

Balkan leaders meet to persuade Y'slavia to accept UN demands

NATO jets prepare for strikes amid marathon Kosovo talks

BELGRADE, Oct 12: With NATO warplanes being moved closer to Yugoslavia for possible airstrikes, US envoy Richard Holbrooke described the Kosovo standoff as an "emergency" on Monday and demanded the Yugoslav leader end his crackdown, reports AP.

Holbrooke returned to his hotel just before dawn Monday following an 11-hour session with President Slobodan Milosevic and three hours on the telephone with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and National Security Adviser Sandy Berger.

Holbrooke described his meeting with Milosevic as "intense, indeed, and at times very heated." He said the standoff between NATO and the Yugoslav president "can only be called an emergency."

Holbrooke headed for Milosevic's offices shortly after 10 am (0800 GMT), and new talks were reported to have begun shortly after.

NATO officials also met in Brussels, Belgium, first on an informal level in the morning. An official conference was scheduled for later in the day, which was expected to result in an "activation order" for NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia unless diplomacy produces a breakthrough.

Foreign presence was being reduced in anticipation of NATO action.

The international team of US Russian and other diplomats observing events in Kosovo over the past months was to drive out to neighbouring Macedonia later Monday. Sources at the American Embassy said all but 12 people would be evacuated from Belgrade to Budapest.

The Germans were expected to do the same, while British embassy staff was waiting for the outcome of the present Holbrooke-Milosevic talks.

The Americans and Europeans are demanding that

Milosevic halt the crackdown he launched on February 28 against the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army. Kosovo is a 90 per cent ethnic Albanian province of Serbia, a part of the Yugoslav Republic.

The major obstacle appears to be Holbrooke's request that Milosevic agree to an expanded international monitoring mission to verify compliance with demands of the UN Security Council.

The Belgrade daily Nasa Borba reported Monday that Milosevic was reluctantly considering the demand, but there was no confirmation.

The Security Council demands include an immediate ceasefire, a withdrawal of special troops in the province, allowing refugees to return home and beginning talks with independence-minded ethnic Albanians on Kosovo's future.

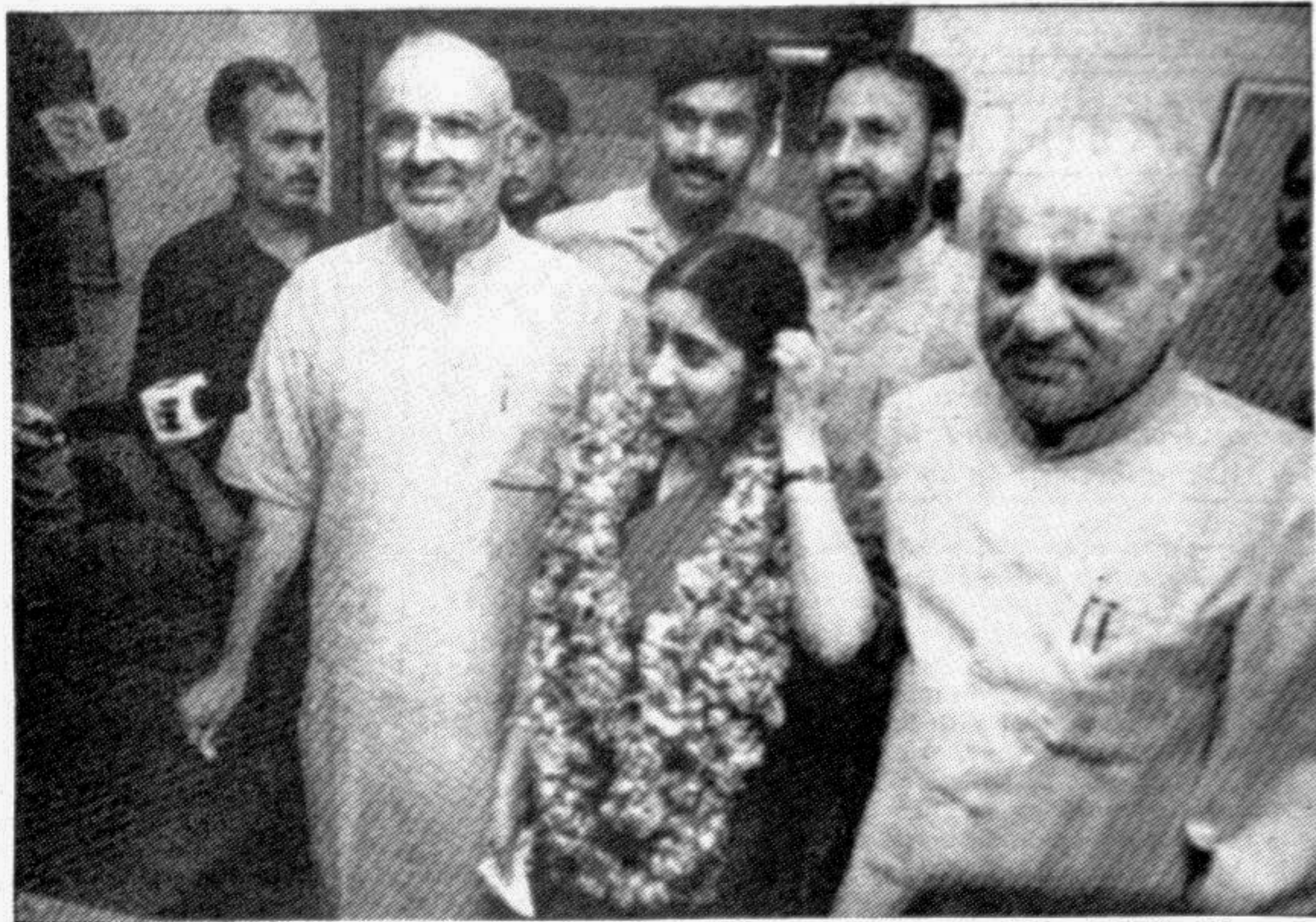
The Pentagon is continuing military preparations in case Holbrooke's mission fails. Six

