

Several MQM members arrested in Karachi

KARACHI, Nov 21: Armed police on Saturday arrested several members of an ethnic party, hours after the prime minister suspended civil rights in Sindh province and ordered the army to curb violence in Karachi, its troubled main city, reports AP.

In an overnight raid, police surrounded a hostel run by the ethnic Muttahida Qami Movement (MQM) in Karachi's Azizabad neighbourhood and arrested several of its members, including two lawmakers of the Sindh provincial assembly.

The raid came just hours after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ordered the army to help curb violence in the southern province. Sharif also ordered the setting up of military courts in Karachi to try "terrorists and criminals" — a move the MQM says is targeting only its own ethnic group.

The MQM, a former ally of Sharif, speaks for the political and economic rights of Urdu speakers who migrated from India at independence from Britain in 1947 and their descendants.

The party, formerly known as the Mohajir Qami Movement, has controlled the city for more than a decade.

More than 1,000 people have died in political and religious violence in Karachi, Pakistan's financial and commercial centre.

"They (police) barged into the hostel late in the night and started beating our people," Hasan Musana, a MQM spokesman, told The Associated Press.

Last month Sharif dismissed the elected Sindh provincial government of which the MQM was a major coalition partner and instituted direct federal rule in an attempt to stop violence in Karachi.

Sharif has accused the MQM of most of the bloodletting, and hold it responsible for the murder of former governor Hakim Said.

The MQM denies the charge and blames Sharif for "state-sponsored violence" against its members.

The MQM is fighting with its splinter faction, the MQM Haqqi. Hundreds of people

have died in killings between these two groups in recent months.

The human rights groups and opposition parties Friday criticised the decision to suspend civil rights and call the army to help the government.

It is a mini-martial law. The government has no justification of taking such a harsh step," said Senator Iqbal Haider of the opposition Pakistan People's Party.

But Sharif said the move is in the interest of the city and the country.

"We want to get Karachi out of this hell," he said.

He said military courts are needed in Sindh because "the terrorists threatened witnesses, judges and their families" and have paralysed the justice system.

Sharif said military courts reach decisions much more quickly than civilian courts, in "days, not weeks and months."

In civilian courts, the government says criminals easily get bail. The decision of a military court cannot be challenged in a civilian court.



Greeted by residents, Palestinian police officers wave their rifles as they ride into the West Bank town of Qabaitieh following an Israeli pullback Friday. Israeli troops pulled out of parts of the northern West Bank Friday, fulfilling the first step of the new mideast peace accord. —AP/UNB photo

Albright optimistic about latest ME peace accord

JERUSALEM, Nov 21: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Friday that she believed Israel and the Palestinians would implement the latest peace accord, noting that Israel had begun withdrawing troops from the West Bank as outlined in the agreement, reports AP.

Albright said in an interview with Israel television that she had just spoken by phone with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about the withdrawal, which was outlined in the land-for-security agreement signed Oct 23 in Washington.

Israel transferred 9.1 per cent of the West Bank to full or partial Palestinian control earlier in the day as part of a three-phase pullback to be completed by the end of January. Israel captured the West Bank from Jordan in 1967.

"I think that we need to see this in a positive way in the fact that things are actually happening that people thought would not happen," Albright said.

The secretary of state admonished Israeli and Palestinian leaders against making provocative statements as they had earlier in the week.

Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon had called on Jewish settlers "to move, to run, to grab more hills, expand the territory" in the West Bank to prevent the lands from being transferred to the Palestinians.

Palestinians leader Yasser Arafat said Monday that "our rifles are ready" to take Jerusalem.

Both Sharon and Arafat later retracted or clarified their statements.

Albright told the television that there was "too much rhetoric" from both sides.

"It's very important to look at the actions, and the actions are moving very much in a positive direction," she added.

The peace accord worked out at the Wye Plantation in Maryland also details several Palestinian actions against anti-Israeli militants and incitements.

The Israeli Cabinet approved Friday's withdrawal only after verifying that the Palestinian Authority had begun to carry out several of the security measures.

The Wye Memorandum effectively ended almost two years of deadlock in the peace process.

