



A demonstrator (C-L) dressed as the Statue of Liberty stands above the crowd during a protest march in Washington, DC, on Saturday. Thousands gathered in Washington to march against the policies of the World Bank and the IMF, one day after riot police swiftly crushed smaller protests and arrested nearly 650 people.

### Maoist rebels torch Nepali airport tower

Nepal's Maoist rebels early Sunday set fire to the airport tower at Phaplu, northeast of here, damaging the entire communications system, police said.

"No one was injured in the incident," a police spokesman said.

Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation Bal Bahadur had gone to the area to inspect the damage, an official said.

The rebels have been fighting for a communist republic in Nepal since 1996 and so far over 4,900 people have been killed.

### India bans speeches at Hazratbal mosque

The authorities in Indian-administered Kashmir Sunday banned speeches on special festival days inside the region's holiest mosque, Hazratbal, the scene of sieges in 1993 and 1996.

The decision, which comes ahead of a festival next week, was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by police divisional commissioner Pervez Dewan on Saturday, a police statement said.

"In a significant decision and in keeping with the wishes of the devotees no speeches would be allowed inside the shrine during the Urs (festival) days," Sunday's statement said.

### Prisoner swap raises Lanka peace hopes

A Tamil rebel leader who narrowly escaped death when a soldier fired at him shook hands with the man who had tried to kill him at this northern Sri Lankan town during a POW swap displaying rapprochement.

Sri Lanka's defence secretary Austin Fernando said the exchange of 20 prisoners of war on Saturday marked a milestone in the Norwegian-backed peace bid, but the bonhomie at the ceremony was an unexpected boost.

"One of the top Tiger leaders at the head table with me shook hands with a soldier who had tried to kill him some time ago," Fernando said. "The way the combatants interacted on both sides is very encouraging."

### Pakistan blasts Advani for equating ISI with al-Qaida

Pakistan Sunday blasted Indian Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani for blaming its premier intelligence agency ISI for acts of terrorism in India, saying the world does not take his "extremist" comments seriously.

"The world is quite clear that Advani is an extremist Hindu leader that's why it does not take seriously what he says about Pakistan," President Pervez Musharraf's spokesman Lieutenant General Rashid Qureshi told AFP.

## EU observers term Pak polls ban on leaders illegal

European Union (EU) election observers say Pakistan's decision to bar top opposition leaders from next month's general election "seems to have no legal basis at all", in an internal briefing paper.

The observers, in a confidential briefing for the EU Commission in Brussels, also express concern about controversial constitutional amendments decreed by President Pervez Musharraf before the polls.

The October 10 election will be the first since army chief Musharraf deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and seized power in a bloodless coup in October 1999.

The document was disclosed by Sunday's Daily Times newspaper.

"The disqualification of... Nawaz Sharif and the new PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) leader Shahbaz Sharif seems to have no legal basis at all, either in the domestic legislation nor in internationally accepted practice," says the briefing paper from the 52-member EU Election Observation Mission (EUEOM).

It was not clear when the document was prepared. Nawaz Sharif was not formally disqualified from standing but the government had said he would not be allowed to return from exile.

The briefing paper says that a recently introduced ban on "absconders" from standing in the polls "is widely seen as a person-specific provision targeting the former prime minister Benazir Bhutto."

The self-exiled Bhutto was banned after failing to return to Pakistan for a corruption case against her.

Sharif, convicted of corruption and other offences, was banished to Saudi Arabia in December last year after his lengthy prison term was set aside under a deal brokered by a Saudi prince.

According to the government he has been barred from politics for 10 years under an agreement which has not been made public. Sharif's party denies any deal exists.

The EU mission document describes the reported deal as "highly questionable" and not based on domestic law or international standards.

The briefing paper also questions the ruling that only graduates

can be candidates. "In practice the provision prevents an estimated 98 percent or less of the electorate from running for office," it says.

The EU observers also note that "Pakistan appears to be the only country in the world where candidates can be disqualified for unpaid utility bills."

Chief observer John Cushnahan said in a statement that the document is "part of the ongoing briefing of the EU Commission in Brussels by the EUEOM in which we convey the concerns that have been expressed to us during the course of our observations."

"At this stage the EUEOM has not come to any conclusions on these issues," Cushnahan said.

Cushnahan said a preliminary report would only be issued after the poll count.

Musharraf said Saturday he is determined to avoid a return to the "loot and plunder" eras of Bhutto and Sharif, who ruled successively in the 11 years before his coup.

Musharraf declared himself president in June 2001 and in April this year held a controversial referendum aimed at legitimising his rule.



