

'India should market its defence technologies'

NEW DELHI, Oct 10: Country's top defence scientist APJ Abdul Kalam on Friday advocated aggressive marketing of India's frontline defence technologies like missiles, guns and battle tanks to get its due share of the whopping global market, reports PTI.

Making case for export of defence systems such as Main Battle Tank (MBT), missiles not covered by Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), guns, light combat aircraft and nuclear power stations, Kalam said this was needed to reach a developed country status.

Speaking at the first PN Haksar memorial lecture on "Developed Nation: The vision" here, he said India was on the threshold of expansion of aerospace, advanced electronics, advanced sensors and materials industry and should operate them in a market-driven environment to win its share of global market.

Kalam said India's thrust for self-reliance should be coupled with global marketing to overcome what he called pressure which the developed world may force upon us.

He said this had become the focus of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) so that the self-reliance mission of realising 70 per cent indigenous defence systems by 2005 as compared to the present 30 per cent was achieved.

Referring to the Pokhran-II and recent successful testing of Agni-II missile, Kalam said these successful missions were marks of national triumph for self-reliance despite technology denial.

Last year's nuclear explosion was also an example of a great partnership between Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and DRDO which helped the country achieve self-reliance in these strategic sectors, he said.

Mubarak approves new cabinet

CAIRO, Oct 10: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has approved a new cabinet with 12 fresh faces although key ministries like foreign affairs and economics have been left in old hands, officials said Sunday, reports AFP.

But Mubarak was still to officially announce the 32-member line-up after his new Prime Minister Atef Ebeid meets late Sunday with his cabinet members, the officials said.

The cabinet will then meet with Mubarak when they will be sworn into office.

Those keeping their jobs are Defence Minister Hussein Tantawi, Foreign Minister Amr Mousa, Interior Minister Habib al-Adli, Economy Minister Yusef Butros-Ghali and Information Minister Sawat al-Sherif.

Yussef Wali also stayed on as deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture.

Ali Edine Helal, who was dean of the faculty of political sciences at Cairo University, was appointed to head a new youth ministry.

Maher Abaza and Hamdi al-Banbi, who were respectively the ministers of electricity and oil in the previous government of prime minister Kamal al-Ganzuri, were replaced by Ali al-Saidi and Sameh Fahmi.

At the finance ministry, Medhat Hassanein, replaces Mohamed al-Gharib.

Newcomer Mustafa al-Rifai was given the industry portfolio renamed technological development and industry to underline the importance that the government gives to modernising the country and entering a new era, an official said.

The job was previously held by Suleiman Reda.

The transportation and communications ministry was divided into two separate ministries, with Ibrahim al-Dameiri being given transportation and Ahmed Nazif communications.

Voting opens in Berlin poll

BERLIN, Oct 10: Voting opened Sunday in Berlin, the German capital and one of the country's 16 states, in a poll expected to be yet another in a string of humiliating electoral defeats for the Social Democrat (SPD). Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, reports AFP.

Poll say the opposition conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) will win the Berlin state vote, which opened at 1200 BST. Television exit poll estimates of results were expected almost instantaneously after the polling stations closed at 2200 GMT.

The CDU may emerge with an absolute majority in the Berlin state parliament after governing for the past five years in a coalition with the SPD, according to an Infratest Dimap poll released last Sunday.

The poll put the Christian Democrats' support at 45 per cent compared to only 21 per cent for the Social Democrats, below the SPD's already disastrous score of 23.6 per cent in 1995, a post-war low for them in a Berlin vote.

Even if the Christian Democrats, who scored 37.5 per cent in 1995, still need the SPD to form a government, the conservatives are almost certain to remain the dominant party, with their candidate Eberhard Diepgen, 57, staying in office.

Schröder's centre-left government is now almost as unpopular as that of his conservative predecessor, Helmut Kohl, at the end of his 16-year stretch as Germany's leader, an opinion poll indicated last week.

Armed encounters with peacekeepers

Militiaman shot dead in E Timor

DILI, East Timor, Oct 10: Interfet troops shot dead a militiaman and possibly hit two others in separate encounters along the tense western border of East Timor, an Interfet spokesman said Sunday, reports AFP.

The firefights, on Saturday and Sunday, marked the second and third time since the International Force in East Timor (Interfet) arrived three weeks ago that its men had to fight it out with armed pro-Jakarta militias.