US B-52 bombers arrived in Britain on Sunday and a contingent of A-10 anti-tank planes flew from Germany to Italy.

The Romanian government agreed to let NATO use its airspace in an emergency, and Hungarian authorities were considering a similar request from the organisation.

Meanwhile, Balkan leaders gathered in Antalya, a Turkish seaside resort, for a last minute effort to persuade Yugoslavia to accept international demands on Kosovo and avoid NATO airstrikes.

Although Yugoslav premier Momir Bulatovic and Foreign Minister Zivadin Jovanovic were said to be bearing "new ideas," it seems unlikely the heads of government attending Monday's two-day Balkan summit will be able to convince them to accept a key United Nations demand that could avert a NATO decision to authorize military action.



Sushma Swaraj, centre, who was selected as the new chief minister of New Delhi addresses a press conference Sunday. To her right is Sahib Singh Verma, who reluctantly gave away his position after his government lost face on several local issues, and to her left, Madan Lal Khurana, who was ignored for the post by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party high command, at a press conference in New Delhi Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

Delhi plans to hold exercise near Pak frontier

India to build 6000 bunkers along Kashmir border

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: India will build 6,000 bunkers along its disputed Kashmir border to protect residents from further Pakistani attacks, the Indian Express daily reported today, says AFP.

Kashmir police chief Gurba Khan Jagat said the bunkers, to be built at a cost of 160 million rupees (3.8 million dollars) would cover the frontier district of Baramulla, Kupwara and Kargil where border firing between the two sides has been the heaviest.

"Kargil is being shelled throughout the year and hit by up to 2,000 shells on a single day," he said.

"With bunkers in position,

precious lives will be saved and the villagers will know exactly where to head for cover."

Jagat said 1,481 bunkers would be constructed across 83 border villages in the district of Baramulla, 3,681 bunkers in 71 villages in Kupwara district and around 2,000 bunkers in the district town of Kargil and surrounding villages.

Indian and Pakistani troops regularly clash in the disputed Himalayan state of Kashmir — the cause of two of their three wars — but rarely fight elsewhere along the border.

Around 700 bunkers were built in Kargil district last year following heavy Pakistani mortar shelling.

Kashmir officials said each bunker would be able to accommodate 45 people.

Reuters adds India said today it was planning a routine military exercise near the border with arch-foe Pakistan next month.

"This is a routine training exercise there is nothing unusual about it," an Indian Defence Ministry spokesman said.

Britain's "Electronic Telegraph" said on Sunday that India planned a military exercise involving some 100,000 troops on the sensitive border.

An Indian defence department official said Pakistan had been informed of next month's exercises weeks in advance.

Campaign aides for Azeri president claim victory in polls

BAKU, Oct 12: Campaign aides for Azerbaijan's leader Heydar Aliyev today said he had won another election in office although the country's Central Elections Commission had yet to issue any results, reports Reuters.

