

Fresh tremor hits Uttar Pradesh: One killed

NEW DELHI, Apr 1: A major aftershock rocked northern India today, killing one person and injuring several others in the same region where an earthquake claimed more than 100 lives earlier this week, reports AFP.

Officials said the fresh tremor, measuring 4.8 on the Richter Scale, struck the mountainous district of Chamoli in Uttar Pradesh state at 2:10 am (2040 GMT Wednesday), killing a 55-year-old man who was buried under falling debris. Several others were injured.

Chamoli was at the centre of a major quake, measuring 6.8 on the Richter Scale, that hit the region in the early hours of Monday and left more than 100 dead.

An aftershock Wednesday sparked panic among the survivors of the original quake. Most have spent the last three nights in tents rather than risk returning to the few homes left standing.

Purulia armsdrop case Four Latvian accused begin hunger strike

CALCUTTA, Apr 1: The four Latvian accused in the Purulia armsdrop case yesterday started hunger strike at Alipore Presidency Jail demanding speedy trial and early disposal of their case, the jail authority informed the City Civil and Sessions Court, reports PTI.

Judge PK Biswas heard the petitions submitted by Latvian accused for early disposal of the case. The CBI in their counter petition prayed further time to close the evidence.

Hearing both the sides, the judge ordered the prosecution to close the evidence as early as possible. A tentative date has been fixed to close the prosecution evidence by April 19.

Biswas also recorded the evidence of four persons — Ranjit Prasad of Patna, Amar Jyoti of Bangalore, Gulab Chaudhuri, Survey Department of Calcutta and SR Bandyopadhyay, CBI, Calcutta.

Amar Jyoti, an upper division clerk of regional passport office (RPO) of Bangalore, in her evidence told the court that the RPO received an application from Satyanarayan Gaur for issuance of international passport in 1993 and it was issued to him accordingly. Satyanarayan who was wanted by the CBI in this case, is still absconding.

SR Bandyopadhyay said that he recorded the statements of some persons at Calcutta and seized some documents during his investigation.

The other two witnesses — Ranjit Prasad and Gulab Chaudhuri — identified and confirmed their report in connection with the case.

One lakh refugees flee Kosovo

Y'slav army capture 3 American soldiers

Russia plans to send more warships

MORINA, Albania, Apr 1: More terrified refugees from the Kosovo capital of Pristina streamed into Albania early today saying the city had been virtually emptied of its ethnic Albanian population, report agencies.

An international relief operation for some 100,000 refugees already in Albania moved into higher gear with an Italian supply ship docking at Durres Harbour and a UNICEF shipment of medical supplies and blankets due at Tirana Airport.

Meanwhile, the Yugoslav army confirmed today that it had captured three American soldiers, the official Yugoslav state news agency Tabgny.

As NATO's air attack continued, Serbian television reported that a NATO missile on Thursday knocked out much of the water supply and damaged a bridge in the center of Novi Sad, the largest Serbian city in northern Yugoslavia.

There was no immediate confirmation from NATO about the reported strike on Novi Sad.

The Serbian TV pictures showed the three captured men, wearing camouflage uniforms, with what appeared to be dirt or abrasions on their faces. They were speaking to someone off

camera, and subtitles were shown with what the Serb TV said were their names.

Continuing to disapprove of the NATO airstrikes, Russia announced Wednesday that it was dispatching a frigate to the region and putting other warships on standby.

President Boris Yeltsin was studying plans today to send more warships to the Mediterranean to shadow NATO ships conducting operations against Yugoslavia as his generals considered other possible responses.

The government said it would continue its diplomatic efforts to end the NATO attacks and resume international talks on ending the Kosovo crisis. At the same time, officials said, Russia would increase military preparedness, but no further details were given.

The Clinton administration offered on Wednesday 50 million dollars in food and supplies that will be delivered by US military aircraft.

The Defence Department stands ready to provide whatever assistance we can," Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said, adding that several hundred tents and perhaps more surplus military shelters will be sent to the refugees as well.

