

## International

New weapons delivered to soldiers in Jaffna

## Tigers ask Sri Lankan troops to surrender

NEW DELHI, May 19: Tamil Tiger rebels on Friday asked government soldiers defending northern Jaffna to surrender even as the air force bombed suspected guerilla artillery positions targeting the only military airport in the peninsula, reports AFP.

The call over their clandestine Voice of Tigers radio came a week after the government rejected their ceasefire offer to facilitate withdrawal of nearly 40,000 soldiers fighting the battle for Jaffna, the former capital of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

There was no immediate reaction from the government. But President Chandrika Kumaratunga said last week that government troops would fight to the last man to hold Jaffna, the centre of Tamil culture in Sri Lanka.

If the Palali airbase falls into rebel hands, the 40,000 troops will be trapped in the

northern Jaffna peninsula with no land route available to leave. The alternative is two sea ports in the region, but the rebels can fire on the navy ships as well, military officials said on condition of anonymity.

The military fortified the Palali airbase with new bunkers after it was hit by rebel artillery over the past two days.

Meanwhile, government soldiers also stepped up shelling of rebel-controlled areas, said Ariya Rubasinghe, chief government spokesman and censor, in a statement faxed to The Associated Press.

"Security forces retaliated with heavy and medium artillery causing casualties among the terrorists," Rubasinghe said.

Details of damage in the Palali attack were not immediately known, but sources close to the rebels said one shell fell on a military hospital and the other on a communication

lower. The base, however, has a standby communication system.

Rubasinghe said all essential food items, medicine and ammunition are being supplied to Palali regularly.

He also said that some "newly acquired weapons system" were being sent to Palali and "will become operational shortly."

The rebels said they captured a strategic military base outside Jaffna city and sections of two roads, killing at least 100 soldiers.

"The strategically important Kaithady garrison town with its heavily fortified military bases fell to the fighting formations of the Liberation Tigers after 12 hours of ferocious combat," the rebels said in a statement posted on their Web site.

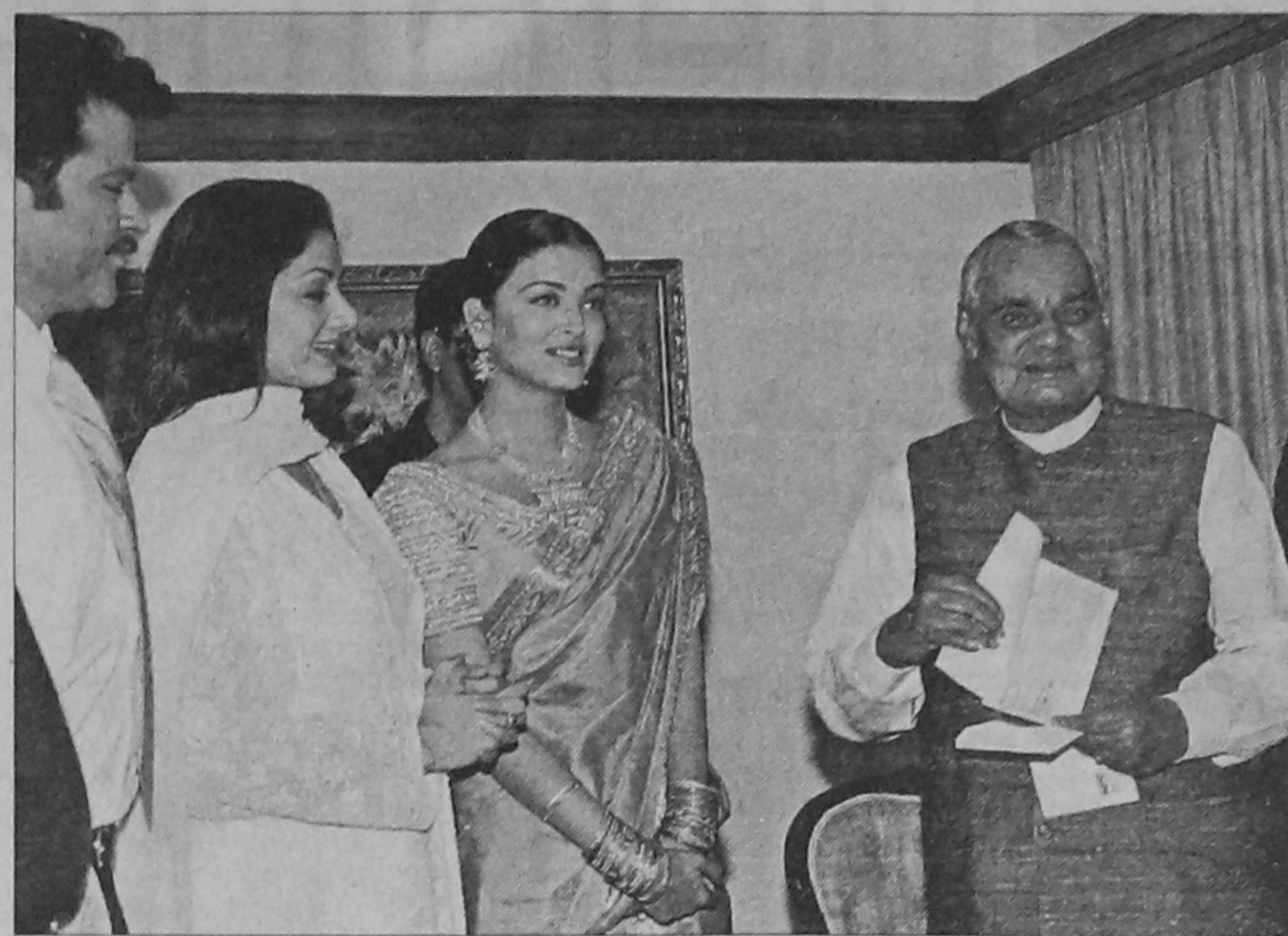
The government denied that it has lost control of the roads, but admitted that its security forces had shifted their de-