No Interfet casualties were reported in either encounter, spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Mark Kelly said.

Kelly said the first firefight erupted at 2:30 p.m. (0830 GMT) Saturday when a small patrol of some five men ran into 12 to 15 militiamen.

They opened fire on the militia after they were attacked two kilometers (1.2 mile) inside the border at a place called Alto Lebos, to the north of the town of Suai.

Kelly said the militiamen had posed a clear threat to the Interfet patrol.

It was at the last safe moment with the fire coming towards them, (at) their observation post... they (the patrol) engaged (them) by fire.

After the clash the militiamen withdrew towards the border region, but the dead man's body had been recovered, and there was nothing on the corpse to indicate that he had anything to do with the Indonesian army.

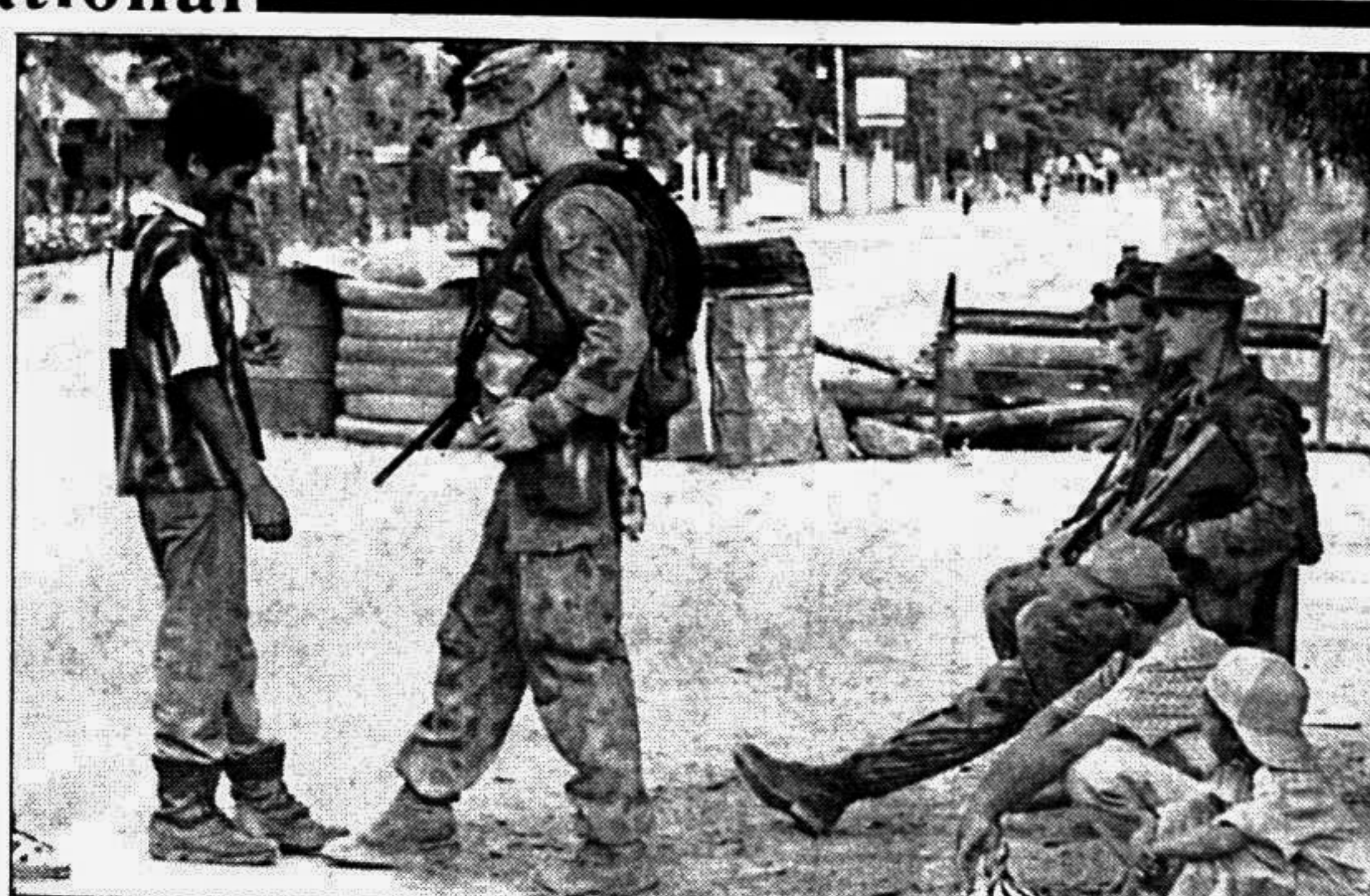
In Sunday's shootout near the border town of Motaain, Interfet troops firing in self defence, said two militiamen may

have been hit. The encounters were the first since last Monday, when two militiamen were killed and two Australian soldiers seriously wounded near Suai.

