

# Pakistan out to destroy peace prospects in Kashmir: India

## Security forces vow to see through truce

NEW DELHI, Nov 29: India charged Pakistan today with trying to destroy prospects for peace in Kashmir, one day after New Delhi launched a ceasefire initiative in the region, reports AFP.

The government is resolved to defeat such attempts. Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told members of India's lower house of parliament.

Singh said the unilateral ceasefire, which came into force midnight Monday was part of India's efforts to normalise the situation in Kashmir.

Under the ceasefire, Indian security forces have been instructed not to initiate combat operations against militants in the state during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan.

The government is willing to hold talks with all those who are prepared for a dialogue "in keeping with the strong desire of the people of the state for peace," the minister said.

Singh said India had managed to raise international awareness of Pakistan's support for Muslim militant groups fighting in Kashmir.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training the Muslim guerrillas of Kashmir, a charge which Islamabad denies.

On the first full day of the ceasefire Tues-

day, 12 people, including five soldiers were killed in separatist-linked violence.

The Hizbul Mujahideen militant outfit, whose headquarters are in Pakistan, claimed responsibility for blowing up three soldiers in a landmine attack.

On Monday, Home Minister L.K. Advani had called on Pakistan to stop sending militants across the disputed Kashmir border with India, to shut down militant training camps in Pakistan and cease providing the separatists with arms and explosives.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars since independence in 1947 over Kashmir.

This is the first time the Indian government has implemented a unilateral ceasefire in Muslim-majority Kashmir since the launch in 1989 of the separatist insurgency that has claimed some 34,000 lives.

In the past, militant-initiated ceasefires in Kashmir have heralded sustained phases of violence by hardened separatist groups opposed to any deals with New Delhi.

Meanwhile, Indian security forces in Kashmir promised today to see through their historic one-month ceasefire, despite separatist-linked violence that claimed 12 lives on the first day.

"As far as we are concerned, the ceasefire will continue for one month come what may," Kashmir Deputy Inspector General K.R. Kumar told AFP.

Army and paramilitary forces ceased all operations against Muslim militant groups in Kashmir as of midnight Monday, in line with a ceasefire announced by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

But the first day of the initiative was marred by a militant landmine blast that killed three soldiers and injured a dozen more.

In another incident, an Indian border patrol fired on a group of militants crossing into Indian Kashmir over the disputed border with Pakistan.

Five militants, two soldiers and two civilians were killed in the ensuing shootout.

"Obviously this is a testing period for us," Kumar said. "The first day was peaceful apart from these isolated incidents and I feel there has been a change of heart and thinking among militants."

However, the militant group which claimed responsibility for Tuesday's landmine blast -- Hizbul Mujahideen -- made it clear that other attacks would follow.



Some 5,000 demonstrators pass the suburban financial district of Makati as they march towards the presidential palace demanding the resignation of President Joseph Estrada yesterday. Estrada will face impeachment trial on December 7 after the former film star was accused of pocketing payoffs of millions of US dollars from illegal gambling syndicates. -AFP photo

# Three nuclear reactors shut down in Ukraine

KIEV, Nov 29: Three Ukrainian nuclear reactor have been shut down because of a malfunction and damaged electric lines, officials said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The No 6 reactor at the Zaporizhka atomic power plant was halted late Monday by its automatic safety system after a transformer malfunctioned, the state nuclear company Energoatom said. Workers planned to restart it later Tuesday, the company said.

Meanwhile, winds snapped ice-crusted power lines at the Yuzhny plant and forced an unscheduled shutdown of the No 1 and No 3 reactor early Tuesday. The No 3 reactor was restarted later in the day.

No radiation leaks were reported at either plant.

The shutdowns followed the switching-off Monday of the Chernobyl nuclear power station's only working reactor because of a power line breakage. Also Monday, reactor No 2 at the Yuzhny plant was shut down because of a leak in its steam generator.

Ukraine's energy grid was unstable Tuesday after power frequency dropped from the normal level over the reactor shutdowns. Energy supply across Ukraine was reduced by some 20 per cent, the Interfax news agency reported. Officials said nearly 4,000 towns and settlements were without electricity Tuesday.

Interfax cited energy experts as warning that a further power frequency drop could force the shutdown of the remaining reactors out of 14 operation in Ukraine.

