

UN court hands Milosevic warrant over to Belgrade

AFP, Belgrade
UN war crimes court officials yesterday formally delivered a warrant for the arrest of former president Slobodan Milosevic to Yugoslav Justice Minister Momcilo Grubic, the court's registrar said.
"I handed over the indictment and warrant for the arrest and Mr Grubic promised to have it served to Mr Milosevic in person," said registrar Hans Holthius.
The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) had insisted the warrant be delivered to Milosevic, the central figure in a decade of Balkans conflicts, who is currently in a Belgrade jail on domestic charges of corruption and abuse of power.
The ICTY has indicted Milosevic on charges of war crimes allegedly committed when his forces tried to empty Kosovo of its ethnic Albanian population, driving more than 800,000 people from their homes.
The court's chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte has said she has also prepared a separate indictment against the

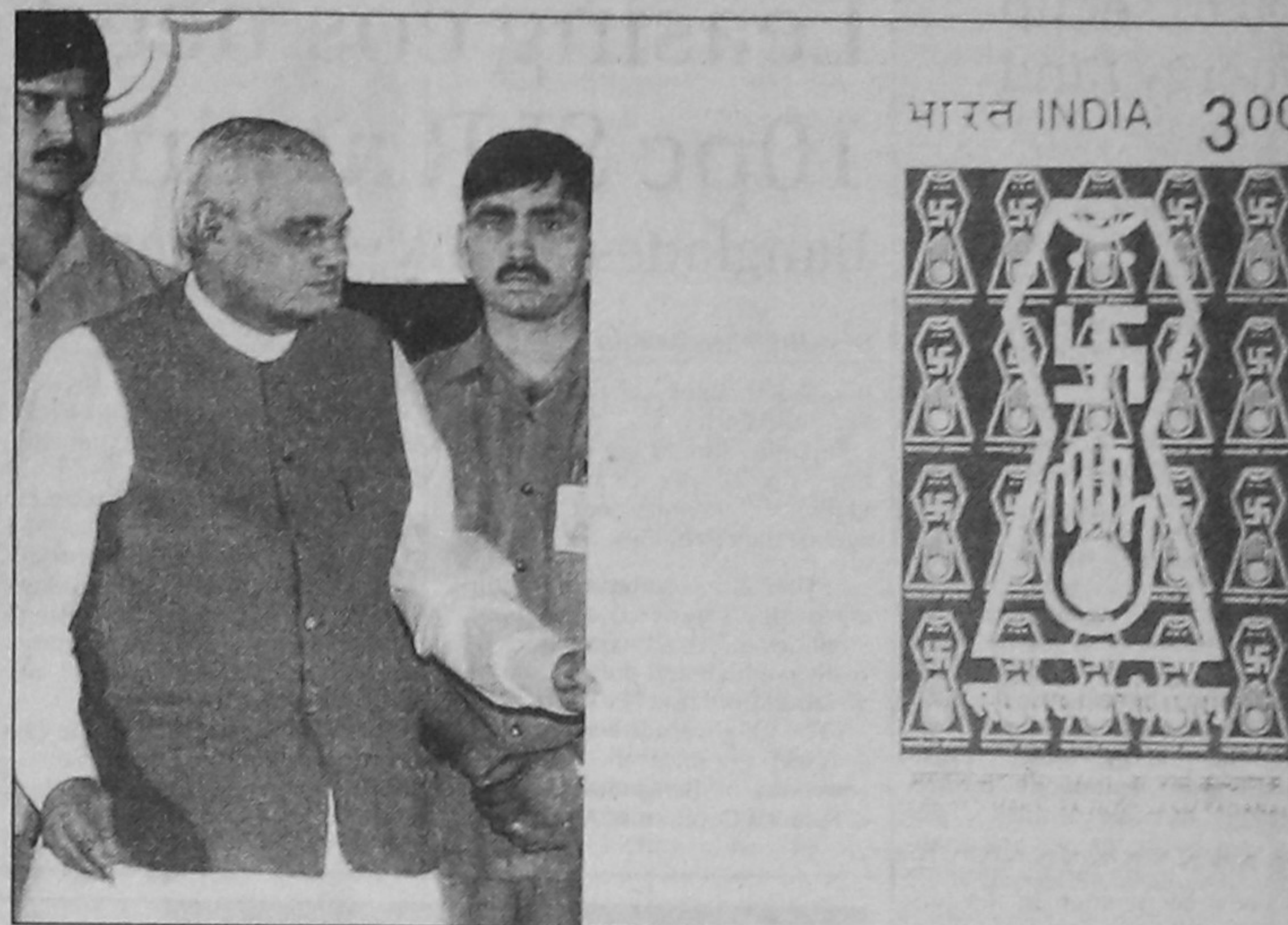
former Balkans strongman for his role in the brutal 1992-95 war in Bosnia.
The ICTY wants Belgrade to extradite Milosevic immediately to The Hague to stand trial, although Western leaders who initially clamoured for his hand-over have eased off the pressure after the new authorities threw the ex-president in prison last weekend.
Yugoslav law still forbids the extradition of its nationals, although Del Ponte has argued that the ICTY is not a country and that handing Milosevic over would effectively be a transfer rather than an extradition.
Under increasing international pressure, including US threats to cut off aid, Belgrade has drawn up a draft law on cooperation with the tribunal, and Grubic said the federal parliament should debate it before the end of May.
Holthius said he had been given a copy of the draft law during what he termed "very useful and satisfactory discussions".