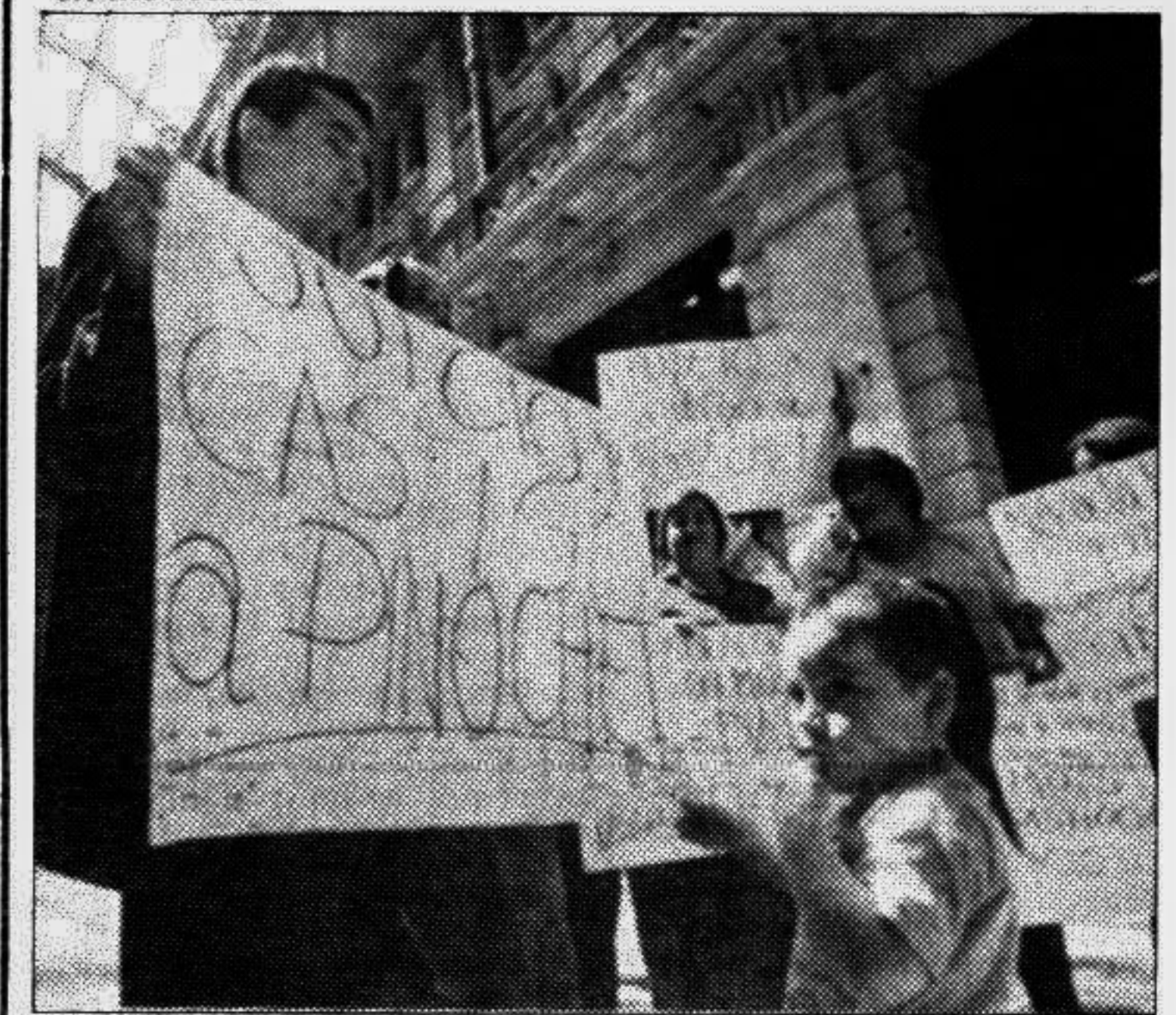
BRIEFLY

Flooding claims 16 in Vietnam: At least 16 people have died in the third bout of serious flooding to hit central Vietnam in a month, local officials said Saturday. The death toll was expected to rise as more reports filtered in, AP reports from Hanoi.