# Lockerbie trial Judges reject acquittal request of Libyan

CAMP ZEIST, The Netherlands, Nov 29: The Scottish judges hearing the Lockerbie bombing trial today turned down a plea from one of the two Libyan suspects, Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah, that he be acquitted for lack of evidence, reports AFP.

On Tuesday, Fhimah's lawyer asked the court to throw out the case against his client, on the grounds that the evidence presented against him was purely circumstantial.

"We have come to the view that having regard to certain entries in the accused's diary, to his association with the first accused... and crucially to the evidence of Abdul Majid Giaka, we are unable to decide there is no case to answer," Presiding Judge Lord Sutherland said.

Fhimah and Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi are accused of planting a bomb on Pan Am Flight 103 which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland on December 21, 1988, killing 270 people.

According to evidence presented by the prosecution, Fhimah was shown to have made entries in his diary reminding himself to acquire Air Malta luggage tags a few days before the attack.

Abdul Majid Giaka was a Libyan double agent who testified that he had seen Fhimah in company with al-Megrahi carrying a brown suitcase similar to one believed to have contained the bomb.

# Korean families set for new reunions

SEOUL, Nov 29: A 100-year-old woman and the 75-year-old son she has not seen in 50 years are to meet in Pyongyang on Thursday in the latest reunions of families separated by the Korean War, reports AFP.

Yu Du-Hee is one of 100 people from South Korea due to travel to the North Korean capital. The same number of North Koreans are due in Seoul as part of the second round of reunions to have been organised after the historic inter-Korean summit in June. Yu Du-Hee had no news of her son, Shin Dong-Gil, until this month. Shin was conscripted into the North's army at the start of the three-year Korean War in 1950 and his mother heard nothing more.

# Singing whales learn a new song

PARIS, Nov 29: Like people who take a fancy to songs from foreign cultures, humpback whales in the western Pacific have picked up a catchy tune from visiting cetaceans from the Indian Ocean, say Australian scientists, reports AFP.

The finding is intriguing because it suggests whales may be attracted to a cultural novelty and adopt it themselves.

Recordings were made of male whale sounds in the Great Barrier Reef off eastern Australia between 1995 and 1998 when humpbacks passed by twice a year, migrating to and from their breeding grounds.

In 1995 and 1996, out of 82 humpbacks, 80 sang the same song as they identified themselves to other whales for the reproductive ritual.

The other two sang a completely different song that the scientists had previously detected among humpbacks in the eastern Indian Ocean, off Australia's western coast.

# Israel heads for early elections as Barak grapples for peace deal

JERUSALEM, Nov 29: Israel geared up today for early elections after Prime Minister Ehud Barak took the biggest gamble of his political career, hoping to present the nation with a peace deal with the Palestinians to end the deadly cycle of violence rocking his government, reports AFP.

Representatives from Barak's Labour Party and the main right-wing opposition Likud bloc were holding talks to set a date after the prime minister threw down the gauntlet to his rivals and said he was ready to go to the country two years early.

"You want elections? I am ready for general elections for the prime minister and the Knesset," Barak said in a defiant speech to parliament late Tuesday.

Israeli media reports suggested that the elections could be held on May 8 or May 15, just two years after Barak's landslide victory in a right-wing predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu, who is now waiting in the wings for a political comeback.

But political horse-trading continued apace on Wednesday, with Ariel Sharon, Netanyahu's successor as Likud leader, saying a national emergency government was still an option ahead of the elections, despite rebuffing repeated earlier calls from Barak to join forces.

Despite the opposition victory and the

announcement of new elections, Tuesday was a sad day. The nation needs to unite because division only encourages our enemies," Sharon told army radio.

Sharon, reviled by the Palestinians for setting off the violence by visiting their third holiest shrine in east Jerusalem two months ago, said leaders of Israel's opposition parties would meet on Wednesday to plot their strategy.

"If there is an invitation from the prime minister, we will discuss it with him," he added.

Sharon said he was treating positively a proposal by Eli Yishai, leader of the powerful ultra-Orthodox Jewish Shas Party, to form an emergency government until the elections "to enable the government to confront the serious security issues."

But he later told reporters in Jerusalem that "there is no alternative to early elections." Faced with a hostile parliament Tuesday, Barak seized the initiative by pledging new elections and vowing to try to make peace with the Palestinians after the wave of unrest that has claimed the lives of more than 290 people.

The 120-member parliament subsequently backed on first reading five bills calling for the dissolution of the Knesset and new elections.

