

Pakistan concerned at Indian N-plans

ISLAMABAD, Sept 11: Pakistan yesterday expressed deep concern over India's dangerous plans for nuclear and conventional arms escalation and urged the international community to formulate a coherent and determined response in order to arrest this, reports PTI.

The Defence Committee of Cabinet (DCC), the highest decision-making body on security affairs which met under the chairmanship of premier Nawaz Sharif, reviewed the situation in the region in wake of continued Indian hostilities and aggressive posture along the line of control, an official statement issued here said.

The meeting also discussed the shooting down of a Pakistan Naval Aircraft last month by India, the statement said.

In an obvious reference to India's draft nuclear doctrine, the DCC expressed deep concern over India's plans for large scale acquisition, operationalisation and deployment of the land, air and sea-based nuclear weapons and massive build-up of sophisticated conventional weaponry.

Such offensive military capability will be a threat not only to the security of Pakistan but also to peace and stability of the entire Indian ocean region and beyond, it charged.

Police said they had arrested Bhosle, a member of the Hindu nationalist BJP party, following the murder just after midnight of local nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Lewe.

Lewe died from his wounds after being attacked by half-a-dozen unidentified assailants armed with swords.

Seven killed as police fire in Ambon

JAKARTA, Indonesia, Sept 11: At least seven people were killed and dozens injured when troops fired into a mob trying to attack shops in the eastern Indonesian city of Ambon, officials and reports said Saturday, reports AFP.

The troops opened fire Friday after a marine was injured when people in a mob of Muslim youths began throwing molotov cocktails toward them, a local photographer said by phone.

The photographer said the troops had been trying to block the youths from getting to the downtown A.Y. Patti shopping centre.

He said he saw 10 people fall, apparently fatally wounded, and at least 60 others were injured.

But Nibu, an official at the Al-Fatali Islamic hospital where the victims were taken, put the death toll at seven.

He said most of the casualties in Friday's shooting in Ambon had suffered gunshot wounds.

40 Russian troops killed in Dagestan

MAKHACHKALA, Russia, Sept 11: Government troops battling Islamic insurgents in western Dagestan have suffered heavy losses in the last 24 hours with more than 40 dead, Russian officials said Saturday, reports AFP.

Unofficially, the Russian death toll could be as high as 45, said an official at the military press centre here who asked not to be named.

The report came a day after Russian forces said they had recaptured the village of Gamiyakh from rebels who poured across the border from Chechnya a week ago and seized more than half a dozen villages.

Heavy fighting continued Saturday around the rebel-held village of hapayev, Novoloksoy, Tukhchar and Duchy, also in western Dagestan.

Afghan chopper crash kills 13

KABUL, Sept 11: Thirteen people were killed after a military helicopter transporting civilians crashed between Kabul and the southern capital of Kandahar, sources said Saturday, reports AFP.

The helicopter and its passengers were on a mission to transport wounded soldiers to a hospital in Kabul, a diplomatic source told AFP. But he added there were few other details.

No official comment has been made in regard to the crash and a Taliban spokesman was not immediately available.

UN team arrives in E Timor US suspends military sales to Jakarta

DILI, East Timor, Sept 11: A UN Security Council team arrived Saturday in East Timor's fire-blackened and devastated capital as Indonesia came under intense world pressure to end the bloodshed, reports AFP.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan warned Indonesia it could be held responsible for crimes against humanity and the United States suspended all military sales to Jakarta.

The five-member delegation saw street after street of blackened and gutted buildings, and hundreds of fearful refugees wearing Indonesian colours -- apparently for protection from marauding pro-Jakarta militia.

There is no civil war here, the militia are armed and they are shooting everybody," an unnamed UN official told a pool reporter with the team.

The team was handed blue flak jackets for the trip into the city, where columns of smoke still rose from the unchecked militia violence.

Troops were everywhere on otherwise deserted streets and the occasional militiaman

roamed with automatic weapons, an AFP photographer said.

The team was to make a first-hand appraisal of the situation after the UN evacuated all but 80 staff from its beleaguered headquarters in Dili Friday.

As pressure mounted to end the murderous militia rampage since an August 30 ballot voted overwhelmingly for independence, the International Monetary Fund suspended crucial aid talks with Jakarta, and France deployed a warship to join other navies off East Timor.