Tropical Storm Dawn dumped up to 350 millimetres of rain on the area Thursday and Friday. That submerged large swaths of land and inundated thousands of houses. Roads and communications to many villages were cut off.

Duma member murdered: A leading liberal independent member of Russia's state Duma lower house of parliament was found murdered late on Friday, Reuters reports from St Petersburg.

Galina Starovoiitova, 52, was murdered in St Petersburg. Itar-Tass news agency, citing law enforcement sources, said the murder occurred outside Starovoiitova's home on the banks of the Gribovsev Canal in the centre of the city. Guns were found on the scene.



Two-year-old Sandra Rodriguez looks at posters demanding "Trial and Punishment to Pinochet" during a lawsuit against former dictator Gen Augusto Pinochet, charging him with mistreatment, at the Court of Appeals in Santiago, Chile, Friday. In a separate case, Britain's highest court will announce next week whether Pinochet has immunity from arrest and can leave Britain. — AP/UNB photo

13 massacred in Colombia: At least 13 men were killed by a suspected right wing death squad in a mountain village in northwest Colombia, local authorities said on Friday, Reuters reports from Bogota.

Luis Fernando Restrepo, mayor of Yolombo, near where the massacre took place, said the bodies of two peasants were found on Thursday and the other corpses were discovered early on Friday in two outlying villages. He gave few other details of the attack but said all the victims had been shot several times. "We have information that those responsible for the massacre were paramilitary gunmen," Restrepo told local media.

2 die, 1,600 hurt in China quakes: The toll from the twin earthquakes in southwest China rose to two dead and nearly 1,600 injured yesterday with a further 200 casualties reported, officials said, AFP reports from Beijing.

The latest injuries were in Yanyuan county, Sichuan province, which was isolated when the tremors knocked out all communications with the region. "We have 22 people seriously injured, including three in critical condition. There were 175 people who suffered light injuries," a civil affairs bureau official said. Nearly 2,000 people were left homeless who had to spend the night out in freezing temperatures. "We are making housing arrangements for them today," she said.

Vietnam executes 2 drug smugglers: Two Hong Kong men have been executed by a firing squad after being convicted of drug-trafficking charges in Ho Chi Minh City, the city Police newspaper reported Saturday, AP reports from Hanoi.

Chan Chung Hung Sam My, 38, and Sun Chi Kin, 36, were arrested at the city's Tan Son Nhat airport on March 15, 1996, while carrying 9.05 kg of heroin each in suitcases. Chan and Sun, who held fake Portuguese passports, arrived from Bangkok in transit to Belgium and Netherlands, the paper said.

Botha won't be prosecuted on HR violations due to lack of evidence

JOHANNESBURG, Nov 21: The South African government will not prosecute former apartheid strongman PW Botha for human rights violations committed under his rule due to lack of evidence, South African radio reported on Friday, reports Reuters.

"We have no evidence needed to bring him before a court of law. We have to prove beyond a reasonable doubt," it quoted Jan d'Oliviera, the deputy director of national Prosecutions, as saying.

In its final report handed to President Nelson Mandela in October, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) said Botha, 82, was accountable for gross violations of human rights committed on a wide scale during the period he was president.

Jones no longer wants apology from Clinton

LOS ANGELES, Nov 21: Paula Jones said that she no longer wants an apology from President Bill Clinton now that her sexual harassment lawsuit against him is settled, reports AP.

"I wouldn't want an apology from him anymore," she said Friday during taping of a "Roseanne" programme. "It's empty. It doesn't mean anything anymore. Because he doesn't mean it. It doesn't come from his heart."

The interview was taped a week after Clinton agreed to pay Jones 850,000 dollar to drop her lawsuit and end the legal battle that led to impeachment hearings against Clinton. The settlement did not include the apology Jones sought when she filed her lawsuit four years ago.

Italian court frees Kurdish leader Ocalan

ROME, Nov 21: Kurds and their supporters danced for joy after a Rome court granted conditional freedom to a Kurdish rebel leader detained when he came to Italy seeking asylum, reports AP.

