

Pressure mounts on Netanyahu to pull out troops from S Lebanon

JERUSALEM, Nov 28: There have been seven military funerals over the past 10 days. Again and again, Israel's nightly news has led with anguished parents sobbing as the caskets of their sons, soldiers in their teens or early 20s, were lowered into the ground, reports AP.

Sensing the growing popular pressure to get the troops out of Lebanon, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday promised a thorough review of Israel's policy, saying he cut short a trip to Europe and returned home to "make decisions."

He called a Sunday meeting of Cabinet Ministers and generals to discuss Lebanon, one of many attempts, all unsuccessful, in recent months to "re-think" the policy.

Israel invaded Lebanon twice, in 1978 and 1982, to drive back guerrillas with the Shi'ite Muslim group Hezbollah. Israel set up a self-proclaimed "security zone" in southern Lebanon after withdrawing from the rest of Lebanon in 1985.

The Israeli rationale for maintaining the security zone is to prevent Hezbollah from approaching Israeli villages

along border. Israel's history is spotted with bloody terror attacks in cities and towns near the border, including assaults on a school and a kindergarten.

Netanyahu said Friday he would only pull Israeli troops out of southern Lebanon if this did not expose northern Israel to Hezbollah attacks.

With Hezbollah unwilling to give such guarantees, it is unlikely Israeli troops will re-deploy any time soon.

Hezbollah commander Sheikh Nabil Kaouk on Friday offered little encouragement that an Israeli troop withdrawal would quickly end the conflict. He warned that "any adventure by the Israeli occupiers to try and change the status quo in south Lebanon will serve to increase its losses."

Since 1985, Israel's policy has been based on the belief that it can only pull out its troops as part of a peace agreement with Lebanon. However, Syria, the main power in Lebanon, is unlikely to permit such talks until Israel withdraws from the Golan Heights, a strategic plateau captured from Syria in the 1967 war.

Netanyahu is unwilling to hand back the Golan, thus mak-

ing a peace agreement with Syria or Lebanon in the near future unlikely.

The Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot quoted Netanyahu as saying in London that he did not reject out of hand a plan by Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon under which Israel would withdraw gradually and strike Hezbollah if it attacked northern Israel.

However, upon his return home Netanyahu appear to be sticking closer to Israel's long-standing policy. "As long as we don't have an alternative, we'll stay in Lebanon in order to defend northern Israel," he said.

Still, the rising death toll is increasing Israeli popular pressure to end Israel's occupation of south Lebanon. In all, 23 Israelis have died in Lebanon this year.

A poll in the Israeli newspaper Maariv on Friday indicated that 40 per cent of Israelis support a unilateral withdrawal, compared to only 16 per cent in February 1997. The survey was conducted among 560 adults and had a margin of error of 4.5 percentage points.

A signed front-page commentary in Yediot Ahronot called on Netanyahu to "take an

initiative," cut through the tangle of Israel's involvement in Lebanon and order a pullout.

Many Israelis say that if the Israeli army is no longer in Lebanon, Hezbollah will have no reason to attack. The Lebanese government endorses that argument.

But Hezbollah, sponsored by Iran and driven by an extremist ideology that leaves no room for a Jewish state in the Middle East, has given no such assurances.

A unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon would be a "gamble," Israeli army Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz has said.

The grim choice facing Israel's leaders may well be choosing between army casualties and civilian casualties, say opponents of an Israeli pullout. They say Syria would have an interest in wearing Israel down by encouraging Hezbollah attack against Israeli villages.

Along the Israeli border, many residents are nervous about the prospect of an Israeli army pullout. A mayor of one of the border towns estimated that if a terror attack follows an Israeli military withdrawal, 20 per cent of the residents of the area would leave for good.

ULFA rebels blow up oil pipeline, 2 bridges in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Nov 28: Separatist guerrillas blew up an oil pipeline and two major bridges in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam today, crippling supplies, police said, reports AP.

Guerrillas from the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) set off explosives by remote control at Morigaon, about 70 kilometers (43 miles) east of here, a police spokesman said.

The explosion destroyed parts of an oil pipeline of the state-run Indian Oil Corp (IOC), snapping oil supplies from Assam to the rest of the country.

The blast also destroyed a railway bridge nearby, crippling rail services in the region. A second blast blew up a key road bridge in northern Assam's Darrang district.

The attacks came a day after ULFA militants gunned down five Indian soldiers and blasted a pipeline in the oil and tea-rich state.