"They are fleeing a murder machine," he said of Serb forces.

Half the 50 million dollars in relief money will pay for airlift food and other needed supplies to the Balkans and the other half will be sent to the UN High Commission on Refugees and other international assistance groups. White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said.

Additionally, the US agency for International Development sent a disaster relief team to Albania to assess the growing humanitarian crisis, Lockhart said.

On the NATO operation side, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said airstrikes had begun Wednesday and that preliminary reports from Tuesday night's attacks suggest allied forces have struck several Serb tanks and other heavily armed vehicles.

NATO aircraft also hit the Belgrade headquarters of Yugoslav special forces, an elite military group that is accused of slaughtering ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Those fleeing from Pristina told harrowing stories similar to those told by others from towns closer to the border who have been pouring across for the past week saying they had been driven from their homes

by armed Serbs.

"They held long knives whose blades were red from blood and they were masked," said Blerim Gashi a 20-year-old man. "They talked with each other about shooting me and shot close to my feet to frighten me."

Agriculture student Ibish Fejzo said he had seen long lines of people walking towards train stations.

"Except for people who are unable to walk there are no more ethnic Albanians in Pristina," he told Reuters.

Other refugees coming through the Morina border post said men had been separated from women at Hani Dilit, near Pristina.

A woman named Vera said she had secured the release of her husband a university professor, by paying 5,000 German marks (2,700 dollars).

Ethnic Albanians in Pristina had not dared leave their homes after NATO airstrikes began last week. They reported that their businesses had been looted and burned down by Serbian forces.

Albanian authorities, backed by international relief agencies, were ferrying the refugees to shelters throughout Albania.

Ten Naxalities killed in Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD, Apr 1: In a major encounter with police, ten Naxalities of the outlawed People's War Group (PWG), including three women, were killed near Chinna Chintalaha in Medak village in Andhra Pradesh yesterday evening, reports PTI.

Two police constables received minor injuries, police said.

In the five-hour-long fierce exchange of fire, the entire ten-member squad of 'Narsapur Dalam' was wiped out, police said here.

The Dalam Commander Samanna was among those killed, police said.

Acting on a tip-off that extremists were holding a meeting in their hide-out in the village, a special police party rushed there.

On seeing the police, Naxals opened fire at them. In the encounter that followed, ten Naxals, were killed and two police constables received minor injuries, police said adding that top police officials from here have rushed to the spot.

N Korean ship sinks after collision with ROK vessel

COLOMBO, Apr 1: A North Korean ship sank in international waters off Sri Lanka after colliding with a South Korean vessel, Colombo's port radio officials said Thursday, reports AP.

At least 35 crewmen of the North Korean ship were missing after the accident 350 miles (560 kilometres) off the southern port city of Galle late Wednesday, said the officials at Colombo Radio, the official communicator for navigation.

Two crew members were picked up by the South Korean ship which did not suffer much damage.

The South Korean ship, "Hyundai Duke," which was due to dock at Colombo Friday, collided with the North Korea ship "Manpo," said Colombo's harbour master, Captain Shanti Jayamanne.

Meanwhile, the Indian Air Force has sent a rescue aircraft today to look for survivors, officials said.

Colombo Radio, Sri Lanka's ship-to-shore communication centre, said the Indian Air Force organised the search from Port Blair in the Andaman Islands to look for 35 crew missing after Wednesday's collision.

HK judge orders release of 100 mainlanders

HONG KONG, Apr 1: A judge ordered Hong Kong officials to release 100 mainland Chinese residents who were rounded up this week after a court ruled the territory can deport would-be immigrants who overstay their visas, reports AP.

The Chinese can stay in Hong Kong at least until lawyers for 17 other people who are claiming residency rights here can finish an appeal of the ruling that went against them, Justice Brian Keith said in the Court of First Instance.

