

Colombian man confesses killing 140 children

BOGOTA, Oct 30 : A 42-year-old man has confessed to killing 140 children in a five-year killing spree across 11 provinces. Colombia's chief prosecutor Alfonso Gomez said yesterday, reports AFP.

Luis Eduardo Garavito has been in police custody since April 22 in the city of Villavicencio, where he was arrested for the 1996 murder of a boy in the city of Tunja.

But the investigation that ultimately led police to Garavito began in 1998, when the bodies of 36 children were found in the town of Pereira.

As police looked into that massacre, they were able to link Garavito to the Tunja murder and arrest him in April.

So far, 114 corpses have been found that police believe are Garavito's victims.

Most of Garavito's victims were poor children -- either young workers, students, peasants or beggars, Gomez said. Garavito would pose as a street merchant, a monk or an aid worker to enter schools or other gatherings of children and find his victims, officials said.

Gomez described Garavito as mentally ill, and said he was apparently abused as a child himself.

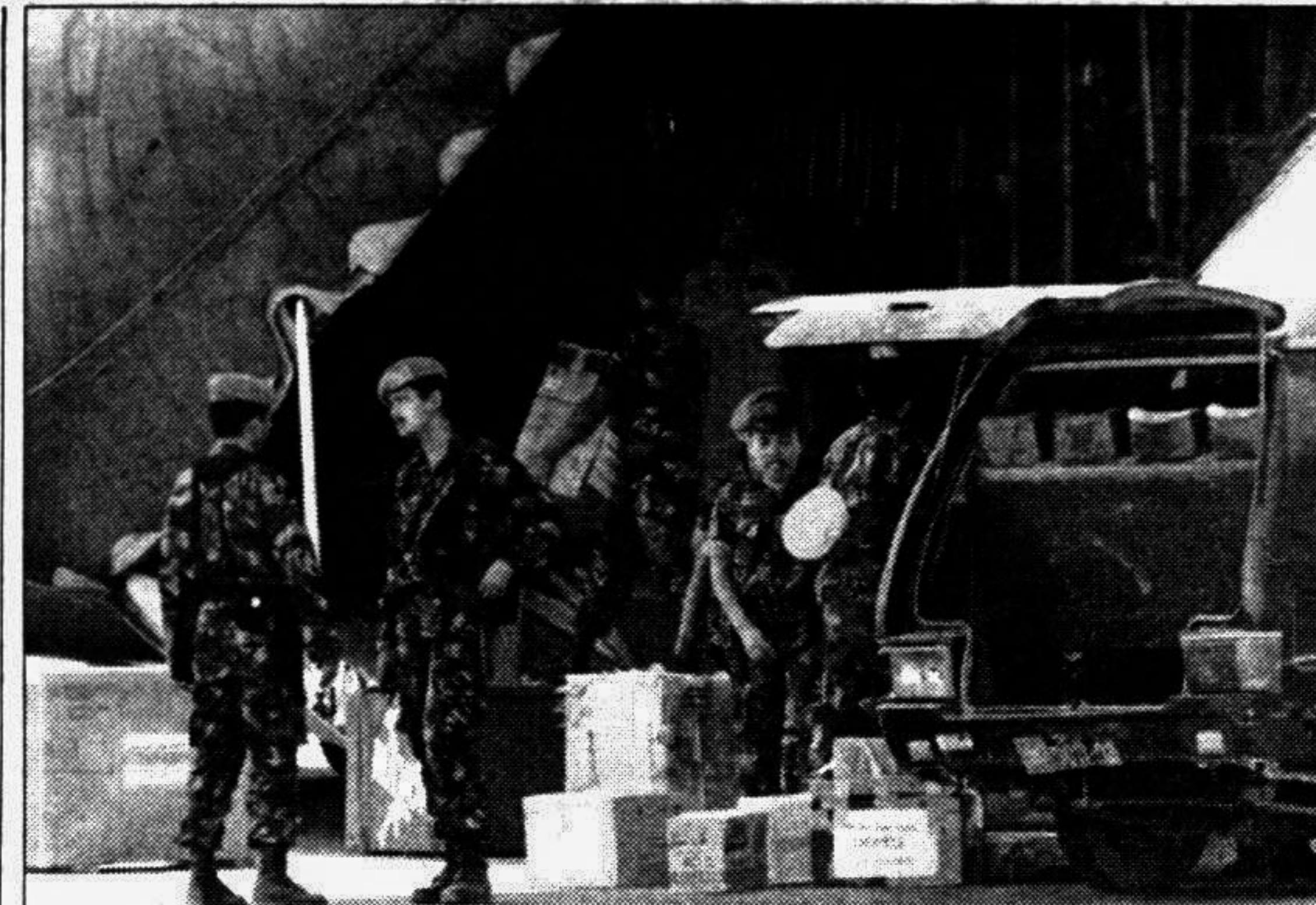
Lanka plans snap parliamentary election

COLOMBO, Oct 30 : Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga is planning a snap parliamentary election soon after her own re-election bid for the presidency in December, state radio said today, reports AFP.

On October 20 Kumaratunga declared her intention to face a fresh presidential election at least 10 months ahead of schedule.

She was quoted as saying today that she also planned to have an earlier parliamentary election. The current parliament could go on until August next year but the president has powers to dissolve the assembly.

"Parliamentary election will be held soon after the presidential election (on December 21)," the radio report said, quoting the president.



Indonesian military personnel load a C-130 transport plane before their final departure from East Timor yesterday. The last Indonesian troops were leaving the territory, ending a quarter of a century of military presence in East Timor.

— AFP photo

Gusmao bids farewell to last Indonesian troops

DILI, East Timor, Oct 30 : East Timorese resistance leader Xanana Gusmao on Saturday said farewell to the last Indonesian troops here, and held out a hand of friendship to the new government in Jakarta, reports AFP.

Dressed in military combat fatigues, a smiling and relaxed Gusmao exchanged salutes with Indonesian army officers during an informal departure ceremony in the old terminal of Dili's Comoro airport.

He was later seen laughing and smoking a cigarette as he shook hands with Brigadier General J.D. Sitorus, the commander of the last Indonesian troops here, and ambassador Taufik Sudarso, head of the Indonesian task force.