An aide, who refused to be identified, said that according to his data Aliyev won about 79 per cent of the vote in Sunday's presidential election, well above the two-thirds majority needed to clinch a victory in the first round without a run-off vote.

Aliyev's closest challenger, Eubur Mamedov, won 13 per cent and Maverick nationalist Nizami Suleymanov was third on six per cent, he said.

The numbers have been compiled by Aliyev representatives in the country's more than 4,000 polling stations, he said.

Sharif denies using Islam for amassing more power

LAHORE, Pakistan, Oct 12: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Sunday dismissed accusations that he was trying to accomplish a personal agenda of amassing more power by launching an Islamisation campaign in Pakistan, reports AFP.

"I cannot think of using Islam for personal interest. Islam is not my politics," he said in a televised address.

Greeting the nation over the passage of the Sharia Bill by the lower house on Friday, he said Pakistan was the first Muslim country to introduce Islamic system "through democratic means."

He said he regretted that the opposition did not back his move to declare the Quran and the Sunnah or the traditions of Prophet Mohammad (SM), the supreme law of the country.

The 217-member House adopted the Islamisation Bill by 151-16 last week. Many deputies including the political allies of Sharif's party, abstained from voting.

The bill will now be moved in the Senate (upper house) where the opposition commands a stronger position. In the 87-member Senate Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League has 47 members, 11 short of the two-thirds majority needed to make it a law.

"I feel sorry for the opposition who could not take part in the act of piety," Sharif said.

Aitzaz Ahsan, leader of the opposition in the Senate belonging to former premier Benazir Bhutto's party vowed on Saturday the opposition would put up a fight to block Sharif's "dictatorial" move.

"Opponents criticised the bill saying it contains provisions which give the government discretionary authority to interpret Sharia and bar the judiciary from entertaining any legal challenge."

Sharif's Cabinet on Thursday deleted a clause empowering the government to issue Islamic "directives."

"I am not carrying out any personal agenda, nor I have any lust for power," Sharif said, adding his aim was to project Pakistan as an Islamic welfare state where rights of non-Muslim minorities and women were guaranteed.

In the enforcement of Sharia "I foresee a crime-free society, end of exploitation and equal opportunities for all," he said promising peace and legal justice.

Indian scientists claim developing new N-detector

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: Indian scientists claim that they have developed a nuclear detector which will help recreate conditions of matter akin to what existed at the point of the origin of the universe, Press Trust of India (PTI) said Sunday, reports Xinhua.

Teams from two of the country's premier nuclear research bodies — Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics (SINP) and Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC) have developed a nuclear detector, which will provide a plethora of information to get a feel of what happened right after the "big bang" millions of years ago, PTI said.

The detector fabricated at VECC in collaboration with several universities and national institutes will be the first of its kind at the Geneva-based Particle Physics Laboratory, CERN, which has embarked upon the construction of huge new particle accelerator — the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), it said.

The detector, to be fitted in the LHC, will pick up shining light particles out of a collision between two atomic nuclei.

CBI summons Laloo Prasad for interrogation on fodder scam

PATNA, Oct 12: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has summoned Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Laloo Prasad Yadav for interrogation on October 21 in a disproportionate asset (DA) case relating to the multi-crore fodder scam reports PTI.

CBI sources told PTI today that Yadav would be interrogated at the agency's state headquarters here.

The summons followed the raids conducted by the agency on the official residence of Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi in connection with the case against her husband Laloo in August.

The case (C 5A/98) relates to accumulation of wealth worth Rs 50 lakh by Yadav, allegedly disproportionate to his known sources of income.

BRIEFLY

Australian FM wins polls: Foreign Minister Alexander Downer yesterday won one of the tightest contests of Australia's election, after being targeted by the right-wing populist One Nation party for attacking its leader Pauline Hanson's criticism of Asians, AFP says from Canberra.

Nine days after the polls closed, candidate for the centrist Australian Democrats Party John Schumann conceded Downer was going to win the electorate of Mayo with just a handful of votes to be counted and a very tight margin.

Angolan president in China: Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos arrived in Beijing this morning for a five-day state visit to China at the invitation of Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Xinhua says from Beijing.

Thousands protest in E Timor again: About 15,000 East Timorese staged a second consecutive day of protest on Monday and demanded the provincial governor quit over a threat to fire government employees who support an independence referendum for the trouble territory, AP says from Dili, Indonesia.

The protesters arrived in hundreds of cars and motorcycles from several regions in the morning and joined others already in the East Timor capital, Dili.