Miss International beauty pageant contestants (R-L) Evelyn Sussette Arriaga of Guatemala, Milena de Lima Lira of Brazil, Consuelo Guzman of Colombia, Isabel Christina Ontaneda of Ecuador and Jeimi Vanessa Hernandez of Dominican Republic pose for photographers during a photo session at a Tokyo amusement park on Sunday. Final event will be held today.

## 5 militants plotting to kill Advani gunned down

Police said Sunday they shot dead five suspected Muslim militants who were plotting to assassinate India's Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani and other Hindu leaders, in the southern city of Bangalore.

Imam Ali, 32, one of the prime accused in the 1993 bombing of a regional office of the rightwing Hindu outfit Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteers Corp), was among those killed in a raid on a house, police said.

Bangalore police chief H.T. Sanghiana told a press conference that the raid was carried out between 2:00 am and 3:30 am Sunday (2030 GMT and 2200 GMT Saturday) jointly by police commands from southern Tamil Nadu and Karnataka states.

Police said 13 policemen sustained minor injuries during the raid and five militants, one of them a 23-year-old woman, were killed in the ensuing gunbattle.

"It was culmination of information collected by the Tamil Nadu police. One prime accused Imam Ali has been organising a gang indulging in various anti-social activities, murder, robbery and manufacture of explosives," Sanghiana said.

Ashutosh Shukla, deputy inspector general of police of Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu, who took part in the raid, said Ali had been planning to assassinate top Hindu leaders.

"We have information that Ali

was planning to go to Allahabad (in northern Uttar Pradesh state) and was plotting to kill the deputy prime minister, the human resources minister (Murali Manohar Joshi) and Ashok Singal (chief of the World Hindu Council)," Shukla said.

"The police were tracking his movements. Ali and his members reached Bangalore two months ago," he said.

Ali, described by police as a "most wanted Muslim extremist" and carrying a reward of 500,000 rupees (10,416 dollars) on his head, had links with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence secret service and had received training in Kashmir from the Hizbul Mujahideen militant group, Shukla said.

# Bush losing ground on Iraq

## Baghdad gets ready for talks with UN on arms inspection

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush's push for a new United Nations resolution on Iraq and Congressional authorisation for unilateral military action against Saddam Hussein has come up against hefty resistance.

At home, opposition leader Tom Daschle drew blood on the floor of the US Senate, denouncing the politicisation of the prospect of a military offensive against Baghdad, which the Bush administration believes is assembling an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

A draft resolution presented by the US leader to lawmakers would have earned him a blank check to wage a war against the leader that Bush on Thursday called "the guy who tried to kill my dad," a reference to former president George Bush.

Daschle was only one of a string of Democrats who came out swinging, accusing the president of using a war that would risk American lives as an election strategy.

"Clearly, the Republican pundits and Republican advisers have urged the White House to take full advantage of this for political purposes," he said Thursday.

"And I think we have to be very concerned about that as we work with them and deliberate about how best to run this country."

Added Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy, older brother of the assassinated US president John F. Kennedy, war should be "should be a last resort, not the first response."

But it was former vice president Al Gore who offered the most searing criticism of the Bush administration's strategy of preemptive strikes against purported threats to the United States.

"If what America represents to the world is leadership in a commonwealth of equals, then our friends are legion," Gore said at the Commonwealth Club, a respected San Francisco-based public affairs forum. "If what we represent to the world is an empire, then it is our enemies who will be legion."

But, like Bush, the Democrats are seeking to bolster their numbers in the six weeks before the midterm elections. With a narrow one-vote majority in

the 100-member Senate and at a six-seat disadvantage in the House of Representatives, the Democrats are scrambling to find a toehold in the debate.

Abroad, only chief ally Britain has offered support to a strong resolution on Iraq that would set a tough timeline for arms inspections and deploy armed force as a consequence for non-compliance.

Security Council colleagues France, China and Russia, each of which holds the power to veto any United Nations resolution have remained unconvinced by the evidence Washington has put forward in support of its claims that Iraq was both linked to the al-Qaida network responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks and developing weapons of mass destruction for an attack.

Washington has yet to develop a timeline for the United Nations, but almost daily Bush comes back to his refrain: "If the United Nations Security Council won't deal with the problem, the United States and some of our friends will."

However, the US leader has yet to elaborate as to who these "friends" are.

Meanwhile, Iraq prepared for talks Monday to organise the return of UN arms inspectors, under the shadow of US threats to enforce disarmament despite opposition from China, France and Russia and the clamour of anti-war protests.

With Washington intent on giving Baghdad just seven days to agree to US demands, Hans Blix, chairman of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), was to get down to the logistics of the resumption of arms checks after a gap of four years.

Blix, accompanied by Vienna by eight aides, including senior advisers on training, planning and legal matters, would focus exclusively on practical details, his office said.

Blix last met Iraqi officials on September 17, the day after President Saddam Hussein agreed to allow weapons inspectors back without conditions.