India to be most populous nation by 2050

DPA, New York
It took the 15-member European Union the whole of last year to increase its total population by 343,000 persons, but it took India only one week this year to have that same increase, the UN Population Division said Thursday.
By 2050, India's population is expected to be 1.6 billion against China's 1.5 billion. China is currently the world's most populous country with 1.3 billion while India has 1 billion.
The UN said the world population by 2050, now at 6.1 billion, is expected to be as low as 7.9 billion and as high as 10.9 billion. Half of that would be in just six countries: India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Indonesia.
One of five countries by 2050 will have a population smaller than it is today, including Japan and Germany with a projected 14 per cent loss; Italy and Hungary with projected 25 per cent loss; and Russia, Georgia and Ukraine with losses projected of 28 to 40 per cent.
Largely due to immigration, Canada, Australia and the US are slated for increases of 33 to 40 per cent.
The increases will place growing strains on limited resources such as water in developing countries, the United Nations said.

India to scrap N-arms if all nations follow suit: Vajpayee

AFP, New Delhi
Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday said India was willing to scrap its nuclear weapons provided all other nations agreed to destroy their arsenals.
"India has always stood for global nuclear disarmament, but we have taken certain steps in self-defence. We do not want nuclear weapons to proliferate," Vajpayee said.
"If other countries decide to destroy their nuclear arsenals, we are also prepared to do so," he added, recalling the teachings of non-violence by the founder of Jain religion, Lord Mahavira, on the anniversary of his birth.
Vajpayee said his teachings were relevant even now and were probably the most practical way for the world to eliminate the nuclear threat.
"Mahavira had taught the lesson of non-violence not because he was a coward, but because he was the bravest. That is why his teachings are more significant in today's context," Vajpayee said.
Two of India's neighbours, China and Pakistan, have nuclear weapons.
International experts have often described the South Asian subcontinent as a nuclear hotspot.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (2nd L) issues a postal stamp of Lord Mahavira (R) during a religious inauguration function of Tirthankara Mahavira Jayanti in New Delhi yesterday. Vajpayee inaugurated the 2,600th birth year celebrations of Lord Mahavira.

Lanka pushes Oslo peace bid, eases ban on LTTE-held areas

AFP, Colombo
Sri Lanka has eased sanctions on areas held by Tamil Tiger rebels in a key concession aimed at boosting Norway's bid to broker an end to the island's bloody ethnic conflict, officials said yesterday.
The Norwegian ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jon Westborg, crossed army lines and travelled to the Wannu stronghold of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on Friday following the partial lifting of the economic embargo.
Officials said Westborg's visit to Tiger territory came as the government removed more than 25 commodities from a list of banned items that could not be taken to "uncleared" areas.
The vast Wannu region is known as "un-cleared," an official euphemism for territory held by the Tamil Tigers who are demanding a separate state in the island's northeast for minority Tamils.
The Norwegian ambassador is expected to hold talks with LTTE leaders in the Wannu area Friday, but it was not immediately clear if he was due to meet with Tiger supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran.
Westborg was involved in talks

