

NATO jets hit Chinese mission in Belgrade: Three killed

BEIJING, May 8: China Saturday strongly denounced the NATO attack on its Belgrade embassy that killed three people as a "barbarian act" and a war crime which must be punished as the UN Security Council expressed shock and an angry crowd pelted the US mission here with stones, reports AFP.

"The Chinese government and people express their utmost indignation and severe condemnation of the barbarian act," said a government statement carried by state media.

"The US-led NATO should bear all responsibilities arising from this," it said, adding that the Chinese government reserved the right to take further action. Xinhua news agency said three people were confirmed killed, including its own correspondent Shao Yunhua. One person was still missing and more than 20 injured.

US ambassador to Beijing James Sasser was "urgently" summoned to receive "the strongest protest" at the bombing in Beijing's strongest condemnation of the day, China's ambassador to the United Nations Qin Huasun denounced the attack as a "crime of war" which breached the Geneva Conventions "and should be

punished."

Qin made the statement during an open session at an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council.

US ambassador to the UN Peter Burleigh responded that the attack had not been confirmed as a bombing by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. He told reporters before the Security Council meeting: "In case it was a NATO bomb, it is obviously something we deeply regret and we apologize for it."

"We never target civilians and we would never target an embassy."

However Burleigh ignored a Chinese call for a halt to the air campaign, saying the conflict was caused by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's "horrendous" policies that triggered an exodus of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo.

"We will continue to take action until he agrees to the NATO demands," Burleigh said.

NATO indirectly confirmed hitting the embassy but denied targeting it and expressed "regrets" for the incident. It said the bombing would go on.

A furious mob of more than 2,000 Chinese stormed the US embassy in a rage over NATO's bombing of Beijing's Belgrade mission, while scores of police

looked on.

More than 100 uniformed police had been deployed in the embassy area as the crowd, apparently mostly university students, continued to swell but did nothing to intervene, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

However, some 30 police formed a two-deep cordon in front of the embassy gate. The police were not equipped with riot gear.

Demonstrators also threw plastic water bottles and other debris at the building, smashing an external light, and the crowd cheered as each missile was lobbed.

They chanted anti-US and anti-NATO slogans and waved banners condemning the overnight bombing in Belgrade which left at least three dead at the Belgrade embassy, according to Chinese officials.

"USA are killers," the crowd chanted, as more than 100 uniformed police watched on. "Return Chinese sovereignty."

One banner said: "USA go to hell." "NATO Nazis," said another.

"I want to exchange blood for blood," one protester yelled.

Down with American! Americans go home," others chanted. The news of the attack did not emerge on state television until

midday when footage of the embassy and the injured was carried, along with the government's strong condemnation of the "barbarian action."

"China's leaders should take some action. We are shocked and angry," said Feng Ping, a student in her twenties. "Chinese people love peace. Why should they bomb the Chinese embassy?"

The missile attack on the embassy further inflamed people already unhappy with the NATO campaign.

In the Chinese city of Shanghai, there was no demonstration at the US consulate, but at least 20 police were guarding the compound.

Saturday's rowdy protest at the US embassy here was unusual as Chinese authorities routinely block demonstrations, regardless of their subject. Chinese state television reported the strikes in its midday news programme, showing footage of the embassy and people hurt in the strike. It also carried the official government statement.

The 15 Security Council members meanwhile met the UN behind closed doors for almost four hours. Council president Denis Dague Rewaka then read a statement expressing "shock



Angry Chinese chant anti-US slogans in front of the United States embassy Saturday in Beijing. More than 2,000 furious Chinese protested outside the US embassy against NATO's bombing of Beijing's Belgrade mission.

and concern" but noting the "regrets" expressed.

The council also noted NATO was investigating Friday night's attack. It then went into open session.

Diplomats said the statement was a watered-down version of a draft proposed by China, which initially had

sought to have the attack officially branded a violation of international law.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov cancelled a trip to Britain at the last minute because of the bombing.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was "shocked and distressed" to learn of the air

strike, his spokesman Fred Eckhard said.