The government and the mainland residents are fighting over how to interpret a decision issued in January by Hong Kong's highest court, the Court of Final Appeal, which said anybody with at least one Hong Kong parent has the right to live in the territory.

Some Chinese who say they fall into that category argue that the ruling gives them the automatic right to stay in Hong Kong, where they have been residing even though their visas had expired. Another judge ruled Tuesday in a case brought by 17 immigrants that all such people must return to mainland China to apply for immigration clearance.

The judge said the 17 plaintiffs can stay here while they appeal, but immigration officials immediately rounded up dozens of other people with similar visa status.

Visa-free entry for persons of Indian origin

NEW DELHI, Apr 1: The Indian government launched a scheme yesterday, granting visa-free entry and other benefits to "persons of Indian origin" (PIOs) living overseas, reports AP.

On payment of 1,000 dollars PIOs around the world will be issued with a special card, valid for 20 years, aimed at "making their journey back to their roots simpler, easier and smoother," government statement said.

An estimated 15 million people will be eligible for the card, which is open to anyone holding a foreign passport who can claim Indian ancestry going back a maximum of four generations.

Launching the scheme, Indian Home Minister LK Advani said people from Pakistan and Bangladesh would not be eligible "because of problems of illegal immigration."

PIO card holders will not require visas to visit India, and will enjoy the same access to education, as well as housing and bond schemes, as non-resident Indians (NRIs-Indian passport holders settled overseas).

However, they will not have the right to vote.

The scheme is a response to pressure from expatriate Indians who have complained at New Delhi's reluctance to allow them dual citizenship.

Pakistan for complete arms embargo on Afghan factions

ISLAMABAD, Apr 1: Pakistan has demanded a complete arms embargo on all warring factions to stop the protracted civil war in Afghanistan and called for punitive measures against countries violating such curbs, reports PTI.

A steady inflow of arms from outside is responsible for prolonging the conflict in Afghanistan, Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shamsahad Ahmed told newsmen here yesterday calling for a total arms embargo on the country.

He also suggested that those countries violating the arms embargo be punished under the UN Charter.

Rejecting allegations that Pakistan was meddling in Kabul's internal affairs, he said Pakistan's sincerity and policy of non-interference can be judged from its suggestion for a complete arms embargo on warring Afghan factions.

Pakistan, he said, was directly affected by developments in Kabul and would not like to see turmoil there.

Warring Afghan factions have repeatedly accused Pakistan and Iran of interfering in Afghanistan's affairs and helping rival groups leading to tension between Islamabad and Tehran.

Shamsahad conceded there have been a few difficulties in bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan over the Afghan issue in the past, but these (difficulties) are now waning.

In fact, we have asked Iran to make a collective endeavour towards lasting peace in Afghanistan, he said.

Sunni leader shot dead

KARACHI, Apr 1: Gunmen today shot dead a local leader of an extremist Sunni Muslim group and wounded another in an attack in Pakistan's violence-scattered city of Karachi, police said, reports AFP.

A senior police official linked the killing to religious rivalry.

Two men on a motorbike shot dead Sunni Tehrik Party office bearer, Javed Qadri, 25, with automatic weapons while he was sat in his shop in the Ranchore Lines area, they said. Another activist was injured.

The unidentified assailants fled the scene, leaving behind the dead and injured in a pool of blood.

Sunni Tehrik is a bitter rival of Muslim Shiite extremist factions and also has tense relations with other Sunni groups because of its hardline views.

Japan to launch spy sats to ward off N Korean threat

TOKYO, Apr 1: Japan announced today it would develop its own spy satellites for launch in 2002 in response to North Korea's missile programme, reports AP.

The government said last November it would launch four spy satellites in response to the perceived North Korean threat but originally considered buying them from the United States.

Japan "will develop the satellites on its own," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka told a news conference here today.

"It is thoroughly possible to develop the satellites with technology possessed by National Space Development Agency of Japan," the chief Cabinet Secretary said.

The advantages of making the satellites in Japan, Nonaka said, included rapid maintenance and repairs of technical problems.

