

Ocalan's death sentence upheld

ANKARA, Nov 25: Turkey's Appeals Court today upheld the death sentence handed down on Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan, to the cheers of teams of Turkish soldiers murdered in the separatist conflict, reports AFP.

The presiding judge, Demirel Tavil, said the sentence was "in conformity with procedures and law."

The judges' decision was unanimous.

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Ocalan, who was not present at the five-minute hearing, was sentenced to death on treason and separatism charges on June 29 after a high-profile trial on the prison island of Imrali.

The Appeals Court ruling must now be ratified by the Turkish parliament and President Suleyman Demirel before Ocalan's execution can go ahead.

But the defence team have a further two options to follow to prevent Ocalan's execution. "Once the court notifies us of the decision in 15 days, we will appeal to the chief prosecutor of the appeals court for a re-examination of the sentence," attorney Dogan Erbas told AFP Thursday.

If Savas agrees to the lawyers' demand, the appeals court will review the case for a second time.

This move is however unlikely to produce a result as Savas supported the approval of

Ocalan's death sentence in a report before the start of the appeals process.

If Savas rejects the defence team's application, the last domestic legal recourse will be exhausted, paving the way for Ocalan's execution.

Ocalan's lawyers to take the case to the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights.

"We will have six months to apply to the European court," Erbas said. "When we do, we will base our argument on the necessity to abolish the death penalty under the European Convention on Human Rights."

Even though Turkey has not signed the protocol to annual capital punishment, it has to respect it as a member of the European family, Erbas added.

Outside the court building, hundreds of relatives of soldiers who died in fighting with the PKK erupted into cheers of joy after the ruling was announced.

"This decision has made me very happy," said Jale Altgan, whose brother Murat was killed in the southeastern province of Sirnak. "It has alleviated our grief."

"We trust our parliament. We are only asking for the murderer to pay for the crimes he has committed," she said.

The relatives, waving Turkish flags, tore apart effigies of Ocalan and chanted slogans demanding his execution. Several of them set up symbolic

gallows and hanged an effigy of Ocalan depicted as a vampire with blood dripping from his teeth.

"(Prime Minister Bulent) Ecevit, you are not in a hurry to hang Ocalan, but we are," read one of the banners the demonstrators carried.

"We want to see Ocalan hanged," said Unal Yildiz with tears in his eyes in memory of his 21-year-old son who was killed in a 1995 cross-border operation in northern Iraq against PKK rebels.

"But we have doubts over Ecevit's attitude," he added. "Our patience has run out."

The ruling was expected to put pressure on Turkey just over two weeks ahead of a European Union summit in Helsinki on December 10-11, which will also discuss Ankara's decades long bid to become a member of the bloc.

European countries have urged Ankara to spare Ocalan's life, hinting that his execution could harm Turkey's chances of joining the EU.

Although the death sentence exists in Turkey, there have been no judicial executions since 1984. A total of 47 people are currently on death row in various Turkish prisons.

The verdict comes amid peace calls by Ocalan's Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has promised to pull out of Turkey and end the 15-year war against Ankara that has claimed more than 31,000 lives.



Pakistan's cricket hero turned politician Imran Khan (L) with his wife Jimima Khan and their baby led a protest rally against Russian aggression over Chechnya yesterday. Scores of protesters gathered in front of the United Nations (UN) office and chanted slogans against Russia and demanded imposition of UN sanctions on Russia. — AFP photo

Treason case

Sharif's brother arrested

KARACHI, Nov 25: Police arrested the brother of Pakistan's deposed Premier Nawaz Sharif today to stand trial in a treason and conspiracy to murder case, police officials told AFP.

Shabbaz Sharif, the former powerful chief minister of Punjab province, was flown to Karachi early Thursday and will appear alongside his brother in an anti-terrorism court here.

He has been under detention since army chief General Pervez Musharraf seized power in a coup and deposed Nawaz Sharif on October 12.

