

International

'India may go to war over Kashmir'

NEW DELHI, June 23: India could go to war with Pakistan over the latest Kashmir conflict, Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Advani told reporters in the northern city of Lucknow that Pakistan, which has fought three wars with India in the last 50 years, was "a rogue state having several centres of power," the Press Trust of India said.

He did not elaborate but some Indian politicians and defence experts have suggested Pakistan's defence forces and the intelligence masterminded recent clashes along the border in Kashmir without informing Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

"I cannot say there could not be a war," the number two in India's Hindu nationalist government said. "Prudence demands that the country should be ready to face any situation."

The minister, considered a hawk among Hindu nationalists, warned that Pakistan "would have to pay a stupendous price if it tried to escalate the conflict," in Kashmir, where a battle has been raging since May 9 between Indian troops and Muslim raiders.

Advani said Pakistan's objective of changing the border with India had been failed.

"Pakistan had thought that it would be able to alter the Line of Control (the official name of the frontier) by taking a key highway in Indian Kashmir."

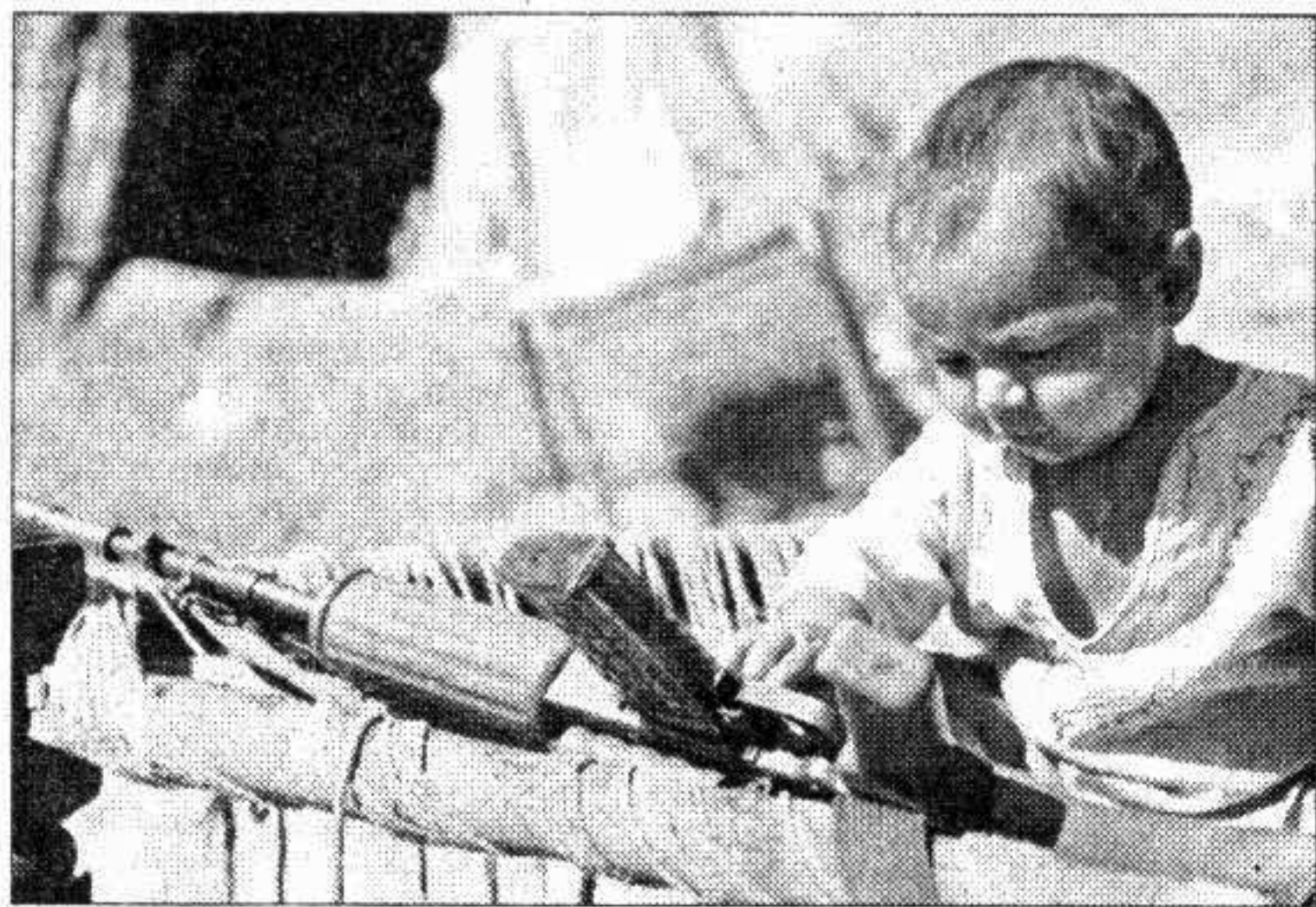
He said it had also failed in its attempt to seek international backing for its claims on Kashmir by wresting the Indian zone of the disputed and divided state.

