

International

Muslim countries urged to cut off ties with Israel

DOHA, Nov 13: Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia opened an Islamic conference Sunday by urging Muslim nations that have ties with Israel to cut them, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said his people will sacrifice for the 'noble cause' of rising up against the Jews state, reports AP.

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said Muslim nations should impose economic and political sanctions on Israel to punish it for 'the most barbaric crimes' against Palestinians.

The calls came on the opening day of ninth summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, during which Iran handed the OIC's three-year chairmanship to Qatar. The anti-Israeli statements will likely be welcomed by most participants, but key Muslim states -- Turkey, Jordan and Egypt -- already refused similar demands made at preparatory ministerial meetings Thursday and Friday.

At an evening session devoted to the Israeli-Palestinian violence, Khatami expressed support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, saying it 'should not wait for the consent of usurpers and their supporters.'

'It is essential for those member states that have not yet severed their diplomatic relations with Israel... to break at the shortest possible time their ties with this regime,' Khatami said.

Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah and Syrian President Bashar Assad echoed Khatami's call.

'We demand that relations with Israel be cut in order to deter it from carrying on its criminal acts against the Palestinians,' Assad said.

Abdullah urged Islamic countries with Israel ties to rise to 'the huge challenge imposed on all of us by Israel.'

'The least we expect from those countries is to minimize their relations with Israel to the least possible level or freeze them completely and link any future dealings with Israel to achieving actual tangible progress in the peace process -- not just on the Palestinian process but all other levels,' Abdullah said.

He also said the summit should call for a severing of diplomatic relations with countries that move their embassies to Jerusalem.

Khatami, who opened the gathering, asked participants to stand and recite a special verse for the dead from the Quran, the Islamic holy book, to honour Palestinians killed in clashes with Israel that erupted Sept. 28. More than 180 people, most of them Palestinian, have died in the violence.

In their opening speeches, the leaders blamed Israel for the recent bloodshed.

Iraqi Vice President Izzat Ibrahim called for jihad, or holy war, against Israel. He lambasted the United States for its support of Israel, describing the American administration as 'the evil administration in the Black House.'

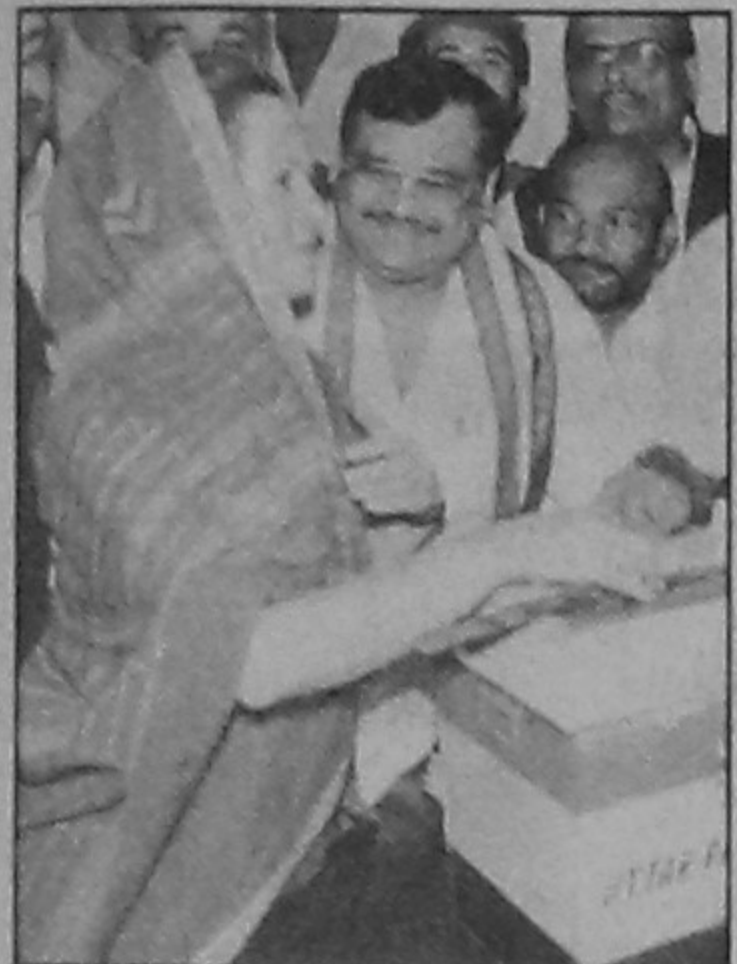
Sudanese President Omar El-Bashir called for 'Jihad in all its forms' against Israel and an end to any sort of normalization of relations with Israel.