The militias have warned in Indonesian-ruled West Timor they have up to 12,000 men ready to engage Interfet and they are digging in for a guerrilla war.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard warned Saturday confrontations between the Australian-led Interfet and the militia could mount.

"I've said it before and I'll say it again today, this is a dangerous mission," Howard said. "So far we have been spared the awful trauma of heavy casualties but we can't lose sight of the possibility that things could turn nasty."



Australian soldiers man a roadblock in the Becora district of Dili while conversing with Timorese residents yesterday. The peacekeeping and humanitarian operation by Australian-led International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) enters the fourth week. — AFP photo

S Arabia to boost military ties with France

RIYADH, Oct 10: Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz has assured his visiting French counterpart Alain Richard that the oil-rich kingdom aims to boost military cooperation with France, a key arms supplier, reports AFP.

The fruitful cooperation between the armed forces of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and France is progressing, and it will continue," Prince Sultan told reporters late Saturday as they entered a first round of talks.

A French bid to sell its Leclerc tank was "just one aspect of a wider Saudi-French cooperation," he said, adding the matter was in the hands of joint military committees.

Richard, who was to hold a second working meeting with Prince Sultan on Sunday, hailed what he called the "extremely solid links" between the two countries "at the political and military levels."

The French minister, on a two-day visit, also met King Fahd after his arrival in the Saudi capital on Saturday.

Saudi Arabia, which plans to update its battle tanks, has since 1996 been testing the Leclerc, built by France's GIAT industries, in the southern Rub al-Khali desert.

The Leclerc is in competition with the M1-A2 Abrams of the United States and Britain's Challenger-2. The Leclerc is more expensive but has the technological edge over its rivals, according to Richard.

OIC calls for closer ties among members

YAOUNDE, Oct 10: Member countries of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference have called for closer cooperation in a Yaounde declaration winding up a four-day conference here, organisers said yesterday, reports AFP.

The declaration, approved Friday, said Islamic states had to face up to the challenges of globalisation and improve exchanges and trade among themselves which still remained weak.

They Yaounde meeting stressed the need to promote trade and investment in the private sector, particularly in southern countries which make up the majority of the 55-nation organisation.

Main topics discussed agriculture, agro-alimentation, leather, textiles, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, engineering, metal and service industries.

Only 27 of the OIC member states were represented at Yaounde. The OIC was founded in 1969 with the aim of reinforcing Islamic ties and economic cooperation.

Chinese dissident to be tried for subversion

BEIJING, Oct 10: A prominent Chinese democracy activist is to be tried soon for subversion by a Beijing court, a New York-based rights organisation said Sunday, reports AFP.

The wife of Jiang Qisheng has been told to find her husband a lawyer in a sign that the trial could take place soon, Human Rights in China said in a faxed statement.

Jiang was detained on May 18 after making an open appeal for public commemorations to mark the 10th anniversary of the June 4, 1989 crushing of weeks of pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square.

A former graduate student at the People's University, Jiang participated in a student dialogue with then premier Li Peng during the tumultuous 1989 protests.

After serving more than a year in prison following 1989, Jiang helped other dissidents track down and identify those killed by the People's Liberation Army in the crackdown, the group said.

In a related event, Ma Yuanxin, who worked with Jiang on the 10th anniversary appeal, has been found in a "reform-through-labour camp" after being sentenced without trial for one and a half years, the group said.

Ma disappeared in police custody on May 18, and his fate was only revealed when a friend received a letter from him on October 5, the group said.

Demarcation of Sino-Indian boundary a must: Experts

BEIJING, Oct 10: Indian foreign policy and security experts feel that Beijing and New Delhi must initiate steps to resolve the vexing boundary issue by demarcating the Line of Actual Control (LAC) so as to avoid a potential future conflict, reports PTI.