"Had that happened, Pakistan would have achieved its aim of staying on in the areas already captured by them," he said.

Two of the Indo-Pakistani wars were fought over Kashmir, administered in parts by the two sides.

Advani's comments came a day after India and Pakistan

UK sends 'tough messages' to Pakistan



An Indian child plays with the gun of a soldier in the Kashmir village of Akhnoor Monday. — AFP photo

upped the ante on the fighting, which has left 163 Indians dead, 322 wounded and nine missing. The Indian army claims to have killed 339 Pakistani soldiers.

On Tuesday, Pakistan army chief General Pervez Musharraf warned that hopes for peace with India over Kashmir were fading, while Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif vowed he would defend "every inch" of Pakistani territory.

India, meanwhile, said any future military action in Kashmir would be governed by ultimate security interests.

Advani said the latest Pakistani transgression in Indian Kashmir was a "desperate attempt to resurrect" a Muslim secessionist campaign which has claimed more than 24,000 lives since 1989.

India accuses Pakistan of backing the insurgents. Islamabad denies the charge.

Meanwhile, Britain has sent "tough messages" to Pakistan to

withdraw intruders from Indian Kashmir, British envoy to India Sir Rob Young was quoted as saying by the media here Wednesday.

"The only solution to the ongoing Kashmir conflict would be a complete withdrawal of intruders," high commissioner (ambassador) Young said.

"Tough messages have been sent to the Pakistan government but I would also urge the Indian government to exercise restraint as it has done a very good job as it has a very good international position and should not do anything to jeopardise that."

The G8 stand clarifies where exactly the responsibility for the conflict lies and clearly urges a respect for the Line of Control.

A weekend summit of the Group of Eight (G8) leading industrialised nations and Russia in Germany said they were "deeply concerned about the continuing military confronta-

tion in Kashmir following the infiltration of armed intruders which violated the Line of Control."

Young's comments on the conflict, which started on May 9 after hundreds of what New Delhi terms Pakistani-backed forces were found to have occupied key mountains in India, follows strong expressions of global concern.

Washington has asked Islamabad to immediately withdraw the infiltrators while UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has urged a halt to the conflict.

Young said he hoped India would exercise "the same amount of restraint so far and that talks follow a complete withdrawal of intruders" in the spirit of a February peace pact finalised by the Indian and Pakistani premiers.

"Every possible step needs to be taken to resolve the Kashmir issue," he said, warning that "an escalation on either side would lead to an intensification of the conflict and this is what has increased our worries."

The bloody conflict has left 163 Indians dead, 322 wounded and nine missing, according to Indian officials. New Delhi also claims to have killed 339 Pakistani army regulars since May 9.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars and staged nuclear tests last year. Two of their conflicts were over the divided state of Kashmir, whose ownership they dispute.

Meanwhile, Indian troops on Wednesday resumed heavy ground attacks on Muslim raiders holding key positions in Kashmir following an escalating war of words between India and Pakistan.

A military source told AFP intense firing restarted after a brief overnight break in the Bingu, Bum and Gargadoo posts in the Batalik mountain range

of northern Indian Kashmir, as well as in the village of Munto-Dholo, which has been occupied by Pakistani-backed forces.

The Indian army was also pounding the 15,140-foot (4,590-metre) high Tiger Hills post in Drass region, a military spokesman said, adding that between 50 and 60 infiltrators were still perched on the peak.

Last night, one Indian soldier and two Pakistani troops died in fighting in Tiger Hills, a source said, adding that three other Pakistani soldiers had died in battle in Kaksar, another conflict zone.

Defence officials said the infiltrators had intensified attacks around the Tololing ridge, where Point 5140 -- the highest peak in the area -- was captured by Indian forces on Sunday as well as the flashpoint of Kargil, about 150 km north of Srinagar.