with Prabhakaran on November 1 at Wannu with Norway's special peace envoy to Sri Lanka, Erik Solheim who announced afterwards that the rebels were serious about talks.
Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar announced earlier this week that the government was considering a "package of humanitarian measures" in line with an "agreement of understanding."
The measures will increase the flow of essential commodities to Wannu, the minister was quoted as saying while insisting there was never an official "embargo" on rebel-held areas, but only shortages.
He blamed the Tamil Tigers for taking supplies meant for civilians, creating shortages and sending prices sky-high.
Military sources said they have begun allowing food and medical supplies, agricultural appliances, alcohol and cigarettes into LTTE-held areas from this week.
However, urea fertiliser that could be used in the manufacture of land mines, gasoline and material that could be directly used by the Tigers in the battle against security forces are not allowed into the Wannu region.
Minister Kadirgamar announced

Estrada asks SC to block his corruption trial

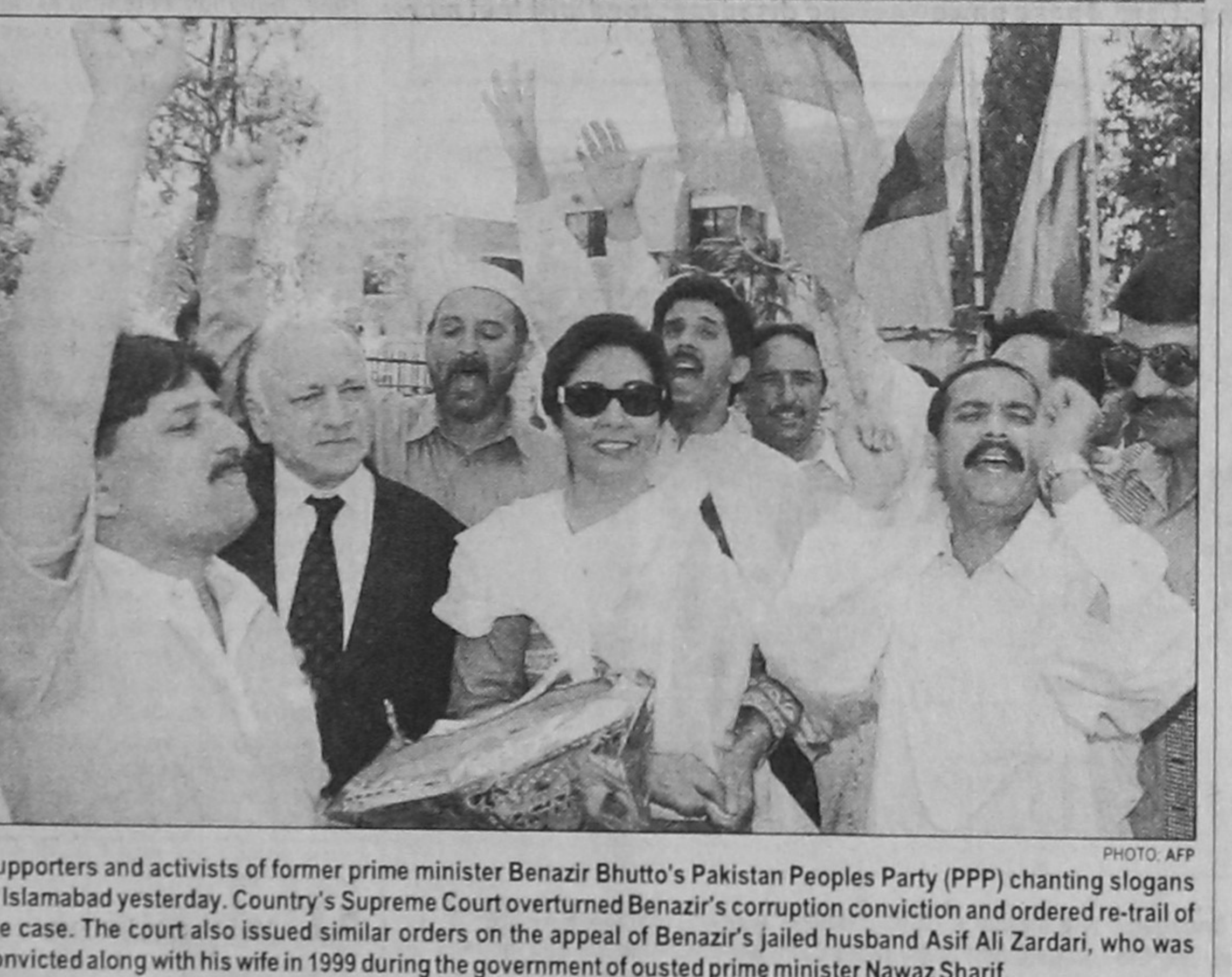
AFP, Manila
Ousted Philippines president Joseph Estrada yesterday asked the Supreme Court to stop a special anti-graft court from hearing corruption charges filed against him, court officials said.
Estrada lawyers asked the country's highest tribunal to issue a temporary order to stop the Sandiganbayan special court from taking action on eight corruption charges filed by government prosecutors against him, they said.
His lawyers Pacifico Agabin and Cleofe Verzola alleged in their formal petition that Ombudsman Aniano Desierto had failed to follow