NATO's air campaign will however not be affected by the bombing in error of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the alliance said on Saturday.

"It is important and necessary to keep the pressure up on President Milosevic."

Six militants killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, May 8: At least six militants were killed in an encounter with police and security forces at Saloni Village in Poonch district of Jammu region yesterday, a police spokesman said, reports PTI.

The encounter between ultras and a joint police and army party started at 1100 hours and continued for over six hours, he said. Troops gunned down six militants during the encounter, the spokesman said.

The identity of slain militants was yet to be ascertained, he said, adding some arms and ammunition including six automatic rifles were recovered from the encounter site.

Blair to meet Dalai Lama in London

LONDON, May 8: British Prime Minister Tony Blair has agreed to meet Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama who flew into London Friday, the Foreign office said, reports AFP.

Blair will meet the Dalai Lama "in his religious capacity" rather than as a political leader, a spokesman said.

It will be the Tibetan spiritual leader's first meeting with British government leaders since Blair took office in 1997. He will also meet British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.

No date has been given for the meeting during the Dalai Lama's weeklong visit to Britain.

By meeting the Dalai Lama only in his religious capacity, the British officials hope to avoid upsetting China, especially in view of a planned visit here by Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

Iraq lacks will to normalise ties: Iran

TEHRAN, May 8: Iraq lacks the political will for a rapprochement with Iran nine years after the end of their war, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi charged today, reports AFP.

"Iraq does not have the political will to resolve its problems with Iran," Kharazi said in an interview with the English-language newspaper Kayhan International.

"As long as there is no strong political will on the part of Iraq, normalisation of relations cannot be achieved."

Iraq and Iran have yet to sign a peace treaty nine years after the end of the 1980-88 war with the fat of thousands of prisoners of war the main bone of contention between the two countries.

Tehran also accuses Iraq of supporting Iran's main armed opposition group, the People's Mujahadeen.

"We want the lingering problems with Iraq to be resolved amicably," Kharazi said. "We have taken steps for normalisation of relations with Iraq but, at the same time, there are a lot of obstacles."

Rebels release 7 hostages in Colombia

MONTERREY, Colombia, May 8: Colombia's second largest rebel group Friday released seven of the 32 hostages it has held since hijacking a commercial airliner last month, and asked them to deliver a message for the government, reports AFP.

Among those released was an Ecuadorian nun, Josefina Menosca, and Venezuelan national Otto Duarte, taken along with 39 other hostages April 12. The other five people released were Colombian men, held since the Avianca flight from Bucaramanga to Bogota was hijacked and forced to land on an airstrip in the jungle.

The 25 people remaining in the hands of the National Liberation Army (ELN) are being held in two groups in the same region near here where the release took place, the freed hostages told journalists.

350 Mexicans died in 1998 trying to cross into US

OAXACA, Mexico, May 8: More than 350 illegal immigrants died trying to cross Mexico border with the United States in 1998, an effect of measures to counter crossings that "we cannot tolerate," an Interior Ministry official said Friday, reports AFP.

The death of immigrants "is one of the effects that we cannot tolerate" of US policies which treat immigration as a political phenomenon and not a human one, Interior Deputy Minister Fernando Solis said. The fences put up by US border patrol and political actions "have not reduced and will not reduce the immigration flow which is reaching an historic level," Solis told a conference here on immigration.

Above all, he said, immigration along the 3,200-kilometre common border with the United States is a "work phenomenon." "Immigration is not a criminal action, and the immigrant is not a criminal, but a person who leaves his home to look for better living conditions," Solis stated.

Every day, an estimated 2,000 people try to cross the border illegally, to join the 17 million Mexicans who live in the United States.

Since 1994, 1,187 people have died as they tried to cross the Rio Grande in remote areas,

Nepal debates water pact with India

MAHENDRANAGAR, Nepal, May 8: Nepalese, preparing for the second round of a general election, are debating the future of a river pact with India which has become a thorn in relations between the two neighbours, reports Reuters.