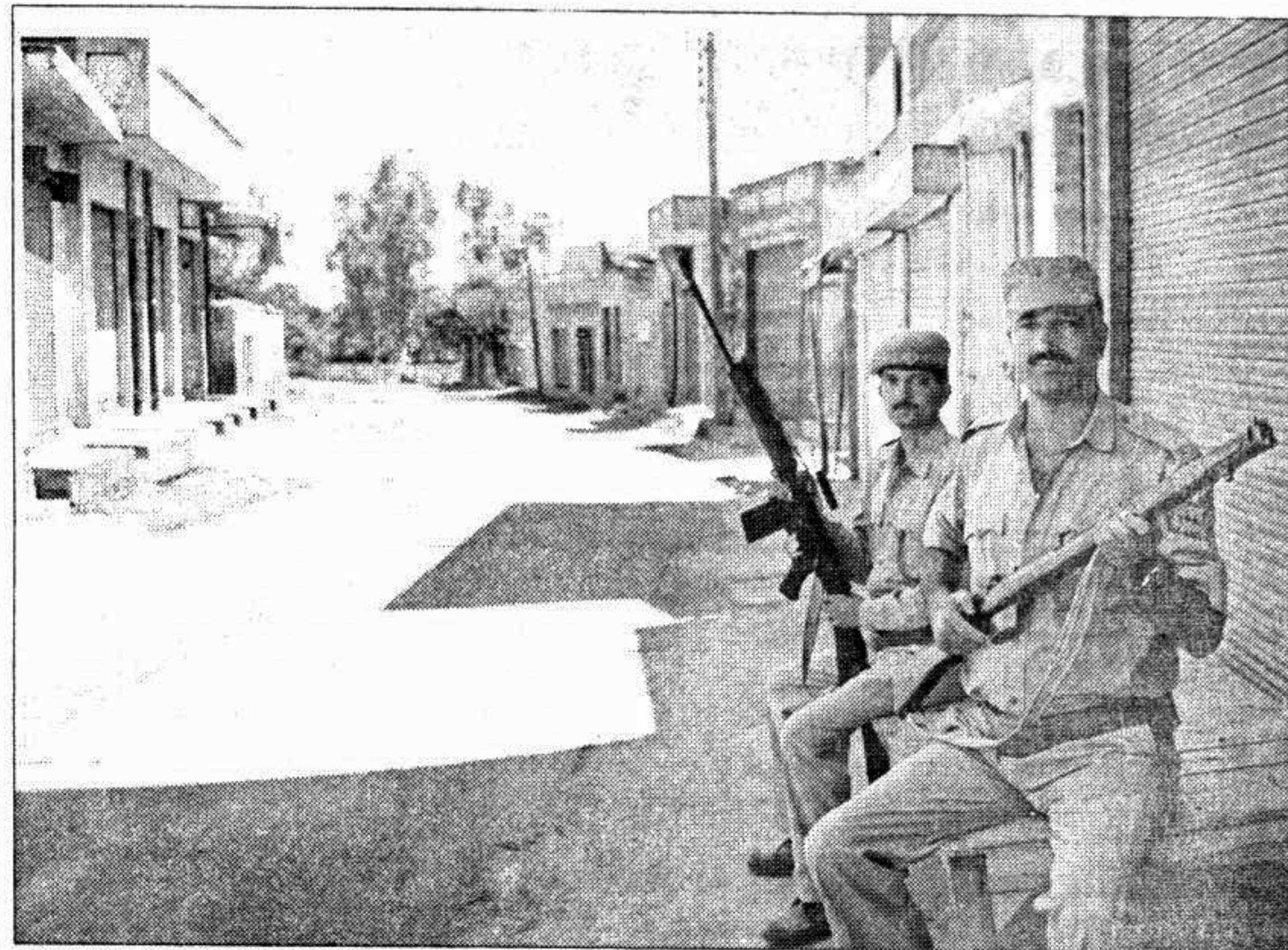
12m children die of disease every year: WHO

HARARE, June 23: At least 12 million children die in developing countries every year of diseases before they reach the age of five, said an official of the World Health Organisation (WHO), reports Xinhua.

Visiting WHO Regional Secretary Head Liz Mason Tuesday told the Zimbabwe News Agency that seven out of 10 of the deaths were caused by acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, measles, malaria and malnutrition.