the prescribed procedure for initiating charges against public officials, and argued that hearing the case could cause their client "irreparable injustice".
They also asked the Supreme Court to compel Desierto to withdraw the indictments and give Estrada his "constitutional right to due process" by allowing him to present his side in a proper hearing.
The ombudsman had "committed grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack of jurisdiction in disregarding its rules and in depriving (Estrada) of the right to file a motion for reconsideration" before he issued the criminal indictments.

US must apologise: Jiang

AP, Santiago
Chinese President Jiang Zemin again called for the United States to apologise for a collision between a US military plane and a Chinese fighter, saying China was exasperated by continued American surveillance flights.
"I have visited many countries and I see that when people have an accident, the two groups involved, the two parts always say excuse me," Jiang said Thursday.
He spoke after arriving in Santiago, Chile, on the first stop of a 12-day Latin American tour.
The United States has declined to apologise for the mishap, but on Thursday, President George W Bush expressed "Regret" qualified lan-

guage that has been used by other American officials.
Jiang, speaking through an interpreter, said both sides should try to seek a resolution.
"I want to say with emphasis that the leaders of China and the United States must manage this issue to the maximum interests" to US-China relations.
"American planes come to the edge of our country and they don't say excuse me," Jiang said. "This sort of conduct is not acceptable in any country."
He said the US surveillance plane's 24-member crew was "healthy and alive," and expressed regret about the missing Chinese flyer involved in the crash.
"During my flight to Chile, I was thinking about our pilot, and we don't where he is, and our plane is at the bottom of the ocean," said Jiang, whose comments were translated into Spanish by his interpreter.
The crew of the US Navy's EP-3E surveillance plane has been held on Hainan island in the South China Sea since making an emergency landing at a Chinese military base there Sunday after the collision. US diplomats waiting on Hainan have been granted just one meeting with the crew and are pressing for another.
China insists that the US plane caused the collision, about 100 km south of Hainan. China and the United States agree that the EP-3E was flying in international airspace when it collided with one of two Chinese F-8 fighters sent to track it.



Supporters and activists of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chanting slogans in Islamabad yesterday. Country's Supreme Court overturned Benazir's corruption conviction and ordered re-trial of the case. The court also issued similar orders on the appeal of Benazir's jailed husband Asif Ali Zardari, who was convicted along with his wife in 1999 during the government of ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Clinton maps out battle plan for quake victims

AFP, Ahmedabad
Former US president Bill Clinton held talks on Thursday with relief agencies to map out a strategy for reconstruction work in the quake-devastated Indian state of Gujarat.
One day after touring some of the areas worst hit by the January 26 disaster, Clinton met with a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Gujarat's commercial capital, Ahmedabad.
The NGOs are hoping for a slice of the 50 million dollars raised by the America India Foundation (AIF), which was set up in the wake of the Gujarat quake with Clinton as chairman.
The former president was also due to meet senior Gujarat government officials before flying to Bombay.
On Wednesday, Clinton visited the devastated Gujarat townships of Bhuj, Ratmal and Anjar, where he paid tribute to local people for their fortitude in the face of such an