Barak called a halt to the seven-year peace process in October, although negotiations for

a final agreement on the thorniest issues dividing the two sides such as the fate of Jerusalem, had been stalled since the failure of a Camp David summit in July.

"We are working to halt the violence, but there is no military solution to our problem with the Palestinians and, therefore, we have to keep the window open (to negotiations)," Barak said.

Israeli political commentators were in widespread agreement that Barak's political future lay in the hands of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

"If he wants, Arafat can give Barak a year and a half of quiet and an agreement that he will be able to sell to his voters," wrote Nahum Barnea, top columnist with the best-selling Yediot Aharonot newspaper.

"And if he should want otherwise, Arafat can give Barak half a year of warfare and wipe him and his party off the political map in Israel."

Barak, a 58-year-old former army chief, was swept to power last year by voters disillusioned by Netanyahu, whose three year rule was marked by a freeze in the peace process and bitter internal strife.

But Barak lost his parliamentary majority in July after the defection of right-wing and religious parties over his peace policies on the eve of the Camp David peace summit.

# Mob sets 5 on fire in Guatemala

GUATEMALA CITY, Nov 29: An angry mob burned to death five men accused of killing a local man in the mountains of central Guatemala Tuesday, bringing to 28 the number of people killed in vigilante violence here so far this year, reports AFP.

Hundreds of villagers in the hamlet of Las Conchas cornered the five people, doused them in gasoline and lit each one on fire while they begged for their lives, said Vincent Piola, a spokesman for the United Nations Mission to Guatemala.

The mob believed the men were involved in the fatal shooting of a local man during a botched robbery attempt Tuesday afternoon in the village, about 145 miles northeast of Guatemala City.

At least two of the mob's victims were carrying weapons at the time they were captured, said an official at the Coban state police office.

"It appears that these men were responsible for the first killing," said the official, who said he was not authorised to have his name published.

According to the United Nations Mission to Guatemala, 45 acts of mob violence have now claimed 28 Guatemalan victims this year. Some 22 of those deaths have come since the end of June.

"There's no explaining the sudden rise we have seen in these types of lynchings," said Piola, whose organisation released a bulletin condemning mob violence earlier this month. "This is deplorable for the United Nations and for all of the citizens of Guatemala."

# Wahid to sue Suharto family

JAKARTA, Nov 29: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid today said he was preparing to take several members of the family of former president Suharto and their lawyers to court over slanderous accusations, a presidential spokesman said, reports AFP.

"The president will sue people who have made accusations at will, especially those concerning the meeting at the Borobudur (Hotel)," Spokesman Adhi Massardi told journalists at the palace.

Massardi was referring to a meeting between Wahid and the fugitive youngest son of former president Suharto, Hutomo "Tommy" Mandala Putra, at the Borobudur Hotel last month.

Wahid had said that during the meeting he had repeated to Tommy that he would not grant him the presidential pardon he was seeking over an 18-month jail term for corruption issued by the Supreme Court in September.

# 9 killed amid kidnappings in Philippines

PAGADIAN, Nov 29: Six suspected Muslim guerrillas, two bystanders and a government militiaman were killed during the kidnapping of a businessman's wife in the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, military officials said today, reports AFP.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MLF) gunmen snatched Marilyn Tiu, wife of a local trader, at her seaside home near Alecia town on Tuesday, local military commander Colonel Felix Cabreros said.

A member of the household called for help from a military detachment and pursuing troops killed two kidnappers on the shore. A government militiaman and two civilians were also slain.

The gunmen fled aboard two motorboats and later clashed with pursuers at sea, leaving four other kidnappers dead, Cabreros said.

At least two surviving kidnappers escaped with their captives, who is believed to be alive, he added.

# Thousands take to streets asking Estrada to quit

MANILA, Nov 29: Thousands of Filipinos took to the streets today to demand President Joseph Estrada's resignation as his allies moved to prevent the Senate putting him on trial for corruption, reports AFP.

At least 7,000 students, union activists and professionals prepared to march on Malacanang presidential palace at the head a giant papier mache lizard which they called "Erapzilla", a play on Estrada's nickname and the monster movie "Godzilla".

Across town earlier Wednesday in the Makati financial district, about 5,000 leftists, businessmen, opposition politicians and disgruntled Estrada officials gathered to watch performers sing popular songs with their lyrics changed to lampoon Estrada.