She said most of the children died during their first year of life, calling for an integrated approach to the management of childhood illness.

"Projections indicate that these conditions will continue to be major contributors to child deaths unless significant efforts are made to control them," she said.



Indian paramilitary troops guard a deserted frontier village in Pallaswalla along the Kashmiri border Monday. Tens of thousands of villagers have fled their homes along the frontier after a military conflict between Pakistani-backed forces and Indian troops broke out in Kashmir in May. — AFP photo

Britons are living longer than ever

LONDON, June 23: Britons are getting older, and the number of those who reach 100 is set to explode, according to the latest official figures, reports AFP.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) thinks the number of centenarians in England and Wales will rise from 6,000 in 1996 to 39,000 in 2036.

By 2066 -- exactly 100 years after the peak year of the 1960s baby boom -- the number will have reached 95,000 centenarians.

The ONS survey also indicates that most of them will be women. Currently, women are eight times more likely to pass 100 than men.

Tigers seek S Africa's help to end Lankan war

COLOMBO, June 23: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas are planning to send a top leader to South Africa to seek Pretoria's help in ending the island's separatist war, a press report here said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) planned to send the group's ideologue, Anton Balasingam, to South Africa for talks with President Thabo Mbeki and former president Nelson Mandela, the island newspaper said.

It quoted unnamed Tiger sources as saying the guerrillas were keen that South Africa be

a "third party facilitator" if and when talks open with the Sri Lankan government.

In November, three South African diplomats told reporters here that Mandela has been asked to mediate a settlement to the Sri Lankan conflict.

The diplomats based in New Delhi said Mandela had been invited by "certain quarters" to get engaged in the Sri Lankan conflict but made it clear there had been no official request.

They said a mediatory role by Mandela must have the backing of all parties to the conflict as well as the support of countries in the region.

Marxist rebels kill 40 soldiers, 10 peasants in Colombia

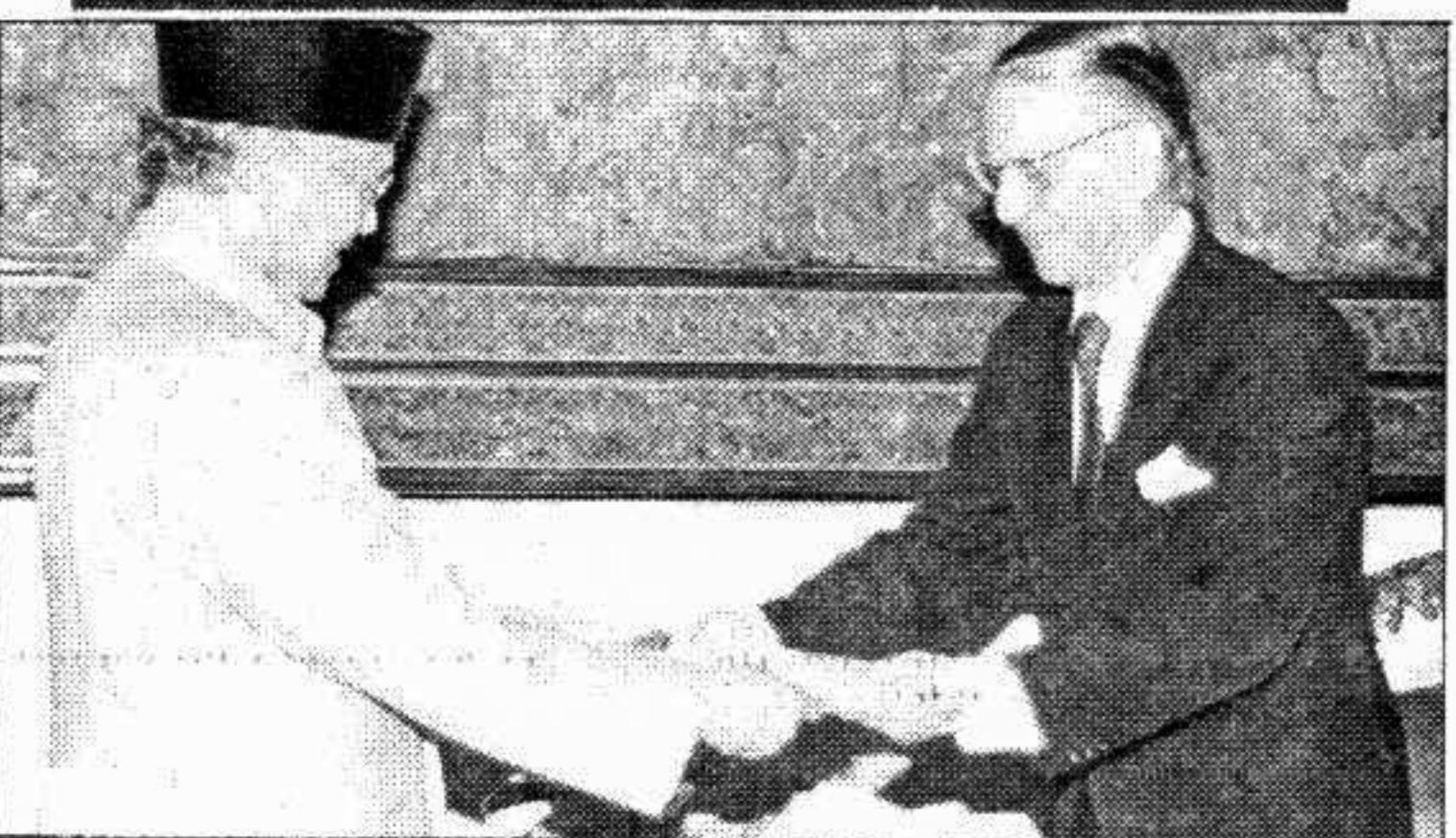
BOGOTA, June 23: At least 40 soldiers and 10 peasants were reported to have died when Marxist rebels launched a new bid to storm the mountain stronghold of Colombia's top right-wing death squad chieftain, authorities said late on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

