

Suicide bomber kills 4 in Algeria

AFP, Thenia

A suicide bomber drove into a hail of bullets to set off a bomb outside a police station in eastern Algeria that security services said killed four people and injured 20.

A series of attacks blamed on al-Qaeda's offshoot in North Africa has left hundreds dead over the past 12 months.

Three of the dead in Thenia, 50 kilometres (30 miles) east of Algiers, were police and security services feared the death toll would rise as several of the injured were in critical condition, some in a coma.

The blast caused extensive damage around police station, gutting at least seven buildings. The police station only suffered slight damage however.

Witnesses said police opened fire to stop the small van driven by the suicide bomber from reaching its target.

The van collided with several obstacles, including barriers around the police station, giving police time to take action.

Brown presses Musharraf on 'credible polls'

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown told Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on Monday that next month's elections had to be credible, insisting the country's stability was vital for South Asia.

Brown's call came as demonstrators staged angry protests against Musharraf's visit to London, at the end of a week-long trip to Europe aimed at reassuring leaders about the transparency of the delayed February 18 vote.

"Credible elections" were "essential", Brown said at a joint news conference following what he called "very productive" talks with a "key ally" in combating terrorism and extremism.

"I urged President Musharraf to engage with all political parties in Pakistan for a peaceful, democratic

future for the country," he said at his Downing Street office.

"A stable Pakistan is essential for the security of the South Asia region."

Musharraf had assured him that processes were in place to ensure transparent polling, Brown said.

The world's priority had to be ensuring "that the democratic process remains on track", he added.

Musharraf voiced a "strong desire" to hold the parliamentary elections, postponed in the wake of the December 27 assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto.

"I am very sure that we will have a peaceful transition and we will have a strong democratic government following the February 18 election," he added.

The Guardian daily in its Tuesday edition said that it did not doubt Musharraf's sincerity, but

the issue was "whether he is truly in touch with what is happening in his country."

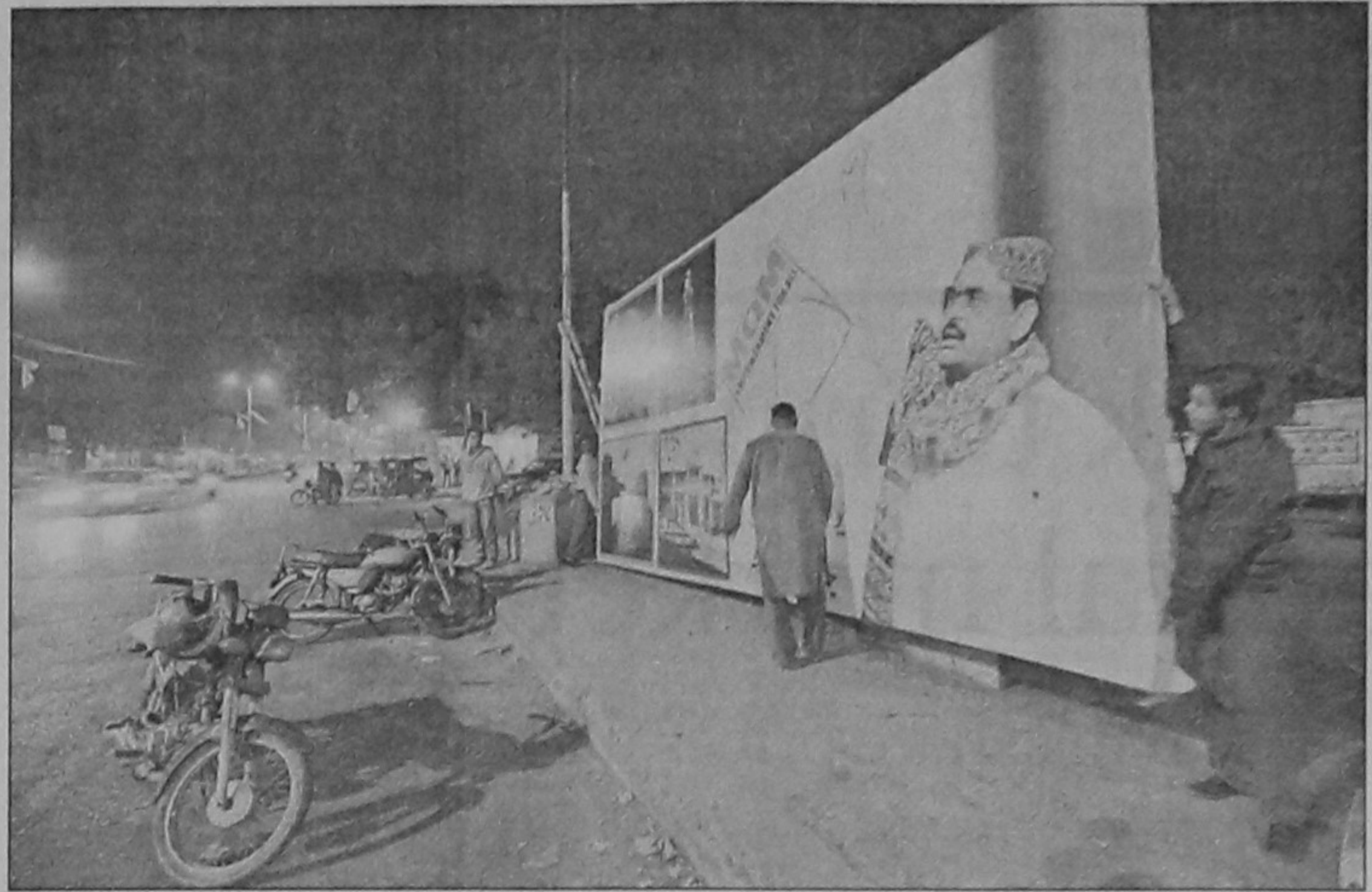
"Mr Musharraf conflates his destiny with Pakistan's. The two are synonymous in his eyes. He may have shed his military uniform but not his belief that he is the ultimate arbiter of order."