But the senior government official added, "We are going to acquire satellite parts and a system on intelligence analysis from the United States and other foreign companies."

"Developing the satellites on our own is good for our country, and I believe the introduction of the satellites will further strengthen our security ties with the United States," he said.

Tokyo's decision to equip itself with its first independent satellite intelligence followed North Korea's launch on August 31 of a rocket that stunned Japan by flying over part of its territory.

Two of the satellites would have optical sensors able to resolve images as small as one square metre and the other two would have radar able to see regardless of weather or brightness.

Nonaka said the government set up a committee today to promote the launch of the intelligence satellites, with the first meeting scheduled for Friday.

Chaired by the Chief Cabinet Secretary, the committee comprised nine government officials including some from the Defence Agency, the Foreign Ministry and Science and Technology Agency.

Interview with Clinton Impeachment vote no 'badge of shame'

WASHINGTON, Apr 1: President Bill Clinton said he does not consider the impeachment vote against him "some great badge of shame" and that he believes historians will fairly explain the political motives behind Congress' action toward him, reports AP.

In an interview with CBS News, Clinton said he felt "honoured" that the impeachment gave him a chance to defend the Constitution. He said the American people clearly saw that driving the impeachment was an attempt by Republican congressional leaders to undermine the good works of his presidency.

"Those that did not agree with what I had done and were furious that it had worked and that the country was doing well, and attempted to use that should have been a constitutional and legal process for political ends, did not prevail," Clinton said. "That's the way I saw it."

"But I do not regard this impeachment vote as some great badge of shame. I do not," Clinton said. "I do not believe it was warranted and I don't think it was right."

The interview, conducted

Wednesday at the White House by CBS anchor Dan Rather, yielded Clinton's most detailed assessment yet of his impeachment on charges stemming from his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. He was acquitted by the Senate in February.

The president said he never thought about resigning.

"I would never have legitimized what I believe is horribly wrong with what has occurred here over the last four or five years. So it never crossed my mind," he said. "...I just, I prayed about it."

He also said he has no lingering animosities toward political enemies who fed the impeachment frenzy. "I don't wake up every day mad at those people," Clinton said.

"Any moment I spend full of anger and bitterness is a moment I am robbing from my wife or from my daughter or from my country or from my friends," he said. "I just think that it's past us and we need to put it behind us, and we need to get on."

"We owe that to the American people, to let it go. ... All the great players here, they need to let it go," he said.



Ethnic Albanian refugees arrive at the Morina border checkpoint, northeast of Kukes, northern Albania on Wednesday. This north-western border town became the main exit route for the tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians fleeing death, destruction and terror in Kosovo. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Israeli jets bomb Hezbollah posts: Israeli warplanes on Wednesday bombed suspected positions of the Shiite Muslim Hezbollah militia north of the Israeli occupied zone in Southern Lebanon, police said, AFP reports from Tyre.

Israeli jets fired ten missiles in two attack Wednesday near the villages of Zibqin and Jebel al Botom, they said, without giving word on casualties or damage.

Arafat to meet Yeltsin: Yasser Arafat will hold talks with Russian President Boris Yeltsin during a visit to Moscow next week, Yeltsin's press service said Wednesday, AP reports from Moscow.

The Palestinian leader will also meet Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

S'pore to replace navy chief: Singapore is replacing its two-star navy chief, Rear Adm. Richard Lim, with his one-star deputy, Rear Adm. Lui Tuck Yew, on July 1, the government announced Thursday, AP reports from Singapore.

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, following consultation with the Armed Forces Council, recommended that Lim, 45, "relinquish his appointment, said a statement from the Ministry of Defence. It said President Ong Teng Cheong had accepted the advice.

Ukrainian convicted of killing 52: A former sailor has been declared guilty in the worst killing spree in modern Ukrainian history, with a judge reading a lengthy verdict documenting 52 slayings, AP reports from Zhytomyr.