In Turkey, the response to Friday's release was outrage. Turkey's prime minister made unspecified threats, and relatives of Turkish soldiers killed fighting Kurdish separatists urged their government to do everything necessary to bring "this murderer" to Turkey.

The Italian court threw out a Turkish arrest warrant for Abdullah Ocalan under a law barring extradition in death penalty cases. The court ordered Ocalan to stay in Rome, but Justice Minister Oliviero Diliberto indicated that the rebel chief would be freed from even that restriction on Dec 23 if Germany chose not to pursue extradition on its own warrant against him by then.

Clinton, Kim urge N Korea to abandon N-proliferation

SEOUL, Nov 21: US President Bill Clinton exhorted North Korea Saturday to abide by its agreements on nuclear nonproliferation, warning against "further provocations," reports AP.

South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, appearing at a news conference with Clinton, joined in declaring: "We will not tolerate any possible attempt by North Korea to proliferate nuclear weapons missiles and other weapons of mass destruction."

But both leaders tempered their warnings with empathetic appeals for the North to continue dialogue and contacts with the South.

Clinton said he was struck by television pictures of South Koreans crowding a tourist ship bound for the North. He drew a contrast with concern over a massive underground facility north of Pyongyang which US officials suspect may be used to hide a nuclear weaponry programme.

"Nothing could ever be put in that hole in the ground, that would give the North Koreans as much advantage, as much power, as much wealth, as much happiness, as more of those

ships going up there full of people from here," Clinton said.

Kim, who advocates a "sunshine policy" of engagement toward his communist neighbour, urged North Korea to take steps to "clear the suspicion" surrounding the underground site that the United States wants to inspect. North Korea has demanded \$300 million simply for the right to look — a condition Clinton called unacceptable.

The two presidents spoke after bilateral talks at South Korea's presidential Blue House.

The joint news conference covered a range of other issues, including efforts to boost the Korean economy. UN inspections in Iraq and turmoil in Indonesia.

Clinton said the United States would stand behind Korea's efforts to recover from economic difficulties.

"I know Korea has endured much pain and still has a difficult road to travel," he said, adding that Kim "needs the support of all segments of society."

Asked about Iraq, Clinton responded cautiously to news indicating that president Saddam Hussein was balking at a UN request for documents about

its banned weapons programme.

"I think it's important we not overreact here on the first day," Clinton said.

As student protesters returned to the streets of the Indonesian capital, Clinton voiced hope that "there will be no backsliding" on human rights by the new Indonesian government, which has promised to implement reforms, including investigation of human rights abuses, and efforts to scale back the military's prominent role in politics.

On North Korea, Kim insisting that any nuclear proliferation would not be tolerated. He added that "the policy of engagement is the best policy from a realistic standpoint and this ought to be pursued with consistency."

Clinton warned that, if North Korea continues to rebuff US inspection appeals, Congress would likely have "a great reluctance" to continue provide funds for oil shipments.

"It would be a sad thing indeed if, for no good end over the long run, the North Koreans would make it impossible to go forward," Clinton said.

Habibie holds peace talks with university leaders

JAKARTA, Nov 21: Indonesian President BJ Habibie and armed forces chief Gen Wiranto held peace talks with university leaders on Saturday, a week after bloody street clashes between soldiers and student demonstrations in which up to 16 people died, reports AP.

Wiranto and Education Minister Yuwono Sudarsono were among seven senior ministers who attended meetings at the presidential palace with 15 deans from private universities in Jakarta.

Thousands of students have swarmed the streets of Indonesia's largest cities in past weeks demanding greater democratic reform. Habibie's resignation and for ex-President Suharto to be tried for corruption and human rights abuses.

Up to 16 people were killed in violent clashes on Nov 13-14, when soldiers opened fire on demonstrators trying to march on Parliament. Police say 13 people died. Hundreds were injured.

The students returned to the streets unbowed this week. Blaming him for the deaths, students are now calling for Wiranto's resignation.

On Friday, about 1,500 protesters and family members laid flowers at Atma Jaya University, the site of the worst of last week's violence.