About 500 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas attacked four hamlets in northern Cordoba province Monday, killing 10 peasants and razing a number of homes, according to Mario Carrascal, mayor of Puerto Libertad, a town close to the combat zone.

The heaviest clashes occurred late on Tuesday when army troops poured into the area to hunt down the rebel unit. A spokesman for the army's 11th Brigade said at least 40 soldiers were feared to have died in a FARC ambush.

Military sources said the FARC had been attempting to push into the Nudo de Paramillo mountain range, the power base of its most bitter enemy, Carlos Castano, head of an illegal alliance of ultra-right wing death squads known as the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC).

BRIEFLY



Indonesian President BJ Habibie (L) receives documents from Pakistani President's special envoy, Niaz A. Naik during their meeting at the presidential palace in Jakarta Wednesday. Naik briefed Habibie on recent developments in Kashmir conflict. — AFP photo

Clinton's return from Europe: US President Bill Clinton returned to the White House yesterday after a seven-day trip to Europe, Reuters reports from Washington.

Clinton, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and their daughter, Chelsea, arrived at Andrews Air Force Base in nearby Maryland aboard Air Force One, the presidential aircraft, and took a helicopter to the White House.

Riot in Mexico prison: Police fired tear gas canisters in a bid to quell a riot in the Pecosurio Sur penitentiary in Mexico City, prison officials said late Tuesday, AFP says from Mexico City.

Anti-riot police surrounded the prison and battled with the inmates around midnight Tuesday, the officials said, adding that there were no early reports of injuries.

Taliban issue decree to protect aid workers

KABUL, June 23: Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar has issued a decree to ensure the protection of foreign workers amid rising security concerns in Afghanistan, radio Shariat reported Wednesday, reports AFP.

The decree came after several security breaches including last week's beating up of two foreign and eight local residents working for the International Committee of the Red Cross in the central province of Bamian.

"Perpetrators of such deeds -- Taliban or non-Taliban -- will be given a term of five years in jail," the radio quoted the religious militia leader as saying.

Omar also advised officials to make sure such "undesirable deeds" were not repeated.

The Red Cross, a major aid agency in the war-torn country, scaled down its operations only to life-saving activities after its staff were beaten up and robbed of their belongings on their way to Bamian on an assessment mission.

"It seems that this is the plot of the opposition and the enemies who have disguised themselves as Taliban trying to show to the world that foreign institutions are not safe in Afghanistan," the decree said.

Omar told foreign aid workers to live by the rules and the militia regulations.

In Bamian and surrounding areas in central Hazarajat region, foreign aid workers are hesitant to take the Bamian highway.

Taliban's governor of Kabul at a meeting with a Red Cross official Tuesday said the ruling militia had taken steps to ensure the safety of aid workers, the radio added.