"He claims the elections will be free and fair and that he will work with whoever is able to form the next government. We shall see."

"Pakistan is in the eye of the storm."

Outside, some 400 anti-Musharraf protesters, including opposition leader Imran Khan and his ex-wife Jemima, disagreed as they angrily demonstrated about Musharraf's presence.

As a far smaller number of Musharraf supporters cheered, opponents booed and waved their fists as his motorcade arrived.



Workers of Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) install a billboard for the general elections scheduled for February, in Karachi, late Monday. Pakistani opposition leader Imran Khan told AFP his country could do with taking a lesson in democracy from rival neighbour India as he dismissed the chances of a transparent elections next month in Pakistan.

Key Republican primary opens in Florida

AFP, Miami

Florida voted in its key Republican presidential nominating contest yesterday, with top contenders John McCain and Mitt Romney tightly matched and ex-New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani's campaign hanging in the balance.

Polls opened at 7:00 am (1200 GMT) in the primary election, in which Florida will provide 57 delegates -- the highest number to date -- to the September convention that will pick the party's presidential candidate.

It will also give the winner strong momentum ahead of next week's "Super Tuesday" when voting will be held in 22 states.

With Giuliani and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee sidelined in opinion polls, McCain and Romney hit out at each other ahead of the primary on the economy and the Iraq war, two major issues for voters.



A member of the Kikuyu tribe throws items he and others picked by ransacking homes reportedly owned by Luos during ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley town of Naivasha yesterday. The slaying of a Kenyan opposition lawmaker sparked riots Tuesday across the east African nation already reeling from weeks of deadly clashes set off by disputed elections.

Killing of Kenyan MP sparks new chaos

AFP, Nairobi

Kenyan military helicopters opened fire Tuesday above feuding gangs in a western town, and 13 died in fresh clashes elsewhere as the murder of an opposition lawmaker sparked new chaos.

Nine people died in tribal fighting in western Kenya and four were killed in a Nairobi slum, police and medical sources said, as riots and ethnic clashes flared across the country.

Meanwhile, three Kenyan military helicopters opened fire above fighting ethnic groups in the western Rift Valley town of Naivasha, police and witnesses told AFP.

"The crowd is unruly and we want to disperse them, that is why we're using helicopters," a police commander told AFP in the lakeside town, a flashpoint of the most recent clashes since the disputed elec-

tion of President Mwai Kibaki on December 27.

In Nairobi, opposition leader Raila Odinga, who claims he was robbed of the presidency, accused "our adversaries" of having a hand in the fatal shooting in Nairobi of a lawmaker from his party.

"We suspect a foul hand of our adversaries in this," Odinga told a news conference. "The country is drifting into a state of anarchy."

Kibaki condemned the killing "as a heinous crime" and ordered immediate investigations, a statement from his office said.

In Cheptiret in western Kenya, police said they killed three men after they were attacked by around 50 armed with bows and arrows.

"The men attacked police forcing police to fire back, killing three of them while the rest fled," said Rift Valley police commander Joseph Ashmalla.