Arafat, meanwhile, said the Palestinians 'are determined more than ever to continue their jihad and the resistance of the occupation.'

He urged Muslim countries to alleviate the Palestinians' economic hardship by opening their borders to Palestinian workers, saying the latest bloodshed has cost his Palestinian areas more than 900 million.



United Arab Emirates representative Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammad al-Mashriqi (L), the ruler of Fujairah, and Foreign Minister Rashed al-Nuaimi attend the opening session of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Doha on Sunday. The leaders of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims are meeting in Qatar where Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat vowed to carry on with the uprising despite the high cost in human lives and financial losses until the end of Israeli occupation. --AFP photo



Congress party president Sonia Gandhi casts her vote amidst her supporters during intra-party elections for the post of party president at the party's state headquarters in Lucknow in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh on Sunday. Sonia, who is standing for re-election faces an unprecedented challenge to her family's leadership of the country's oldest political party from senior party leader Jitendra Prasad. --AFP photo

Laden denies link with Kuwaiti terrorists

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 13: Osama Bin Laden, the man most wanted by the United States, has denied any link with alleged Kuwaiti terrorists and said he is not planning any attacks on US forces in the region, a newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

'I assure you that we are not linked with them (the Kuwaiti group) in any organisational relations, or any other form,' Bin Laden told Kuwait's Al-Rai Al-Aam by phone from an undisclosed location.

The Qaeda (The Base-Bin Laden's group) has no intention of attacking US military bases or forces stationed in the area.

'Neither I nor my followers have the intention to strike against oil installations, civil or military targets in Kuwait or any Arab country,' he added.

Kuwait said it has arrested six Kuwaiti suspects for plotting to carry out attacks against targets in Kuwait and the region, and press reports linked the group to Bin Laden.

The leader of the Qaeda also denied any link with the suspects arrested in Yemen in connection with the October 12 attack on the destroyer USS Cole which killed 17 US sailors.

'We have no relation with the persons who have been detained, and they do not represent us in any way,' said Bin Laden.

Kuwait's cabinet on Sunday hailed the arrest of the group, saying they foiled a 'terrorist plot by criminal elements to destabilise the country.'

A senior interior ministry official said the prime target of the group was to carry out suicide bombings on US military convoys, moving in and out of Camp Doha.

Kashmiri leader allowed to attend son's wedding in Pakistan

SRINAGAR, India, Nov 13: A Muslim separatist leader based in the Indian part of divided Kashmir has been finally granted permission to travel to Pakistan for his son's wedding, official sources said today, reports AFP.

Veteran separatist leader Abdul Gani Lone has been allowed to go to Rawalpindi to attend the marriage of his son Sajjad Lone to Asma Khan on November 19. The bride and the groom were both educated in London.

Khan is the daughter of the chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front rebel group, Amanullah Khan, who lives in Pakistani-administered Kashmir.

The permission has been granted and it now depends upon Abdul Gani Lone if he wishes to attend the marriage, a top official told AFP on condition of anonymity in Srinagar, the state summer capital.

India and Pakistan have fought two full-scale wars over the Himalayan region, as well as a border conflict last year, and bitterly dispute the ownership of the fractured state.

An armed Muslim insurgency in Indian Kashmir has claimed more than 34,000 lives since 1989.

Nearly all the pro-independence, pro-Pakistan and pro-India leaders in Indian Kashmir have been invited to the wedding, including Kashmiri Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah.

There is a shift in New Delhi's policy, Abdul Gani, a leader of Kashmir's largest separatist grouping, the All Party Freedom Conference, said, welcoming the move to allow Lone to attend his son's wedding.