Today's was the fifth attack in five years on Assam oil facilities, the police said a large fire was raging at Morigaon following the pre-dawn attack.

"It will take at least three days to restore the pipeline," an officer told AP.

The ULFA observed November 27 as a protest day to denounce New Delhi's decision to launch a military offensive against the group in 1996.

MQM leader warns of 'revolution' in Pakistan

LONDON, Nov 28: Altaf Hussain, leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), has warned Pakistani leaders of a "revolution" and said that a time would come when the nation's estimated 22 million Mohajirs would say "we don't want to live in Pakistan," reports IANS.

Mohajirs, the name given to Indian Muslims who migrated to Pakistan after the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, have long been accused by the Pakistani establishment of loyalties to India.

Altaf Hussain was quoted in an interview to the Dawn newspaper as saying that if pushed to the wall, Mohajirs might say goodbye to Pakistan. "When they (Mohajirs) will not get justice from anywhere, when they will be declared terrorists and subjected to army aggression, when extra-judicial killings will take place, ultimately a time will come when they will be forced to say that - no, we don't want to live in Pakistan."

Altaf Hussain had issued similar warnings in a number of earlier interviews. Last week he spoke of a coming "revolution" to the News of Pakistan. "The country is moving towards

a revolution," he said. "This will not come today or tomorrow (but) the time is not far when the corrupt will be brought to book."

The awareness is spreading all over the country and there is widespread resentment in all sections of the society, even in the rank and file of the armed forces," Hussain said.

The MQM leader warned the Pakistan government against attempts to "capture" Karachi. Stating that any attempt to declare Karachi a federal territory would be the first step towards the "breaking up and disintegration of the country," Hussain said. "We would never allow the government to run Karachi as a federal territory after capturing it to establish PML (Pakistan Muslim League) rule here."

Hussain has spoken repeatedly and strongly of his determination to resist Pakistani government attempts to "capture" Karachi and launch "aggression" against the smaller provinces.

Demanding autonomy for the provinces, Hussain said, "if you want to maintain Pakistan you will have to give autonomy to the provinces."

The MQM leader, who has a

commanding hold over the Mohajirs of Pakistan from his London headquarters, has warned that the dangers for Pakistan also lie in Punjab and not just Karachi.

"Different Punjab-based religious groups, with foreign affiliations, are fighting each other and the ongoing Shia-Sunni clashes have caused regional and international consequences," he said.

Altaf Hussain, who has been accused by the Pakistani government of statements that are implicitly pro-India, balanced his new warnings to the Pakistani government with nationalistic statements against India.

Accusing Sharif of playing into India's hands, Hussain said, "We will never accept India's supremacy over Pakistan at any cost. If we accept Indian supremacy, that would mean we are not a free nation."

Hussain alleged Sharif had already accepted Indian hegemony in the region by agreeing to sign the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) and also the FMCT (Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty).

LTTE rebels operating aircraft

COLOMBO, Nov 28: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas have for the first time announced they are operating aircraft and said they were used to drop flowers over a "martyrs cemetery," Tamil sources said today, reports AP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said in their clandestine voice of Tigers Radio today that helicopters were used in a ceremony at Muliyawli in the north-east of the country on Friday.

Tamil sources who monitored rebel radio in the northern town of Vavuniya 260 kilometres north of here, said the rebels' ceremony marked the culmination of their "Heroes Week" which commemorated thousands of fighters killed in the separatist conflict.

The radio announcement was the first admission by the guerrillas that they were operating aircraft.

The radio said while its 'Air Tigers' carried out the operation to drop flowers over the cemetery where their cadres are buried, anti-aircraft guns were brought into the area to keep away Sri Lankan airforce planes.



Hadassah Gez, sister of fallen Israeli soldier Eyal Cohen, is comforted by relatives as she grieves Friday over his flower-covered grave at the military cemetery in Bersheba. Eyal Cohen was one of seven Israeli soldiers killed in South Lebanon in the past ten days. Sensing pressure to get the Israeli troops out of Lebanon, Premier Benjamin Netanyahu cut short his trip to Europe to deal with the problem. — AP/UNB Photo

Court delays hearing on Anwar's bail

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 28: Jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim's hearing on an appeal to free him on bail was adjourned till next week to allow his defense lawyers more time to prepare their case, reports AP.

Anwar's lawyers on Saturday told the three-member Court of Appeal they needed at least 24 hours to study a new court ruling that could potentially disqualify any further attempts to free Anwar on bail.

The higher court moved the hearing to Dec. 5.