"Today we suspended all military sales," Clinton told reporters in Auckland, New Zealand before going into a meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

The US president said it was "imperative" that Indonesia allow in international peacekeepers to stop the violence in East Timor and he expected a development "in the next couple of days."

Clinton said Washington was continuing "to work to try

to persuade Indonesia to support the United Nations offer to go in and help to end the violence and secure the safety of the people there.

"I think the United Nations will support such an endeavour if the Indonesians will request it and I think it is imperative they do so. I think we are making headway ...

"I think you will see a development here in the next couple of days."

Earlier he had for the first time directly accused Indonesia of direct involvement in the militia brutality.

"It is now clear that the Indonesian military is aiding and abetting the militia violence," Clinton said during a stopover in Hawaii.

In New York the UN Security Council was to convene at 11:00 a.m. (1500 GMT) Saturday for the first part of a two-stage meeting to discuss efforts to persuade Indonesia to accept an international force in East Timor.

It will reconvene later to hear the report of the five am-

bassadors who are expected back in New York before Monday.

Annan urged the Indonesian government to agree to a force "without further delay," warning that if Jakarta refused "it cannot escape responsibility for what could amount ... to crimes against humanity."

"Before the eyes of the world, the people of East Timor are being terrorised and massacred because they exercised their right to self-determination in a ballot organised by the United Nations."

Annan said Australia was willing to lead an international force into East Timor but such a force required Indonesia's consent.

The militiaman had again fired into the UN compound on Thursday night and threatened to invade it, "yet the Indonesian forces who are supposed to be protecting the compound did nothing."

A spokesman inside the UN compound in Dili said Friday night had been free of attacks.

China demands US action on Taiwan

AUCKLAND, Sept 11: Chinese President Jiang Zemin on Saturday demanded that the United States end arms sales to Taiwan and block pro-Taiwan security legislation at a meeting here with US President Bill Clinton, a Chinese spokesman said, reports AFP.

Jiang also reaffirmed China would "never renounce the use

of force" against Taiwan and attacked Taiwan leader Lee Teng-hui for trying to split China with his "two states theory."

Jiang told Clinton the "Taiwan question has always been the most outstanding question" in China-US relations, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said.

"And within the United States there have always been those who have tried to obstruct the reunification of China," he quoted the Chinese president as saying.

Asked to elaborate, Zhu told a media briefing that Jiang was referring to "some moves by the US side which could not but have aroused serious concern among the Chinese people."

He cited frequent anti-China resolutions tabled in the US Congress, referring to the "so-called Taiwan Security Enhancement Act" and also a US commitment to sell advanced weaponry and equipment worth 550 million dollars to the island.

Jiang reportedly said the arms sales represented a "serious violation" in both "quantitative and qualitative terms" of Sino-US understandings.

"Furthermore there are people in the US who advocate the incorporation of Taiwan into the TMD (Theatre Missile Defence) system and selling advanced TMD-related systems to Taiwan," he said, citing another irritant.

"China hopes that the US side will give a clear-cut statement of opposition to the so-called two-states theory and act to block the so-called Taiwan Security Enhancement Act from becoming law and effectively reduce with the view to terminating extra arms sales to Taiwan," the president was quoted as saying.

The Jiang-Clinton meeting took place on the eve of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum which begins a two-day summit here Sunday.

Tensions between China and Taiwan have increased since the Taiwan leader said in July that cross-strait ties should be treated as "state-to-state" relations to the fury of Beijing, which considers the island to be a renegade province.

Jiang told Clinton that China was committed to a peaceful means of resolving the Taiwan issue. "However, we in China will never renounce the use of force," spokesman Zhu quoted him as saying.

"Our struggle with Lee Teng-hui is a struggle whether to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China or whether to split China's sovereignty and territorial integrity," he reportedly said.