Their allies staged similar street rallies in provincial centres. A strange alliance of leftist activists and businessmen, socialites and civic groups met on the streets of Makati shortly before lunchtime, where red-flag-waving workers and peasants received packed lunches prepared by the wealthy traders.

Professionals and businessmen in expensive utility vehicles

staged a protest convoy around the business district, carrying signs saying "Erap resign. What are you waiting for, Christmas?"

In a commercial district in central Manila, another leftist group staged a traditional Chinese "dragon dance" but instead of a dragon, it used the likeness of a crocodile, the traditional Philippine symbol of corruption.

Most of the activists plan to hold a vigil until Thursday in front of the presidential palace.

Police said they would not interfere with the protest actions, but were keeping their riot control forces and water cannons ready in case violence broke out.

Some protest leaders had earlier warned that they would barricade the streets to force Estrada's ouster but police swiftly said they would arrest anyone who tried this.

The protests came a day after the country's top judge, Supreme Court justice Hilario Davide, denied an appeal by Estrada's lawyers to dismiss the corruption charges against him on technical grounds.

Davide acted in his capacity as presiding officer of the special court comprising 22 senators.

# UN to launch largest aid appeal for North Korea

BEIJING, Nov 29: The United Nations will launch its largest appeal for food aid to North Korea by reminding donor nations that UN food has helped the isolated nation emerge from its shell, a UN official said today, reports AFP.

Catherine Bertini, head of the World Food Programme (WFP), will launch an inter-agency appeal for aid to Africa and North Korea in Stockholm later Wednesday. Dr. Dilawar Ali Khan, UNICEF representative to North Korea said.

Khan said the appeal for North Korea, the sixth such appeal since 1996, would be larger than the 600,000 tons of grain delivered as part of a 1999 aid appeal, which was the largest UN-organised aid package so far to Pyongyang.

"We need to get the message across to the donor nations that the aid should be spread across the four major concerns of food, health, water and sanitation," Khan said.

"If we expect to see a sustainable recovery by North Korea from

its difficulties then we need to address all these areas together," he said.

Bertini will announce the specifics of the package from Stockholm, he said.

Khan, who is based in Pyongyang, predicted that international aid to North Korea would need to continue until "the development of its external relations will help to sustain the country in the long term."

Khan acknowledged there were wide-ranging estimates as to how many lives the seven years of food shortages in North Korea had taken.

He would only say that the figure lies somewhere between the 600,000 put forward by the North Korean government and the up to three million by independent reports.

The presence of United Nations agencies in North Korea since 1996 has worked towards opening up the Communist nation, crowned by the historic June summit between North and South Korea, he said.

# 'Evidence mounting against Fujimori'

LIMA, Nov 29: A Peruvian special prosecutor has said there appears to be enough evidence of criminal activity to justify a broad investigation into ousted president Alberto Fujimori's dealings with a former close adviser, reports AFP.

"Enough evidence has begun to appear to merit at least a preliminary investigation" into Fujimori's involvement with his fugitive former close aide, ex-National Intelligence Service chief

Vladimiro Montesinos, prosecutor Jose Ugaz told reporters here Tuesday.

He added that inquiries were already underway into Panamanian companies, also linked to Montesinos, that may have been used to settle Fujimori family credit card bills.

But Fujimori, speaking to Newsweek in an exclusive Web interview, dismissed the allegations.

# Life on land began earlier than thought

PARIS, Nov 29: Life on land may have emerged from the sea more than 1.4 billion years earlier than previously thought, according to research into soil in South Africa, published Thursday, reports AFP.

Conventional thinking is that the oceans were an evolutionary incubator, acting as a DNA soup in which the first micro-organisms developed around 3.8 billion years ago.

But when these tiny ancestors of ours first colonised land has been a big matter of debate.

To date, the earliest undisputed sign of terrestrial life is in rocks from Arizona that are 1.2 billion years old.

But new research, published in the British journal Nature, says the first micro-organisms may have gained a foothold on land between 2.6 and 2.7 billion years ago.

They carried out carbon-dating of ancient soils, called paleosols, at Schagen in Mpumalanga Province, northeastern South Africa.

The organ matter very probably represents remnants of microbial mats that developed on the soil surface between 2.6 and 2.7 (billion years) ago. This places the development of terrestrial biomass more than 1.4 billion years earlier than previously thought," they write.