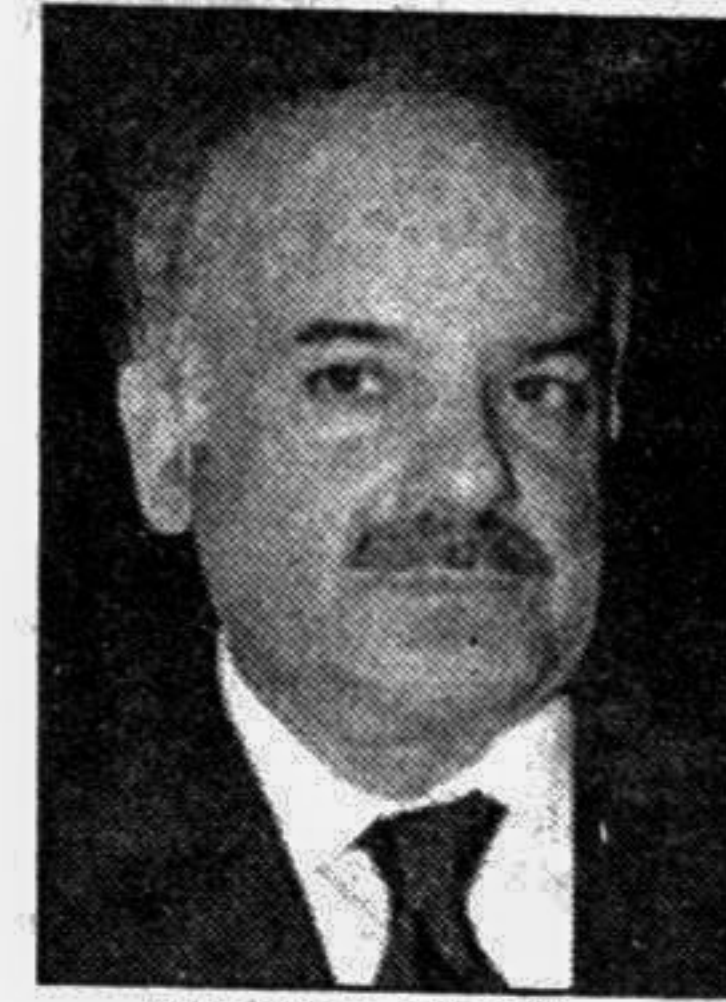
Two other officials were also arrested and brought to Karachi: Saeed Mehdi, former principal secretary to Sharif, and Saif-ur Rehman, former chief of the Accountability Bureau, the sources said.

They could face the death penalty if convicted.

"We have arrested them in a very important case in which the lives of the army chief and other passengers were put in danger through a conspiracy," said Waqar Malhan, chief investigating officer in the case.

The arrests were made after we got evidence about their involvement through witnesses."

Eight people, including the former premier, have now been arrested in the case and charges are due to be brought on Friday.



Shabbaz Sharif

Authority, was pardoned on Wednesday after turning star witness against Sharif.

He confessed Sharif ordered him not to let a plane carrying general Musharraf and nearly 200 other passengers land at Karachi on the night of the coup.

Soon afterwards the army seized control of the airport, allowing Musharraf's plane to touch down, and the general took control of the country and put Sharif under detention.

Special Public Prosecutor Ilyas Khan told the official Associated Press of Pakistan that Chaudhary had prayed for a pardon.

"The competent authority has granted the request for a pardon by the accused, Aminullah Chaudhary," Khan said.

The three other defendants are Khagan Abbasi, former head of Pakistan International Airlines, Syed Ghous Ali Shah, formerly Sharif's chief advisor in Sindh province, and Rana Maqbool, former Sindh police chief.

The men were due in court again Thursday to hear more witness statements against them.

The former premier has denied the accusations against him.

"This is a cooked-up story and the world will judge the hollowness of the accusations, Sharif told reporters on Monday. "I will fight it out."

The former premier and his family are also suspects in a crackdown on corruption.

Military authorities have already arrested Sharif's younger brother Abbas on suspicion of corruption.

Sources said several other members of the ousted prime minister's family, including Hamza Sharif, a son of Sharif's other brother Shabbaz, might also be tried under the same charges.

The Lahore High Court also issued a decree to recover one billion rupees (about 20 million dollars) against Redco Textiles, a firm run by close Sharif aide Saifur Rehman.

Red alert in Lanka as LTTE marks heroes' week

COLOMBO, Nov 25: Sri Lankan troops have stepped up already tight security arrangements as Tamil Tiger rebels commemorate thousands of guerrillas killed in a drawn out separatist war, officials said today, reports AFP.