"unimaginable" disaster.
The quake, which measured 7.9 on the Richter scale, razed entire towns and villages and left more than 20,000 people dead and million people homeless.
Cheering and waving crowds greeted the former president wherever he went, amid heightened expectations the visit would boost relief efforts in the region.
Clinton has said the AIF fund will be used for short and long-term reconstruction in Gujarat, with the foundation working in collaboration with selected NGOs and relief agencies.
Clinton enjoyed a wildly successful five-day presidential state visit to India in March 2000, which infused a new warmth into bilateral ties.
His week-long visit this time around will also see him travel to Calcutta to visit an orphanage set up by the late Mother Teresa and New Delhi, where he will have a dinner meeting with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

31 burnt to death in Indian bus crash

REUTERS, Madras
At least 31 people were burnt to death when their bus was engulfed in flames after it collided with a truck in southern India, police said on Thursday.
The death toll now is 31, including four women and one child, all of whom were burnt to death, a senior police official said of the late Wednesday accident in Tamil Nadu state.
"The diesel tank of the bus was hit and both vehicles caught fire," the official said.
He said 27 people were injured and in hospital and the death toll was likely to rise.



Myanmar fishermen proceed to Kolkata's airport after they were released from jail yesterday. The 59 fishermen were released after spending some three years in jail for fishing in India's territorial waters in 1997.

Israel rockets Gaza police posts US rebukes Tel Aviv over settlement expansion

AP, Gaza City
Intensifying its response, Israel rocketed two Palestinian police stations early yesterday and knocked out power to thousands of homes after three Israeli communities were attacked by Palestinian mortar fire.
Israel will retaliate "relentlessly" from now on and Palestinian security installations will be considered targets as long as security forces fail to prevent attacks on Israelis, said Raanan Gissin, a top aide to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.
In the past, Israel had only launched airstrikes if Israelis were killed or wounded in Palestinian attacks. No one was hurt in Thursday's mortar fire on two Jewish settlements and an Israeli communal farm on the border with the Gaza Strip.
The Israeli rocket attack, the second this week, came only hours after a top member of the militant Islamic Jihad group died in a West Bank explosion blamed on Israel. Earlier this week, another Islamic Jihad activist was killed in a helicopter gunship attack.
Alluding to a new stage of confrontations, Sharon said Israel would conduct a constant struggle against terrorism. "Sometimes we will announce what we did, sometimes we will not announce what we did," he said.
The latest airstrike began at about 12:30 am on Friday (22:30 GMT Thursday) when Israeli helicopters fired several rockets at two police stations in Beit Lahya, a town in the northern Gaza Strip. The rockets knocked out large parts of the facade of a two-story building in a residential neighbourhood. Palestinian police had cleared out when they heard the gunships approaching, but two bystanders were hit by shrapnel.
The attack also damaged a power station, leaving thousands of homes in Beit Lahya, the nearby town of Beit Hanoun and the Jebalya refugee camp without electricity.

Reuters adds: Israeli helicopter gunships attacked Palestinian security forces targets in the Gaza Strip early yesterday hours after the United States issued a sharp rebuke to Israel over its Jewish settlement policy.
Palestinian Public Security Chief Major-General Abdel Razek al-Majaydeh said Israeli helicopters bombed four Palestinian security posts near Jebalya refugee camp in Gaza. Five people were slightly wounded in the attack, Gaza hospital sources said.
The Israeli army said its forces had attacked targets in response to "many" mortar shells that were fired earlier in the evening on villages inside Israel and in the Gaza Strip.
In the Palestinian village of Beit Lahya close to the border, witnesses said the local police station had sustained serious damage during the helicopter attack, with its walls blasted out and missile holes cratering floors.
Majaydeh told Reuters there had been "grave damage to several buildings in the area."
The United States, meanwhile, rebuked Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's new government over its latest plans to expand Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.
Though last week, US President George Bush blamed Palestinian President Yasser Arafat for the cycle of Middle East violence, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher on Thursday condemned Israel for a settlement policy that amounted to playing with fire.
Sharon's administration announced it would auction off West Bank land for the building of 700 more Jewish settler houses.
"Continuing settlement activity by Israel does risk further inflaming an already volatile situation in the region. This is provocative and we have consistently encouraged both sides to refrain from provocative acts," Boucher told a briefing.