In Surabaya, the country's second-largest city, several

hundred protesters marched on a government building.

Jakarta's streets were quiet on Saturday, as student leaders held strategy meetings and waited on the outcome of Habibie's meeting with the university deans.

Earlier this week, attempts to march on Parliament and on Suharto's home in the exclusive Jakarta suburb where he has become a virtual recluse since he quit in May were blocked by police in riot gear and barbed-wire barricades.

Former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating is scheduled to visit Suharto on Saturday, one of few visits by international figures.

Indonesia, a sprawling archipelago nation of 202 million people, is enduring its worst economic turmoil in three decades. Discontent over inflation and joblessness helped spark bloody riots in May which helped force Suharto out and in which 1,200 people were killed.

Officials say security forces last week were ordered to fire only blank ammunition or plastic bullets at protesters who tried to march on Parliament in a campaign for greater democracy.

But doctors confirmed Friday that metal bullet fragments were found in the bodies of some protesters killed.

Habibie has accused some opposition activists of orchestrating the protests in an attempt to overthrow his young government.

Police have formally charged 10 with sedition and questioning another seven. Those charged have denied the allegations.

The students want the armed forces banned from politics and have been angered by a special government assembly that decreed the reduction, but not the elimination, of the military's representation in Parliament.

Iraq fails to turn over sensitive documents to UN weapons inspectors

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 21: Baghdad has balked at turning over sensitive documents to UN weapons inspectors less than a week after Iraq's pledge to cooperate narrowly averted American airstrikes, reports AP.

Iraq's Deputy Foreign Minister Riyadh al-Qaisi told UN weapons inspector Richard Butler on Friday that many of the documents Butler requested this week were destroyed, never existed or already had been turned over. Al-Qaisi also placed conditions on viewing a particularly contentious Iraqi air force document.

The United States maintains the Iraq letters are insufficient responses to Butler's requests and said Baghdad needs to provide more information about its weapons programme. However, US President Bill Clinton responded cautiously today when asked about Iraqi reluctance.

"I think it's important we not overreact here on the first day," he said at a news conference during his visit to Seoul, South Korea. "I want to make sure that I know exactly what

the facts are".

The dispute over the documents was the first glitch between Iraq and the UN Special Commission that oversees disarmament efforts since Nov 14 — when Baghdad announced it would reverse its Oct 31 decision to halt cooperation with the weapons experts.

The announcement staved off what US officials have said were imminent US airstrikes.

Based on Iraq's weekend pledge, Butler sent Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz three letters this week asking for documents about its missiles and its chemical and biological weapons programmes.

Inspectors must certify that those weapons have been destroyed before the Security Council will lift sanctions imposed after Baghdad's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which sparked the Persian Gulf war.

In particular, Butler asked for an air force diary, which inspectors discovered during a July search but were prevented from taking, that detailed munitions destroyed during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Lankan army seeks new strategy to beat LTTE

COLOMBO, Nov 21: The Sri Lankan military's top brass is racing to draw up a new strategy as a one-and-a-half-year operation to open a supply route through the rebel-held northern region appears nowhere near achieving its objective, reports IANS.

Operation Jayasikurui (Victory Assured) was launched on May 13, 1997, to open a land route to the Jaffna peninsula from Vavuniya, the southernmost point of the Tamil-majority northern province. Government troops advanced from Vavuniya to Mankulam, clearing a distance of 26 kilometres through areas under control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). But the capture of Mankulam came with the most severe setback to the military — the fall of Kilinochchi, a strategically important township just south of Jaffna. Troops faced heavy resistance from the LTTE at Mankulam and could not go beyond that point despite the backing of the Air Force and the Navy. They have also not been able to advance from the Jaffna peninsula to Mankulam after the fall of Kilinochchi.

Since the Kilinochchi debacle, Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte has held a series of discussions with frontline commanders in Vavuniya who propose a change in strategy and reportedly came up with several suggestions. The media has been barred from reporting war strategy since the imposition of press censorship on

military news on June 5, 1998. A meeting of the National Defence Council was also held under his chairperson, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, at which the new strategy was reportedly discussed at length. Immediately after the meeting, a number of top commanders were reshuffled to facilitate the implementation of the new plan.