Road blocks and check points in the capital were beefed up fearing attacks by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who end their week-long commemorations Saturday, a police spokesman said.

The rebels usually organise religious services to invoke blessings on their fighters killed in action but the military

accuses the guerrillas of also staging attacks to mark heroes' week.

The ceremonies also coincide with the birthday of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran who turns 45 Friday. Prabhakaran is Sri Lanka's most wanted man but he is hero-worshipped by his followers.

"There is a high state of alert in Colombo as well as in the suburbs," a police spokesman said. "It is usual to take extra precautions at this time of the year."

However, there were no major attacks during heroes' week last year.

The authorities deployed anti-aircraft guns to defend the Sri Lankan parliament last year from rebel air attacks as the LTTE remembered their dead.

The Tigers announced last year that they used an aircraft to drop flowers over a "martyrs cemetery" in the north of the country during heroes week celebrations.

The guerrillas mark this year's heroes week with a string of spectacular successes under their belt. The rebels captured 10 key bases from the army in just five days of fighting earlier this month.

Benazir urges int'l community Press the generals to restore democracy

OSLO, Nov 25: Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Wednesday urged the international community to press the generals who seized power in her country to restore democracy, reports AP.

"I think it is important for the world to continue pressure for democracy in Pakistan," Benazir said in Norway's capital of Oslo. "Pakistan is in turmoil and with it the region's stability is threatened."

Pakistan Gen Pervez Musharraf seized power in a bloodless coup that ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Oct 15. The military leader

accused Sharif and his government of massive corruption, destroying institutions and undermining the constitution.

By over throwing a dictator rather than a democracy, the military government was initially greeted with relief," said Benazir. "But we urge the military's early return to the barracks."

She said Pakistan was already headed for its latest military dictatorship when Sharif ousted her in 1996, and his officials began what she called a campaign to smear her name and bring "trumped up charges of corruption."

Cong hits out at BJP for fall of Goa state govt

NEW DELHI, Nov 25: India's main opposition Congress Party today hit out at the ruling Hindu nationalist for their part in toppling a Congress-run government in the western state of Goa, reports AFP.

Congress spokesman Ajit Jogi warned of "confrontation" with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's federal coalition government following the political coup in distant Goa.

The prime minister talks of cooperation with the opposition, but their actions can only lead to confrontation, Jogi told AFP, a day after the Congress government in Goa collapsed.

In Goa six months ago, winning a slender majority in the 40-seat state assembly. But 11 of 26 Congress legislators rebelled five days ago against their own chief minister.

On Wednesday, the leader of the breakaway rebel group, Francisco Sardinha, was sworn in at the head of a new government that was immediately propped up by Prime Minister Vajpayee's BJP party and two smaller parties.

The developments forced the Congress to settle for the opposition benches in Goa, a former Portuguese colony that is home to a large number of Roman Catholics.

The tiny state has witnessed frequent bouts of political instability in recent years, and the latest government is the 12th in the past decade.

Jogi said there was "a lot of anger in Congress over the way the BJP has destabilised our government in Goa. The BJP is not ready to honour the people's mandate. All their talk of political morality is bunkum."

India's ruling Hindu nationalist-led coalition commands around 300 seats in the 545-member federal parliament, but still needs opposition support in carrying out key economic reforms.

BRIEFLY

1 die in quake in China: An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.2 rocked a county in southwest China on Thursday, killing at least one person and injuring three others, the state-run Xinhua News Agency said, AP reports from Beijing.

The early morning quake hit Chengjiang county in Yunnan, a province that borders Myanmar, Burma and Laos, Xinhua said. Chengjiang is about 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of Yunnan's provincial capital, Kunming.

Russian guard killed in Tajikistan: A Russian frontier guard was murdered in Dushanbe yesterday near his home, the spokesman for Russian troops in Tajikistan told AFP in Dushanbe.

Major Alexander Korneyev, 30, was shot with a Makarov handgun, spokesman Colonel Alexander Kondratyev said.

Chopper missing in Philippines: A private, chartered helicopter with eight people aboard has been missing for over a day and is feared to have crashed, aviation officials said here Wednesday, AFP reports from Manila.

The UH-1H helicopter, belonging to the JAKA Transport Corp, was carrying employees of the state water service to a dam project in Bulacan province just outside Manila when it went missing on Tuesday, the airforce and JAKA personnel said.