Gani pointed out that top Kashmiri separatist leader, Umar Farooq, who doubles up as Indian Kashmir's senior-most Muslim cleric, was allowed to attend the ongoing Organisation of Islamic Conference meeting in Doha.

A team comprising of some two dozen prominent members of the Freedom Conference are also going to Pakistan for the ceremony.

Barak urges Clinton to help end Middle East violence

WASHINGTON, Nov 13: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak appealed to President Bill Clinton to do all he could to end a violent confrontation with the Palestinians, reports AP.

But Barak did not ask Clinton to prod Yasser Arafat for a public statement urging Palestinians to halt riots and rock-throwing that have prompted a deadly Israeli response, a senior US official said Sunday.

Earlier Sunday, at an Islamic summit conference in the Gulf country of Qatar, Arafat vowed a 'jihad and the resistance of the occupation' against Israel would be continued.

Emerging from a meeting of more than two hours with Clinton, Barak said Israel expected the governments and people of the free world 'to make their own judgment about whether a jihad or a negotiated

agreement is the right way to solve conflict.'

Clinton saw Barak to the door of the White House and they shook hands. The president made no statement afterward.

But a senior official, briefing reporters under rules that cloaked his identity, said Clinton and Barak had agreed there was no military solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

The president made the same point in his meeting with Arafat at the White House on Thursday, the official said.

Clinton is determined to find a formula for ending the six-week outbreak of violence and is in the process of deciding whether to send an envoy to the region or to take some other specific steps, the official said.

He suggested Clinton had accepted the burden of terminat-

ing the conflict that has taken a toll of nearly 200 lives. There was no discussion of holding another summit, the official said.

In a brief exchange with reporters, Barak said Israel had been prepared at the summit Clinton hosted in July at Camp David to consider 'far-reaching ideas' to promote peace, but now 'we do hear different signals from the Arab side.'

The main goal now, he said, was to put an end to the violence by implementing a truce Arafat and he agreed to at an emergency summit last month in Egypt.

Barak, whose arrival in Washington was delayed by hijacking crisis back home that wound up being resolved while he was en route, gave no indication, though, that the White House meeting would help end the bloodshed.



A file photo dated November 8, 1997, shows Leah Rabin, widow of the late Israeli prime minister, addressing a crowd of more than 200,000 Israelis gathered at Yitzhak Rabin Square in Tel Aviv to pay homage to her husband on the second anniversary of his assassination. --AFP photo

Leah Rabin passes away

JERUSALEM, Nov 13: Leah Rabin, the widow of assassinated Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin who became a tireless campaigner for peace with the Jewish state's Arab neighbours, died of cancer on Sunday, reports AFP.

Leah Rabin, 72, had been suffering from lung cancer for many months.

Her death came eight days after Israel commemorated the fifth anniversary of the murder of Rabin, who was shot on November 4, 1995 by a Jewish extremist opposed to his peace policies.

Since his assassination five years ago, Leah held the torch of his legacy and brought his voice loud and clear to us Israelis and to the whole world,' Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak told reporters travelling with him to Washington.

'(She was) a courageous, devoted woman who worked together with her husband for two generations to bring Israel into a secure situation and in recent years to bring peace to the Middle East,' Barak said.

'We lost a dear friend and the Middle East has lost a friend of peace. But the work to which she and Yitzhak dedicated their lives must of course continue,' US President Bill Clinton said ahead of his talks with Barak.

Indian air force chopper missing near Pak border

NEW DELHI, Nov 13: The Indian air force launched a massive search today for a military helicopter with 12 people aboard that went missing in the western state of Gujarat bordering Pakistan, a spokesman said.

The air force spokesman told AFP the Russian-made Mi-8 helicopter went missing shortly after taking off Sunday afternoon from the Gujarat town of Koteswar.

'There were eight officials of the Border Security Force on board and four air force crew members,' the spokesman said. They were on a routine mission.'

He said the helicopter went missing in Gujarat's frontier Nalla region, which borders Pakistan. India shot down a Pakistani navy plane in August 1999 near Nalla after repeated warnings to the pilot that he was violating Indian airspace.

Pakistan lodged a compensation claim on September 21, arguing its Atlantic naval surveillance plane was on a routine

training mission when it was shot down on August 10 in Pakistani airspace, killing all 16 personnel on board.

