

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 guerrilla 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

tower. 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.

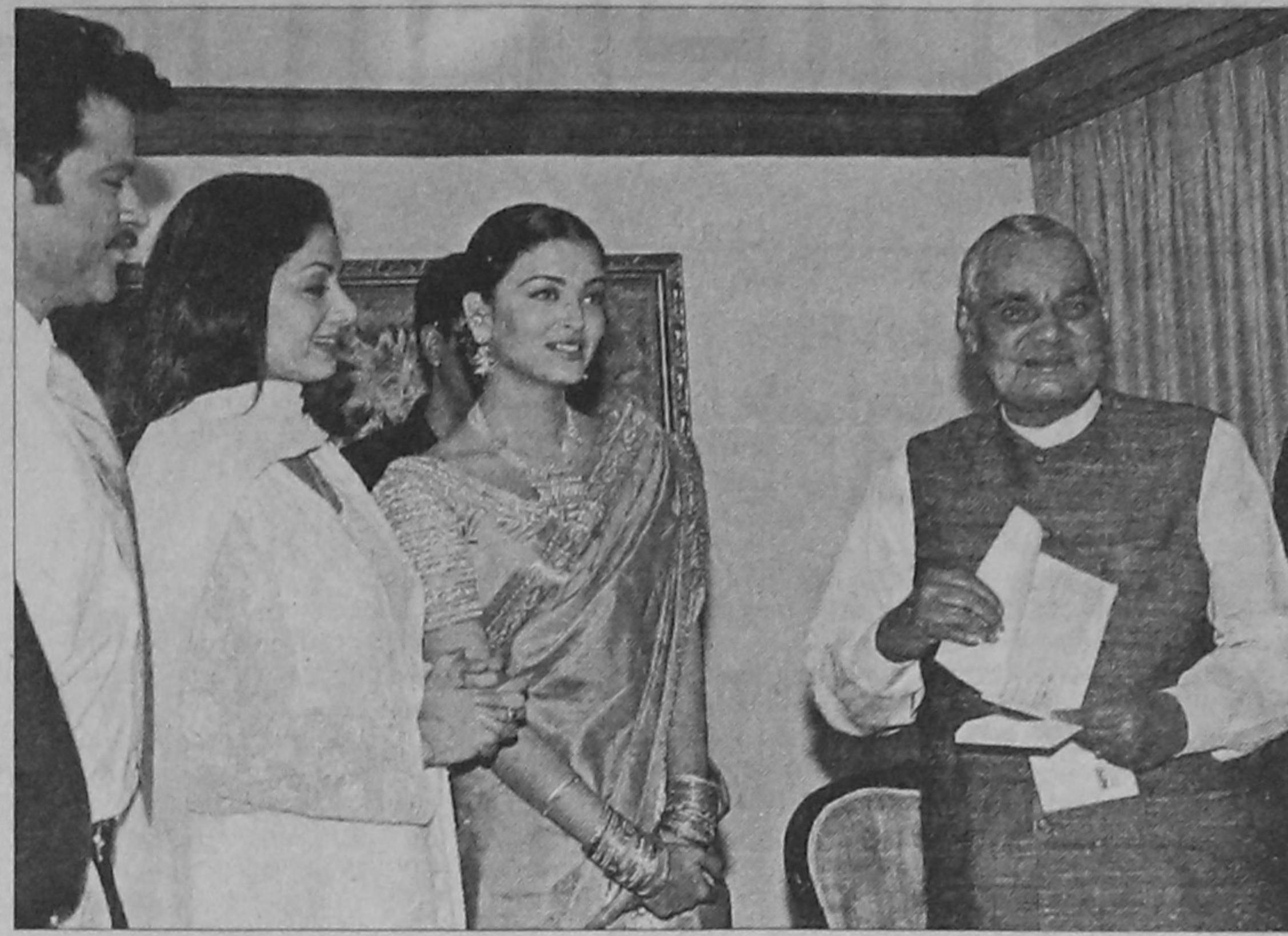
The government denied that it has lost control of the roads, but admitted that its security forces had shifted their de-

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 new 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 Bihari 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

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.