Anwar's bail application has been turned down by a lower court once and an appeal against it also failed. Trial Judge Augustine Paul said Anwar's lawyers weren't able to prove that he would not tamper with witnesses if released on bail.

Final death toll in India train crash 208

KHANNA, Nov 28: Scores of plain wooden coffins were loaded into open trucks Saturday and taken for identification or mass cremation. Authorities cleared away the last of the wreckage from a two-train collision and declared a final death toll of 208, reports AP.

Two days after one of the worst accidents in recent history, about 80 bodies remained unidentified and unclaimed. Video cameras filmed the corpses and belongings for showing later on national television, in the hope that relatives would step forward.

Police said they would hold the bodies in a mortuary in Patiala for a few days, then any remaining corpses would be cremated together. Patiala is 200 kilometers (124 miles) northwest of New Delhi.

In pre-dawn mist Thursday, the Calcutta-bound Sealdah Express collided with cars that had uncoupled from the Frontier Mail en route from New Delhi and toppled into the path of the oncoming train on a parallel track.

Honesty still the best policy for some

BANGKOK, Nov 28: A Thai construction engineer considered suicide after leaving five million baht (139,000 US dollars) in a taxi, but was soon all smiles when the next passenger handed the cash in, the Bangkok Post reported Today, says Reuters.

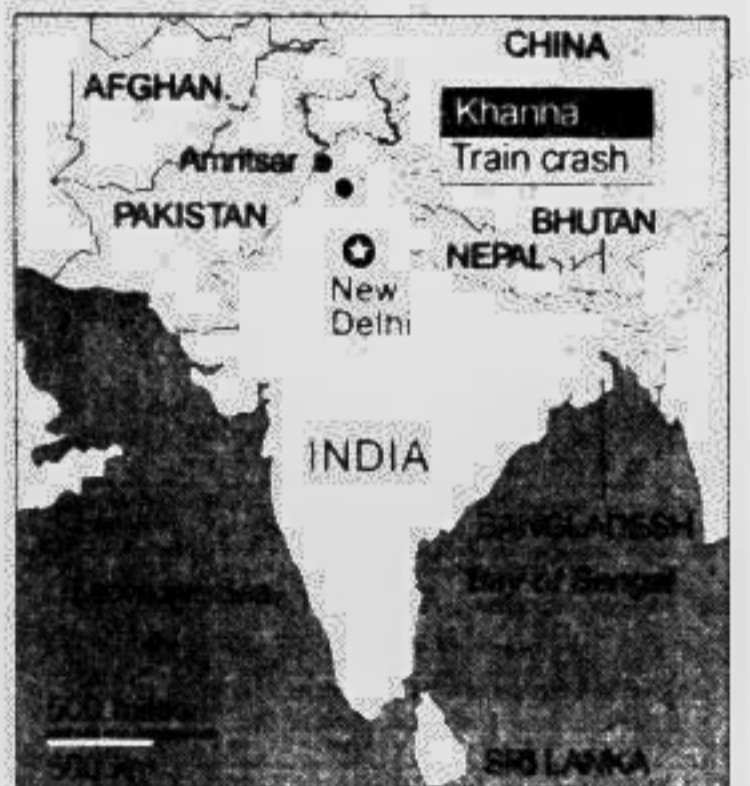
Businessman Soroj Theekasathien contacted a community radio programme when he found a blue holdall containing the money in the back of a taxi on Friday, the paper said.

The cash was claimed by Patpong Srisupak, who said it was for wages for his workers and building materials.

"I would have jumped to my death had I not regained the money," the paper quoted Patpong as saying.

"My company is facing a liquidity problem. The cash I lost in the cab was a loan from my relatives. I am extremely lucky to get it back and to know a very good man I owe him a lot."

Patpong offered Soroj 300,000 baht as a reward.



Train cars crumpled on top of one another, pinning dead and injured under tons of sheared metal. It took more than 24 hours to move giant cranes through the surrounding wheat fields to untangle the cars. No survivors were found since midday Thursday. The national railways began an investigation into what caused the last four cars of the Frontier Mail to decouple and separate from the rest of the train.

