil Nadu)," state Chief Minister and Jayalalitha's arch-foe Muthuvel Karunanidhi said after the accord brokered by Vajpayee over two days of talks with the chief ministers.

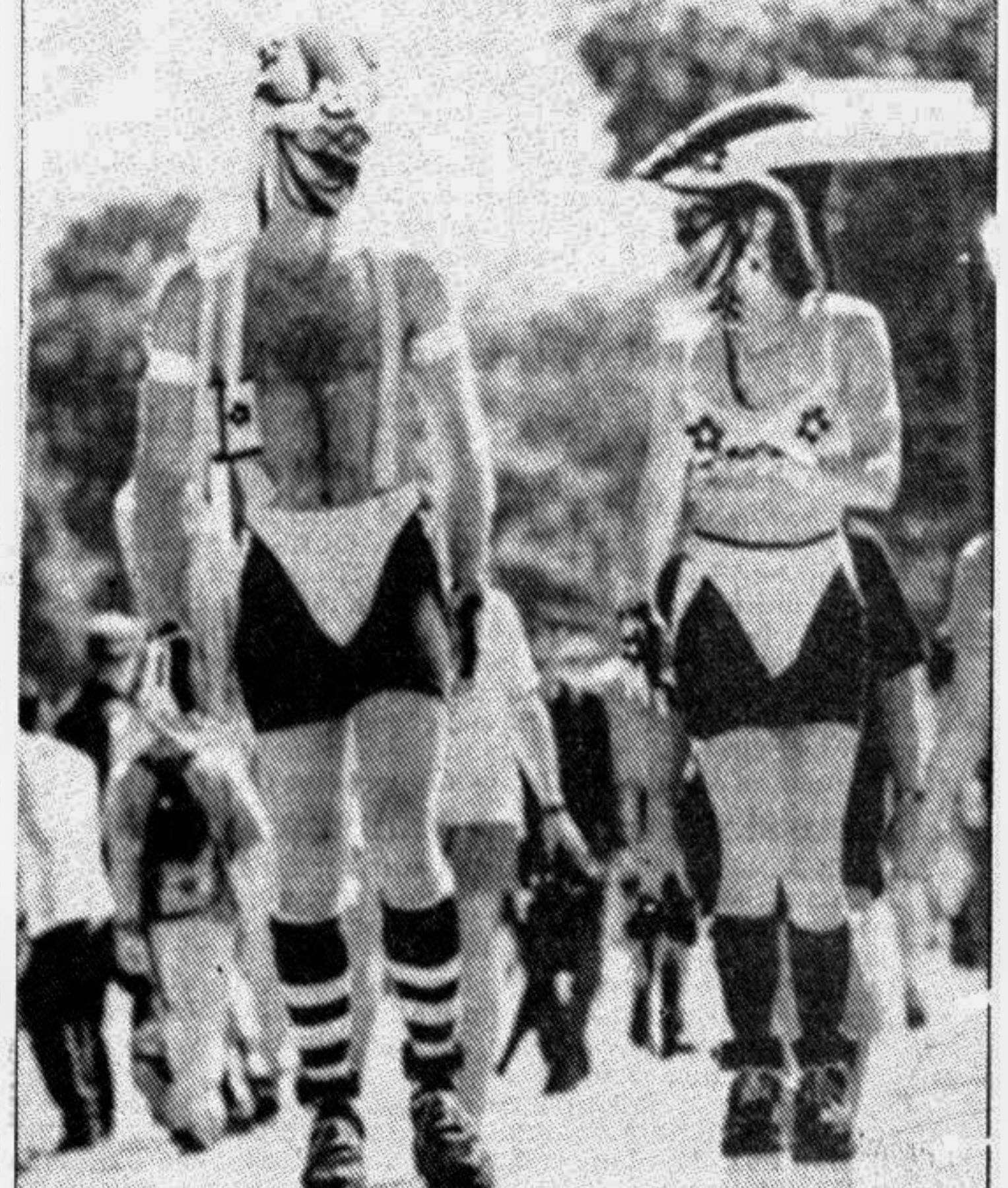
Although Jayalalitha was not present at the talks, unnamed government officials quoted by newspapers said the

Prime Minister was in touch with the AIADMK chief during the discussions.

Jayalalitha was demanding that the government implement the 1991 interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal which ordered Karnataka to release extra river water to downstream Tamil Nadu. Karnataka's continued reluctance to do so had given urgency to the need to resolve the dispute after the AIADMK threatened to pull out of the government if the award was not implemented.

The troubles of the Vajpayee coalition continued with the Sikh regional Akali Dal party in northern Punjab state joining those demanding their pound of flesh. The Akali Dal, which has contributed 11 MPs to the wafer-thin majority of the government, is angry with a proposal to include a Sikh-dominant area in a new federal unit to be carved out of northern Uttar Pradesh state.

The Akali Dal wanted the government to withdraw a cabinet decision on the proposed Uttaranchal state in the Himalayan foothills of Uttar Pradesh. Akali Dal leader and Food and Civil Supplies Minister Surjit Singh Barnala told a party meeting that he had disagreed with his cabinet colleagues on the decision to include the Sikh majority Udham Singh Nagar in the proposed state.



A colourfully costumed couple participate at the 7th Rave Street Parade in Zurich, Switzerland on Saturday. Hundreds of thousands of techno-fans from all over Europe took part in the so called biggest party in Switzerland. — AP/UNB photo