Both sides should focus on delineating and definitely demarcating the line of actual control on the ground as well as cartographically, former foreign secretary JN Dixit told PTI here.

Parallel to this, there must be incremental activity to implement the various elements of the 1993 and 1996 Sino-Indian agreement, confidence building measures in terms of peace and tranquillity and military pull back from areas conceptually agreed on, Dixit said.

I would put the demarcation of the LAC as the highest priority because Chinese intrusions are continuing, director of Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) Jasjit Singh said.

India says China is illegally occupying 43,180 sq km of Jammu and Kashmir including 5,180 sq km illegally ceded to Beijing by Pakistan under the Sino-Pakistan boundary agreement in 1963. On the other hand, China claims that India has occupied about 90,000 sq kms of Chinese territory.

Our priority number one should be to stabilize the frontiers by early demarcation of the LAC, Sing said.

Pointing out to Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan which occurred despite a well-defined Line Of Control

(LOC), Singh noted that along the Sino-Indian border the chances of conflict were potentially high in view of non-existence of well-defined or mutually agreed upon LAC.

There is potential for misunderstanding, miscalculation and escalation of a small incident into a big one, he said. Moreover, the nuclear capability of both sides, requires keeping the Sino-Indian border stable, Singh said.

Singh noted that Chinese intrusions were occurring in areas where there is no agreement on the LAC. Therefore, the tension will remain. Small incidents have the potential to flare up into big incidents, he said.

Dixit said both India and China could take into account new principles or terms of reference in settling the boundary question.

The whole boundary issue has been complicated by the Chinese reverting back to the 17th century national jurisdiction over various areas and part of the claims are projected through the prism of Tibetan jurisdiction, especially in the eastern sector, Dixit said.

Describing the Sino-Indian boundary issue as a very complicated issue in view of the public opinion, the memory of the 1962 war and the concept of territorial nationalism, Dixit said both sides could work out a gradual formulation of terms of reference and principles.

After this, he said both sides could initiate a dialogue on the extend to which the new agreed principles could be applied to the delineation of the Sino-Indian boundary.

Russian rocket puts US satellite into orbit

MOSCOW, Oct 10: A Russian rocket carried a US telecommunications satellite into space and put it in geostationary orbit Sunday from the Sea Launch platform in the first commercial launch from the Pacific Ocean site, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported, citing the control centre, reports AFP.

The DIRECTV 1-R satellite, launched atop the Zenith rocket at 0928 BST, was placed in orbit at 1030 BST, ITAR-TASS said.

The satellite, developed by Hughes Electronic Corp., will provide 30 extra channels for DIRECTV, the leading digital television supplier in the United States.

The Sea Launch platform, close to the equator and far from any land, was developed as a joint enterprise by Boeing Corp., with 40 per cent of the shares, Energiya of Russia, with 25 per cent, Kvaerner of Norway, with 20 per cent, and the Ukrainian firms Iuzhnoye and Iuzhnazavod, with 15 per cent between them.

The enterprise, formed in 1995, holds orders for another 18 satellite launches.

The cost of Sunday's launch has never been officially disclosed, but it is estimated at 100 million dollars, Interfax reported.

A non-commercial launch was carried out successfully from the platform on March 27.

\$140000 paid for release of Cambodian MP

PHNOM PENH, Oct 10: The family of a kidnapped Cambodian opposition MP Lon Phn paid a huge 140,000 dollar ransom to win his release four days into his terrifying ordeal, the freed MP told AFP Sunday.

The MP, a vocal activist for the sole opposition Sam Rainsy Party, also lashed out at Prime Minister Hun Sen for failing to deliver adequate security in the crime-plagued Cambodian capital.

"Now the world can see the Cambodian government is incompetent and cannot even provide security to MPs," he said in an interview at his Phnom Penh home, nursing a concussion caused by a blow to the head from the kidnap gang.

"I must blame the government for my abduction, and I blame Hun Sen in his capacity as a leader who cannot provide security to his people," he complained, saying he was fearful of further attacks.

"I am still in fear of my life and the safety of my family," he said, adding his four-day ordeal before his release late Saturday was spent handcuffed, blindfolded and under constant guard.

Despite the criticism of authorities, family members revealed a "significant" chunk of the ransom payment had been met by way of a loan from Cambodia's authorities.