But Indian defence sources ruled out the possibility of the helicopter was shot down by Pakistan.

'If that was the case, we would already have heard about it,' said a senior defence official who requested he not be named.

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes said during a tour of Gujarat on Sunday that Pakistan had been building up troops along the border.

'There are activities across the border and some additional Pakistani army build-up on the border has been noticed,' the Press Trust of India quoted him as saying.

'However, this should not cause any anxiety,' he said. 'There are some posts on our side and some on their side. There could be small units on the other side but we also have our units on the border,' he said.

Pakistan tightens security ahead of arms exhibition

KARACHI, Nov 13: Security has been tightened here ahead of the opening of a major international arms exhibition which Pakistan hopes will boost its lucrative weapons exports, officials and police said today, reports AFP.

Thousands of Pakistani police and paramilitary were deployed around this southern port city, known as the crime capital of Pakistan and the scene of regular political, religious and ethnic violence.

The three-day IDEAS-2000 defence exhibition starting Tuesday is expected to attract defence ministers, armed forces chiefs and senior generals from 37 countries, including China, Russia, France and Saudi Arabia.

'We have taken extraordinary arrangements with over five thousand police besides assistance from the army and the Rangers for fool-proof security,' Karachi police chief Tariq Jamil told AFP.

Jamil said the military had taken over security at the exhibition site after a bombing at a newspaper office here last week in

which at least three people were killed. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Police and army commandos armed with automatic weapons have been deployed around the exhibition venue in an eastern suburb.

Military ruler General Pervez Musharraf and President Rafiq Tarar are among the Pakistani officials expected to attend the exhibition, which will not be open to the public.

Pakistan's medium- to long-range, nuclear capable Shaheen and Ghauri missiles will be among the highlights of the exhibition.

Pakistan has emerged as a competitive arms exporter with annual weapons sales to the Middle East and Europe doubling in the past two years, according to official reports.

Exports including machineguns, rifles, anti-tank rockets, mortars and ammunition earned 30.2 million dollars last year, the official Associated Press of Pakistan has reported.

Protesters demand resignation of Wahid

JAKARTA, Nov 13: About 1,000 protesters rallied Monday outside Indonesia's parliament demanding that beleaguered President Abdurrahman Wahid resign for failing to fix the country's ailing economy and end bloody separatist and sectarian conflicts, reports AP.

About 200 demonstrators belonging to a Muslim youth group forced their way into the building and smashed furniture in the entrance hall.

Muslim hardliners have been urging that Wahid, a moderate Muslim cleric and Indonesia's first freely elected president in over four decades, be removed from office. He became president in October 1999.

Lawmakers belonging to Wahid's National Awakening Party met with the group to discuss their demands. But other deputies refused to speak with the protesters.

A statement released by the organizers of the protest urged parliament to convene a special session that would impeach Wahid, whom they accused of incompetence.

The statement demanded that Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri take over from Wahid. Sukarnoputri, the daughter of Indonesia's founding president Sukarno, is the leader of the country's largest secular political party.

'Megawati has to be ready to replace Wahid,' the statement said.

Meanwhile, several hundred protesters organized a separate rally outside the United Nations office in downtown Jakarta to demand that the world body intervene to stop the bloodshed in the Aceh province.

Acehnese separatists are demanding that the United Nations organize an East Timor-style independence referendum in the province on the northern tip of Sumatra Island.

Most Singaporean women happy with marriage

SINGAPORE, Nov 13: According to a study conducted by the National University of Singapore (NUS), most women in Singapore are satisfied with the state of their marriage, reports DPA.

However, the study 'Work, Family and Marital Satisfaction: Singaporean Women's Perspectives' also showed that given the chance, one in five women would prefer to marry someone else, the Straits Times reported today.

The study found that a working woman's marital happiness depended a lot on her husband's involvement in household work and how much time he spent with his family.