The first round of voting in the Himalayan kingdom's third legislative election in nine years took place last week and the second is scheduled for May 17.

Voters in this sleepy town on the western border with India are sceptical about the will of politicians to resolve issues such as the Mahakali River controversy.

"They make empty promises but forget everything once they win the ballot," Prem Jaiju said.

Lack of water for irrigation and electricity is a key problem in Nepal, which nestles between India and China on the southern slopes of the Himalayas.

In 1996, Nepal and India signed the Mahakali River Treaty, settling out the terms for the construction of a dam to generate hydroelectric power and provide irrigation.

The new dam, capable of generating up to 6,400 megawatts, would cost more than \$3.0 billion to be shared equally between Kathmandu and New Delhi.

US think tank says No improvement in Indo-Pak ties

WASHINGTON, May 8: Several well-meaning declarations signed between India and Pakistan over the last five decades, including the Shimla Agreement, have not improved ties between the two neighbours, a leading US think tank has said, reports PTI.

Declarations by national leaders have improved troubled bilateral relations between countries in some cases but not in others such as India and Pakistan, the Washington-based Henry L. Stimson Centre said in a recent publication.

The work titled declaratory diplomacy: rhetorical initiatives and confidence building says conciliatory public declarations and even treaties have been largely unsuccessful in improving Indo-Pakistan relations.

The study by Michael Krepon and P.R. Chari, co-director of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, discussed three agreements — the Indus Waters Treaty, the Shimla Agreement and the no-war pact of friendship proposals — and concludes that leaders of both sides have used them primarily to firm up domestic support instead of building mutual confidence.

In sharp contrast, friendly public declarations by political leaders have improved Egypt-Israel and Argentina-Brazil relations. Similar declarations have produced mixed results in US-Soviet ties, it says.

It's time to bury UN, says Iraq

BAGHDAD, May 8: A leading Iraqi newspaper said Saturday it was time to "bury" the United Nations because it had been reduced to an instrument of US policy, reports AFP.

Announcing "the death of the (UN) Security Council," the daily Babel said the United Nations was no longer carrying out its international role.

"It is time to bury an organisation which has not been able to defend its name or its mission," said the paper, which is run by President Saddam Hussein's eldest son, Uday.

"The world needs a jolt to awaken it from its lethargy and to emerge from the situation of despair and weariness provoked by the US hegemony," it said.

Iraq has severed cooperation with the United Nations since a US-British air war in December and wants an immediate lifting of UN sanctions which have been in force since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

PA seeks US help for speedy implementation of Wye peace accord

RAMALLAH, West Bank, May 8: The Palestinian Authority has called upon the US government to draw up a blueprint for peacemaking after the Israeli election, a senior Palestinian official said on Friday.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told Reuters he had asked senior US officials during his recent visit to Washington to prepare plans for the implementation of the Wye peace accord.

"We asked the US administration to put forward mechanisms for the implementation of the Wye deal immediately after the new Israeli government is set up," Erekat said.

Israeli vote on May 17 for a new parliament and prime minister in a general election that could be decided in a second round in June, the prime ministerial candidates get more than 50 per cent of the vote.

Pollsters say opposition leader Ehud Barak, who has pledged to reinstate peace efforts if elected, is several points ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In an interview with Reuters Television, Barak declined to commit himself to striking an accord within 12 months — a target proposed by the United States which has urged the speedy renewal of peacemaking after the election.

Peace moves have been stalled since Netanyahu was forced to call an early election last year.

Netanyahu's three years in office have been marked by a slow pace of peace efforts with the Palestinians. Only the first stage of the Wye deal signed with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in Washington last year has been implemented.

Pak govt to celebrate 1st N-anniversary

ISLAMABAD, May 8: The Pakistan Government yesterday finalised a programme of nationwide celebrations of the first anniversary of the country's nuclear tests on May 28, officials said, reports PTI.