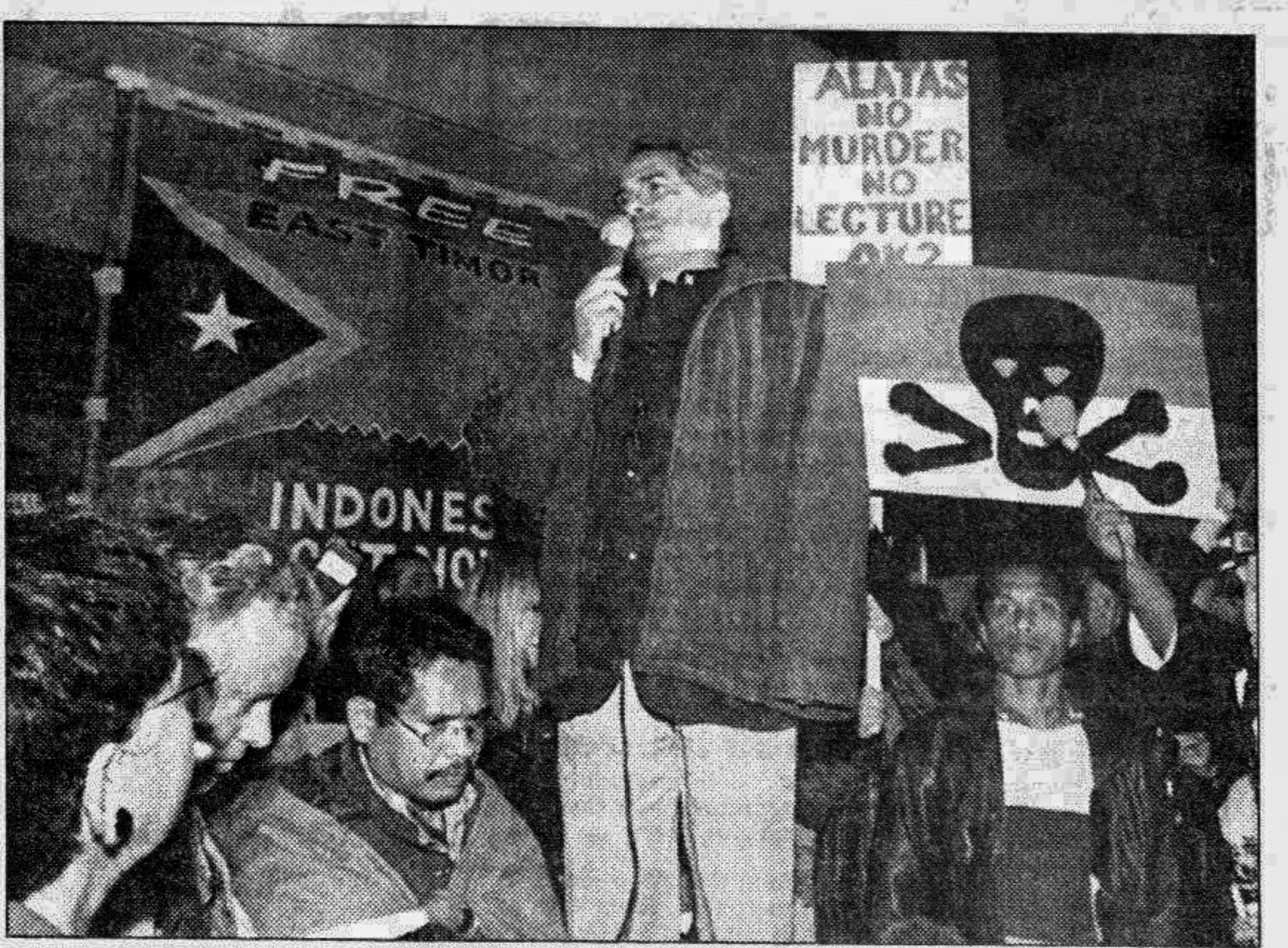
"And on this struggle there is no room for China to manoeuvre," he said, describing Lee as a "trouble maker".

For his part Clinton expressed "his full understanding" and reaffirmed his commitment to the "One China" policy, the spokesman said.