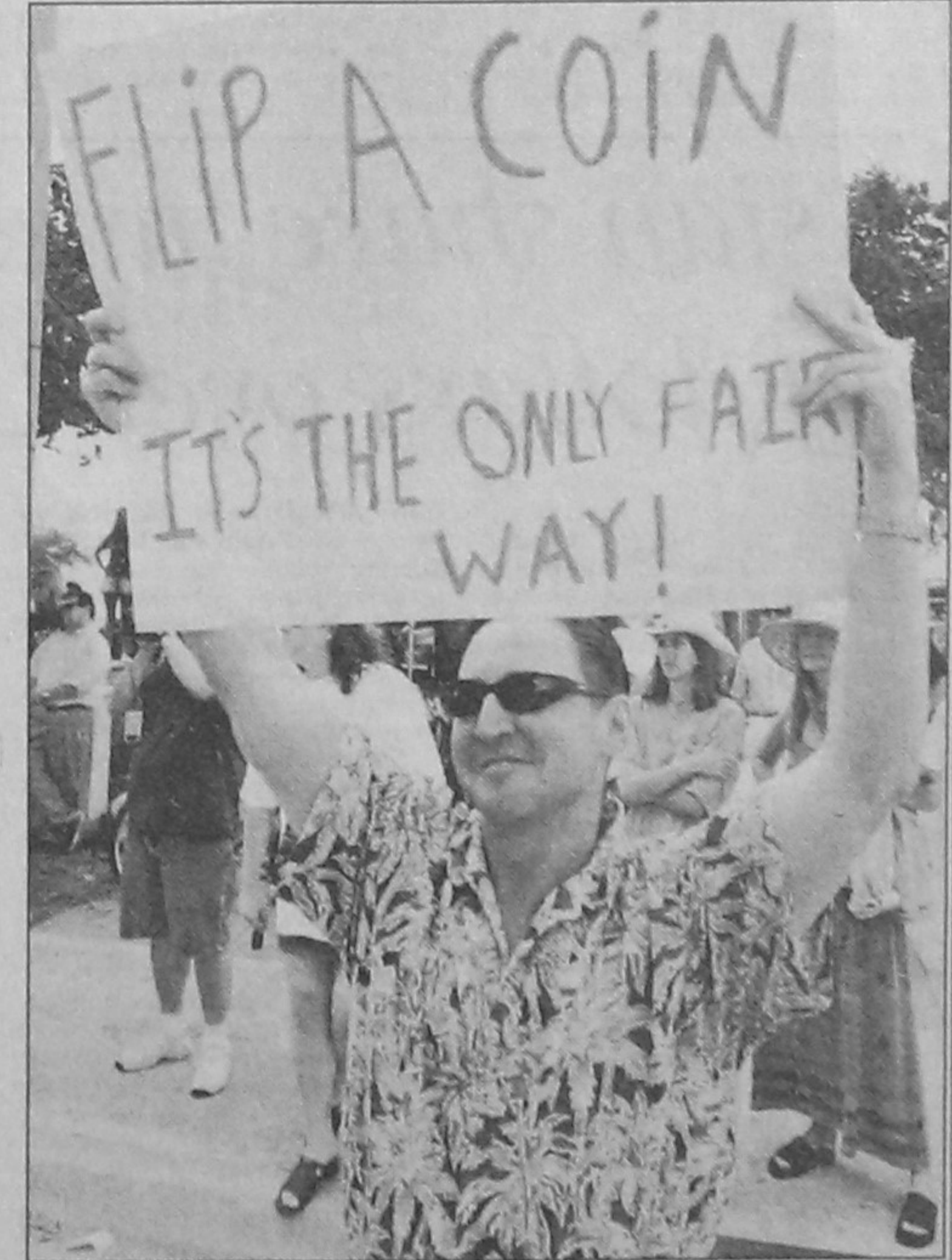
In Singapore, where dual-income families are the norm, working wives need to have their husbands home more often because they find they have little time to fulfil their home responsibilities on top of work commitments, said Dr Pauline Straughan, one of the researchers.

But while most of the women surveyed felt they did the bulk of the housework, more than 88 per cent said they were satisfied with this division of household labour.

In a signal that this situation is unlikely to last, however, the survey found that the more liberal and contemporary a woman was, the more likely she was to be unhappy with such a state of affairs.

Most Singaporean women tend to have conservative views about their roles as wife and mother. Four out of five women felt that it was better for the husband to be the bread-winner, and the wife the home maker.