A high level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also decided to observe the historic occasion as a day of takbeer, an Arabic word which signifies Allah's greatness, they said.

The programme approved by Sharif includes rallies, sport contests and song competitions as well as thanks giving prayers in mosques and hoisting of flags atop key government and private buildings.

Sharif will unveil a model of the Southwest Chaghi Mountains where the nuclear devices were detonated.

The replica being built at the Faizabad entrance of Islamabad city will be 65 feet high 30 feet wide and 35 feet high, officials said.

Paula Jones to seek more in penalties

WASHINGTON, May 8: Paula Jones' lawyers are preparing to ask a judge to order President Clinton to pay nearly \$500,000 in legal reimbursements as a penalty for being found in contempt of court in her case, legal sources familiar with the proposal said Friday, reports AP.

The proposed penalty was prepared for submission Friday to US District Judge Susan Webber Wright in Little Rock, Arkansas, who found Clinton in contempt for giving intentional, untruthful testimony in his January 1998 deposition in the sexual harassment case, the sources said, speaking only on condition of anonymity.

The proposed penalty is about \$200,000 more than the amount Jones' lawyers recently proposed to Clinton's legal team.

Presidential attorney Robert Bennett dismissed that \$300,000 figure earlier this week as "outrageous and greedy and, I think, a gross misunderstanding of the court's order."

Arab League anti-terrorism agreement comes into force

CAIRO, May 8: An Arab League anti-terrorism agreement came into force yesterday, one month after being ratified by seven of the league's 22 members as required by the agreement, reports AFP.

The entry into force of this convention is a great landmark in the battle against the horrific and dangerous phenomenon of terrorism, said a statement from the council of Arab interior ministers which announced the achievement.

Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian authority, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates all ratified the convention before April 7.

Since then, Tunisia has become the eighth country to complete ratification.

It hailed the treaty as a step towards restoring the true image of Islam, which calls for tolerance and renounces all forms of violence and terrorism carried out by minorities in the name of Islam.

Arab League secretary general Esmat Abdel Meguid said in a separate statement he was comforted by the ratifications.

The convention came into effect 30 days after the seventh country, Jordan, ratified the document on April 7.

The agreement, hammered out by league interior ministers last April, binds signatories not the order, finance or commit terrorist acts, as well as to prevent terrorist crimes and fight against them in accordance with national laws.

Guinea-Bissau president flees to Portuguese mission Rebels take control of capital

LISBON, Portugal, May 8: The president of Guinea-Bissau has taken refuge in the Portuguese Embassy after renegade army troops stormed the presidential palace and ousted him in an attack that reportedly left at least 70 people dead, reports AP.

The breakaway army faction also forced the 600-strong presidential guard of President Joao Bernardo Vieira to surrender following a daylong battle.

The presidential guard had refused to disarm as called for under a peace accord intended to end a five-month civil war last year in the former Portuguese colony in West Africa.

After Friday's fighting, the renegade faction which already held most of the country, seized control of the capital — the last government stronghold.

At least 70 people were killed in the battle for the palace, the Portuguese news agency Lusa said, quoting local reports.

Vieira first sought refuge at the French Cultural Centre in

Bissau but the building was surrounded by rebel troops and an angry mob, a Portuguese Defence Ministry spokesman said.

To prevent further bloodshed, our ambassador went by car to the Cultural Centre and took the president and his wife to our embassy where he is safe," the spokesman said on customary condition of anonymity.

The presidential palace, the French Cultural Centre and the French Embassy were later in flames, according to Lusa. It was not clear how the fires started.

Portuguese state television RTP reported that the city was mostly calm in the evening with only occasional bursts of gunfire.

At the United Nations, the Security Council and Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed deep dismay at the resumption of fighting and reminded government and rebel forces of their pledge in February never again to resort to arms.