Eighteen months of the operation have left thousands of soldiers and rebels killed or maimed. The defence expenditure has reached a new high and analysts are of the opinion that next year's defence allocation of 47 billion rupees will not be enough even for the first three quarters of the year. For fiscal 1998, the budget allocation for defence was 45 billion rupees, but a 12 billion rupees supplementary budget was passed last month for the final quarter of the year.

Meanwhile, the Madu Road junction in the north, through which people are allowed to enter into rebel-held areas, was closed by the army until further notice. Only representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are being allowed to go through, but are being asked to restrict their movements.

Forces in the Jaffna peninsula are in a bind over whether to step up security to check LTTE infiltration or continue with the "hearts and minds" project under which they have painstakingly

Opinion polls reveal BJP will be defeated by Congress in state polls

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: India's ruling Hindu nationalists are expected to face devastating defeats in make state elections next week, according to opinion polls published today, reports AP.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) will be defeated by the opposition Congress Party in the November 25 polls, the surveys suggested.

Elections are due in New Delhi city and the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram for local government for the next five years.

An opinion poll by the 'India Today' news magazine said the BJP could end up being defeated by the Congress even in Madhya Pradesh, the only state where it had been expected to win.

Another opinion poll, published by The Times of India newspaper, predicted a rout for the BJP in New Delhi, saying it

would win just 16 of 70 seats while the Congress would sweep 50 seats.

Newspapers said the Congress, which rules Madhya Pradesh and is the main opposition party nationally, had come from behind in the sprawling state after three weeks of hectic campaigning.

The India Today survey said the Congress could bag 150 to 165 seats in the 320-member state legislature and the BJP 133 to 143 seats.

It also predicted a bitter defeat for the BJP in the desert state of Rajasthan and a route in New Delhi city. Both Rajasthan and New Delhi city are ruled by the nationalists.

The BJP is a minor player in Congress-ruled Mizoram in the far east.

Analysts say a BJP defeat in the crucial New Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh elections, or even in just two of

these places, could spark a major crisis for the eight-month-old Vajpayee government.