Nine in ten thought a good wife was one who took care of her husband, children and home. Most also said that ideally, a mother should care for her children full-time.



Richard Westcott, a supporter of Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore, holds up a sign on Sunday outside the Palm Beach County Governmental Centre as he expresses his point of view about the current dispute on the vote count in the state of Florida. -- AFP photo

Hopes dim for speedy resolution of US presidential election

WASHINGTON, Nov 13: Hopes that the disputed US presidential election might be resolved soon faded on Sunday as four Florida counties moved to recount the vote by hand while George W Bush and Al Gore prepared to take the battle for the White House to court on Monday, reports Reuters.

Florida's 25 electoral votes would give either man the 270 votes in the Electoral College to win the presidency. Following Tuesday's election, Gore has 255 votes, Bush has 246 and 37 are undecided, from Oregon and New Mexico as well as Florida.

Former Secretary of State James Baker, representing Bush in Florida, said the country was on a slippery slope. He vowed to vigorously fight the manual recounts in the courts.

That process begins Monday at 9:30 am 2030 BST, when a federal judge in Miami will hear the Bush campaign's request for an injunction to halt the manual recounts. Whatever the ruling, the decision seems certain to be appealed to the next level, possibly all the way to the US Supreme Court.

Democrats on Sunday urged the court to throw out the Republican suit, arguing that the Florida hand count is not unconstitutional as Bush and others claim and disputing that the matter should be considered by the federal court at all.

Asked if the Bush campaign would appeal if they lose, Baker replied on CNN: 'We have said that we will vigorously contest the efforts for a manual recount in selective counties here in Florida. If that means going up, maybe that's what it would mean. On the other hand, maybe we won't.'

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BRIEFLY

**Indo-Pak troops trade fire:** Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy artillery fire along their disputed Kashmir border damaging about 30 houses, police said today, AFP reports from Srinagar.

'Pakistani troops resorted to unprovoked shelling on our villages late Sunday evening in Machil and Gurez sectors of the northern Baramulla district,' a police spokesman said. About two dozen houses were damaged at Machil and six at Gurez, he said. 'There were no casualties as the civilian population had shifted to safer places after the shelling started,' he said. The Indian gunners returned the fire, and the exchange of fire continued for six hours, he said. Indian and Pakistani troops have routinely exchanged heavy fire along the disputed Kashmir frontier since 1989, when an armed insurgency broke out in the Indian zone of the divided Himalayan territory.

**40 killed in Pak road crash:** Forty people were killed and 17 injured when two buses collided head-on here in Pakistan's central province of Punjab, police said Monday, AFP reports from Jehanian.

Hospital sources said 13 of the injured were in serious conditions. Police at this rural town about 40 kilometres south of Multan said a 72-seat bus belonging to the private Alhamra Service and a 30-seat minibus collided at around 9 a.m. The Alhamra was bus was on its way from Lahore to Sadiqabad in southern Punjab while the other was travelling from Bahawalpur to Jehanian.

**Two US jets collide:** Two US military jets collided over waters off northern Japan early Monday and the two pilots were missing, the Japanese Coast Guard said, reports AP from Tokyo.

The jets were probably F-16s and collided off Oshima Island, 660 kilometres (410 miles) north of Tokyo, said Toshifumi Nishikawa, spokesman for the Coast Guard based in Otari, on nearby Hokkaido Island. Two helicopters, four vessels and one aircraft from the Japanese Coast Guard were searching for survivors, Nishikawa said. Each jet was carrying just one pilot, he said.

**Somali MP shot dead:** Unidentified gunmen have killed a member of Somalia's transitional parliament, Hassan Ahmed Elmi, at his home in the capital, relatives said on Monday, AFP reports from Mogadishu.

Sunday's attack was the first assassination of a deputy in the new 245-seat parliament, which held its inaugural session less than two weeks ago, marking a bid to restore central authority after almost a decade of factional warfare. The killing took in the southwestern Mogadishu district of Madina, which is controlled by warlord Musa Sudi Yalahow, one of the faction leaders who have rejected the outcome of a national reconciliation held in neighbouring Djibouti.