# Cambodia charges four Americans with terrorism

PHNOM PENH, Nov 29: A Cambodian court Wednesday charged four American citizens with creating an illegal armed force and terrorism, after an attack by dozens of armed rebels on government buildings in the capital last week, reports AFP.

Municipal court deputy prosecutor Yeth Chakriya said only one of the men, Cambodian-American Richard Kiri Kim, 51, was in custody. The others were charged in absentia.

He identified the others as Chhun Yasth, Thong Samean and Prahit. Police said all four are American citizens.

"We see that these people are organised from abroad with Yasth a Khmer-American living in the US being the big boss... a US citizen, is among the organisers from abroad too," General Chin Chan Por, chief of the military police for Phnom Penh said.

# US, S Korea begin talks to revise military accord

SEOUL, Nov 29: US and South Korean negotiators started key talks today on revising a military agreement that has stirred controversy over the presence of US troops in the country, reports AFP.

The talks aim to renew a 1966 accord that governs the status of the 37,000 US troops based in South Korea to guard against an invasion by the communist North.

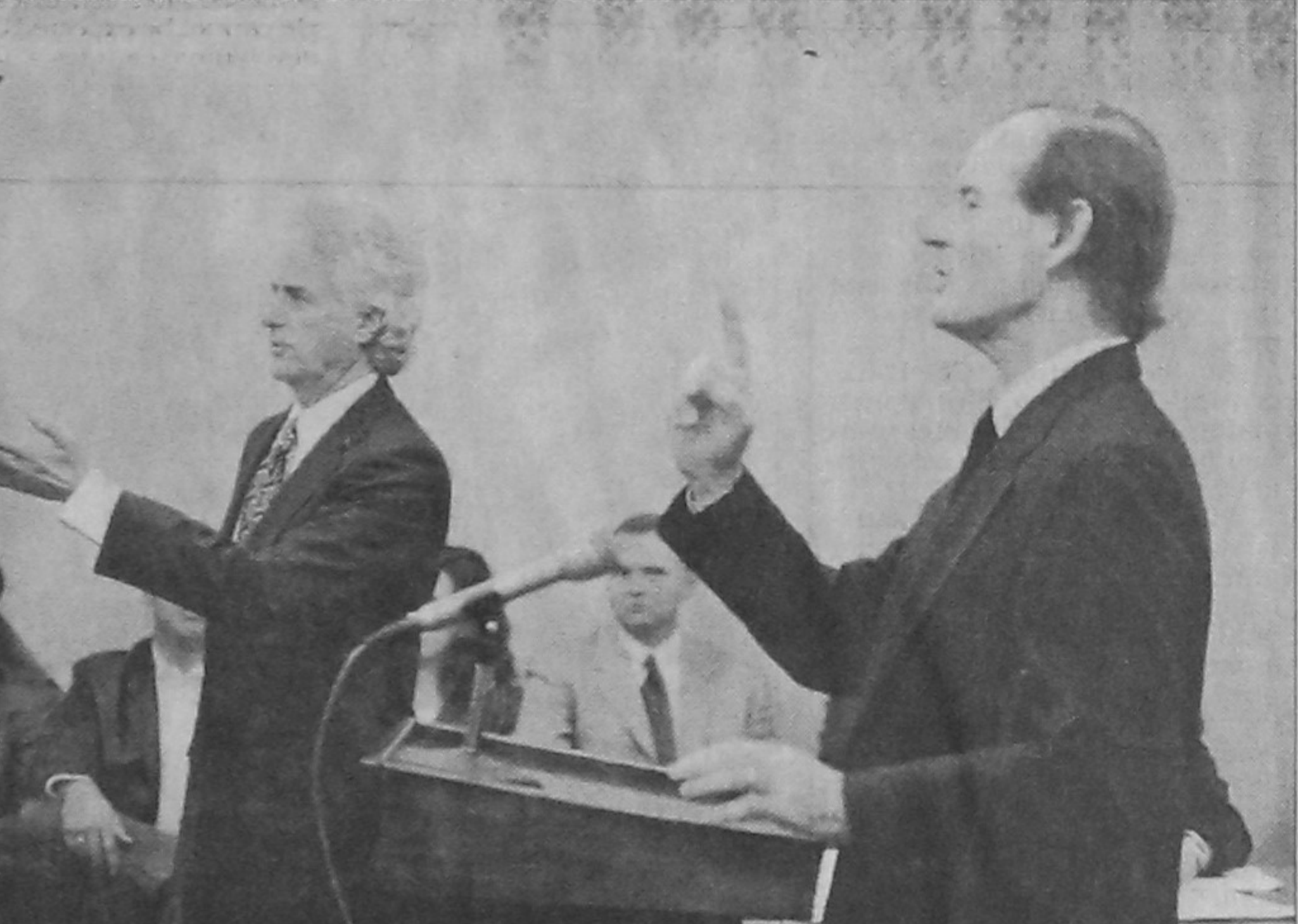
Negotiators started working-level talks on the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). A week of full negotiations between senior officials will start Friday.