Sources close to Hun Sen said on the weekend they were considering footing the bill for the MP's safe return, amid concerns his disappearance would be blamed on state security forces.

Hun Sen has vigorously denied any state complicity in the incident, and police assert they are pursuing a professional kidnap gang with prior arrest warrants pending against them.

"We know who the kidnapers are and we are hunting for them," police spokesman Mao Chandara said.

First-ever auction of Elvis Presley memorabilia

LOS ANGELES, Oct 10: The first-ever auction of Elvis Presley memorabilia has reaped in more money than anticipated, organisers said Sunday, the final day of the three-day event, reports AFP.

Organisers were not able to provide an exact dollar amount from the sale to date, but originally had projected reaping in at least two million dollars.

Already on Friday, the first day of the auction, sales totalled some 1.5 million dollars, according to officials from the New York-based Guernsey auction house, which organised the event.

The sale is going very well. We have probably surpassed that (the two million dollar goal), already, said Amanda Kearns, a spokeswoman for Guernsey's.

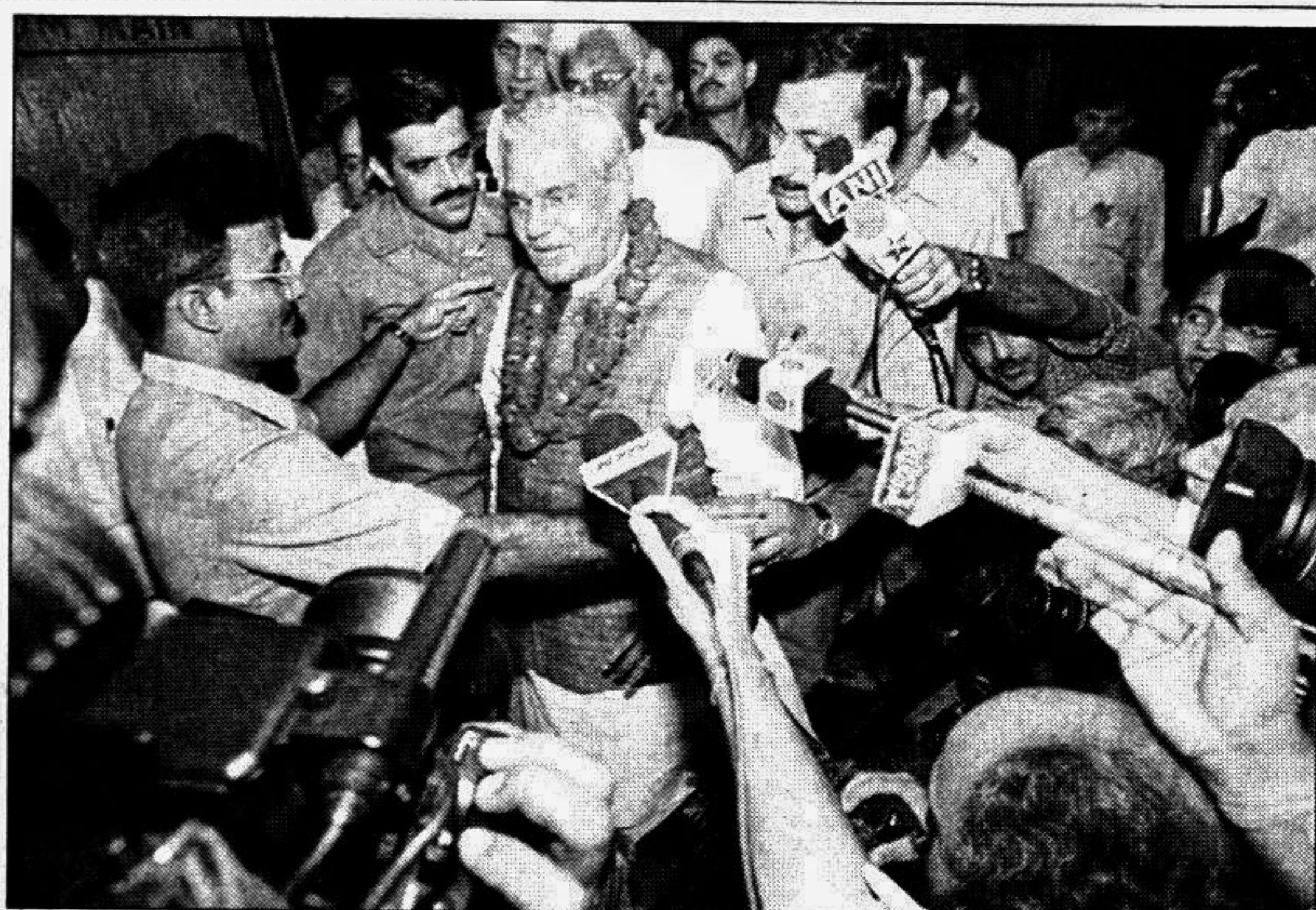
All told, some 2,000 items once belonging to Elvis were to be sold at the auction, which got underway Friday at Las Vegas' MGM Grand Hotel.