The UNMOVIC chief said he hoped to have an advance party in Iraq on October 15, and intends to report back to the world body around October 30 on the upshot of the Vienna talks.

## Stampede kills 16 after Advani addresses Lucknow rally

AFP, Lucknow

At least 16 people died in a stampede here Saturday after a political rally by India's Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani, witnesses said.

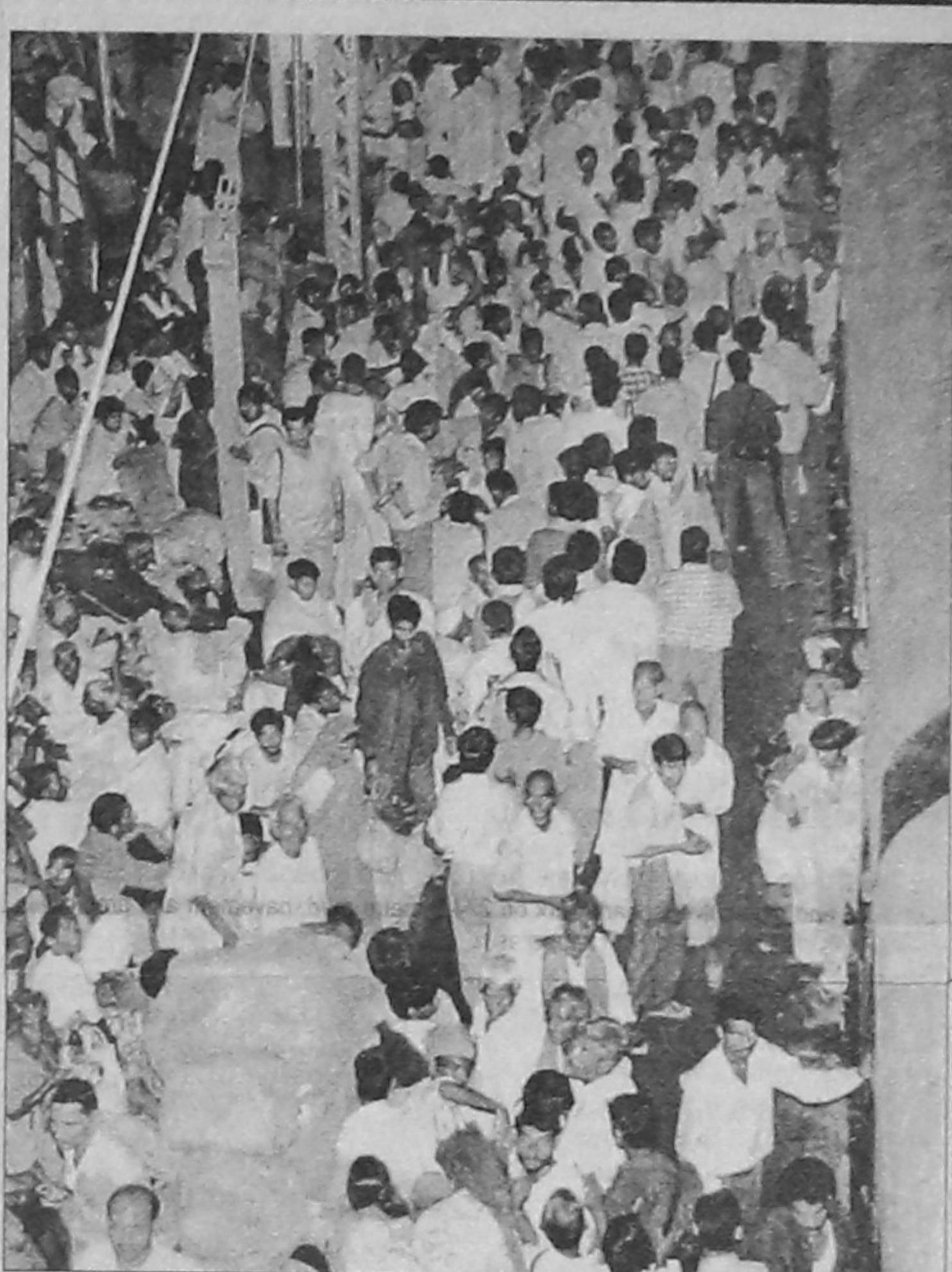
Police said 25 others were injured in the stampede that began when people headed for the main railway station in Lucknow, the capital of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, to catch trains home.

Bua Singh, chief of India's Railway Protection Force, confirmed 11 deaths but rescuers at the site reported 13 dead and warned the toll was likely to rise as many of those injured were in serious condition.

Sate deputy police chief D. P. Sinha said people from the rally climbed down stairs to reach the platform and began jostling passengers. In a sudden rush they toppled and fell over one another.