fenses to another area in the vicinity of Jaffna. The government also said small groups of rebels had infiltrated into populated areas north east of Jaffna.

A Reuters report from London says: The Sri Lankan government today delivered weapons to beleaguered troops in northern Jaffna and continued searching for Tamil Tiger infiltrators after shells were fired at the only air base on the peninsula.

A government statement in Colombo said that some of the "newly acquired weapons systems" had already been sent to Palali, the air base that has been the target of shelling by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels over the last two days.

Sri Lanka has been on an arms buying spree since the LTTE captured the sprawling military base at Elephant Pass last month.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) displays a cheque for 10 million rupees donated to PM's drought relief fund by Indian film actresses Sridevi (2nd from L) and Aishwarya Rai (2nd from R) in New Delhi Friday. North Indian state of Rajasthan, along with its neighboring states are reeling under one of the worst droughts of recent times which is estimated to have affected over 50 million people. — AFP photo

## Lankan police Recover huge Explosives, arrest 12

COLOMBO, May 19: Sri Lankan police have recovered 120 kilograms (264 pounds) of explosives and arrested 12 suspected Tamil Tiger rebels allegedly linked to an assassination plot, the state-run Daily News reported today, says AFP.

A special police team detected the explosives following the arrest of a man who tried to obtain a passport by producing forged documents, the Daily News said.

It said the 12 men taken in were believed to be members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are leading a major offensive against government forces in the island's northern peninsula of Jaffna.

The 12 LTTE suspects now under police custody have revealed that they were assigned to assassinate several cabinet ministers, Tamil politicians and senior police officers," the Daily News said.

Suspected suicide bombers of the LTTE staged blasts and fought street battles with troops,

## Shoot-on-sight ordered in Ambon, Christians to call for UN intervention

AMBON, Indonesia, May 19: Troops were issued with shoot-on-sight orders and three people shot dead by snipers today, as Christians called for UN troops to intervene in the escalating sectarian violence in the Eastern Indonesian city of Ambon, reports AFP.