Rebel spokesman Zamora

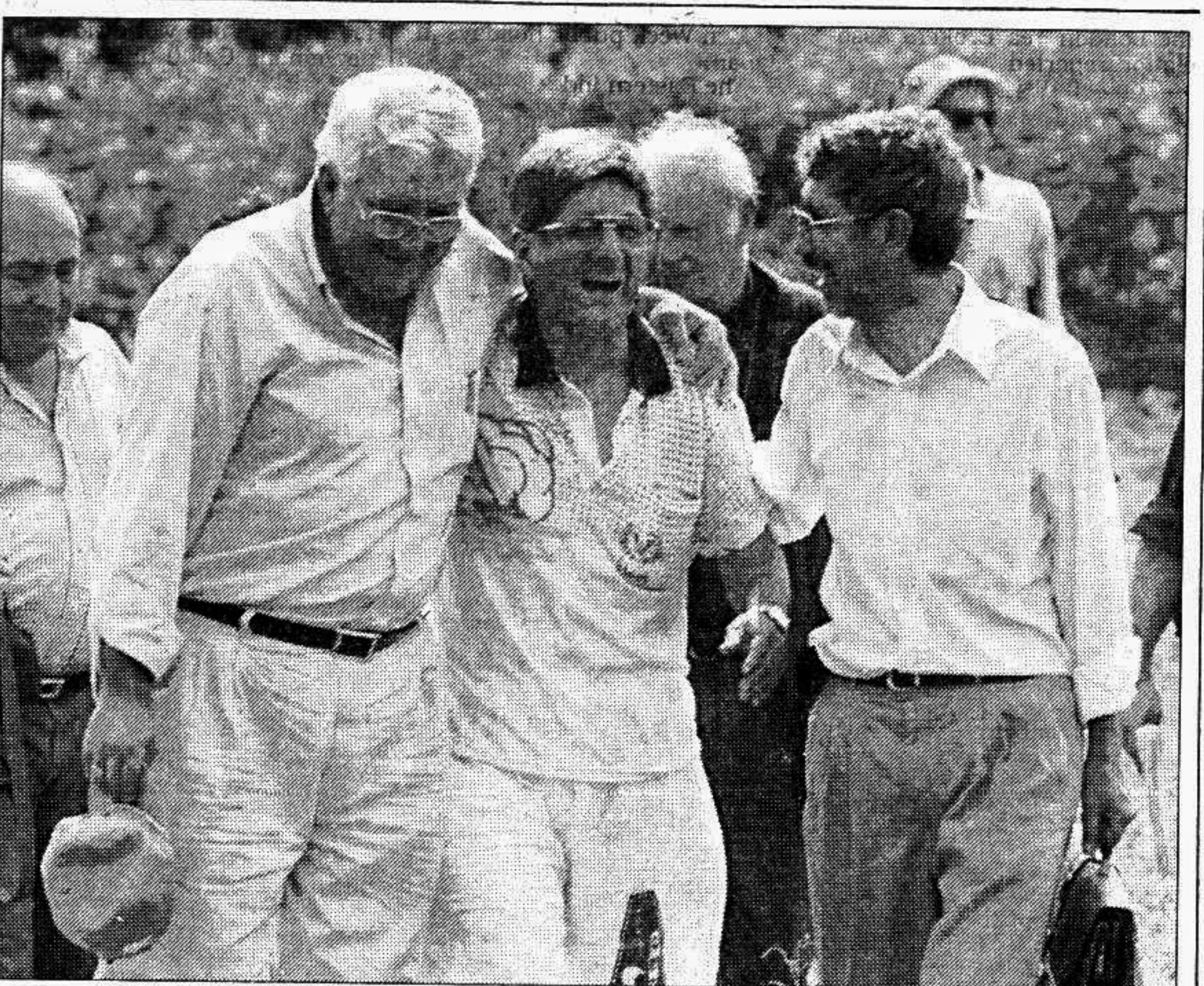
Induta told Portuguese state radio Antena 1 that the insurgents would not pursue loyalist soldiers and stressed that rebel forces had escorted Vieira to the Portuguese Embassy to ensure his safety. He said the rebels wanted only to ensure new and fair elections.