BRIEFLY

- Indian lawmaker held for poaching:** A provincial lawmaker in northern India was arrested on charges of shooting two deer in violation of wildlife law, a news report said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.
- Murad Lari, a member of the Uttar Pradesh state assembly,** was taken into custody earlier in the week after he allegedly shot the spotted deer at a wildlife sanctuary.
- Bus driver shot dead in Seattle:** A Seattle bus driver died on Friday after he was shot by a passenger and the crowded vehicle careered out of control, crashing off a flyover, police said.
- They said dozens of passengers were hurt when the extra-long, articulated Dking county metro bus crashed shortly after 3 pm (6 pm EST/2300 GMT).
- 6 dissidents held in Cuba:** AT least six dissidents were detained Friday after engaging in a shouting match with supporters of the Castro regime outside a courthouse, a dissident told AFP in Havana.
- Five others may have been arrested, said Elizardo Sanchez, president of the Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission.
- German to extradite suspect to US:** A German court accepted Friday a demand from the United States for the extradition of a suspected aide of Saudi millionaire and alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden, defence lawyers said, AFP reports from Munich.
- Lawyers for Sudanese Mamduh Mahmud Salim said they had been informed of the decision by telephone, but stressed that the court had not decided whether to grant or refuse the request.

Food-for-oil programme

Iraq submits distribution plan to UN

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 28: Iraq submitted on Friday a plan for the distribution of food, medicine and other supplies, thereby moving closer to implementation of a new phase of the UN oil-for-food plan, Iraqi and UN officials said, reports Reuters.

Approval of the distribution plan by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's office is necessary before Iraq will resume oil exports and continue the plan, which expired on Thursday.

The UN Security Council approved on Tuesday and Baghdad officially accepted the programme for another six months. But Iraq intends to wait for the distribution plan to be approved before it resumes oil exports.

The oil-for-food plan, which began in December 1996, is an exception to stringent trade sanctions imposed after Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait in August 1990. It allowed Baghdad to sell a specific amount of oil every six months to purchase food, medicine and other necessities.

The latest renewal, the same as in the last six months, was for 5.25 billion dollars. But Iraq in the last six months sold only 3 billion dollars worth because of low oil prices and its dilapidated oil industry equipment.

Nizar Hamdoun, Iraq's UN ambassador, said he did not expect delays in UN approval of its distribution plan because it closely followed the one adopted over the past six months.

International oil traders had predicted a gap of at least three weeks for Iraqi oil exports.

Al-Qaysi also said he had handed over to the UN centre in Baghdad a 42-page report, drawn up on September 10, on chemical analyses of samples from special missile warhead fragments taken in July. These fragments are at the centre of the VX dispute.

But in answer to information of missile engine components produced by Iraq, he said all documents had been handed over to UNSCOM and its request for analysis is not justified on technical or scientific grounds.

Cold wave claims over 50 in Poland

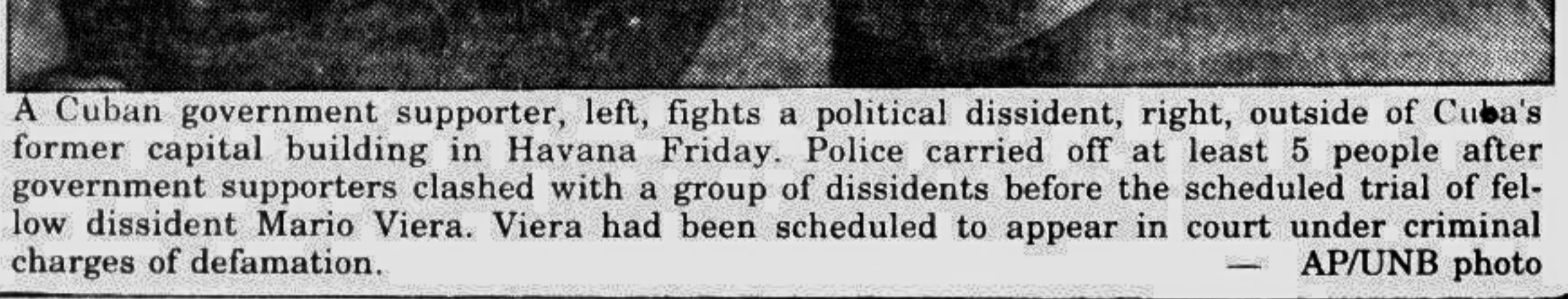
WARSAW, Nov 28: More than 50 people many of them homeless street dwellers have died in Poland in the past two weeks as a result of the bitter cold weather which has hit central and eastern Europe earlier than usual, reports AP.

Police said at least half of the 55 deaths so far recorded were of heavy consumers of alcohol usually men over 50 living in rural areas in many cases they went to sleep in the snow on their way home, and their frozen corpses were discovered the next day by children going to school.

The remaining victims were homeless people of which Poland is estimated to have more than 34,000.