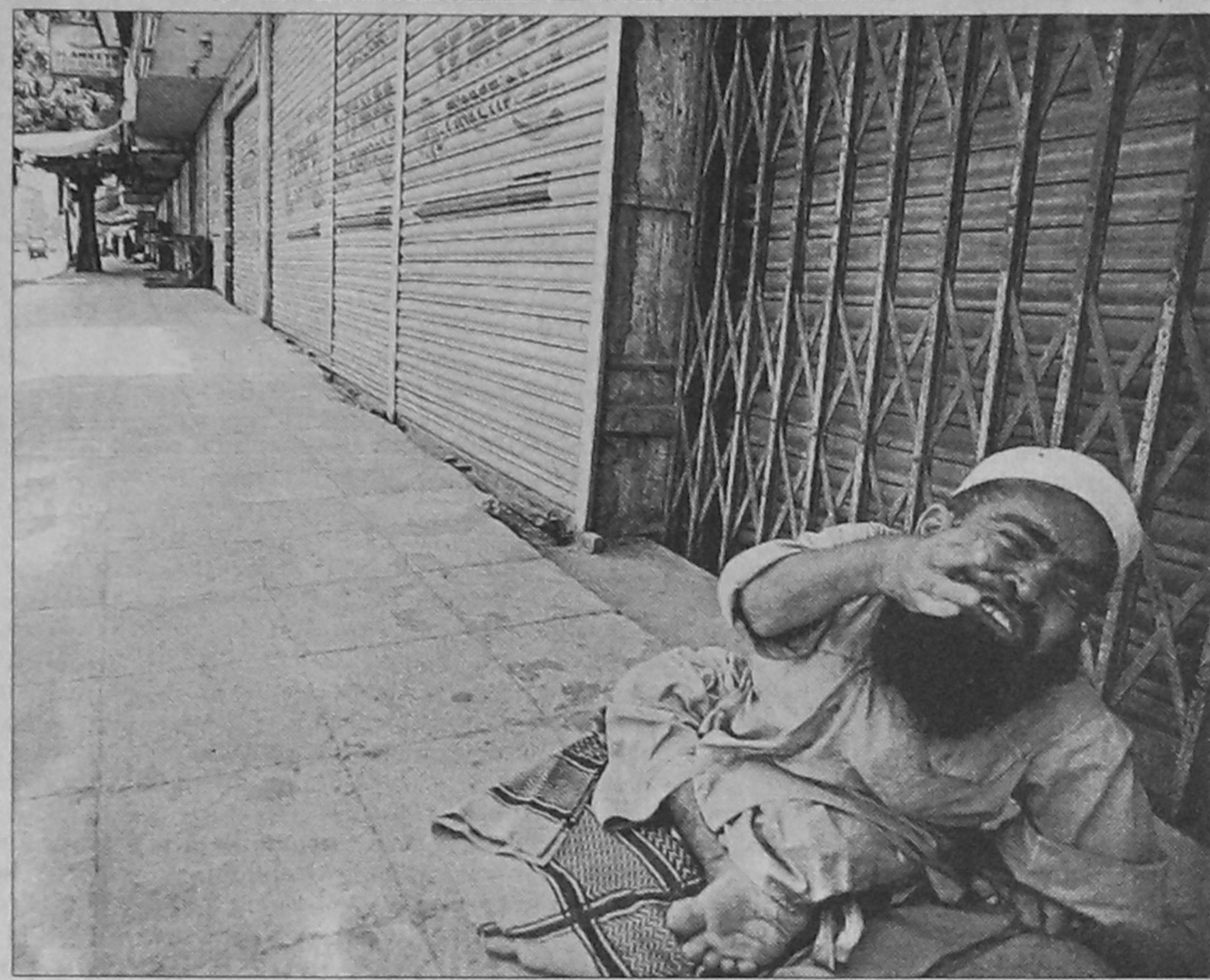
Two soldiers and a civilian were shot dead by snipers early Friday morning in the A.Y. Patti downtown area of Ambon, with the two military victims taken to the Perigi Lima military hospital.

One of the snipers was arrested and is believed to be a member of the police, military sources told AFP.

The shoot-on-sight orders follow three days of violence which have left at least 32 dead, more than 100 injured and scores of houses and a church burned in Muslim-Christian clashes.

The three killed early Friday brought the total known dead to 35.

"The concrete action is to prevent riots from spreading... therefore the shoot on sight order which I had instructed... is to be implemented."