"We wish to make it very clear that we have made our choice and our proper place is in the barracks," Induta said.

Fighting broke out late Thursday after the passing of a Wednesday deadline the rebels had given Vieira to reduce his presidential guard to 30 soldiers.

The battles came despite the presence of a 600-member regional peacekeeping force deployed as part of last November's accord, which led to the installment of a transition government and the scheduling of early elections in the fall.

Interim Prime Minister Francisco Fadul, who was on a visit to Brussels, Belgium, told Portuguese state radio Antena 1 that the ballot would go ahead.



Venezuelan Ambassador to Colombia Fernando Gervasi (L) hugs Venezuelan Otto Duarte (C) and Colombian Miguel Fajardo (R) after their release by the National Liberation Army (ELN) of Colombia on Friday in Monterrey, Colombia.

Historic polls prove symbolic setback for Blair

LONDON, May 8: Scottish and Welsh nationalists on Friday denied the ruling Labour Party outright control of their historic new parliaments, challenging British Prime Minister Tony Blair's boast that separatism had been turned back, reports Reuters.

In another symbolic setback for the once untouchable Blair, the main opposition Conservative Party made gains in nationwide local council elections that were regarded as a referendum on the prime minister's first two years in power.

The "Super Thursday" polls reshaped Britain's politics by bringing nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales into the mainstream, turning the Liberal Democratic Party into a powerbroker and signalling a possible comeback by Conservatives.

Blair claimed victory in the separatist battle because Labour took the most seats in Scotland's first parliament for three centuries and also ended up the biggest party in the new Welsh National Assembly.

For years and years people had a choice between everything routed through the centre, through London, or separatism, breaking up the UK," Blair said. "I believe and I hope that out of these elections the union of the United Kingdom will have been

strengthened, rather than weakened."

But the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Wales' nationalist Plaid Cymru, which both want more independence than on offer at present, took second place and did enough to ensure Labour does not have a free hand in the parliaments.

The new assemblies do not have control of key areas like defence, foreign policy and transport.

In Scotland, Labour won 56 of 129 seats, the SNP took 35, the Liberal Democrats 17 and the Conservatives 18.

The biggest upset was in Wales where Labour took 28 of 60 seats, Plaid Cymru took 17, doubling its vote in 1997 general election. Liberal Democrats six and Conservatives nine.

The results meant that Labour was almost certainly going to be forced into coalitions with the Liberal Democrats to govern.

Although Labour won the most number of seats in the local elections, the Conservatives gained nearly 1,500 over the last local polls in 1995 and Blair's party lost nearly 1,300.

"Power is returning to the Conservatives at the local level. They are the pioneers of what is going to happen nationally," a jubilant party leader William

Hague said, even though the Conservatives still trail Labour by 30 points in opinion polls.

The most high profile contest was in the land of bagpipes and kilts where the likely head of Scotland's first parliament since 1707 will be Labour's Donald Dewar who would take on the title of First Minister.

Blair's struggle to defend the unity of the United Kingdom is being closely watched by other European governments, some of whom have their own nationalist parties to fight.

In Wales, where Labour expected a comfortable majority because fervour for independence is not regarded to be as strong as in Scotland, Plaid Cymru spoiled Blair's 46th birthday on Thursday with their surprisingly strong showing.

Wales' New First Minister is likely to be Labour's Alun Michael who was imposed on the party by Blair despite the objections of grassroots Labour supporters.

The elections saw a poor turnout. There was a 59 per cent turnout by the four million electors in Scotland compared with a normal general election vote of about 70 per cent. In Wales only 40 per cent went to the polls, while there was just a 29 per cent turnout in local elections.



Romanian President Emil Constantinescu (R) speaks to Pope John Paul II (L) during their meeting in Bucharest Friday. The Pontiff began a historical three-day visit to Romania, the first papal visit to an Orthodox country since Christendom split between East and West nearly 1,000 years ago.

— AFP photo