Sinha said some 150,000 of them headed for the station after the rally ended and choked the facility into a sea of humanity.

Three of the thousands who thronged the station climbed atop a passenger train to reach home but were critically injured when they



General view of Lucknow's main railway station after a stampede late Saturday. At least 16 people were killed in the stampede, which occurred after a political rally by India's Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani.

## Russia unhappy with draft UN text on Iraq

REUTERS, Moscow

Interfax news agency quoted informed sources as saying Sunday that Russia was unhappy with a proposed new UN resolution setting down tough terms to Iraq on disarming because it could not be implemented.

The Interfax report, issued a day after Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov discussed the resolution with a top US envoy, said officials were unhappy with its terms setting strict deadlines for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

The sources described experts in Moscow as "disappointed" with the text, saying "in its current form, this resolution cannot be implemented by its very nature."

Ivanov made no comment on the resolution after his talks with US Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman, but restated Russia's position that it wanted the fastest possible return to Iraq of inspectors to check its weapons stocks.

Ivanov said the text of the draft Security Council resolution was being discussed with U.S. and British officials.

Russia, hoping eventually to take advantage of lucrative oil deals in Iraq, sees the inspectors' return as an initial step to lifting sanctions imposed on Baghdad for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

President Vladimir Putin and Ivanov have both said that no new resolutions are needed in order for the monitors to resume work stopped in 1998.

Iraq has denounced the US-drafted resolution, which gives Iraq a week to accept demands to disarm and 30 days to declare all its weapons of mass destruction programs.

## Iraq, Iran kick off talks

AFP, Tehran

Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri opened talks in Tehran Sunday with senior officials to lobby support from Baghdad's old arch-enemy against a threatened US-led attack.

Officials said Sabri held a short meeting with the Iranian counterpart Kamal Kharazi, before meeting President Mohammad Khatami. No details on the content of the talks were immediately given.

Sabri arrived in Tehran on Saturday, voicing his determination to repair ties between the two neighbours who have remained at loggerheads since the end of their devastating 1980-1988 war.

He said he was carrying a message to Iranian leaders from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "concerning the improvement of our bilateral relations".

Iraq and Iran have yet to fully restore diplomatic ties, and frequently exchange bitter recriminations over issues including prisoners of war and the hosting of opposition groups.

While Iran is no friend of Saddam, officials here have voiced fears that US President George W. Bush's aim of "regime change" in Baghdad could unleash chaos in the region and place Iran under greater US pressure than ever before.

But there has been scepticism here over his visit, with the Iran News writing in a commentary Sunday that "the only thing Naji Sabri's visit would accomplish for us is to associate Iran with a regime that is in its dying days."

Bush in January lumped Iraq and Iran together with North Korea in what he said was an "axis of evil", leaving many Iranians fearing the Islamic republic could be next in Washington's firing line.

US officials said Saturday that the White House had drafted a toughly worded UN resolution that would give Baghdad a seven-day deadline to declare all its weapons of mass destruction programs or face possible military action.

Kharazi has already pressed on Sabri the urgent need for Iraq to accept unconditional UN inspections, asserting "the region cannot support a new war".

## Opposition threatens Musharraf with movement

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani opposition leaders threatened Sunday to launch a nationwide movement against President Pervez Musharraf if his government manipulates the results of next month's election.

"The government has started pre-poll rigging. Police and state machinery is being used openly to muster support for pro-government candidates," said Zafar Ali Shah, vice president of deposed premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N).

"They are trying to loot the elections to bring their favourites into parliament," Shah said, alleging "naked" interference in the electoral process.

"Police twice removed my banners and pasted posters of the King's party candidate", Shah told AFP, referring to a splinter Pakistan Muslim League faction (PML-Q) which supports Musharraf's political and economic policies.

Several other leaders including cricket hero-turned politician Imran Khan and former premier Benazir Bhutto's aide Nisar Khorro, said provincial governors in Punjab and Sindh were announcing grants and development schemes to woo voters.

Shah, who is contesting from the twin-cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, accused the state-run TV and radio of ignoring PML-N candidates and promoting PML-Q nominees who are likely otherwise to be defeated.

## 'Kashmir polls negate demand for plebiscite'

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani on Sunday said free and fair elections in Kashmir cancel out the need for a plebiscite on self-rule for the Himalayan province, as demanded by Pakistan.

"The kind of concern being shown by the Western nations proves the importance they are giving to these elections. If the Jammu and Kashmir polls are conducted in a free and fair manner, then there won't be any meaningful holding of a plebiscite," Advani said at the opening of a police conference here.

For the past 50 years, Pakistan has been insisting that India allow a United Nations-conducted plebiscite in Kashmir as was allegedly pledged by former Indian Prime

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