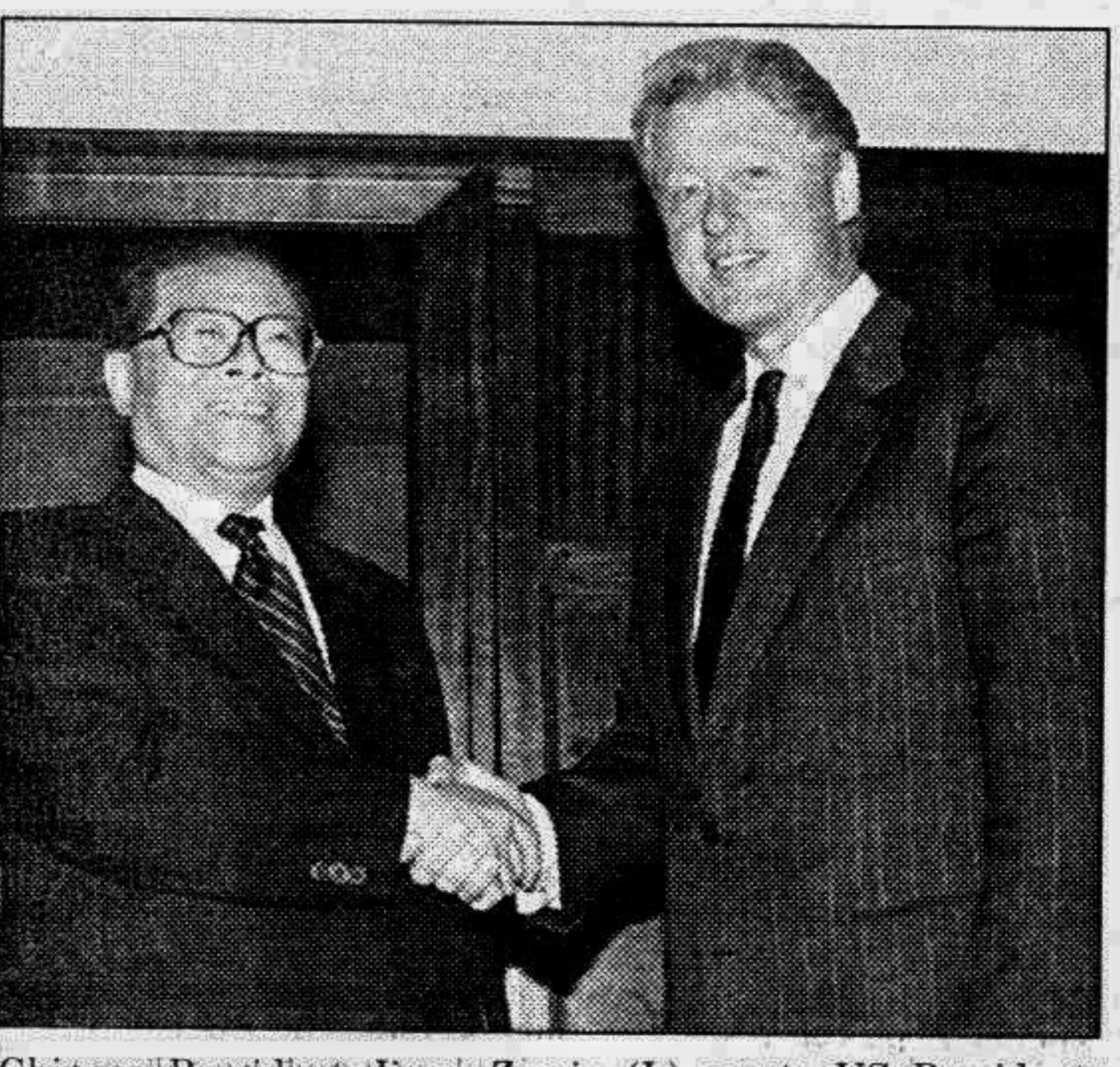
The meeting between Jiang and Clinton was their first since the May US air attack on Beijing's embassy in Belgrade which caused Sino-US relations to plunge.

"Our assessment is that the talks were constructive and productive," the spokesman said.

"We believe the talks represented a very important meeting between the heads of state of the two countries at the turn of the century. I hope and I am confident that this meeting will exert a very positive impact on the cross-century development of China-US relations."



Nobel Peace Prize winner Jose Ramos Horta speaks at a rally in support of East Timor independence in Auckland yesterday. Horta described the human rights violations by soldiers in East Timor and called on the leaders of the 21 countries that make up the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperative (APEC), who are meeting in Auckland today, to come to the aid of the East Timor people.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin (L) greets US President Bill Clinton yesterday during their summit meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum in Auckland. The summit aimed to restore cordial bilateral relations and spur China's admission to the WTO.

Mahathir dismisses fears of murder plot against Anwar

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 11: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday dismissed fears of a murder plot against his ousted deputy Anwar Ibrahim, saying it was not in Malaysia's culture to kill for political reasons, reports AFP.