Ex-Russian naval officer jailed: A former Russian navy captain has been sentenced to five years' prison for giving military secrets about the Russian Baltic fleet to Sweden, a military court announced Wednesday, AFP reports from Saint Petersburg.

Clinton still hopes to visit India

WASHINGTON, Nov 25: President Bill Clinton, who last year cancelled plans to visit South Asia after tit-for-tat nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, said on Wednesday he still hoped to visit India during his presidency, reports Reuters.

"I've always planned to go there and hope I can," Clinton told reporters when asked whether he planned to visit India. "I certainly intend to go and I hope we can work it out."

Clinton was not asked about visiting Pakistan.

US officials have said privately that plans for Clinton to visit Pakistan have been thrown into doubt because of the military coup that ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif last month.

3 soldiers killed in Kashmir blast

SRINAGAR, India, Nov 25: Three Indian soldiers were killed today when suspected Muslim militants triggered a landmine under their vehicle in Kashmir, police officials said, reports AFP.

Three other soldiers were injured in the blast on a highway near Patan town, 30 km north of Srinagar, the Kashmiri summer capital.

The injured troops were in critical condition, a police spokesman said.

Traffic on the highway linking Srinagar was suspended after the blast.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack, but officials said Muslim guerrillas fighting to end Indian rule in strife-torn Kashmir were to blame.

Talks on troops withdrawal from West Bank fail

JERUSALEM, Nov 25: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators failed to reach agreement Wednesday on a delayed West Bank troop withdrawal but remained optimistic that a deal was near, reports AP.

Negotiators met until after midnight Wednesday, trying to resolve a dispute over the location of a pullback from 5 per cent of the West Bank.

"I hope we will have an agreement in the coming days," Israeli negotiator Oded Eran said after the meeting.

The Palestinians have rejected Israel's plan for the redeployment, due to have taken place Nov. 15 under the latest peace agreement, saying Israel wanted to give the Palestinians civil control over areas that are too thinly populated.

Top officers defend role in Aceh repression

JAKARTA, Nov 25: Three senior Indonesian military men appeared before a parliamentary probe today to defend their role in a 10-year army operation in the province of Aceh which claimed some 2,000 lives, reports AFP.

General Wiranto, the former chief of the military who is now a government minister, arrived at the parliamentary complex accompanied by national police chief General Rusmanhadi and current armed forces chief Admiral Widodo Adisucipto.

Only hours earlier the parliament complex had rung to the shouts of about 2,500 Acehese protesters demanding a referendum on self-determination for the province.

Calls for a referendum have been rising since the former ruler Suharto's fall last year. His successor B.J Habibie failed to address widespread anger at the military's excesses in the province and the plundering of its rich natural resources in oil and gas.

In 1989 Suharto ordered the launch of the military operation to crush a small Islamic separatist movement set up in 1976.



Labour leader Helen Clark (C), whose centre-left alliance is currently leading the incumbent centre-right National Party of Prime Minister Jenny Shipley in the opinion polls, gets advice from the party faithful before addressing a campaign rally in Auckland yesterday. The national election on November 27 is the first ever with two female candidates battling for the role of prime minister. — AFP photo

The operations were halted in August 1998 but the violence has persisted, claiming at least 300 lives since May.

On Wednesday, an independent Indonesian investigation, set up by Habibie in July, accused the top military brass of overseeing a decade of "war crimes" in Aceh.

It said it had documented 5,000 cases of human rights abuses including summary executions, torture, rape and abductions, and called for those responsible to be held to account.

The special commission on Aceh has been set up by the lower house People's Representative Council (DPR) to try to seek a settlement with the Acehese.

Those present to hear the three men's testimonies included Attorney General Marzuki Darusman, Defence Minister Yuwono Sudarsono, and State Minister for Human Rights Affairs, Hasballah Saad.