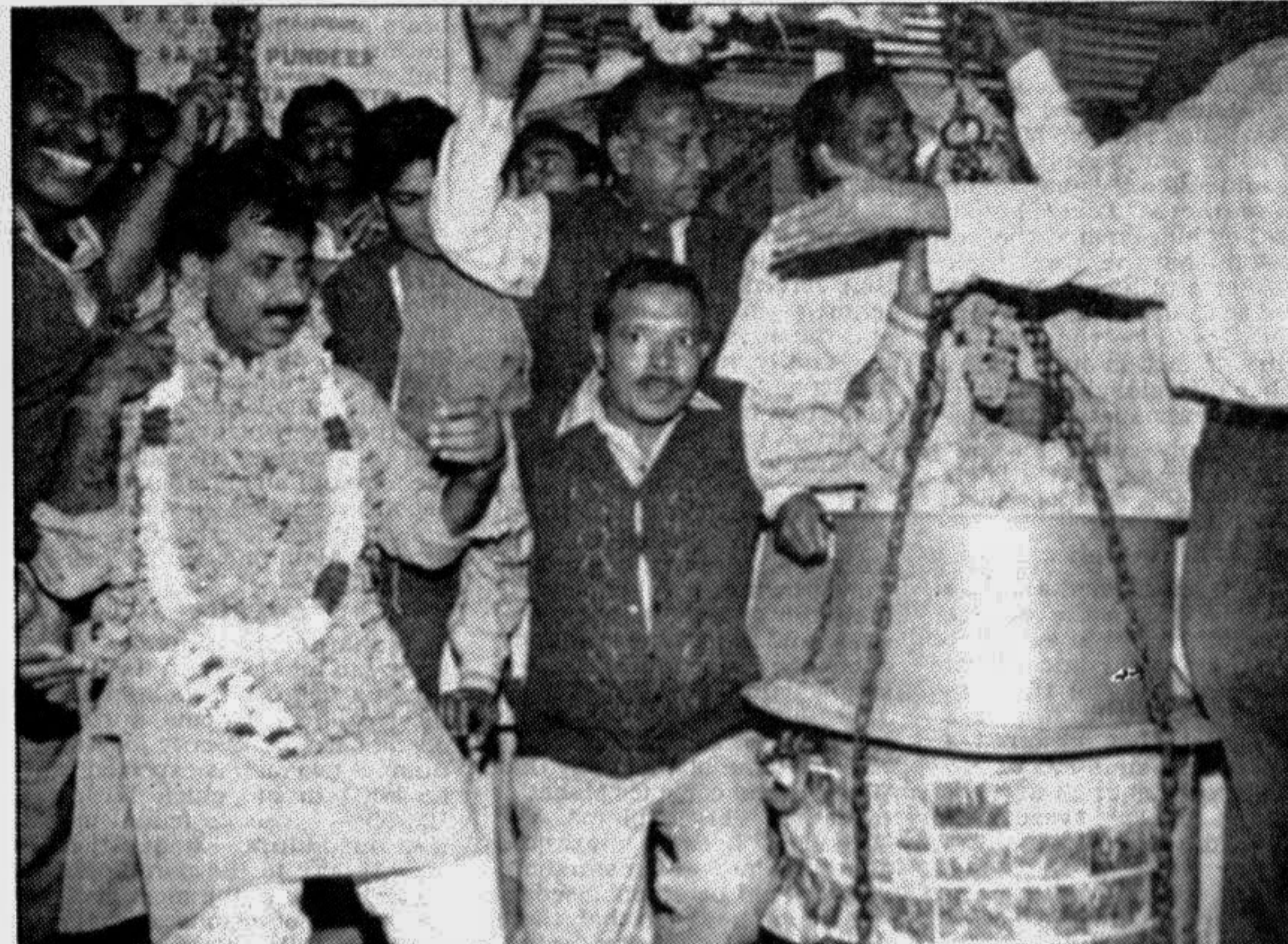
The Congress has come under intense pressure from the rest of the opposition to cobble together an alternative coalition and try to unseat the Hindu nationalist federal government after the elections.

The BJP, which faces popular anger over runaway inflation, says that the ballot cannot be seen as a referendum on the Vajpayee government.

Analysts say this as a tacit admission of its impending defeat.

The Times of India poll, which surveyed 2,358 voters in New Delhi, said 72 per cent of the respondents cited inflation as the chief factor in the elections.

A little over half the voters say they expect the Congress to be able to offer a better government in Delhi, it said.



State Assembly candidate Bhram Singh, left, is weighed against sweets and coins outside New Delhi Friday. Assembly elections in India will be held on November 25. — AP/UNB photo

'US willing to work with Iran to oust Saddam'

WASHINGTON, Nov 21: The United States is willing to work with Iran and other countries in the region to try to oust Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power, a senior US official said Friday, reports AP.

"We will certainly take support from wherever we can get it," said the official, who asked not to be named.

The official declined to say whether Washington had sent out feelers to Tehran on a possible collaboration but he noted that "Iran has, along with other neighbours, suffered particularly from Saddam Hussein's aggressive intentions."

"There is a common interest there in finding a way to change the situation for the better," he said.

Iran and Iraq fought a bloody war from 1980 to 1988. Relations between the two countries have "since been cool."

President Bill Clinton last week announced that the United States would be stepping up its assistance to Iraqi opposition groups as part of a campaign to try to bring about a new

government in Baghdad.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright intends to name soon a special representative to the Iraqi opposition to work with the fragmented array of opponents to Saddam, said the official.

The administration also appears set to try to enlist countries in the region to join the United States in the drive to replace Saddam with a more democratic-minded leader.

To reach that goal, the United States would be willing to include Iran in the effort despite their 18-year estrangement following the 1979 hostage-taking at the US Embassy in Tehran, the official said.

Washington severed diplomatic relations with Tehran in 1980 but Albright offered in 1980 to hold talks on restoring ties.

It was the first time that the administration has hinted that Iran may have a constructive role to play in overthrowing Saddam, who has been in power for 20 years.