Gusmao told reporters after the 25-minute ceremony he felt the same elation he felt on August 30 when the people of East

Timor voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia in a UN-sponsored referendum.

"I feel the same as I feel on August 30, a sensation of acquiring our rights to be free and to be independent," he said.

"I must say it ends the historical errors and mistakes between two countries turned enemy. It means also from now on we have to look at the future and our citizens. And I believe from Indonesia also we shall have to create a new relationship of cooperation and friendship."

Gusmao also expressed confidence in the new Indonesian government of President Abdurrahman Wahid.

He said he was prepared to meet Indonesian army leaders including former army chief General Wiranto to heal the wounds caused by the killing.

and destruction carried out by Indonesian army-backed militias in the wake of the independence vote.

"I believe in the new government and the Indonesian people and the process of democracy that is going on in Indonesia," said Gusmao.

But he also called on Indonesia to allow the free return of all the estimated 260,000 East Timorese who fled or were pushed out of the territory to Indonesian West Timor during the militia reign of terror.

Gusmao arrived at the ceremony by helicopter from the headquarters of his Falintil guerrilla organisation at Remexio, around 30 km east of Dili, and security at the airport was tight.

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Massive relief operation in India

Cyclone leaves trail of death & destruction

NEW DELHI, Oct 30 : Indian authorities today began a massive relief operation on the eastern coast after the "cyclone of the century" left an awesome trail of death and destruction, officials said, reports AFP.

The chief minister of the worst-hit state of Orissa said the estimated death toll could be in the "hundreds" after at least 14 people were killed Friday and more than 200,000 houses flattened.

"You cannot imagine the devastation," the United News of India quoted Chief Minister Girdhar Gamang as saying in the state capital Bhubaneshwar, which was badly affected by the cyclone.

The death toll will be not in the tens but in the hundreds," Gamang said Friday night before Orissa's telecommunications system completely collapsed in the face of the 260-km per hour winds.

Ten cyclone-hit coastal districts of Orissa remained cut off from the rest of India.

The Indian army Saturday moved into the port town of Paradip, which bore the brunt of the cyclone, but said an assessment of the damage would not be immediately possible.