A beggar waits for charity in front of shopping arcade during a strike called by the traders in Pakistani southern port city of Karachi yesterday. — AFP photo

## Strike paralyses Pak cities, troops patrol Karachi streets

KARACHI, May 19: A strike called by Islamic clerics shut down all major cities in Pakistan on Friday, including Karachi, tormented by a second straight day of protests by Islamic students, reports AP.

Hundreds of rock throwing students burned tires, cars and buildings in southern Karachi to protest Thursday's brazen daylight ambush that killed two Islamic clerics, including the principal of a prominent religious school.

Maulana Mohammed Yusuf Ludhyanvi, principal of Banuri Town religious school, was shot and killed by men on motorcycles.

No one took responsibility for the killing, which was the latest in a series of attacks on religious leaders in Pakistan. The religiously motivated violence has involved rival Sunni and Shiite Muslim militants.

Abdur Rehman, a teacher at the religious school, was also killed. Mohammed Yahya Ludhyanvi, the principal's son and Mohammed Naem were injured, police said.

After a night of demonstra-

tions that gutted several banks and a newspaper office, protesters returned to the streets of Karachi on Friday setting fires on fire.

Giant plumes of black smoke wafted skyward as students wailed and beat their chests. Police, paramilitary rangers and the army were out to try to curb the violence.

Elsewhere in Pakistan most cities were shut down, shops were closed and traffic was light.

The shut down was in response to a strike call by religious leaders to press the army-led government to guarantee Islamic laws in the constitution, make Friday a holiday in Pakistan and end interest charges at banks, considered to be against Islam.

Initially the clerics had called the strike to protest attempts by Pakistan's military government to make it more difficult to lay charges under the country's controversial blasphemy law, which carries the death penalty.

Army chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who originally said

he wanted to prevent abuses of the law, scrapped the plan after clerics protested.

Currently it requires only an accusation for charges under the blasphemy law to be laid. Musharraf had proposed an investigation prior to laying charges. There have been several reports of the blasphemy law being used to intimidate or exact revenge. Members of minority religious groups in Pakistan are most often targeted.

Pakistani merchants also joined in on the strike call. They are protesting attempts by the government to try to curb smuggling, impose taxes and document sales in the country.

In the eastern Punjab capital of Lahore shops were closed, in Peshawar in the Northwest Frontier Province traffic was light and businesses were shuttered.

The government had asked the clerics to call off their strike. They refused, but promised that it would be peaceful.

In Karachi, Shiite Muslims say they have asked the government for additional protec-

tion fearful of retaliatory attacks.

One of the largest Shiite Muslim groups, Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan, condemned the killing.

Most of Pakistan's 140 million people are Sunni Muslims who live in peace with their Shiite Muslim brethren. However militant groups, who are well armed, routinely clash.

In recent weeks dozens of religiously motivated attacks have occurred in Pakistan. Until Thursday most of the victims had been Shiite Muslims.

"We have been asking the administration to make adequate security arrangements because it is our leaders who are being targeted," said Allama Hasan Turabi, president of the Shiite Muslim group.

An AFP report adds: Thousands of Pakistan troops and police patrolled the streets of Karachi today following widespread violence sparked by the murder of a prominent Sunni Muslim scholar, police and witnesses said.

## Coups highlights Fiji's ethnic tensions once again

SUVA, May 19: Thursday's coup in which Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry was deposed "on behalf of the indigenous people of Fiji" is the latest dramatic twist in a lengthy ethnic saga which has threatened to split the Pacific state down the middle, reports AFP.

Some 43 per cent of Fiji's 800,000-strong population are of Indian origin, descendants of workers imported by the British in the late 19th century to work in the sugarcane fields.

Die-hard indigenous Fijians, whose ethnic group makes up half the population, have consistently played on fears of Indian domination of power in Fiji, particularly given their control over much of the economically-vital sugarcane industry.

Two bloodless coups in 1987 were undertaken precisely because of those fears, and led to a new, racially-biased, constitution which guaranteed ethnic Fijians a majority of parlia-

mentary seats.

After it gained independence from Britain in 1970, the nation's politics were long controlled by the Fijian-dominated Alliance Party of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.