US will 'confront' Iran if necessary: Bush

AFP, Washington

US President George W Bush warned Iran Monday that the United States will "confront those who threaten our troops" and defend its allies and interests in the Gulf.

Bush, in excerpts of his State of the Union speech provided by the White House, also urged Tehran to suspend its uranium enrichment programme, embrace political reforms, and "cease your support for terror abroad."

"But above all, know this: America will confront those who threaten our troops, we will stand by our allies, and we will defend our vital interests in the Persian Gulf," he said.

His message echoed US warnings about an early January face-off between US and Iranian ships in

the Strait of Hormuz and came as Washington pushed for new UN sanctions against Tehran over its disputed nuclear programme.

"Our message to the people of Iran is clear: We have no quarrel with you, we respect your traditions and your history, and we look forward to the day when you have your freedom," said Bush.

"Our message to the leaders of Iran is also clear: Verifiably suspend your nuclear enrichment, so negotiations can begin. And to rejoin the community of nations, come clean about your nuclear intentions and past actions, stop your oppression at home, and cease your support for terror abroad," he said.

Bush was to deliver the speech at 9 pm (0200 GMT Tuesday). The White House said it would be his final State

of the Union address before leaving office in January 2009.

Earlier US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said a new UN resolution against Iran should deepen current sanctions and could pave the way for other action over its nuclear programme.

Meanwhile, the Security Council held informal talks on a draft text agreed last week by foreign ministers of the council's five veto-wielding permanent members -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- plus Germany.

Asked if the text hammered out in Germany last week fell short of US expectations, Rice replied it was "no secret that a resolution of that kind is a negotiated product" that reconciles different views.

Pakistanis involved with Taliban: Karzai

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, London

After evading a question from former UN official from India Shashi Tharoor at Davos, Afghan President Hamid Karzai has told an American newsmagazine that there is Pakistani "complicity" with resurgent rebels in his embattled country.

Karzai, who was in Davos for the World Economic Forum (WEF) along with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, told Newsweek magazine that Taliban Islamic

hardliners in Afghanistan "would not be strong without support".

Asked if he meant Pakistani support, Karzai said: "I've just had a very good trip to Pakistan, so what I would say is that Pakistan and Afghanistan and the United States and the rest of the world must join hands in sincerity in order to end this problem. They have to take action."

Last week, Tharoor, former UN under-secretary general, asked Karzai a similar question at a session where the Afghan president was sharing the stage with Musharraf.

Kashmir rebels not to use guns to force election boycott

AFP, Srinagar

Indian Kashmir militants announced yesterday that they would not use guns to force voters to boycott state elections due later this year, a report said.

In the past, Islamic rebels have threatened voters with death if they cast ballots in polls held by India in the region. Separatist politicians have also opposed such elections, arguing they would boost India's hold over Kashmir.

"All members of the Jihad Council will take part in the anti-election movement," Syed

Salahudin, who heads the Pakistan-based United Jihad Council, an umbrella group for militant outfits, was quoted as saying by the local Kashmir News Service.

"But guns will not be used to force Kashmiris to boycott the polls," he said, as the Indian Kashmir state assembly neared the end of its six-year term, with elections for the 87-member legislature due before mid-November.

Ever since the insurgency began against New Delhi's rule in 1989, rebels have threatened people who turned out to vote with violent consequences.