Referring to allegations that Anwar was poisoned with arsenic, Mahathir said it was the first time the government had been accused of murder.

"This is not part of our country's culture. No one has been murdered because of his political stand," he was cited as saying by the official Bernama news agency.

In a surprise twist Friday, Anwar lawyers told his ongoing sodomy trial that a specimen of his urine sent to Australia for testing under an assumed name was found to contain arsenic 77 times the normal level. The report from Australia came back on August 26.

The judge postponed the trial indefinitely. Anwar, who said he was suffering from weight loss, numbness and dehydrated skin, was hospitalised for a thorough check-up.

Sacked and arrested last September amid a fall-out with Mahathir over economic policies, he is now serving a six-year sentence for abuse of power.

Anwar, who alleges the charges are part of a political plot to oust him, has described the alleged poisoning as a possible "murder attempt."

Mahathir said Anwar should have sought medical attention immediately if he thought he was being poisoned.

"It appears that they were ready to wait for 14 days to disclose (the test results)," he said. "The premier said he did not

know how Anwar's urine sample was taken out of prison.

"Maybe it was someone else's urine, maybe he was given food in court, in prison. Many people give him food because we give him special treatment and flexibility," he said.



A supporter of jailed former Malaysian deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim pushes a policeman during an argument at a demonstration on the streets of Kuala Lumpur yesterday. About 1,000 supporters held a rally urging authorities to free Anwar after he was allegedly poisoned with arsenic.

BRIEFLY

Mayor of Baghdad drowns: Baghdad's mayor Qassem Awad Jassem al-Qora Ghollhi has drowned, the official television here said Friday, quoting a statement from the presidential office. AFP reports from Baghdad.

The mayor, who held ministerial rank, "died in an unfortunate drowning" in which citizens present at the scene had tried in vain to save him, the statement said. Qora Ghollhi was "a fighter who excelled with his remarkable works during the reconstruction of the town of Fao," on the Gulf, the statement said.

Ex-Kazakh MP arrested: Former Kazakh prime minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin was arrested when he arrived in Moscow from London on Friday, NTV television reported. AFP says from Moscow.

A lawyer for Kazhegeldin, who was prime minister of Kazakhstan from 1994 to 1998, said he was held at the request of the Kazakh authorities who sought his extradition. NTV said the former premier was accused of embezzlement but the Russian prosecutor's office, questioned by the television channel, said it had not issued an arrest warrant for him.

Newsman lands in Malaysian jail: In a landmark verdict, a Malaysian court sentenced Canadian journalist Murray Hiebert to a six-week jail term Saturday after he lost an appeal against a contempt of court conviction. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The Far Eastern Economic Review correspondent's original three-month sentence, however, was reduced to the six-week term by a three-judge bench of the appeal court.

Suu Kyi urges greater use of sanctions on Myanmar

BANGKOK, Sept 11: Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has called for greater use of economic sanctions against the government, after the military rulers quashed threats of a dissident uprising, reports AFP.

Exiled dissidents had called for a nationwide uprising on September 9 aimed at ending decades of military rule.

But although small-scale demonstrations occurred in several areas, they admitted a tight security net limited protest action.

Diplomats in Yangon said the day passed quietly.

In a video address smuggled out of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi said September 9 was not a crucial day for the country's democracy movement.

"I myself am not aware why September 9 should be a special day for democracy," the Nobel peace laureate said in a copy of her speech received here by AFP Saturday.

"For us, every day is a special day for democracy," she said. "but if the whole world were to rally around us ... we shall get there much faster."

Dissident groups had called for a mass uprising on September 9 (9/9/99) -- or "four nines day" -- to mirror protests on August 8, 1988 (8/8/88), when hundreds of protesters were gunned down by the military.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who leads the National League for Democracy (NLD), called for international economic sanctions against the junta, which is widely accused by the west of gross human rights abuses.

"Unilateral sanctions are better than no sanctions at all, the best of course are multilateral sanctions and we would like the whole international community to join in a movement aimed at bringing democracy soon to Burma," she said.

Aung San Suu Kyi denied sanctions would harm ordinary people in Myanmar, with the country's military rulers pocketing the gains of international investment.

She also said the junta had used the four nines campaign as an excuse to crackdown on the democracy movement.

"This is a time when military authorities are more oppressive than they have ever been," she said.