But elections in April 1987 saw the Alliance Party supplanted by a multi-racial coalition which divided ministerial jobs evenly between Fijians and Indians, to the horror of hard-line indigenous nationalists.

The next month, a hand-

picked team of army officers under Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka deposed the new government, suspending the constitution.

A second military coup in September that year led to Fijian being expelled from the Commonwealth and declared a republic.

Military rule remained in force for eight years, and when Rabuka eventually became civilian prime minister in 1990, he did so under a new constitution.

## Tension mounts in Taiwan Chen's inaugural today

TAIPEI, May 19: China launched its bitterest attack on Taiwan's incoming president Chen Shui-bian since his election today after reportedly seeing an advance copy of his inaugural address, reports AFP.

On the eve of his investiture, at which Chen was to set out his keenly-awaited policy on relations with China, Taiwanese newspapers reported the popular and charismatic 49-year-old was to propose a concept of "one country, two governments."

The policy would acknowledge the common history and

heritage of the Chinese "family" as part of some greater spiritual nation, according to the China Times Express quoting government sources.

But it would specifically not accept Beijing's blunt demand that Taiwan was part of "One China."

Instead it would offer a variation on the "one country, two systems" formula used to return Hong Kong and Macau to the mainland which ruled out ultimate rule by the Chinese communist leadership.

China has demanded accep-

ance of "One China" and "one country, two systems" and warned it would invade should Chen move towards independence.

The first hint of Beijing's reaction to Chen's proposals appeared in the People's Daily Friday in a front-page commentary.

The editorial, aimed at Chen but referring throughout to "some people," rejected the president-elect's call for the dispute to be resolved peacefully, with no pre-conditions and on the basis of equality.

## Madonna's man arrested after fight with lurking fan

LONDON, May 19: Madonna's boyfriend, film director Guy Ritchie, has been arrested for allegedly beating up a man outside the couple's London home, police said, reports AFP.

Police arrested Ritchie, 31, early on Wednesday after an altercation with a 20-year-old man, thought to be a Madonna fan waiting for a glimpse of the pop star.

The fan sustained minor injuries and did not require hospital treatment, but Ritchie was nonetheless held on suspicion of causing actual bodily harm. He was later released on bail.

Madonna, who is pregnant, has been plagued by a series of stalkers during her 15-year career.

## Indian soldier killed in Kashmir border shelling

SRINAGAR, India, May 19: An Indian soldier was killed and another injured in an exchange of heavy artillery fire between Indian and Pakistani troops on the disputed Kashmir border, police said today, reports AFP.

A police spokesman said Pakistani troops opened unprovoked artillery fire from across the Line of Control -- the de facto border dividing Indian and Pakistani-administered Kashmir -- late Thursday.

The attack hit an army post in the frontier outpost of Keran in the northern Kashmir district of Kupwara. The post, which was manned by two soldiers, received a direct hit, killing one soldier and seriously injuring the other, the police spokesman said.

## 'Moderate beer drinking can cut heart risk'

LONDON, May 19: Drinking moderate amounts of beer each day could help to reduce the risk of heart disease, researchers said today, reports Reuters.

In a study of Czech men published in The British Medical Journal, Dr Martin Bobak, of University College London, found that the protective effects of beer were most pronounced in men who consumed about up to a litre (two pints) of beer a day.

In this study of beer drinkers, the lowest risk of myocardial infarction (heart attack) was found among men who drank almost daily or daily, he said.

There was a suggestion that the protective effect was lost in men who drank twice a day or more, he said.

The new research supports earlier studies that showed moderate amounts of alcohol can reduce heart disease by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

## BRIEFLY

## Swedish palace guard killed:

A 20 year-old guard at the Swedish royal palace was killed Thursday after being accidentally shot in the back, police here confirmed, AFP reports from Stockholm.

The incident took place just before 4:00 p.m. (20:00 BST) as the unnamed man waited in a side room just ahead of the changing of the guard. The shot was fired as the soldiers took up their AK-5 automatic rifles. He was rushed to the hospital immediately after the shooting and died shortly afterwards, the Stockholm medical emergency services said.

## Saddam sacks minister:

President Saddam Hussein has sacked his Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister Abdel-Jabbar Tawfiq, a newspaper reported Friday, AP reports from Baghdad.