New Zealand goes to polls

November 27 general election

AREA
268,021 km²

POPULATION
3.8 million (2,475 mln registered voters)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Proportional representation

INDUSTRY
Lairy, sheepmeats, beef, wine, fishing, forestry, aluminium

PER CAPITA GDP
US\$15,447 (1997)

UNEMPLOYMENT
6.8%

RELIGION
Anglican 18%, Roman Catholic 13%, Presbyterian 13%, no religion 26%, other/undisclosed 30%

ETHNICITY
European 76%, Maori 14%, Pacific Islanders 5%, Asian 5%

NEW ZEALAND
NORTH ISLAND: Auckland, Hamilton
SOUTH ISLAND: WELLINGTON, Christchurch, Dunedin

—AFP Graphics

Pakistan has found two tunnels on Indian border

LAHORE, Pakistan, Nov 25: Pakistani authorities have found two tunnels dug from the Indian side of the border which could be used by saboteurs, a senior Pakistan police officer said on Wednesday.

The officer, who did not want to be identified, told Reuters the tunnels on Pakistan's eastern border could have been used for smuggling or terrorism.

The charge was made a day after a senior Indian police officer was quoted in a news report as saying that Indian troops had found a 4.5-foot (1.3-metre) wide tunnel dug 100 metres inside their territory originating from the Pakistani side.

The Pakistani officer said one of the two tunnels was dug from the south of an Indian village, Kamalpur, and the other was also close to the same village.

Indian border security forces in collaboration with smugglers, have dug these tunnels to send terrorists in Pakistan for subversive activities and smuggling goods," the officer said.

Russia urges Chechen rebels to surrender

MOSCOW, Nov 25: Russia urged Islamic militant to lay down their weapons and stepped up pressure in breakaway Chechnya, tightening the noose around the capital Grozny, reports Reuters.

Russian troops today geared up to complete their encirclement of the city, which is up to 80 per cent surrounded. The rebels for their part beefed up their defences in and around the capital in expectation of a major offensive.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin again made clear on Wednesday that Russia's aim was to destroy the guerrillas, accused by Moscow of bombing several Russian cities and of destabilising the whole North Caucasus region.

But in a sign that Russia still hopes that Grozny and other centres would allow troops in without a fight, Putin urged the rebels to down their arms and promised not to prosecute those whose "hands were not stained with the blood of Russian citizens".

The eight-week-old offensive through Chechnya has brought the army to within a few kilometers (miles) of the increasingly besieged capital. Continuous bombing and shelling of villages in southern Chechnya have sent almost 200,000 Chechens fleeing to Russia's impoverished region of Ingushetia.

Russian troops control Chechnya's northern lowlands, the regions second town, Gudermes, as well as the town of Achkol-Martan — both secured after winning agreement for residents to allow them in without hostilities.

Putin, whose tough stance on Chechnya has turned him into Russia's most popular politician, told NTV television late on Wednesday that he could consider extending an amnesty declared in 1996, at the end of Russia's ill-fated Chechen war.

Russian tactics to date have focused on methodical advances on the capital. Despite their limited resistance so far, Chechen fighters are expected to put up a tough defence in Grozny, where President Aslan Maskhadov is reportedly directing defence plans.

Trimble sets disarmament deadline for IRA

LONDON, Nov 25: Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble will tell his party's ruling council this weekend that he will pull out of Northern Ireland's power-sharing government if the IRA has not started disarming by the end of January, the Financial Times newspaper reported today, says AFP.

Trimble will spell out the disarmament deadline at a meeting of his Ulster Unionist Party's 860-strong policy-making council on Saturday, in a bid to win support for a compromise peace deal.

He wants the party to change its long-held "no guns, no government" policy and agree to sit

in a devolved power-sharing government with the Irish Republican Army's political wing Sinn Fein before the IRA begins handing in weapons.

Leaders of the Protestant unionists, who support British rule over Northern Ireland, are struggling to sell the deal to hardline members.

If the UUP council supports the deal, an executive could be named Monday and given devolved powers on Thursday.