The (satellite) images that we are seeing are right out of a horror movie," an officer involved in "Operation Hope" said of the daunting task facing army relief contingents now in Orissa.

high ... communications have broken down throughout the state, and we are not able to get in touch with many areas."

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Pro-monarchist Australian Prime Minister John Howard addresses the party faithful at the annual state Liberal Party conference in Sydney yesterday. A survey last week has indicated that 56 per cent intend to vote "No" to Australia becoming a republic in the national referendum on November 6. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Armed Islamists kill 12 in Algeria:

Armed Muslim militants murdered 12 members of a family of nomads this week near Laghouat, 400 kilometers south of the Algerian capital, two Algerian newspapers reported yesterday, AFP reports from Algiers.

The massacre, reported by the daily papers La Tribune and El Alai, was the worst since an October 8 bloodbath in which 16 people died in a shanty town west of Algiers.

Vice mayor killed in Philippines:

The vice-mayor of the southern town of Sibuco was among four people killed in an ambush, police said yesterday. AFP reports from Philippines.

Another five people were wounded in the attack. Vice-mayor Emmanuel Perez was with a large party, including relatives, riding in a jeep through Sibuco on Friday when they were ambushed by a group of men armed with automatic rifles.

Taliban leaders to meet on Bin Laden's offer

KABUL, Oct 30 : Leaders of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia will meet soon to discuss alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden's offer to leave the country, official Afghan sources said today, reports AFP.

The Saudi-born millionaire, accused by the United States of terrorism, made the offer in a letter to Taliban chief Mullah Mohammad Omar on condition the Taliban ensured safe and secret passage to a third unnamed country, according to the private Afghan Islamic Press (AIP).

The sources did not say exactly when Omar, who is based

in the city of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, would convene the militia's consultative council to discuss the issue.

The Pakistan-based AIP, a usual conduit for Taliban announcements, quoted a militia spokesman as saying Omar would give a reply to bin Laden over the coming days after the consultation.

Bin Laden, who has lived in Afghanistan as a guest of the religious militia, is blamed by the United States for August 7, 1988 bombings of its two embassies in East Africa in which more than 200 people were killed.

The sources did not say exactly when Omar, who is based

International

Commonwealth unlikely to suspend Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Oct 30 : Commonwealth ministers who spent two days trying to investigate whether Pakistan's military-ruled government intended to restore democracy have softened their tone and are unlikely to recommend the country be suspended, officials said, reports Reuters.

The delegation of four Commonwealth foreign ministers failed to get a date for the return of Sharif or to see ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The team, led by Canada's Lloyd Axworthy, was the first high-level mission to visit Pakistan since army chief General Pervez Musharraf deposed Sharif in a bloodless October 12 coup.

They said the delegation would urge a summit of Commonwealth leaders next month to give Islamabad six months to

prove it was serious about returning the country to civilian rule or face further sanctions.

Axworthy said Musharraf vetoed a meeting with Sharif but had promised the ministers could speak to him by telephone from their hotel suite.

But after waiting for more than an hour, the call failed to materialise and Pakistani officials said Sharif did not want to talk by telephone.

The Commonwealth has banned Pakistan from taking part in its meetings and threatened to push for formal suspension of membership, which would mean the end of all technical assistance to the impoverished country.

But the officials said the situation in Pakistan was much

more complex than it had first appeared.

Asked whether the ministers were now distancing themselves from the idea that Pakistan be formally suspended, one member of the mission said: "That's a good assessment."

The ministers belonged to the eight-nation Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), set up to investigate abuse of democracy among the 54-member grouping of mainly former British colonies.