Closure of newspaper Iran's culture minister challenges authority

TEHRAN, Sept 11: Iran's reformist culture minister Ataollah Mohajerani Saturday publicly challenged the authority of the conservative-dominated press court by questioning its decision to close a leading moderate daily, reports AFP.

The conservative press court's closure of the moderate daily Neshat last Sunday "had no legal justification," Mohajerani told a news conference here.

"Judge Said Mortazavi ordered the paper's closure in haste," Mohajerani said.

Neshat, close to reformist President Mohammad Khatami, fell foul of Iran's conservative-controlled judiciary when it published two controversial articles last week.

In one article it called for an end to the death penalty and Iran's strict "eye-for-an-eye" Islamic law of retribution.

It also published an unprecedented open letter from an opposition leader questioning the authority of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, an illegal act under Iranian law.

Khamenei then made Neshat's closure virtually inevitable, decreeing that journalists opposed to the vengeance law were "apostates" who themselves were liable to be put to death.

Neshat was charged with "insulting the sacred decrees of Islam and the supreme leader," Tehran's judiciary said.

The paper's director, Latif Safari, was meanwhile summoned to the press court and given until Sunday to make his appearance following 10 listed complaints against his paper, press reports said Thursday.

The closure of Neshat, the fourth pro-Khatami paper this year, was the latest move in a mounting clampdown by the regime's conservatives on Iran's fledgling moderate press.

AI accuses Lankan govt of torturing Tamils

COLOMBO, Sept 11: Amnesty International on Saturday accused the Sri Lankan authorities of torturing three Tamils arrested for allegedly killing a top moderate Tamil politician, reports AP.

The three young Tamil men have been severely tortured in police custody in the capital, Colombo. All three may be in urgent need of medical attention," the London-based human rights group said in a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

A copy of the letter was made available to The Associated Press. There was no immediate government comment.

Amnesty International said Sri Ram, Anthonipillai Binoth Vimalraj and Sivagnanasunderam Sri Kanthan should be given access to medical treatment they may require, and to their families and lawyers.

The three were arrested by police investigating the assassination of Neelan Tiruchelvam, the Tamil leader, in July.

The government has blamed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for Tiruchelvam's killing. He was opposed to the LTTE's demand for a separate nation for minority Tamils.

Amnesty said the two of the accused, Ram and Kanthan, have been "badly tortured, and have scars from being beaten on their backs and hung up by their wrists."

"Vimalraj was allegedly beaten all over his body, had pins inserted under his fingernails and had an iron rod inserted into his anus," the human rights group said.

For years, human rights groups have blamed the government for widespread human rights violations involving Tamils.

Amnesty International said it has obtained many testimonies from the torture victims, and medical certificates corroborating these testimonies. The Supreme Court also has ordered compensation to torture victims.

A government investigation recovered 47 complaints of torture in July-December last year.

In 1994, Sri Lanka accepted the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Torture is a criminal offense in the island nation.

However, security forces continue to enjoy powers of arrest and detain people without trial.

Delhi rejects US charges

NEW DELHI, Sept 11: The Indian government Saturday rejected a US government report alleging religious intolerance here, and refused to host a US envoy for religious rights who said he planned to visit New Delhi, reports AFP.

An external affairs ministry statement said the Indian constitution guaranteed religious freedom to its citizens and these rights were guarded by the judiciary.

"The government and people of India reject any intrusive exercise into how we conduct our affairs," it said.

The statement came two days after a survey on religious freedom published by the US State Department flayed India's ruling Hindu nationalist and allied groups for discriminating against non-Hindus.

The global survey said India's traditional secular values were threatened by the Hindu nationalists and other powerful Hindu groups.

Newspapers here quoted the US Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom Robert Seiple as saying he was "concerned" about religious freedom in India and planned to visit New Delhi this year for a "candid discussion".

But the Indian foreign ministry made it clear that New Delhi had "no plans or intention to invite such an official to India or to engage in discussion with any foreign government or agency on these matters."