Lima mayor reelected: Popular Lima Mayor and potential presidential candidate Alberto Andrade was re-elected mayor of the capital Sunday with almost two-thirds of the vote, according to exit polls, AFP says from Lima.

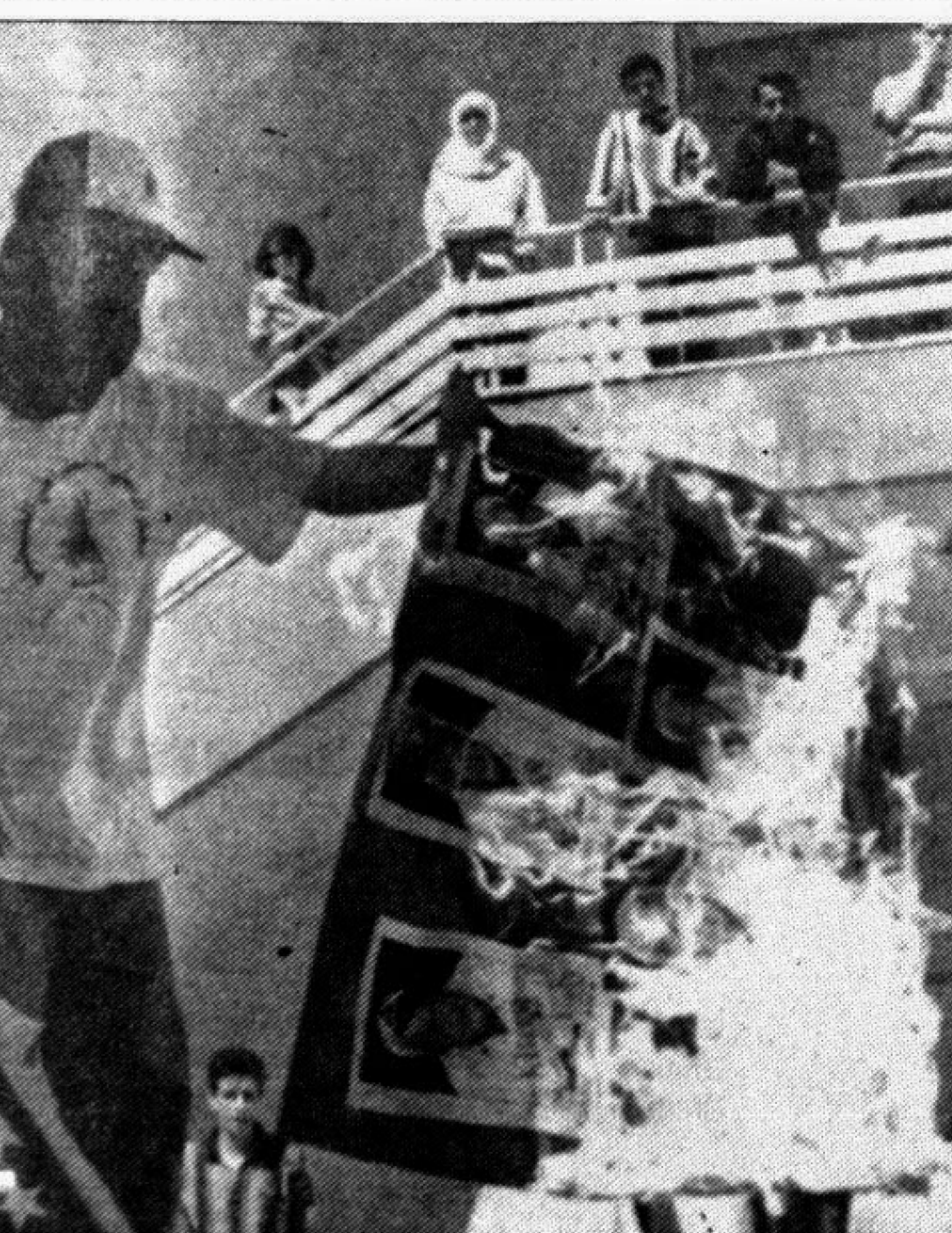
The polls showed the mayor — expected to run for president in 2000, won 65.2 per cent of the vote.

13 die in clashes in Colombia: At least 13 people were killed over the weekend in a wave of attacks by leftist guerrillas and rightist paramilitary groups, authorities said Sunday, AFP reports from Bogota.

The attacks come despite progress in getting peace talks moving between the government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the most powerful rebel group in Latin America, and the smaller Army of National Liberation (ELN).