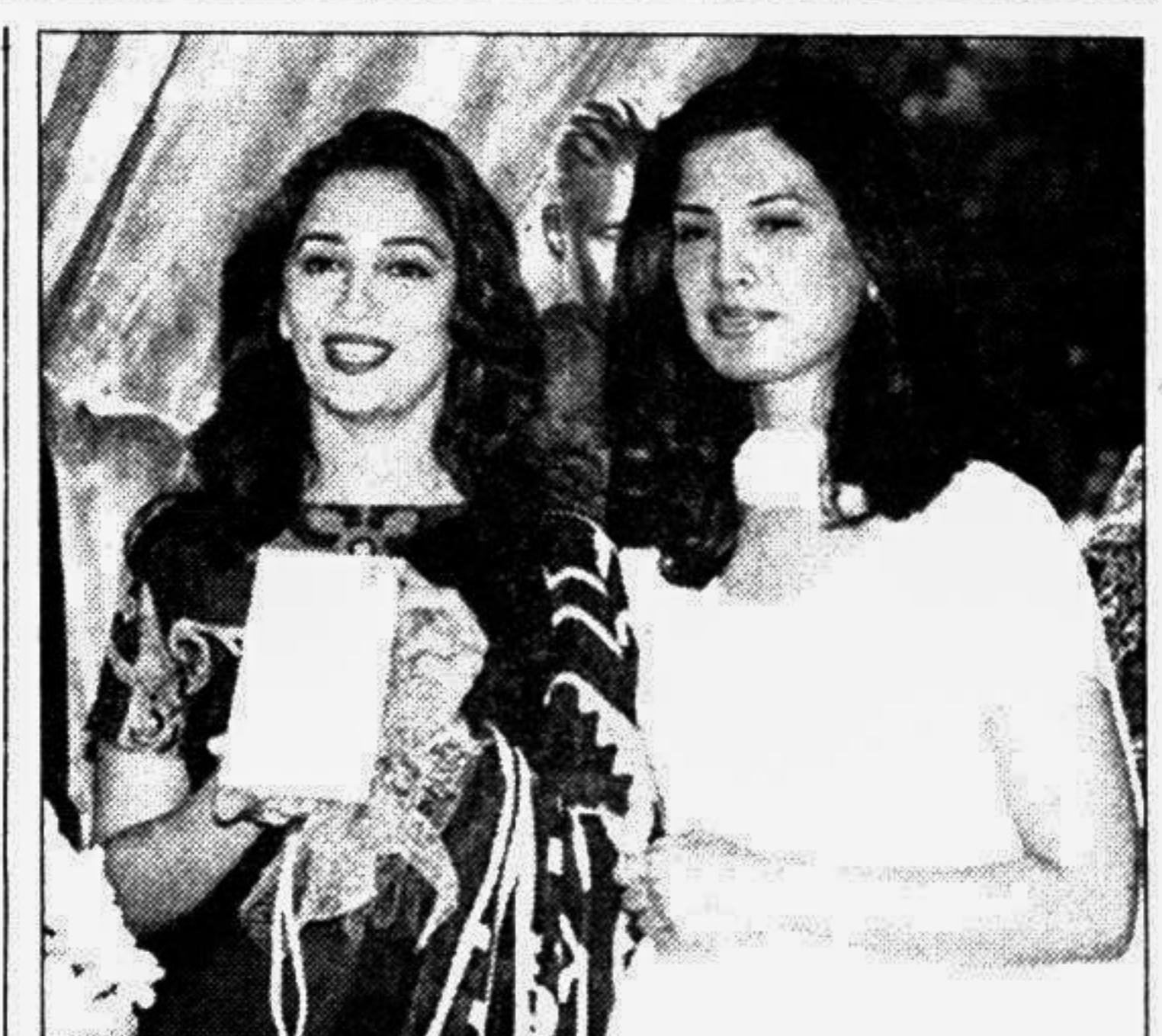
The team yesterday met Musharraf, who like other senior officials said Sharif's "chaotic" rule had been leading the country to disaster and pointed to signs that the general public had supported the army takeover.

Musharraf refused to pro-

duce the timetable the Commonwealth wanted, saying he had been encouraged by his promises of reforms, although they made clear that CMAG would be watching events in Pakistan very closely.

"It's likely that we'll recommend Pakistan be given six months to make good on its promises. If it doesn't we'll write to all the heads of government and tell them we propose to suspend the country immediately," said one official.

The officials said the ministers had taken note of the fact that virtually none of the people they talked to had expressed any support for Sharif's chaotic 31-month rule. Even the prime minister's own party did not ask for his restoration.



India's top film actress Madhuri Dixit (L) presents her new fashion book "101 Ways to Look Your Best" written by the country's leading fashion designer Ritu Beri (R) during its fashion launch in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP photo

US, Russia call for return of civilian rule in Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Oct 30 : The United States and Russia on Friday issued a joint call for the new military leaders in Pakistan to return the country to civilian control, reports AFP.