The removal of Tawfiq, appointed to his post in August 1997, followed a Cabinet meeting chaired by Saddam on Thursday. The government newspaper Al-Thawra, which reported the news, did not say why Saddam fired Tawfiq.

## Ivory Coast junta sacks most of its 'govt of transition'

ABIDJAN, May 19: The Ivory Coast's military junta sacked most of its appointed "government of transition" Thursday, giving eight out of nine posts in the new Cabinet to its own men, reports AFP.

Junta leader, self-appointed president and defence minister General Robert Guei, who came to power in a December 24 coup, told a press conference he made the move because of unspecified "acts of defiance and even insubordination".

Apart from the addition of four junta members to the new government, the change saw the departure of almost all ministers from the Rally of Republicans (RDR) party of former prime minister Alassane Ouattara.

Ouattara was himself dismissed from his responsibilities, which included the finance and economy brief.

Only one RDR member, Culture Minister Henriette Dia-

bate, was kept on.

The junta, officially called the National Committee for Public Salvation (CNPS), has swelled to nine from four, with only one member of the junta not in the government -- Staff Sergeant Boka Yapi, head of the presidential guard.

General Guei told the press conference that "the ministerial reshuffle today (Thursday) is a reply to a concern to improve the solidarity of the members of government."

He added that, he, as "head of state remained the sole authority under whom is determined the management of political matters."

"Acts of defiance, from whatever quarter, will not be tolerated, especially when they subjugate or refuse the will of the greater number, meaning the refusal of the elementary principle of democracy," he said.

## Ethiopia escalates war against Eritrea

ADDIS ABABA, May 19: Ethiopia has escalated the fighting against Eritrea from a border war into a military assault on strategic targets deep into the country as US President Bill Clinton appealed for calm, reports AFP.

State television station ETV here reported late Thursday that Ethiopian warplanes had bombed Eritrean military positions close to the Eritrean Red Sea port town of Massawa.

The strategic Massawa port lies northeast of the Eritrean capital Asmara and more than 100 km north of the disputed border area.

"The valiant air force bombed selected strategic posi-

tions in the vicinity of Massawa," ETV said.

Ethiopian forces "have been consolidating their positions by destroying the remaining Eritrean troops that have been fleeing from Barentu towards Akordat," it added.

ETV said the Ethiopian government had no interest in annexing Eritrean territory, despite comments to the contrary by Eritrean officials who spoke of an "invasion".

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Eritreans, including troops, fleeing the Ethiopian invasion have crossed the border into eastern Sudan's Kassa state, press reports said today.

## Israeli troops put on alert for Palestinian 'days of rage'

JERUSALEM, May 19: Israeli forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were on full alert with tanks and combat helicopters today for two "days of rage" declared by Palestinian groups, a military source said, reports AFP.

Reinforcements had been sent in, and the troops had orders to reply with live rounds to any shooting from the Palestinian side, the source added.

The Palestinian Prisoners Club and the National Islamic Committee for Prisoners Solidarity called on Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip to take to the streets in demonstrations on Friday and Saturday.

The region has barely recovered from five straight days of violence, the culmination of sporadic clashes throughout the Palestinian territories since last Wednesday, that left at least four Palestinians were killed and hundreds wounded.

The fighting, in which more than 20 Israelis were also hurt,

witnessed intense gun battles between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian police.

The protests started out as solidarity demonstrations with the prisoners and culminated in the commemoration Monday of what the Palestinians call the Nakba, or catastrophe, of the establishment of Israel in 1948.

The prisoners club said the two "days of rage" should not be limited to Israeli checkpoints, an implication that they would spread to Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The "days of rage" organizers have called on the demonstrators and on the Palestinian security services to refrain from using guns in the event of the protests turning violent.

Palestinians hope the protests will push Israel to release more prisoners, some of whom have been on a hunger strike since the beginning of the month.



A military unit, seemingly manned by supporters of fugitive General Lino Cesar Oviedo, opens fire outside the Paraguayan Congress in Asuncion late Thursday in a coup attempt against the government of President Luis Gonzalez Macchi. — AFP photo