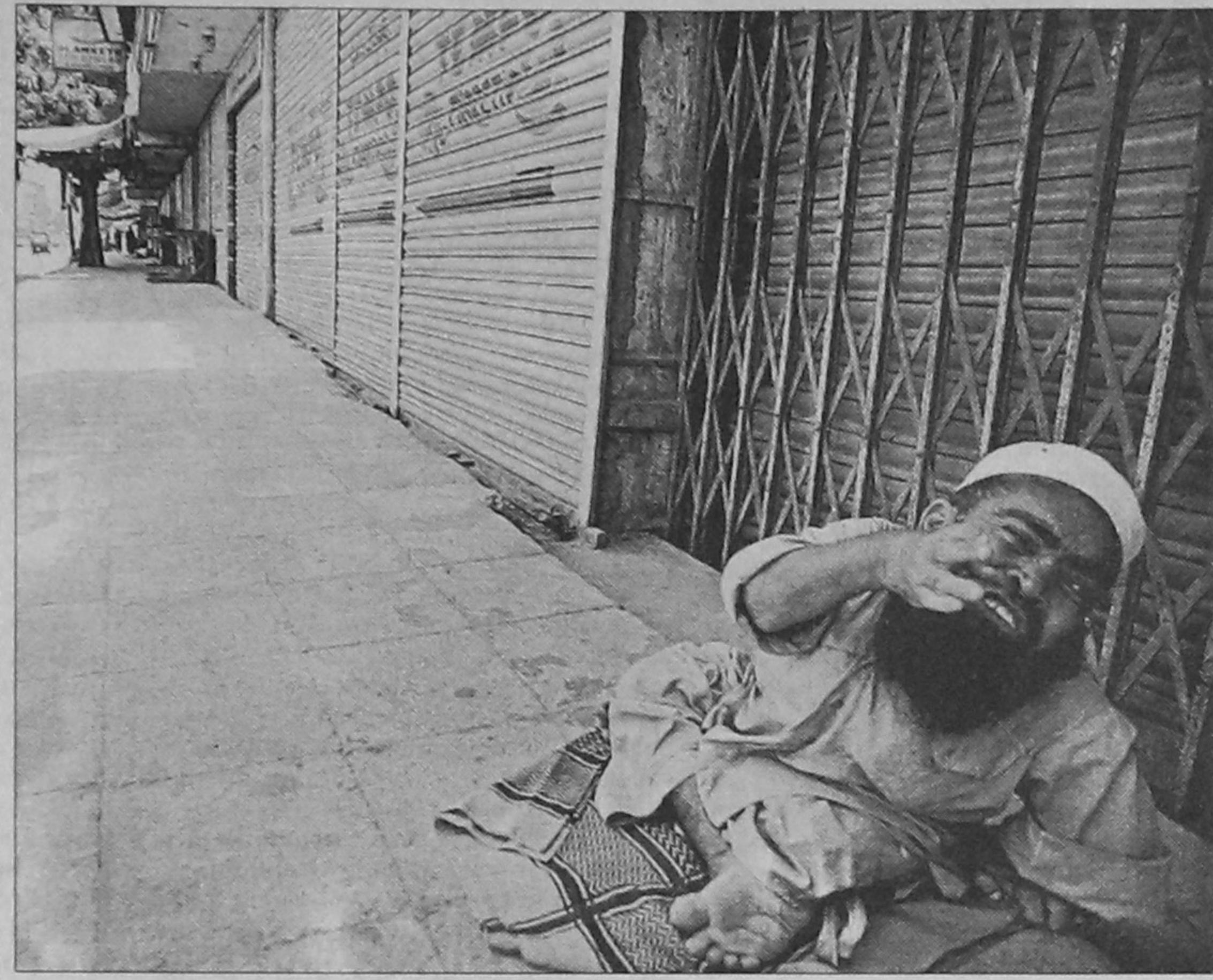
Two soldiers and a civilian were shot dead by snipers early Friday morning in the A.Y. Patti downtown area of Ambon, with the two military victims taken to the Perigi Lima military hospital.

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 a shopping arcade during a strike called by the traders in Pakistani southern port city of Karachi yesterday.

— AFP photo

Coup 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 Fiji 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.

State television station ETV

here reported late Thursday that Ethopian warplanes had bombed Eritrean military posi-

tions 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 Ethopian 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 Ethopian invasion have crossed the border into eastern Sudan's Kassala state, press reports said today.

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