The detailed verdict took the whole court day to read Wednesday, and sentencing for Anatoly Onoprienko was not expected to be announced until Thursday.

US Democrat leader hopes India will sign CTBT

NEW DELHI, Apr 1: US Congressional Leader Richard Gephardt said Thursday he was "positive" India would sign up to a global nuclear test ban treaty, paving the way for a visit by President Bill Clinton, reports AP.

"There is a clear desire, I believe, on the part of India and its leaders to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)," said Gephardt, who has been leading a high-level Congressional Delegation to India for talks that have largely focussed on foreign economic and trade issues.

"But there are a variety of issues and a process we have to go through to get to that result," said Gephardt, the Democrat leader in the House of Representatives.

"I am positive that it can be achieved, and I am also positive that the president wants to visit India at the earliest moment, and achieving that result will make (his visit) a very, very real possibility."

Clinton twice postponed plans last year to visit India, the second time because of India's nuclear tests in May which drew a raft of US-led international sanctions.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has indicated India will sign the CTBT before the

Verdict of corruption case Apr 14 I'm victim of political plot by Mahathir: Anwar

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 1: As the curtains fell on the dramatic corruption trial of ousted Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim today, he continued to insist he was being "politically assassinated," reports AP.

The case, stretching over 77 hearings, the longest criminal trial in Malaysian history, ended with Judge Augustine Paul fixing April 14 as judgment day. The verdict was earlier scheduled for next Tuesday, but the judge said he needed more time to consider the final arguments.

Anwar told The Associated Press, after prosecutors gave their closing arguments, he was the victim of a political plot by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and his allies.

"I still maintain that a political conspiracy involving Dr. Mahathir and his close associates to politically assassinate me," was behind the four corruption charges, Anwar said.

Anwar, 51, said he was recommended to a prison term.

Each corruption charge carries 14 years in jail and a 20,000 ringgit (5,000 dollars)

fine. A conviction would bar Anwar from entering politics for five years. He still faces another corruption charge and five counts of sodomy, a crime in this predominantly Muslim country.

The trial opened on November 2, with many unexpected twists and turns as prosecutors attempted to prove Anwar was a corrupt adulterer and sodomist and defence lawyers tried different ways to prove that Anwar was framed.

The September 2 sacking and Anwar's arrest 18 days later, defence attorneys told the court, was a conspiracy to eliminate the challenge he posed to Mahathir's 18-year grip on Malaysian politics.

But defence lawyers were repeatedly blocked from arguing that Anwar was a victim of a conspiracy when his one-time mentor, Mahathir, 73, fired him.

The prosecutors paraded a slew of witnesses who corroborated, often in lurid detail, that Anwar led an immoral lifestyle swinging between adultery and sodomy. They insisted