NATO to help reinforce Albania-Macedonia border

AFP, Brussels
NATO has granted a request from Tirana to help reinforce Albania's border with Macedonia and talks are underway on the details, an alliance official said yesterday.
Albanian Prime Minister Ilir Meta wrote asking for help last week and "we have replied in affirmative that we can help them," said the official.
"We are talking with them now about what kind of help we can provide," he said, adding it would be in the form of "technical assistance."
He said NATO had been "quite successful" in reinforcing the Macedonian-Kosovo border area against ethnic Albanian rebels battling Macedonian security forces.
He added, however, that "there is a potential problem of people trying to get into (Macedonia) via Albania."
Meta on Thursday said his country had asked NATO for help in border reinforcement.
But he dismissed accusations from Skopje that rebels had entered Macedonia from Albania in efforts to set up a new front after being ousted from their northern positions by the Macedonian army.

EU seeks Moscow's support for Kyoto Protocol

AFP, Moscow
A European Union mission arrived in Moscow Thursday at the start of a major diplomatic push to preserve the UN Kyoto Protocol on global warming following Washington's decision to pull out of the accord.
The delegation, led by Swedish Environment Minister Kjell Larsson, was to hold talks with Deputy Trade and Economic Development Minister Mohamed Sikanov and the head of Russia's meteorological agency.
The delegation, which will travel onto Iran, China and Japan, aims to secure continued support for the Kyoto Protocol, said Jonas Weiss, press spokesman for the Swedish embassy in Moscow.
Sweden currently holds the rotating EU presidency.
The United States late last month announced it would not ratify the treaty, painstakingly hammered out in the ancient Japanese city in 1997.

Pakistan to send 4000 peacekeepers to Sierra Leone

AFP, United Nations
Pakistan will send 4,000 troops to reinforce UN peacekeepers in Sierra Leone, the United Nations announced on Thursday.
Details of the deployment, including equipment and logistics, are still being studied, said UN deputy spokesman Manoel de Almeida Silva.
He said Nepal also would provide a battalion of 800 troops to UNAMSIL, the UN mission in Sierra Leone.
The additions will permit the 12,000-strong UNAMSIL to reach the 17,500-level authorised by the Security Council on March 30.
The reinforcement should allow the UN force, embarrassed last year by rebels, who captured some peacekeepers to deploy in the lucrative diamond-producing zones controlled by the Revolutionary United Front.

Marathon operation to separate Siamese twins

AFP, Singapore
Nepal last May, are joined at the top of their skulls and are facing opposite directions.
They underwent a final scan on Thursday for doctors to determine if there had been any late change in the shape of their brains before the intricate surgery.
Doctors then spent several hours on Friday making final preparations before starting the actual surgery at 4:00 pm (14:00 BST).
"The surgery is very complex," a hospital statement said, advising there would be no progress reports on the operation.
A team of Singapore surgeons began a marathon operation yesterday to separate a pair of Siamese twins, joined at the head and with their brains sharing the same cavity.
The operation on 10-month-old Ganga and Jamuna Shrestha is expected to take 24 to 36 hours, a spokeswoman at Singapore General Hospital said.
"Doctors tell us that there is an 80 percent chance that everything will be okay," the girls' mother Sandhya Shrestha told the Straits Times.
Ganga and Jamuna, born in

Myanmar junta terms UN HR envoy's visit 'constructive'

AFP, Yangon
Myanmar's ruling junta said Friday an historic three-day visit by the United Nations' new human rights envoy Paulo Sergio Pinheiro was "constructive."
"We consider the visit of Mr. Pinheiro as constructive. We have cooperated with him to our utmost," Myanmar's foreign ministry said in a statement to AFP.
"We regard him as an honest person and hope that his reports to the human rights commission will reflect the reality and truth prevailing in the country," it said.
The visit, hailed as a sign of a diplomatic thaw in the military-run country, culminated in a meeting Thursday

with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi at her Yangon home, where she has been confined since September.
The envoy left Yangon later Thursday for Bangkok en route to Geneva, after a wrap-up meeting with Foreign Minister Win Aung.
On Wednesday Pinheiro was allowed to call at the headquarters of the opposition National League for Democracy where he held hour-long talks with senior members, including party elder U Lwin.
The Brazilian academic is the first UN human rights envoy to be allowed into Myanmar in five years. He replaced Rajsoomer Lallah who quit last year having never being given permission to travel to Yangon.