Ex-CIA chief admits US used waterboarding in past

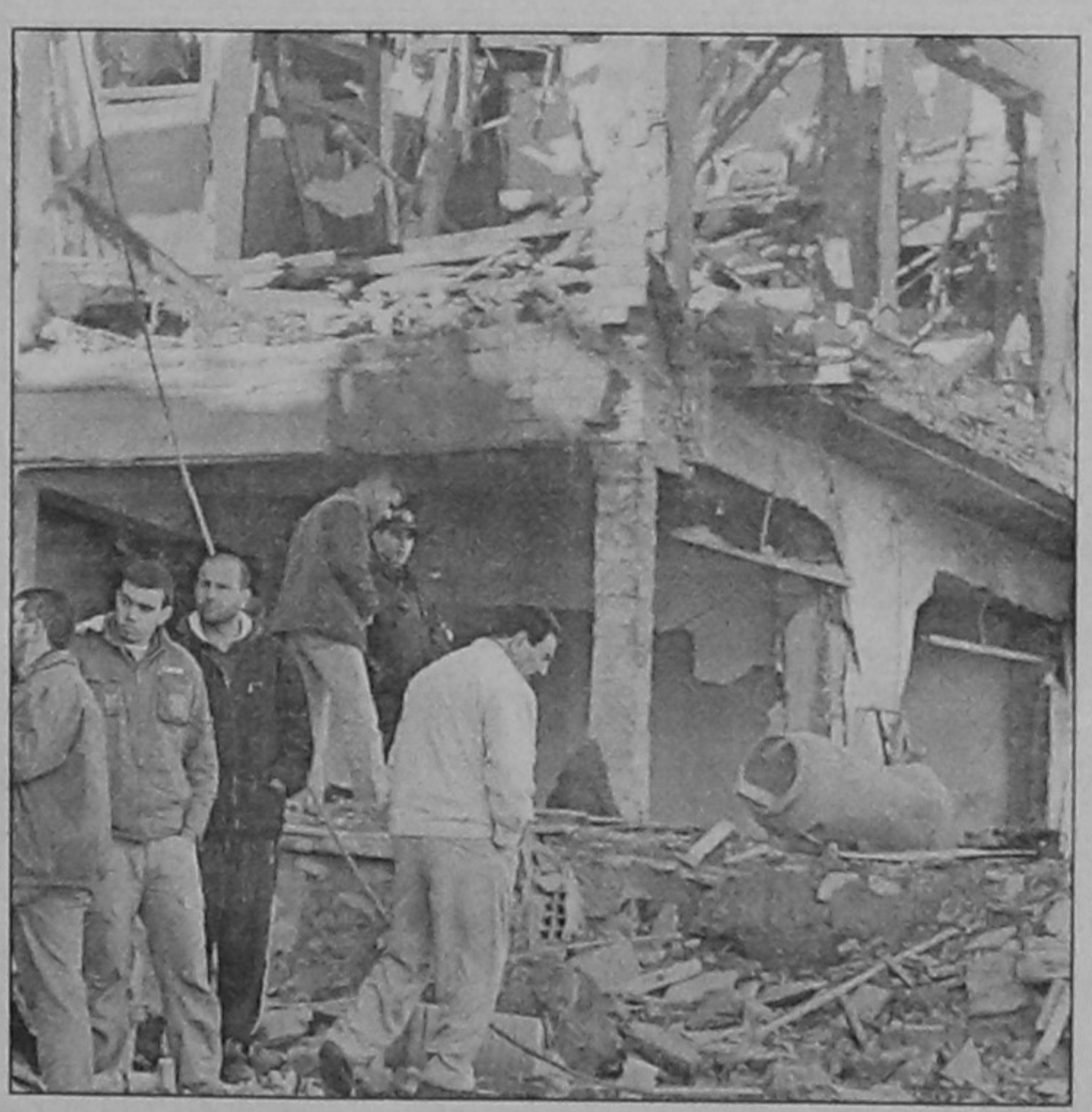
AFP, Washington

Former US spy chief John Negroponte admitted that the United States has used a controversial interrogation technique known as waterboarding but does not anymore, according to a published interview Monday.

Negroponte, who currently serves as deputy secretary of state, told the National Journal that the country has made improvements and that it has been years since interrogators used the simulated drowning technique, often described as torture.

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Algerian security officers and bomb experts inspect the rubbles of the destroyed police station attacked by a suicide bomber in Thenia City, some 60 km east of Algiers yesterday. At least four people were killed and 20 wounded in the attack by a suicide bomber on a police station at Thenia.

EU calls for release of Suu Kyi

AFP, Bangkok

The EU's special envoy for Myanmar on Tuesday urged the country's military regime to free democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi as he kicked off an Asian tour aimed at pressuring the junta for reform.

"I hope the lady Aung San Suu Kyi can be free as soon as possible," Piero Fassino told reporters after a meeting with Thai Foreign Minister Nitya Pibulsonggram.

Aung San Suu Kyi, a 62-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner, has spent 12 of the past 18 years under house arrest in Yangon.

The ruling junta, in an apparent bid to defuse global pressure after its bloody crackdown on protests

last September, appointed Labour Minister Aung Kyi in October to handle contacts with the detained opposition leader.

Since then, Aung San Suu Kyi and Aung Kyi met four times, including their last meeting on January 11, but the military government has given no details of their talks.

Fassino, a former Italian justice minister, said he supported the junta's dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi but urged the regime to make concrete progress.

"Now it's necessary to open new phases. I think it's necessary to open real dialogue between the junta and the opposition and all different sectors of Myanmar society," he said.

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