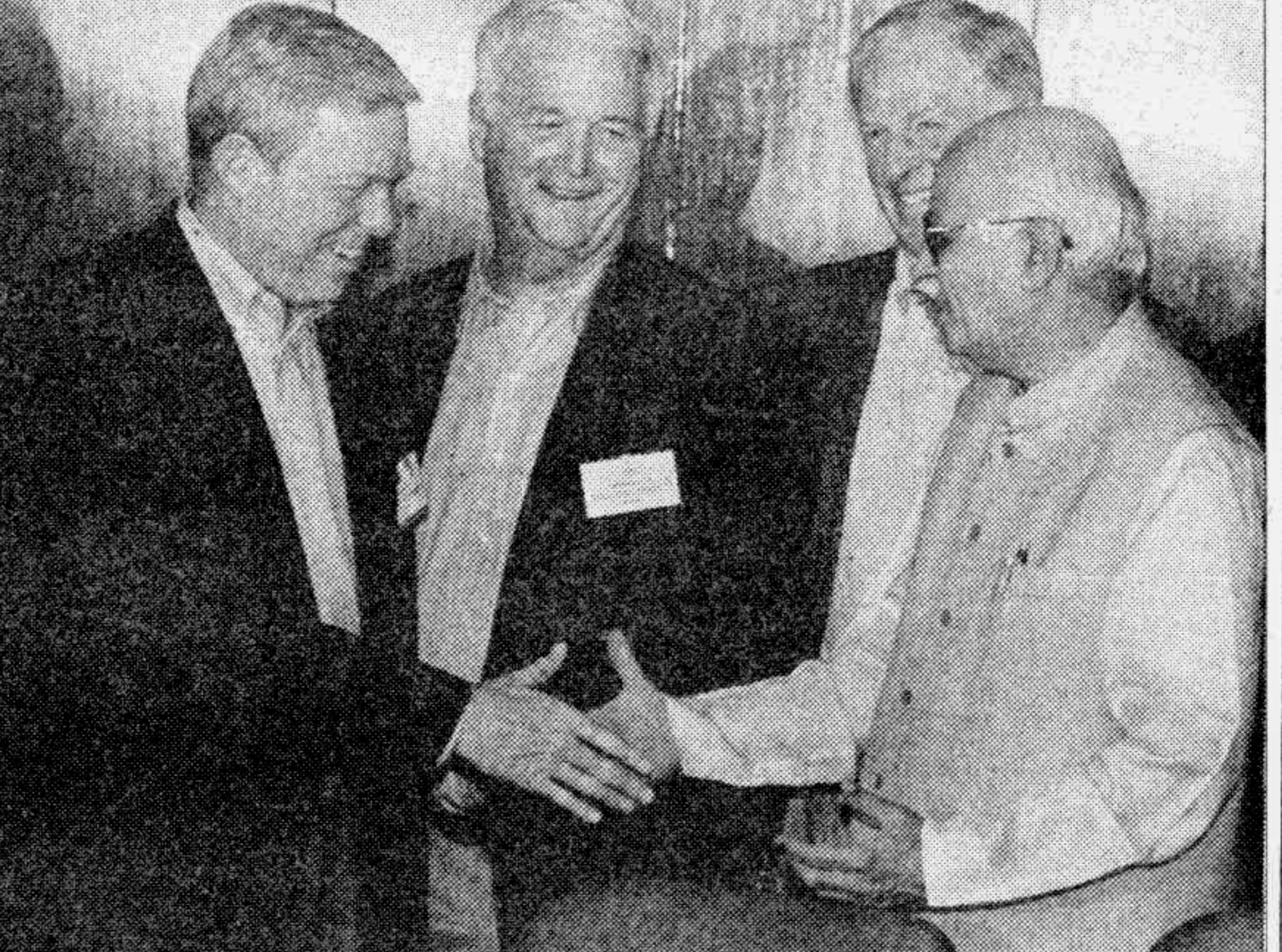
that he abused his power by forcing police to try to cover up his sexual misdeeds.

The prosecution has proved its case beyond a shadow of doubt," said prosecutor Abdul Gani Patail. "This honourable court should find the accused guilty of the four charges and convict him accordingly."

Defence attorney Christopher Fernando countered: "The only crime he has committed is being courageous enough to stand up against powerful politicians and to uphold justice and freedom. He is entitled to an acquittal."

The judge had first ended the trial on March 22 in a huff after defence lawyers insisted he hear a motion to disqualify him. Anwar in his motion said the trial had been unfair and the judge was biased against him.

Paul declined to hear the motion and threatened to hold the nine defence lawyers in contempt for insulting the court. But he relented, heard the motion on Saturday, only to dismiss it quickly, and allowed the defence to conclude.



US Congressional leader Richard Gephardt (L) is greeted by Indian Home Minister LK Advani (R) prior to talks at the Home Ministry yesterday. Gephardt, who is heading a Congressional delegation, said the US was reviewing its black list of dozens of Indian government agencies and institutions drawn up as part of US sanctions imposed after India conducted a series of nuclear tests in May 1998. At centre is US Congressman Bill Delahunt. — AFP photo