Late Saturday, a wristwatch which once belonged to "the King" of rock and roll music, among the most coveted and bid-for items, fetched 32,500 dollars. A credit card issued to Presley by the gas station chain Texaco was sold for 11,000 dollars.

On Friday, Presley's prized 1956 Lincoln Continental fetched some 250,000 dollars, while the singer's first piano sold for 90,000 dollars, and his little black phone book for 9,500 dollars.

The auction, organised by the Elvis Presley Enterprise which manages the late singer's estate, includes photographs and letters sent to Elvis, concert costumes and accessories, as well as books, guns and furniture. Presley died in August 1977.

A portion of the proceeds will be used to fund Presley's national housing development in Memphis, Tennessee, officials said.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (C) is mobbed by reporters as he leaves a meeting after Bharatiya Janata Party MPs selected him as the leader of their parliamentary wing in New Delhi yesterday. Vajpayee will be sworn in on October 13 as India's prime minister for the third time at the head of a multi-party coalition. —AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Typhoon kills 5 in China: A

Typhoon that lashed southeastern China's Fujian province killed five people and shut down highways and rail lines, state media reported Sunday, AP reports from Beijing.

The storm on Saturday also left more than 100 people injured and caused 15 million yuan (dls 1.8 million) in losses, the Beijing Evening News reported. It was the worst storm to hit the city of Xiamen in 46 years, the report said. Most of the city was without water, power and gas. The five deaths occurred in houses that toppled in the city of Zhangzhou, Xinhua reported.

French minister visits Riyadh:

French Defence Minister Alain Richard arrived in the Saudi capital Riyadh Saturday for a two-day visit to boost bilateral defence cooperation. Xinhua reports from Kuwait City.

French diplomatic sources in Riyadh said Richard will hold extensive talks with his Saudi counterpart Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz on defence cooperation. Kuwait News Agency reported. In an interview with the London-based Arabic daily Asharq Al-Awsat before his visit, Richard said Paris hopes to sell French-made IFCIFRC tanks to Saudi Arabia, underlining "equipping the Saudi army with the French tanks would give a new boost for cooperation" between the two countries.

Author Morris West dead:

Internationally-renowned Australian author Morris West has died from heart failure while sitting at his writing desk in his home on Sydney's northern beaches, his son said Sunday, AFP reports from Sydney.

West, 83, was the author of block-busting novels including "The Devil's Advocate", "Children of the Sun", and "Shoes of a Fisherman". "He died very peacefully in the middle of a sentence," his son Chris O'Hanlon said Sunday. "He was working at his desk in the middle of his last novel and his heart simply stopped."

Mexico floods death toll rises to 400

PUEBLA, Mexico, Oct 10: The death toll from this week's devastating floods in Mexico climbed above 400 on Saturday as rescue workers pressed on with the grim task of digging out people buried when a mudslide engulfed an entire village, reports Reuters.

The extent of what President Ernesto Zedillo called the "tragedy of the decade" was becoming starkly clear as the rains eased and rescue workers were able to reach villages that had been cut off for days.

At least 200,000 people lost their homes to flood waters that swept over nine of Mexico's 31 states. Flash floods turned hill-sides into deadly rivers of mud that reached rooftop level and buried alive villagers who took refuge in homes and schools.

The death toll of 425 includes the states of Puebla, neighbouring Veracruz, central Hidalgo, Gulf state Tabasco and southeastern Chiapas. That is more than the approximately 400 killed by Hurricane Pauline two years ago and the hundreds killed by floods last year in Chiapas.

The unofficial toll is much higher. The newspaper La Jornada published a tally Saturday of 600 dead. And Formato 21 radio station said 206 had died in Zacatlan, another town in Puebla.