The government has declined any responsibility for the wave of deaths which has put Poland at the head of a macabre league table of countries affected by the cold snap.

The majority of victims are irresponsible people who abused alcohol, said government spokesman Jaroslaw Sellin. I don't see what the government can do about someone who drinks too much then goes to sleep outdoors.



A Cuban government supporter, left, fights a political dissident, right, outside of Cuba's former capital building in Havana Friday. Police carried off at least 5 people after government supporters clashed with a group of dissidents before the scheduled trial of fellow dissident Mario Viera. Viera had been scheduled to appear in court under criminal charges of defamation. — AP/UNB photo

7.4m acres of land belonging to Suharto unearthed

JAKARTA, Nov 28: Former President Suharto and his family were found to own or have shares in nearly three million hectares (7.4 million acres) of land in four Indonesian provinces, a report here said yesterday, reports AP.

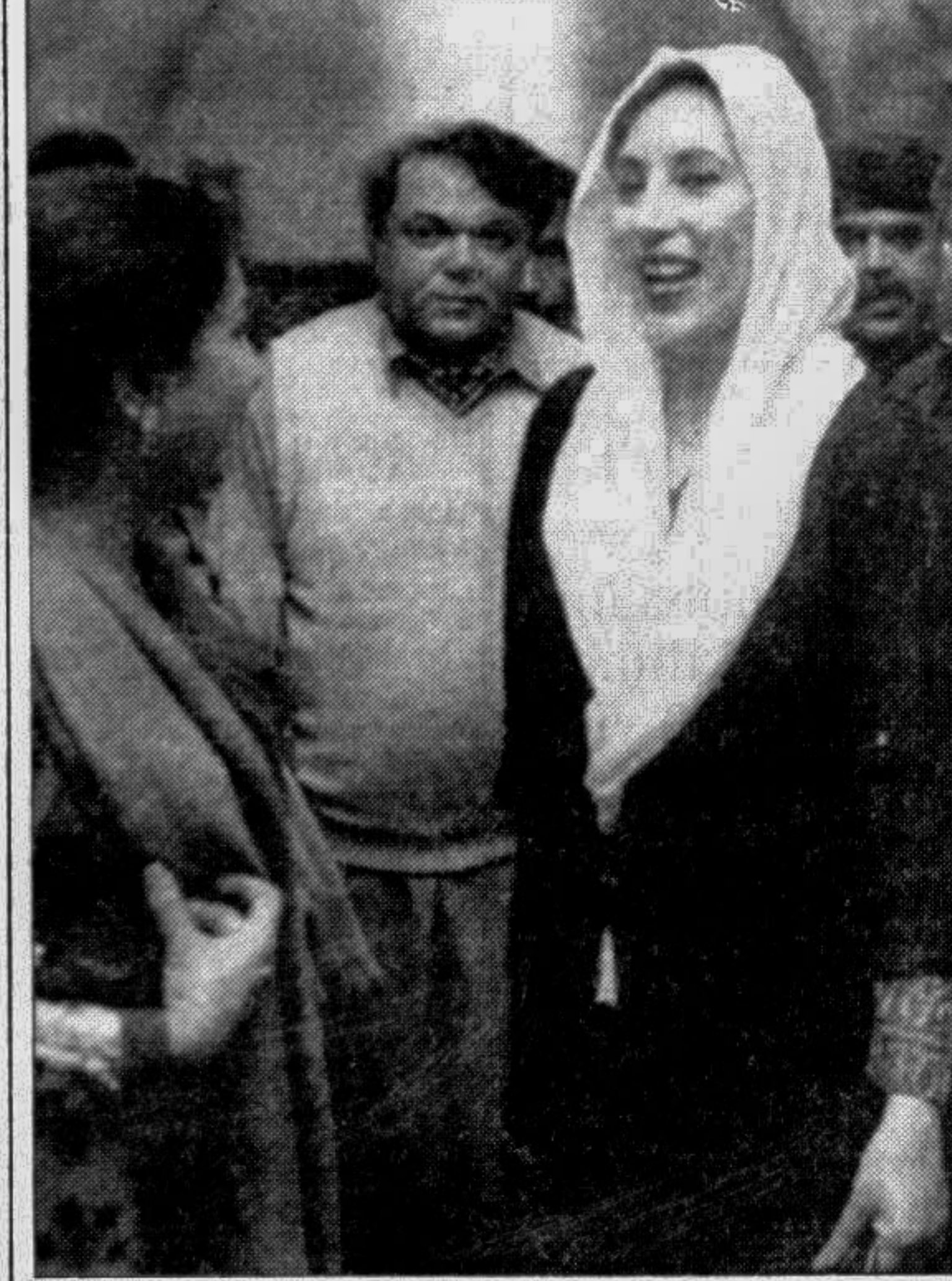
Some 2.44 million hectares were in forested areas of East Kalimantan, where Suharto and his family owned 12 logging concessions.