Wednesday's preliminary talks concentrated on the environment and US construction in South Korea.

The key aim is to narrow differences on the treatment of US soldiers accused of crimes in South Korea.

Under the current agreement, US troops accused of a crime are kept in American military custody until they are convicted by a local court.

The United States is willing to hand over custody of accused US soldiers as soon as they are charged, but has sought legal safeguards.



Barry Richard (L) lawyer for the Bush campaign and David Boies (R) lawyer for the Gore campaign, make arguments in Leon County Courthouse on Tuesday in Tallahassee, Florida. A lawsuit filed by Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore alleges that if manual vote count in three Florida counties had been done properly and certified Gore would have won the presidency over Republican opponent George W. Bush. -AFP photo

# US election remains mired in legal battles

WASHINGTON, Nov 29: Three weeks after Americans cast their votes in the US presidential election, the result is now pending court action by an army of lawyers representing Al Gore and George W. Bush and a handful of judges, reports AFP.

In the realm of public relations, Democrat Gore made a fresh proposal on holding a state-wide vote recount in Florida, which Republican Bush flatly rejected as he busily put together a transition team he believes he will take to the White House.

On Wednesday, Gore's legal team is expected to file an appeal to speed up a court hearing on his challenge to the Florida vote count, while the Florida Supreme Court will hear arguments for a revote from residents of Palm Beach County, who claim the November 7 ballot forms were confusing.

The Republican-controlled Florida legislature, meanwhile, will likely take steps to appoint a reserve batch of electors in case Gore overturns Bush's slim lead in Florida and gets the state's 25 electoral votes required to win the presidency.

In the first good news for vice president Gore since Bush was certified winner in Florida on Sunday, a circuit judge on Tuesday ordered ballots from Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties, as well as a voting machine, to

arrive under police escort at his court by 5:00 pm (4:00 BST) on Friday.

Leon County Circuit Court Judge Sanders Sauls said scheduled a hearing for 9:00 am on Saturday, to hear Gore's core argument that he was robbed of nearly 2,000 votes that would have guaranteed him victory over Bush in Florida.

Shrugging off polls suggesting the public may be tiring of the fight, Gore Tuesday offered a way out of the legal morass.

"Seven days, starting tomorrow, for a full and accurate count of all the votes," Gore said.

Texas Governor Bush turned Gore down flat. In Austin, Texas, his spokeswoman Karen Hughes charged: Gore "wants to go back and change the rules after the counting is over."

Bush's running mate, Richard Cheney, later told CNN's "Larry King Live" program that he would concede the election if he were in Gore's shoes.

"If I were in his position that's what I'd do," Cheney said. Florida declared Bush the winner of its election by 537 votes -- out of six million -- on Sunday, with two hand recounts incomplete, giving the Texas governor its 25 electoral votes and the keys to the White House.

Bush's lawyers blasted Gore's challenge to the disputed Florida vote.

"We believe that the election contest is without legal substance," senior Bush lawyer Barry Richard told judge Sauls in Tallahassee.

On hearing the challenge to results in three counties, Sauls gave Gore a partial victory by ordering ballots to be brought to his court, but turned down his request that the ballots -- about 10,000 from Miami-Dade and 3,300 from Palm Beach -- be counted.

The Bush side is opposed to counting the ballots, all of which are of the infamous "dimpled chad" nature, arguing they have already been counted twice by machines that rejected them.

Gore's top lawyer David Boies maintained that the ballots had to be counted as quickly as possible and told Sauls he would likely appeal his ruling to ask for a hearing on Thursday, not Saturday, to decide whether the ballots should be tallied.

He also said he would be asking the Florida Supreme Court to issue clear instructions on how to count the disputed ballots.

"The court is moving faster than the defendants would like it but slower than we would like it," Boies said, noting the importance of concluding the case by a December 12 deadline for Florida's Electoral College members to be elected.