"We are always prepared for your security measures and you should not worry at all," the governor was reported as saying.

Besides the UN and the Red Cross, there are more than a dozen other international aid agencies working to help the impoverished population.

Last year the agencies were all ordered out of Kabul after they defied a Taliban ruling to shift to a dilapidated compound outside the city.

The United Nations also evacuated from Kabul after an Italian officer Colonel Carmine Carlo was shot dead in August following the US cruise missile attacks on suspected terrorist camps run by Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden in southern Afghanistan.

The UN and other aid agencies returned this year after the ruling militia gave top-level guarantees on security arrangements for foreign aid workers.

Barak nears formation of govt

JERUSALEM, June 23: More than five weeks after he was elected prime minister on promise of changing the way Israel is governed, Ehud Barak looked set Wednesday to give erstwhile foes in the outgoing right-wing government a dominant place in his new coalition, reports AFP.

Officials from Barak's Labor Party negotiated throughout the night with their counterparts from the Likud bloc headed by outgoing Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon.

Israeli radio said the two sides were near a coalition deal.

A pact between the two main Israeli parties would open the way for Barak to create a broad coalition that would give him the support of at least 85 of the 120 members of parliament.

Since his crushing victory over Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the May 17 election, Barak has said such a wide government was needed to make the difficult concessions required to finalize peace accords with the Palestinians, Lebanon and Syria.

But the price, according to media reports, would be putting key ministerial posts in the hands of current or former members of Likud who shared responsibility for the stalemate in peace-making efforts during Netanyahu's three years in office.

According to the reports, Barak has promised Likud, which won 19 seats in parliament, five cabinet posts including the finance portfolio for Sharon.

The foreign ministry has reportedly been promised to David Levy, a former Likud leader who held the job under Netanyahu until the two fell out in early 1998 and later joined Barak's One Israel election alliance.

Including the leaders of smaller parties that have rallied to Barak, his planned 18-member cabinet will include nine ministers who served in Netanyahu's government.

Barak's Labor Party, with 26 seats, would be badly outnumbered in parliament by center-right and far-right lawmakers from Likud and its former government partners.

Such a scenario has drawn howls of protest from the leftist Meretz party, which has 10 Knesset seats and has long been Labor's main ally.

Meretz leader Yossi Sarid cut off his negotiations with Barak this week to protest the prime minister-elect's courting of Likud and the ultra-Orthodox movement Shas, the third largest party in parliament with 17 seats.

"A government that includes Likud and Shas cannot bring about the changes which

(Barak) promised the people before the elections," Sarid said.

Labor Party officials also privately expressed worry that Sharon, 72, a wily nationalist hardliner who is deeply mistrusted by the Palestinians, will undermine peace efforts.

"Likud will be a Trojan horse in the Barak government," one unnamed Labor Party official was quoted as telling the Yediot Aharonot newspaper. "It's only a matter of time until Sharon throws a wrench into the peace process."

Once he's in the government, Sharon will gain strength, block the peace talks and try to force Barak out," another Labor figure said.

Barak, who has kept silent on policy matters during the coalition talks, tried to calm such concerns in an overnight statement that insisted Likud could only join the government if it accepts policy guidelines already worked out with other partners, including Meretz.

But officials said Labor and Likud were still negotiating Wednesday over such key policy questions as the future of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It was also not clear how a compromise could be worked out over Barak's willingness to withdraw from much of the Golan Heights.

Kosovo prepares for int'l rule

STENKOVEC, Macedonia, June 23: US President Bill Clinton on Tuesday received a rousing welcome from ethnic Albanian refugees as the international community prepared to run Kosovo for at least three years, reports AFP.

The foreign ministers of Britain, France, Germany and Italy were set to visit Kosovo Wednesday to begin the process of mapping out the province's administrative future.

As Clinton met thousands of cheering refugees at a camp near the Kosovo border, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was in Bucharest to stress Washington's commitment to a stable Balkans including Serbia, but only if

Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was no longer in power.

In a speech loudly cheered by thousands of refugees, Clinton pledged to help rebuild war-torn Kosovo but appealed to the Kosovars to await the all-clear on minefields before returning home.

"I don't want anyone else to lose a leg or an arm or a child because of a landmine," Clinton told the refugees in the Stenkovec camp.

"Please be patient with us. Give us a couple of more weeks to take the landmines out if the people ask you to do that, because you are going to be able to go back in safety and security," he added.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees however were ignoring Clinton's plea.