The findings have been reported to the attorney general's office, the head of the east Kalimantan higher attorney's office, Mansyur Kertayasa, was quoted as saying by the Kompas Daily.

Some 16.2 million hectares of 77 per cent of East Kalimantan, which is located in the island of Borneo, are forest areas. Some of the concessions were held jointly with Suharto's business partner, plywood tycoon Bob Hasan, some wholly owned and others as individual or Suharto foundation shares in joint-venture foreign logging companies.

Kertayasa said that besides the land holdings, his office had traced 29 additional assets in the form of chemical and coal companies, as well as factories and buildings.

Meanwhile the south Kalimantan higher attorney's office



Benazir Bhutto, Pakistani opposition leader and former prime minister, left, comes out from Lahore Airport Friday. — AP/UNB photo

Mexico's Popo volcano erupts again

MEXICO CITY, Nov 28: Mexico's Popocatepetl Volcano erupted again on Friday, twice spewing a column of red-hot lava and noxious gases up to two and a half miles into the air as it rumbled ominously, reports Reuters.

Officials said the snow-capped 5,452 metre volcano 40 miles southeast of Mexico City erupted in late morning, spreading a shower of ash on nearby villages and frightening residents with the thunder of its explosion.

The eruption sent fragments of lava over a radius of just under 1 mile, the Disaster Prevention Service said in a bulletin.

The volcano, commonly known as "Popo," had a second, stronger eruption in the early afternoon, which also hurled blazing rocks up to nearly a mile away and sent a smoke column soaring 2-1/2 miles into the sky.

F-16 fighters

US yet to pay off Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Nov 27: U.S. President Bill Clinton may have some good news for Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif when the latter visits him next week, reports IANS.

The Clinton administration has been negotiating with New Zealand and believes it may have convinced the Kiwis to purchase the 28 F-16 fighter aircraft manufactured for Pakistan nearly a decade ago but never delivered. The aircraft have been sitting in the Arizona desert because the Pressler Amendment came into effect. The amendment was triggered in October 1990 when then President George Bush was unable to provide the annual certification required by Congress if Islamabad was to continue receiving American economic and military largesse - that Pakistan was not developing a nuclear device.

Since then Pakistan has been demanding that if the U.S. can't supply it with the planes, Washington should at least give its money back. Both Clinton and Congress agree that Pakistan's request is only fair, but finding buyers for the aircraft, which are virtually obsolete now, hasn't been easy. The U.S. has tried to sell the planes over the years to Bahrain, the Philippines and Indonesia, among others, but the deals have fallen through for one reason or the other. Bahrain and the Philippines drove a hard bargain and wanted the planes fitted with the latest avionics to make them on a par with the newest top-of-the-line aircraft. But they did not want to pay the full price for them, which meant that Pakistan would not be fully reimbursed.

A couple of years ago the deal with Indonesia was almost through till Congress decided to spike it because of the country's human rights violations in East Timor. Even though the administration believed it had the votes to push the proposal through Congress, the Indonesians got fidgety over some of the lawmakers' critical remarks and told the U.S. they could buy fighter aircraft from someone else.

The only way out for the U.S. is to try and sell the planes to anybody who will have them. A senior administration official asked why the U.S. was trying to push the aircraft to New Zealand, quipped: "Well, they've got money. There's a definite interest on their part." But apparently the New Zealanders are also driving a hard deal. They want to lease them first, with an option to buy if they feel like it down the road.

The administration would very much like to sell these aircrafts, return the money to Pakistan and be done with it because the F-16 issue is a festering irritant. It is the only facet of U.S.-Pakistan relations that has become a sticking point on the defensive by saying the latter is holding on to something paid for.

Clinton to address Palestinian Nat'l Council in Gaza

WASHINGTON, Nov 28: President Bill Clinton will travel to Gaza to address the Palestinian National Council and oversee implementation of one critical element of the Israeli-Palestinian accord negotiated last month in Maryland, the White House said Friday, reports AP.

The council, meeting Dec. 14, is due to reaffirm the revocation of clauses in the Palestine Liberation Organization charter calling for Israeli destruction.