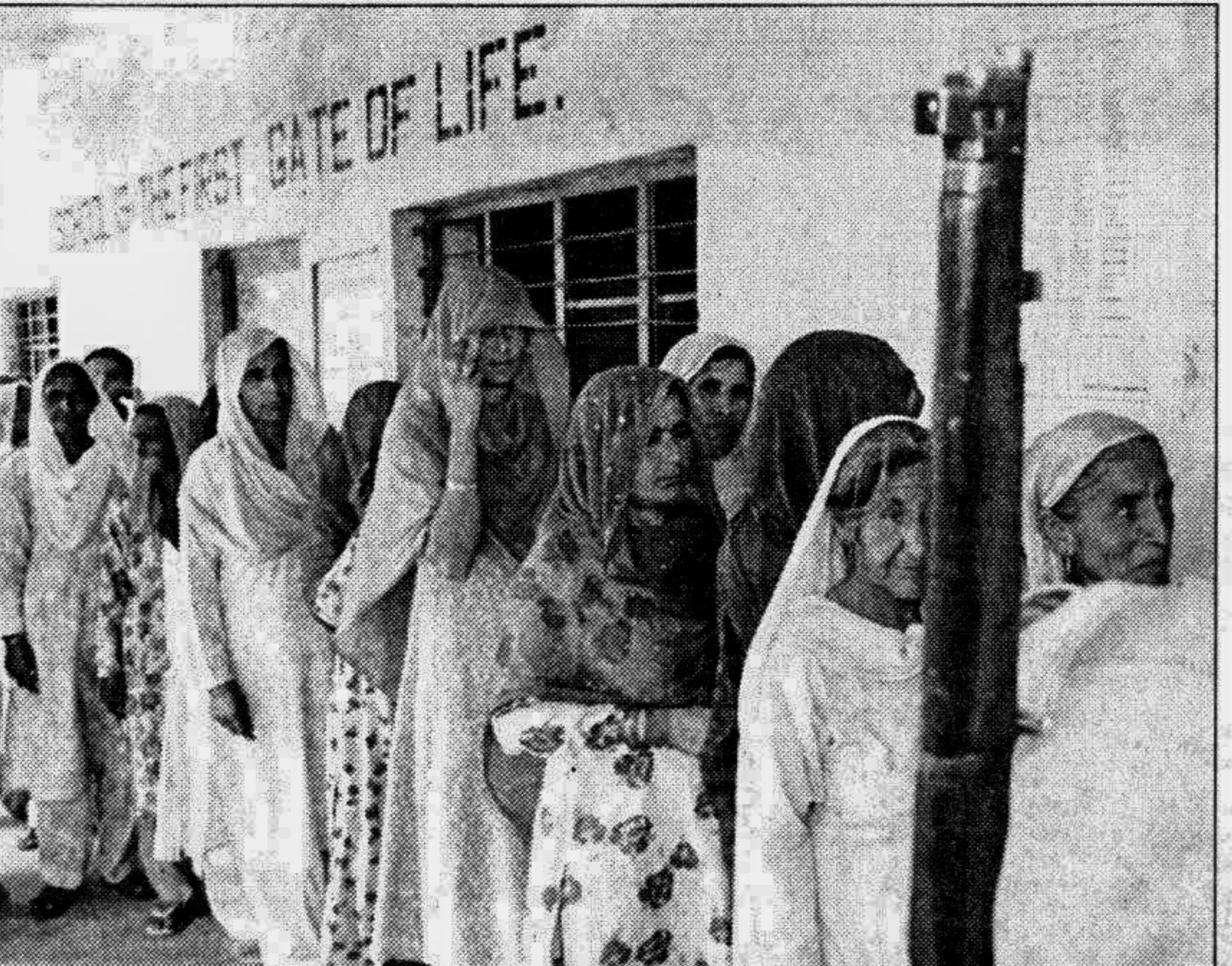
Those who concern themselves with monitoring religious freedom would be well advised to focus their efforts on countries which remain under the pall of bigotry and intolerance, where religious minorities are discriminated against by law and their freedoms progressively curtailed."

The US report was denounced on Friday by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party, now in the midst of elections.

"We reject the ... survey," a BJP spokesman said. "The motivated sources on which the survey is based remains to be probed so that its credibility or lack of it is understood."

The US report said tensions between Muslims and Hindus and to a lesser extent between Hindus and Christians continued to pose a challenge to the concepts of secularism, tolerance and diversity in India.

In addition, governments at the state and local levels only partially respect religious freedom," it said.



A long queue of voters amid tight security in Jammu yesterday. The Udhampur and Jammu Parliamentary constituencies went to the Polls yesterday amid tight security across the troubled region ahead of the second phase of the Indian General Elections.