Yeltsin feeling better: Russian President Boris Yeltsin was feeling better yesterday, his spokesman said, after cancelling public events during a visit to Uzbekistan the previous day, AP says from Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Yeltsin appeared stiff and stumbled Sunday on his arrival in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, and had to be supported by Uzbek President Islam Karimov.



A member of the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) burns a poster with photographs of Ariel Sharon, the newly appointed Israeli Foreign Minister, during a rally in Nablus, Sunday. The appointment of the controversial former defence minister Sharon to the post of Foreign Minister drew mixed reactions on the Palestinian streets. — AP/UNB photo

Opposition wants talks be held abroad

Cambodia govt unruffled by US condemnation of Hun Sen

PHNOM PENH, Oct 12: The Cambodian government said on Monday it was unconcerned by a US congressional resolution calling for an investigation into violations of international humanitarian law allegedly committed by strongman Hun Sen, reports AP.

The resolution, passed last week in the House of Representatives, is non-binding and not supported by the US State Department, a Cambodian government spokesman said.

It is, therefore, not seen as a threat to Cambodia's leader, he added.

"We expected this resolution. It won't affect the relationship between the American government and the Cambodian government at all," spokesman Khieu Kanharith said.

The resolution calls on the United States to collect information against Hun Sen and supply it to "an appropriate international judicial tribunal for use as evidence to support a possible indictment and trial of Hun Sen for violations of international humanitarian law after 1978."

Events mentioned in the resolution include Hun Sen's coup d'etat against his co-Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh last year, and his violent crackdown in September against anti-government demonstrations.

The resolution was written by Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif), a staunch critic of Hun Sen who represents a district with America's largest ethnic Cambodian population.

The US Embassy in Phnom Penh released a statement last

week saying the State Department supported investigations into political killings and other serious human rights violations in Cambodia, but not the House resolution because it called for the establishment of a tribunal focusing on a single individual.

Meanwhile, Cambodia's opposition parties demanded on Monday that talks between their leaders and strongman Hun Sen aimed at forming a coalition government take place outside the country.

A spokesman for Hun Sen's party called the demand and opposition trick, but did not rule out meeting abroad if King Norodom Sihanouk endorsed the idea.

Hun Sen's party won 64 of the 122 seats in the National Assembly, or parliament, in a July 26 election, not the two thirds majority necessary to form a government on its own.

The opposition says it wants to negotiate outside the country because it is being threatened by Hun Sen's party.

In a joint statement, opposition party leaders Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy suggested Tokyo and several other foreign capitals as neutral ground where talks could be held.

"We cannot join a meeting in Cambodia as we will not negotiate under threat, including the threat of further so-called 'attacks' on Hun Sen, which could bring consequences of the most serious magnitude," the opposition leaders said.

Both Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy have stayed outside Cambodia.

TULF rebukes govt for not holding talks with LTTE

COLOMBO, Oct 12: Sri Lanka's largest moderate Tamil party blasted the government today for ignoring its demand for talks with Tamil Tigers to end the country's drawn-out ethnic conflict, reports Reuters.

In a statement, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) also accused the government of dragging its heels in the investigation on alleged mass graves in the north of the country, as well as the disappearance of an airliner carrying mostly Tamil passengers.

The statement said the government had refused to consider its suggestion of political dialogue with Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) aimed at ending the 15-year-old conflict.

The repeated demand of the TULF that a dialogue be commenced between the government and the LTTE with the assistance of third party facilitation... has thus far not received due consideration," the party said in a statement issued after a weekend meeting of its executive committee.

The TULF has five seats in Sri Lanka's 225-member parliament and has generally supported the government in the past.

The government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga has said it is willing to engage in talks with the Tigers, but only if they give up demands for a sep-

arate homeland and lay down their arms.

The TULF statement also said the government had failed to send forensic experts to investigate alleged mass graves in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

A soldier, sentenced to death for the rape and murder of a Tamil schoolgirl in Jaffna in 1996, has said he is prepared to identify 400 graves of Tamil youths who are alleged to have disappeared after the military captured the region from the LTTE that year. Human rights organisations have said as many as 600 Tamils disappeared in Jaffna that year.

The statement also accused the government of moving slowly over investigations into last month's crash of a private airliner carrying mostly Tamil passengers from Jaffna to Colombo.

The government's indifference in regard to the Lion Air disaster... indicates a discriminatory attitude on the part of the government, the statement said.