In a joint statement issued after three days of high-level meetings here between US and Russian diplomats, the two countries said peace and stability in South Asia would be enhanced by civilian rule in Islamabad and welcomed any moves made to reduce tensions with India.

They encouraged the military authorities in Pakistan to take decisive steps to return the country to civilian, democratic and constitutional government including the announcement of a timetable," the statement said.

Pakistan's new military leader General Pervez Musharraf, who ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif on October 12, has promised to return the country to civilian rule but has

not yet said when he would do so.

In addition to the call for civilian control, the statement urged Pakistan and India to resolve their dispute over Kashmir.

The statement came after talks between US assistant secretary of state for South Asia, Karl Inderfurth, and Russian deputy foreign minister, Grigory Karasik.

The disputed province has caused two of the three wars between India and Pakistan.

The two sides agreed on the importance of India and Pakistan overcoming their legacy of confrontation and called on both sides to resume their political dialogue at the earliest opportunity," the statement said.

It welcomed Musharraf's decision to withdraw some Pakistani troops from the international border with India and noted Washington's and Moscow's desire to see that reduction also occur on the Kashmiri border.

NLD loses court battle with junta

YANGON, Oct 30 : A Myanmar court has rejected allegations that junta leaders illegally harassed and intimidated members of Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), reports AFP.

The NLD had filed complaints against 29 government officials including powerful First Secretary and military intelligence head General Khin Nyunt and Home Minister Colonel Tin Hlaing.

But the Supreme Court said in judgement received here Saturday that no evidence had been found to support the allegations and all investigations had been dropped.

Observers said the ruling was largely a formality as the military, which has ruled Myanmar in various guises for

decades, tightly controls the legal system.

In a brief statement, the NLD said it would continue to pursue the matter from "within legal bounds."

The NLD has been locked in a bitter struggle with the junta since winning an overwhelming victory in 1990 elections, which was ignored by the military.

State-run media has been carrying daily reports of mass defections from the NLD, proof the party says of coercion by military intelligence.

Diplomats say the government has been engaged on a concerted campaign to crush the party's ability to organise and to isolate its leaders in Yangon.

Breach of Berlin Wall punctures Soviet power

PARIS, Oct 30 : The fall of the Berlin wall on November 9, 1989 was the symbolic moment that not only proclaimed the collapse of the Soviet bloc but also set off a chain of events that culminated two years later with the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself, reports AFP.

When a few weeks earlier Gennady Gerashimov, spokesman for Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, announced the "Sinatra doctrine", Moscow's new policy allowing each of its satellites to determine its own fate ("my way"), he could not have imagined how far the tide of nationalist sentiment would reach.

Poland and Hungary were already well advanced in their transition towards democratic systems.

In August Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a leading figure in the state on all areas.

free trade union Solidarity, had become Polish prime minister. In September, a round table of political leaders in Hungary had agreed to proceed to multi-party elections.

With the physical barrier between east and west finally removed, it was only a matter of time before the other peoples' democracies seized the opportunity to break away, and within weeks Czechoslovakia, with its "velvet revolution", and -- more bloody -- Romania had cast their communist regimes into the dustbin of history.

1989 was also the high point of "perestroika" in the Soviet Union, where the first multi-candidate elections were held in March and the wave of reform unleashed by Gorbachev gradually eased the stranglehold of

Local governments are asked to take necessary measures to educate those deceived while punishing a small number of cult leaders and those who have committed crimes," it said.

Russian gangs killing street-kids for organs

BERLIN, Oct 30 : Germany's secret service has reported that Russian gangs are killing street-children and selling their organs to rich patients in Russia and the West, the weekly Focus said in an article today.

A spokeswoman for the secret service, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), in the southern town of Pullach, near Munich, confirmed the existence of the document, saying it had been submitted to the government in April.

She said the information gleaned was "credible," but should nevertheless be treated with caution.

Focus said the report showed Russian police were powerless to stop the organ trafficking, adding that the disappearance of street-children was not usually registered.

Kuwaiti authorities frequently stop and search boats that stray into their waters, and after one seizure in August they accused Baghdad of exporting powdered milk like that supplied to Baghdad under the UN-administered oil-for-food programme.

The programme allows Iraq to sell a limited value of oil in order to purchase essential goods to help avert the effects of sanctions slapped on Baghdad for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait