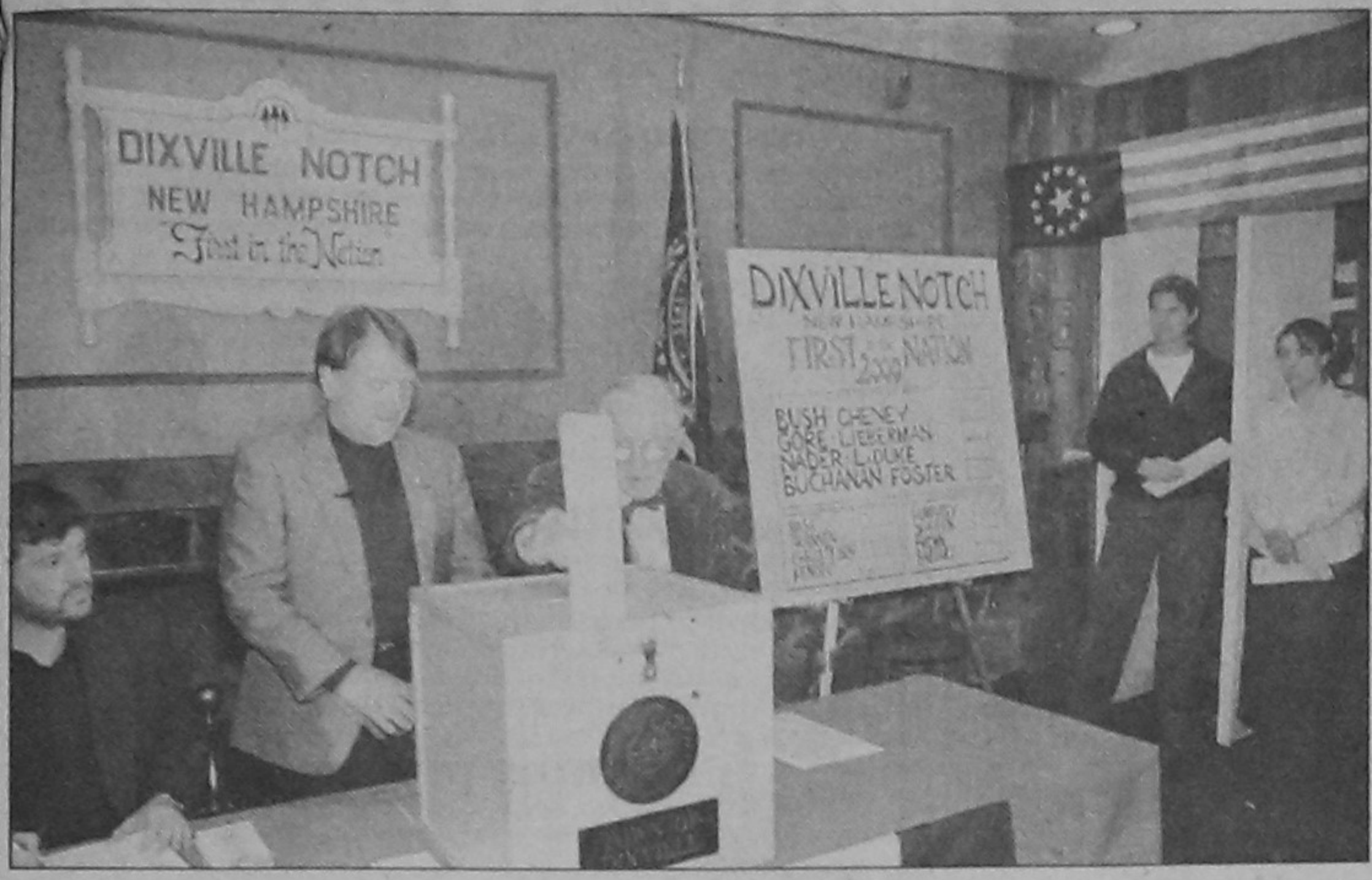


International

US Presidential Election



Neil Tillotson (3rd from left), aged 101, is the first voter in the US to cast the ballot in the presidential election in Dixville Notch, New Hampshire, in the early hours of yesterday. Seventeen people in this town cast votes in person and ten other residents sent their ballots in by mail. According to the final tally, Republican candidate George W. Bush defeated Democratic candidate Al Gore by 21-5. Green Party candidate Ralph Nader got a single vote here. -AFP photo

Four or five states may make the difference

WASHINGTON, Nov 7: As US voters head for the polls today, all eyes are focused on four or five states that experts say may determine the outcome of the race between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore, reports AFP.

Florida, Michigan and Pennsylvania will be among those we'll watch," Gore told ABC television. "And Missouri and Wisconsin..."

Since the outcome of a US presidential election is determined on a state-by-state basis, the Texas governor's narrow lead in most national opinion polls may not reflect the real picture, the analysts said.

To win, a US presidential candidate must secure at least 270 votes in the 538-member Electoral College made up of representatives of all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

Polled conducted on that basis show that Gore may prevail in states with the largest number of electoral votes and, therefore, win the election.

Bush could count on 205 electoral votes as of early Tuesday while Gore was likely to get 181, according to an MSNBC survey.

The same number of electoral votes was given the vice president in a CNN poll against Bush's 224.

A voter.com survey conducted Monday put Bush ahead with 232 electoral vote compared to Gore's 207.

But the electoral dynamic in about a dozen undecided states offered the Democratic nominee grounds for hope, according to political analysts.

"I think he can pull off Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania," said Paul Begala, a Democratic electoral strategist who was instrumental in engineering President Bill Clinton's 1992 victory over George Bush, the Texas governor's father.

"I think he'll lose Ohio but win Illinois big," he

continued. "And then, it goes to these smaller states -- Wisconsin, Tennessee -- oddly enough Gore's home state -- West Virginia and some others."

The latest Zogby International polls showed Gore ahead in Florida 49 per cent to 46 per cent. He was leading the Texas governor in Pennsylvania 48-45 per cent, according to a Mason-Dixon survey, and 46-41 per cent in Michigan, according to the latest Detroit News poll.

Victories in these three states could give the vice president 66 additional electoral votes, bringing his total to at least 247 votes -- still 23 short of the total needed for victory.

Wisconsin, Tennessee and Missouri, however, were less likely to end up in the Democratic nominee's column, according to the Zogby poll. Bush was leading in the vice president's home state 50-46 per cent. He was also beating Gore 47-45 per cent in Wisconsin and 49-45 per cent in Missouri.

But Gore was polling ahead of Bush in Iowa, Washington state and Oregon, and victories in those states could bring him 25 additional electoral votes to put him over the top, according to the analysts.

He was also tied with Bush 45-45 per cent in New Mexico, the Mason-Dixon poll showed, and was competitive in West Virginia, Maine and Missouri, contests that could yield the vice president additional votes.

However, analysts warned this hoped-for winning scenario for Gore could easily collapse if Bush wins voter-rich Florida or Pennsylvania or both.

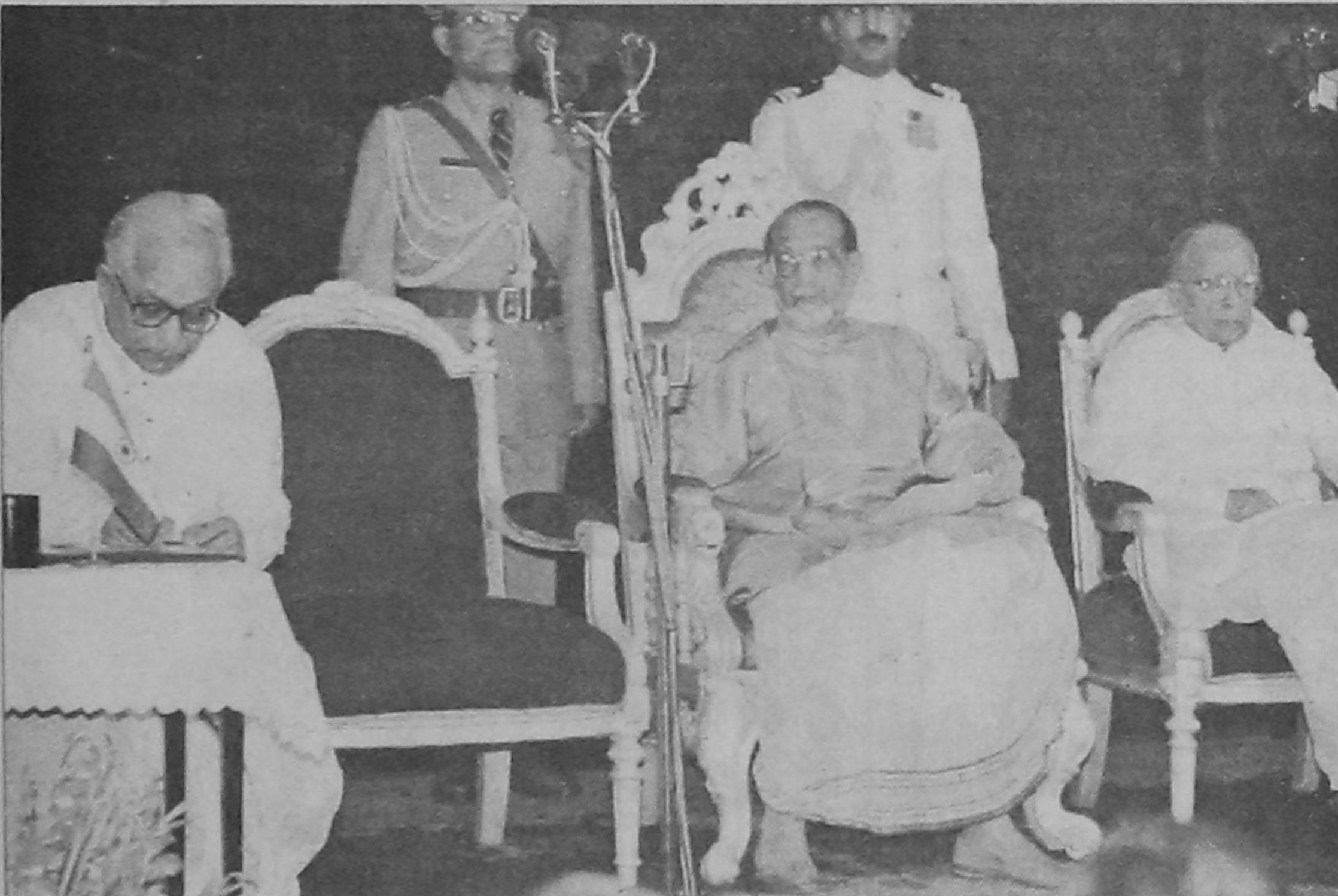
"If there is going to be a split in those states, it's going to drive the election out West," said Republican election strategist Kim Alfaro. "Gore has a lot more to do than Bush has to do."

Police said they launched a major sweep of the city within hours of the blast Monday at the Nawa-i-Waqat media group's building.

"We have arrested around 100 suspects in connection with the blast in the newspaper office in an overnight raid," Karachi police chief Tariq Jamil said.

An unidentified woman believed to be a suicide bomber was among the three dead after the huge explosion inside the advertising department of the building.

An editor of The Nation, Nawa-i-Waqat's English-language daily, said the news group had received threats which had not been taken



Senior Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) leader Buddhadev Bhattacharya signs the oath form while being sworn in as the new Chief Minister of West Bengal, as state Governor Viren J. Shah (C) and outgoing Chief Minister Jyoti Basu (R) look on, at the swearing-in ceremony at the Governor House in Calcutta on Monday. Bhattacharya replaces party colleague Jyoti Basu, who retires on health grounds after serving as the Chief Minister of the state for a record 23 years. - AFP photo

British surgeons separate Siamese twins

LONDON, Nov 7: British surgeons who performed complex surgery to separate three-month-old Siamese twin girls are set to announce the results today after a marathon operation that meant certain death for the weaker baby, reports AFP.

Officials at St Mary's Hospital have remained tight-lipped about the results of the controversial operation, but BBC Radio reported early Tuesday that doctors "are believed to have completed the operation," working "late into the night."

Mary, the weaker of the two three-month-old girls, was certain to die moments after surgeons sever the blood vessels which connect her to Jodie's heart.

But doctors at the Manchester hospital argued that if they did not operate, Jodie too could die as the extra burden of providing heart and lung functions for her sister threatened to overload her organs.

The girls' parents, devout Roman Catholics, had opposed the surgery during a complex legal battle but reportedly stayed at the hospital while they waited for the operation to be completed.

The medical team was aiming to work to save Jodie but had not ruled out the possibility that she could be paralysed by the operation.

If the operation was successful, they said, Jodie could lead a relatively normal life, but would need years of surgery to reconstruct the parts of her body that were fused with her twin.

Mary's death was always inevitable if the separation went ahead as she was born severely disabled and had survived because of her link with her sister, but surgeons warned both girls would die without the operation.

The parents, from the Maltese island of Gozo, had said they preferred to leave their daughters' fate in the hands of God.

Doctors at St Mary's obtained a 11th hour court order last Friday allowing them to operate against the parents' wishes.

Questions have also been raised about the suitability of St Mary's Hospital to carry out such a difficult operation. All three previous attempts to separate Siamese twins at the hospital have resulted in their deaths.

Surgeons at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London are the acknowledged experts in the field with substantial experience of successfully separating joined twins.

Police seize uranium in southern India

HYDERABAD, India, Nov 7: Indian police have seized 26 kg (57 lb) of uranium from a home in the southern city of Hyderabad and arrested two men who had been trying to smuggle the radioactive material out of the country.

A senior police official told Reuters late on Monday that the two men had stumbled upon the uranium when they bought a vast quantity of scrap from a private hospital in Andhra Pradesh state for 60,000 rupees (\$1,285) in 1998.

The men, who separated the scrap from the uranium, had been trying to smuggle out the material, which would fetch millions of dollars in the international market, police said.

They were trying to dispose of two parts of radioactive material containing uranium... weighing about 26 kg in Hyderabad city," the city's Police Commissioner SR Sukumara said.

Police officials said they were investigating how the hazardous material left the hospital.

The radioactive material had been used in the treatment of cancer patients and was supposed to have been returned to the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in Bombay.

The announcement of the date ends weeks of speculation on when Chuan will call the polls, which are seen as a referendum on his government's economic policies.

Hillary leading in close NY Senate race: Poll

ALBANY, NY, Nov 7: The most-watched Senate race in the United States roared through its final hours, with Hillary Rodham Clinton holding rallies in cities across the state and Rick Lazio campaigning for votes in the suburbs, reports AP.

In three new polls released Monday, two showed the race very close, and the third showed the first lady with a double-digit lead over her Republican rival.

"I've felt like the underdog throughout the entire race," Lazio told reporters while campaigning in the Hudson Valley town of Chester. "We were up against a lot, but you know what I have faith in? The fighting forces of New York."

Clinton and her supporters were predicting victory.

"I'll fight for you, I'll stick with you, I'll go to the US Senate and work my heart out for you!" she told 1,200 cheering supporters in Albany.

Earlier, comedian Bill Cosby and Doug Flutie, a professional football star, joined Hillary at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Among the new polls, the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute had the first lady leading the Long Island congressman



51 per cent to 39 per cent, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 points.

A poll from Marist College's Institute for Public Opinion had Clinton at 49 per cent and Lazio at 45 per cent, a gap within the poll's margin of error of plus or minus 4.5 points. A New York Post poll out Monday had Hillary at 48 per cent and Lazio at 46 per cent. The poll was conducted by Zogby International.

Koreas to resume talks today

SEOUL, Nov 7: South and North Korea will hold their first talks for two months from tomorrow, with the South seeking signs that the inter-Korean peace process launched by a historic summit in June has not been held up, reports AFP.

North Korea has shunned talks with rival South since September. There had been fears the rapprochement could be sidelined by North Korea's attempts to seek improved ties with the United States.

"A South Korean delegation led by Lee Kyong-Keun, assistant finance and economy minister, will leave for Pyongyang tomorrow to hold economic talks," a finance and economy ministry official said Tuesday.

The four-day economic talks are aimed at drawing up agree-

ments on investment guarantees and the avoidance of double taxation between the two Koreas.

The talks were originally scheduled for October 18-20 but the North postponed them.

During the first economic talks in September in Seoul, the two sides failed to overcome differences.

Ties between the rivals have warmed rapidly following the June summit between South Korea's President Kim Dae-Jung and North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Il.

The summit was followed by the dramatic reunion of separated families, a groundbreaking ceremony for a railway through the de-militarised zone between the Koreas and talks between their defence ministers.

100 arrested after Karachi blast

KARACHI, Nov 7: Pakistani police today arrested some 100 people over a suicide bomb attack at a newspaper office amid mounting public anger at ethnic and sectarian violence which has claimed thousands of lives here, reports AFP.

Police said they launched a major sweep of the city within hours of the blast Monday at the Nawa-i-Waqat media group's building.

"We have arrested around 100 suspects in connection with the blast in the newspaper office in an overnight raid," Karachi police chief Tariq Jamil said.

An unidentified woman believed to be a suicide bomber was among the three dead after the huge explosion inside the advertising department of the building.

An editor of The Nation, Nawa-i-Waqat's English-language daily, said the news group had received threats which had not been taken

seriously by the police authorities.

He also made veiled accusations against the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a political party representing Indian immigrants which has been blamed for terrorist attacks in the past.

The MQM has denied involvement in Monday's blast and the city's police chief refused to disclose whether those rounded up overnight had any political affiliations.

"All of them have criminal records and we are investigating Monday's incident," he said.

"One person who could have identified (the suicide bomber) died in the attack while the other injured people are not in conditions to give the exact description of the woman, who was blown to pieces."

Extra police had been deployed outside newspaper offices Tuesday, he said.

Muslim rebels storm Filipino jail, free 68

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, Nov 7: Heavily armed Muslim separatists stormed a prison on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao today, killing an inmate and freeing 68 others including several comrades, police and military said, reports AFP.

The pre-dawn Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) raid also left a guard at the General Santos city jail seriously wounded, police said.

Philippine police chief Panfilo Lacson said 68 of the more than 400 inmates escaped, including about "five or six" arrested in connection with a series of MILF bombings in General Santos earlier this year.

About 50 MILF fighters armed with rocket-propelled grenades smashed through the prison

walls and snatched several fellow rebels, Superintendent Nestor Velasquez told AFP.

The lone fatality was an inmate who apparently refused to join the escape, he added.

Among those who escaped was MILF leader Tahir Alonto, who was serving a life term for murder and kidnapping, said police officer Alvin David.

"The prisoners may have joined the rebels because they do not have anywhere to go," David said.

The MILF is the largest Muslim separatist group in the Philippines.

Military chief General Angelo Reyes said Alonto and four of his comrades in the kidnapping schemes escaped but vowed that troops would recapture all of those who broke out.

Thailand to hold elections Jan 6

BANGKOK, Nov 7: Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai's government decided today to dissolve parliament this week and hold a general election on January 6, the first since the 1997 Asian economic crisis, reports AP.

The Cabinet has accepted an Election Commission proposal to dissolve the lower House of Representatives on Nov. 9 to pave the way for the January election, government spokesman Akapol Sorsuchart said.

The dates must be approved by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, but that's a formality, which he is expected to fulfill.

The announcement of the date ends weeks of speculation on when Chuan will call the polls, which are seen as a referendum on his government's economic policies.

Chuan's coalition government came to power during the chaos of the 1997 crisis, and the general election will give voters the first opportunity to pass their verdict on the government's efforts to rescue the economy.

The elections will also be the first under a new election law that gives the Election Commission wide powers to prevent cheating and vote-buying.

Under the new electoral law, formally approved by the king Monday, the Election Commission can disqualify candidates found guilty of votebuying and exceeding their campaign spending limits.

In opinion polls, Chuan's Democrat Party is trailing behind the opposition Thai Rak Thai party, led by telecommunications tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra.

Thailand warns against use of cell phones by children

BANGKOK, Nov 7: Thailand's Public Health Ministry has warned against the use of cellular phones by children under 12 years of age, saying it could affect the development of their brains, reports AP.

A ministry statement received today quoted Dr Mongkhkol Na Songkhla, the permanent secretary of health, as saying that there was no clear evidence that cellular phones emit cancer-causing waves.

"Although we don't know that there's a risk of brain cancer from mobile phones we would like to urge caution," Mongkhkol was quoted as saying.

"People should avoid using them for long periods of time. Children under 12 should not use mobiles because their brain cells are still developing," he was quoted as saying.

Mongkhkol said information obtained from various studies abroad suggested that the use of cellular phones adversely affected brain cells of laboratory animals.

President Estrada faces impeachment trial

MANILA, Nov 7: A key Philippine Congressional panel on Monday endorsed an impeachment motion against President Joseph Estrada, effectively clearing the way for the leader to face trial for corruption in the Senate, reports AFP.

Hours after the justice committee of the House of Representatives approved the motion, Estrada issued a statement saying he was prepared to face justice and would not negotiate any deal to hand over power.

"I am not negotiating for any deals and have no intention of doing so to avoid confronting the accusations against me," Estrada said. "I put my trust in the constitutional process to vindicate my innocence."

In a meeting with an advisory group on security issues earlier Monday, he had brushed off calls for his immediate resignation. "Let the impeachment process take its due course," he said.

Rumours had swept the capital that Estrada would step down by midweek, giving a rocket boost to the moribund local financial markets.

The impeachment motion, following the approval Monday by

the justice committee of the House of Representatives, would be formally adopted by the plenary session of the lower house on November 13 and sent to the Senate.

Its sponsors say 99 legislators, more than the required one third majority, in the 218-member House had already approved the motion.

In the Senate, the 22-member upper house would convene as a tribunal, with the Supreme Court's chief justice sitting as non-voting chairman, to conduct Estrada's impeachment trial. Estrada would need only seven senators to reject the charges to keep his job.

Estrada is accused of bribery, corruption, betraying the public trust and violating the constitution.

But the key charge is that the 63-year-old former movie star took eight million dollars in bribes from illegal gambling syndicates.

Finance Secretary Jose Pardo, Estrada's top economic adviser, earlier said he had offered himself "as a channel for communication" between Estrada and those seeking to oust him.

Table with 4 columns: Sr. No., Name of Candidate, Party, and Remarks. It lists candidates for various positions in the Bangladesh National University (Jahangirnagar) and includes details about their qualifications and the number of votes they received.