All 55 people on board are presumed to have died, although only three bodies have been sighted so far by navy boats searching for the wreckage off the northwestern coast.

The government, which is yet to officially say what caused the crash, has set up a one-man committee to investigate.



United States First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton is accompanied by orphan children of the "Faith, Hope and Love" centre in Sofia as she leaves the charity facility following a visit here, Sunday. Hillary is on two-day official visit to Bulgaria on invitation of Antonina Stoyanova, wife of Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov, where she will attend the Women of the 21st Century conference on Monday. — AP/UNB photo

Impeachment process evokes some questions among US lawmakers

WASHINGTON, Oct 12: Accusations against President Bill Clinton in the Monica Lewinsky affair fall so far short of being impeachable offences that impeachment would endanger future presidents, the White House said Sunday, reports AP.

The comments came as word surfaced of discussions among congressional Republicans and Democrats on ways to punish the president short of impeachment. A Democratic senator said two action Clinton should take first are to "correct" his testimony to prosecutor Kenneth Starr's grand jury and to settle the Paula Jones sexual harassment case now on appeal.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch on Sunday urged US President Bill Clinton to settle the Paula Jones sexual harassment case to help bring quick closure to congressional impeachment proceedings.

"Number one, I'd tell him to get rid of that doggone Paula Jones case," Hatch, a Utah Republican, said on NBC's "Meet the Press" programme on answer to a question about what Clinton could do to quickly end the impeachment proceeding begun in the US House of Representatives.

He also said Clinton needed to face accusations by former White House aide Kathleen Willey that Clinton groped her

Hatch also said Clinton needed to end the "parsing" of language over the nature of his affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, wording that is at the heart of accusations that he perjured himself in a deposition in the Jones case.

Greg Craig, the White House's new special counsel, said the House Judiciary Committee has legitimate reason to call Starr to testify in its impeachment inquiry.

Whatever Starr's report to the committee accuses Clinton of having done, Craig said, "It does not rise to the level of impeachable offence standard that we have used throughout history and we lower that standard at our peril."

"It would do grave damage to the presidency and to future presidents if the bar were lowered," Craig said on CBS television's "Face the Nation."

The House Republican staff has outlined evidence of 15 possible grounds for impeachment, including conspiracy, false testimony, obstruction of justice and witness tampering.

Craig said there are "serious questions about the way" Starr conducted his investigation, and the White House view is that committee members "may well have a number of questions to ask Starr."

Clinton supporters suggest that Starr's office colluded with

conservative operatives to initiate the Lewinsky probe, an accusation the prosecutor denies.

Craig did not specifically suggest that Starr should be summoned and said it is "premature" to say whether Clinton should be a witness in the House inquiry, as some members of Congress have suggested.

On "Fox News Sunday," Majority Whip Tom DeLay tried to quell talk of a punishment for Clinton less than impeachment and instead focused on the possibility of expanding the House inquiry. DeLay said he's convinced that Starr's office will send other referrals to the House.

Noting that congressional panels are looking into allegedly illegal campaign donations and technology transfers to China approved by the Clinton administration, DeLay said "They should be referred to the Judiciary Committee, if they are offences that could be impeachable."

"We want to get to the truth to see what this administration has done, what Bill Clinton has done and particularly their pattern of conduct," said DeLay.

In response, Democratic Rep. Jim Moran predicted on "Fox News Sunday" that is Republicans expand the inquiry, "I do think there will be a backlash, and I think they are too smart to do that."

Taliban hand over bodies of 3 slain diplomats to Iran

CAIRO, Oct 12: Afghanistan's Taliban militia returned the bodies of three slain Iranian diplomats to Iran on Sunday, Iranian television reported, says AP.

The move is likely aimed at defusing growing tensions between Iran, which has massed more than 200,000 troops on its eastern border with Afghanistan, and the Taliban.

The Taliban has said that renegade militiamen killed eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist after the militia captured the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif on Aug 8.

Iran has demanded the Taliban return the bodies of the Iranians and send the killers for trial in Tehran.

The bodies of the other six Iranians already have been returned.

"An airplane carrying the bodies of three Iranian diplomats murdered by the Taliban in Mazar-e-Sharif landed in Mashhad airport, northeastern Iran tonight," the television reported.

The report was monitored by the British Broadcasting Corp and received in Cairo.

On Thursday, Iran said its border forces fought a three-hour battle with Taliban fighters, inflicting heavy casualties. The Taliban denied that any fighting took place and claimed that Iran has been firing artillery into Afghanistan.