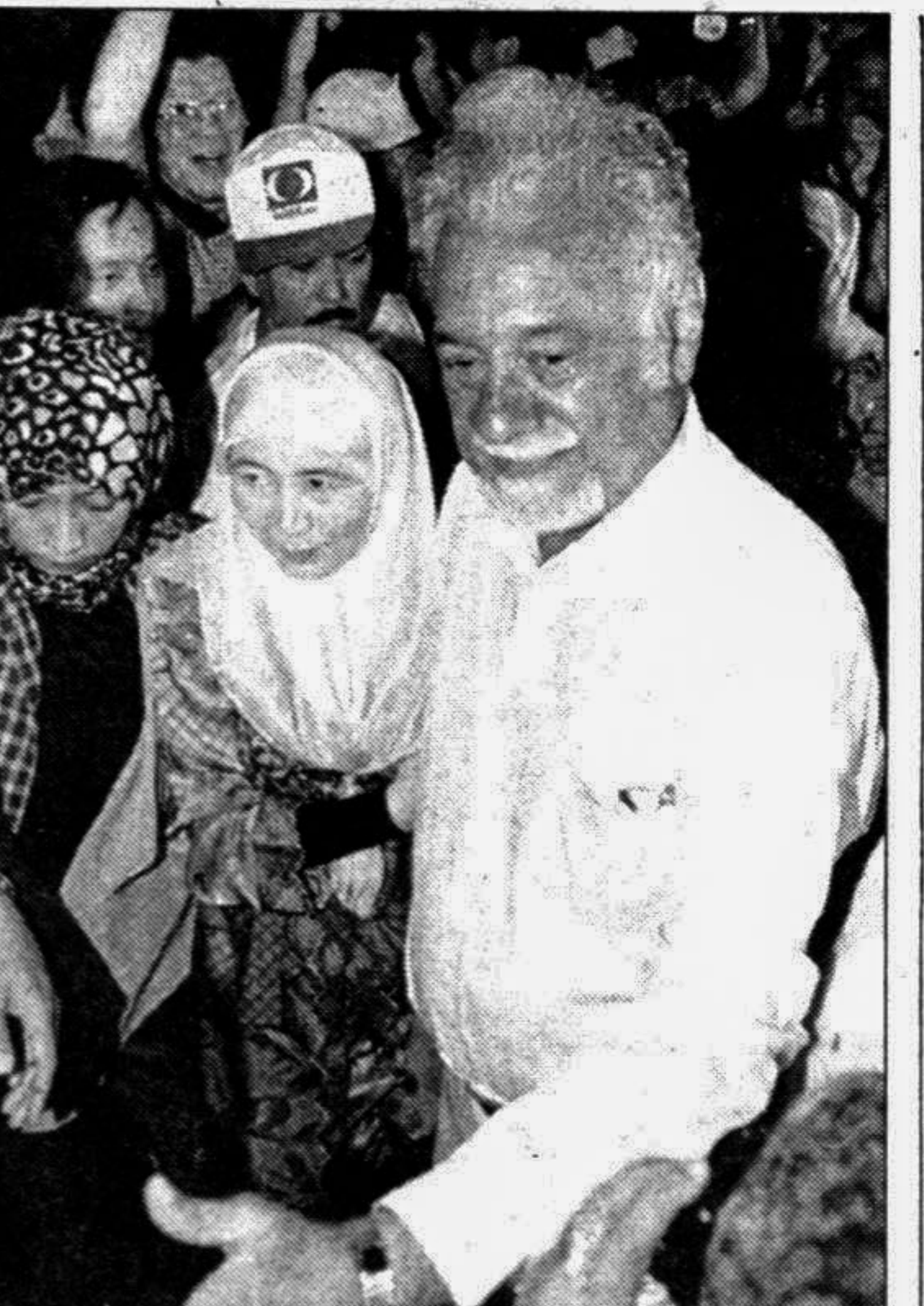
The IRA would then appoint an intermediary to discuss a weapons handover with Canadian General John De Chastelain, who chairs an interna-

tional commission on disarmament.

The paramilitary IRA, which along with other Roman Catholic republican organisations wants a united Ireland, has publicly stated its willingness to name an interlocutor to meet De Chastelain.

But Unionist hardliners argue the peace deal — which aims to end 30 years of sectarian violence — gives no guarantee of paramilitary disarmament.

On Wednesday, the largest Protestant paramilitary group said it would delay a move on disarmament until the IRA had taken the first step.



Opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) deputy president Karpal Singh (r) makes way for the National Justice Party-led by jailed former Malaysian deputy premier Anwar's wife Wan Azizah Ismail (c) to the podium to give him moral support at the rally in Pulau Penang, northern state of Malaysia Wednesday. The opposition parties is contesting every Penang's 33 state seats in which the DAP is taking 17 seats, Keadilan 11 seats and PAS 5 seats against the National Front (BN). —AFP photo