By Tuesday evening, the number of refugees flooding back into Kosovo was expected to reach 200,000, roughly a quarter of the total who fled the Serb forces' repression, the United Nations said.

"The stream of refugees shows no signs of abating," UN spokesman Fred Eckhard said in New York.

Clinton was greeted warmly late Tuesday by American and European fliers when he paid a two-hour visit to Aviano air base in northern Italy, the hub of NATO's air strikes for 79 days against Yugoslavia.

Clinton told the airmen and

their families: "Now the conflict has been won, it is imperative that we and our NATO allies win the peace... no-one thinks that it will take hold without difficulties, as more and more light is shed on those burned villages and even more mass graves than we dared to imagine."

"Thanks to you," the president said, "the worst is already over in Kosovo and tomorrow dictators in other places will have now to take a harder look before they try to destroy or expel an entire people simply because of their race or religion."

Clinton left Aviano on Air Force One for Washington after his stopover.

Foreign ministers Robin Cook of Britain, Hubert Vedrine of France, Germany's Joschka Fischer and Lamberto Dini of Italy were on Wednesday to meet the commander of the province's peacekeeping force (KFOR), General Michael Jackson, and UN special representative Sergio Vieira de Mello, as well as ethnic Albanian leaders, the French foreign ministry said.

In a significant move, moderate Kosovo leader Ibrahim Rugova will also travel to Kosovo Wednesday, Macedonian national radio reported.

The ethnic Albanian leader recently said that he planned to return to Kosovo soon.

His absence from the province, 10 days after NATO began deploying its peacekeeping troops, has given his rivals from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) free rein to consolidate their support.

The foreign ministers are expected to review the conditions for setting up a transitional administration with the UN envoy, who is to oversee an international civilian structure in Kosovo.

US Senate okays payment of US arrears to UN

WASHINGTON, June 23: The Senate on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved a bill authorising the payment of US arrears to the United Nations, reports AFP.

Passed by a 98-1 vote, the appropriation bill allocates funds to the Department of State and includes a payment of \$19 million dollars in US arrears to the United Nations.

The bill also forgives the 107 million dollar debt the United Nations owes Washington.

But the long-overdue payment is not without conditions. To receive the arrears, the United Nations must adopt budgetary reforms that include the reduction of the US contribution to the world body from 25 to 20 percent and of the US share of the UN's peacekeeping budget.

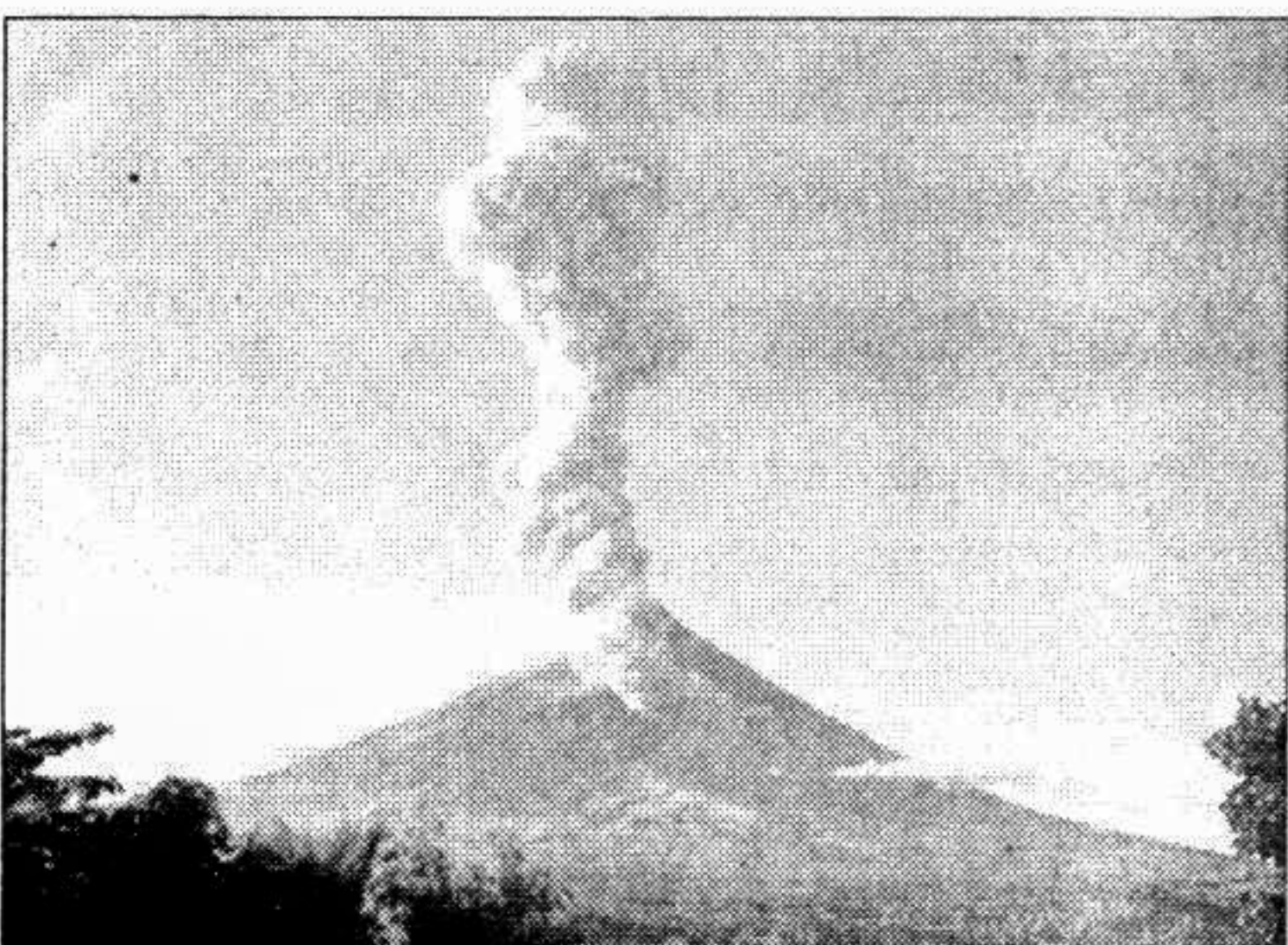
Colonel faces life term for bribery in Indonesia

JAKARTA, June 23: An Indonesian army colonel may get life imprisonment for trying to bribe a foundation linked with former president Suharto to ensure his reappointment in a senior position, reports said Wednesday, reports AFP.

A military prosecutor at the court martial in Semarang in central Java on Tuesday accused Colonel Sri Roso Sudarmo, formerly head of the central Java district of Bantul, of attempted bribery, the Media Indonesia daily said.

The prosecutor, Colonel S. Pangruruk, was quoted by the daily as saying the charges could lead to life imprisonment.

Sudarmo was also widely believed to be linked to the murder of a journalist in 1996.



Mayon volcano, seen from Daraga town, erupts a column of ash and steam rising some 10-km Tuesday sending scores of villagers fleeing from their homes. — AFP photo

N Ireland peace accord may collapse: Blair

LONDON, June 23: British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Northern Ireland's peace accord could collapse as the main Protestant leader effectively demanded the sacking of a government minister and republicans warned events could spiral out of control, reports Reuters.

Blair, firmly sticking to a June 30 deadline to end a deadlock over last year's Good Friday peace agreement, delivered a take-it-or-leave-it warning on Tuesday night to feuding Northern Ireland politicians.

He made clear on Northern Ireland television that he was fed up with a long-running dispute between Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders over guerrilla disarmament which has paralysed the province's peace process.

"If this agreement goes down, then we will have to pick up the pieces in the best way we can,"

Blair said. An AFP report from London adds: Talks on the political future of Northern Ireland during the coming week are the most critical yet since the start of the peace process, the leader of the IRA's political wing warned today.

Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams said failure to implement the Good Friday accord, which was signed last year, would create a dangerous vacuum.

His remarks in The Times came as British Prime Minister Tony Blair geared up to fly to Belfast on Thursday to press for an agreement by his "absolute deadline" of June 30.

That is when he expects the bickering parties to overcome their differences over paramilitary weapons and form the power sharing government that the Good Friday accord envisaged.



US President Bill Clinton (R) holds 2-year-old Getuar Kikku on his lap as he, his wife, Hillary, and daughter, Chelsea, holding 4-year-old Besart Kikku and hear Kosovar refugees tell their stories of their terrorisation and forced expulsion from Kosovo by Serbs Tuesday at Stenkovich I refugee camp in Skopje, Macedonia. — AFP photo