



Iranian demonstrators hold placards during a protest against the results of the recent presidential election and in support of defeated Iranian presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi in Ankara on Saturday. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad again slammed US President Barack Obama for "interfering" in Iran, as debate over the Iranian president's disputed re-election showed no sign of abating.

PHOTO: AFP

Mousavi rejects partial vote recount

Opposition website shut down, supporters tortured

NIANDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Tehran/Washington

Iran opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi Saturday refused to support a panel set up by the electoral watchdog Guardian Council to conduct a partial recount of votes in the disputed presidential election, a media report said.

Refusing to be cowed by attacks on his party offices, Mousavi again demanded for fresh polls.

"Limiting the probe into complaints about electoral irregularities to recounting 10 percent of the ballot boxes cannot attract people's trust and convince public opinion about the results," Mousavi said on his campaign website.

Mousavi said: "Reaching a just judgment is not within the domain of the Guardians Council and above all a board which is appointed by this council. I insist again on cancelling the election (results) as the most suitable way out of the problem," Geo TV said citing Mousavi.

The issue should be referred to a body

which observes (Islamic) Sharia law, has legal status and is independent, said the former prime minister, who trailed in 11 million votes behind incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, according to official results from the June 12 election.

The Guardian Council said that although it has ordered a partial recount, no 'major irregularities' have so far been found and the elections were the 'cleanest we have had'.

Earlier Iran has shut down opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi's website that was the only source for US officials to monitor events in the Islamic country, according to a media report Saturday.

State Department officials, who have been monitoring events in Iran from Dubai via Mousavi's website 'Kalamah', said the website - the opposition leader's last link to the outside world - was completely shut down, the Fox News reported.

The officials also noted reports on Iranian websites alleging that Mousavi's supporters, who have been in jail for

anti-government protests, were being tortured in a bid to force them into 'confessions' on TV that the demonstrations were part of a foreign plot against the Islamic regime, the report said.

It also cited a report by Iranian newspaper with close ties with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps that called on the country's justice minister to prosecute Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi for allegedly violating Islamic and constitutional law through her human rights advocacy.

Since the June 12 presidential election results, which saw incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad retaining power with a landslide victory, were out Mousavi's supporters took to streets in thousands to protest the alleged electoral fraud.

Iranian authorities have used a combination of warnings, arrests and the threat of police action over the last week to drive mass rallies off Tehran's street with smaller gatherings dispersed with tear gas and baton charges.

US asks Pakistan to move more troops from Indian border to Afghan side

ANI, Washington

The United States has reiterated that Pakistan must move its troops stationed along the Indian border to the western Afghan border to focus more on the terror threat emanating from that area.

Addressing a Congressional hearing here, the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Robert O Blake said that Pakistan needed to move more troops from its border with India to the western parts of the country to fight terrorism.

Blake said that the United States would support talks between India and Pakistan to establish peace and stability in the region, but added that it would not interfere in the bilateral talks, and leave it to the two countries 'to chart their own course of action.'

"India and Pakistan face common challenge and we will support continuing dialogue to find joint solutions to counter terrorism and to promote regional stability," The Dawn quoted Blake, as saying.

Referring to the meeting of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari in Russia's Yekaterinburg earlier this month, Blake said that such engagements were encouraging particularly after the heightened tension between both the countries in the wake of November 2008 Mumbai carnage.

"We will continue to support dialogue

between Indian and Pakistani leaders. The timing, scope and content of any such dialogue are strictly matters for Pakistani and Indian leaders to decide," Blake said.

The United States is pushing for the stalled bilateral talks between India and Pakistan to resume as soon as possible. It had even sent a special envoy, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, William Burns, to New Delhi with a letter for Dr Manmohan Singh recently.

The contents of the letter were not disclosed, but media reports suggested that President Obama urged the Indian leadership to resume dialogue with Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Army has been boasting of success against the Taliban and other extremists, and claims that it has flushed the insurgents out, besides killing scores of them during its offensive in the Swat and Malakand Divisions.

But a closer look at the region where the military operation purportedly resulted in death of several militants presents a different picture, casting serious questions over the Army's claims.

While the military has been claiming being engaged in a stiff battle with the Taliban, no such signs are visible in the region, which clearly suggests that the insurgents have just melted into the local population here, only to remerge and fight another day, The New York Times reports.

Tigers won't be allowed to regroup: Army

ANI, AFP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan Army's spokesman, Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara, has said that the government and the defence brass is determined not to allow the rebel Tamil Tigers to regroup.

Brigadier Nanayakkara was quoted by the Sri FM radio station that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would not be left any room by the authorities to regroup in order to revert to their campaign for a separate state.

"People like KP (Kumaran Pathmanathan) can make statements but we will not be bothered by them," Brigadier Nanayakkara said.

KP, the arms procurer for the rebels has claimed leadership of the organisation with another claiming to be the international intelligence wing member of the group contradicting KP.

President Mahinda Rajapakse's government has launched a development drive in the north since the rebel defeat while pledging to implement political power sharing with the Tamil dominated areas.

Meanwhile, the United States issued yesterday a warning for its nationals travelling to or in Sri Lanka about the risk of possible terror attacks despite the recent crushing of Tamil Tiger separatists.

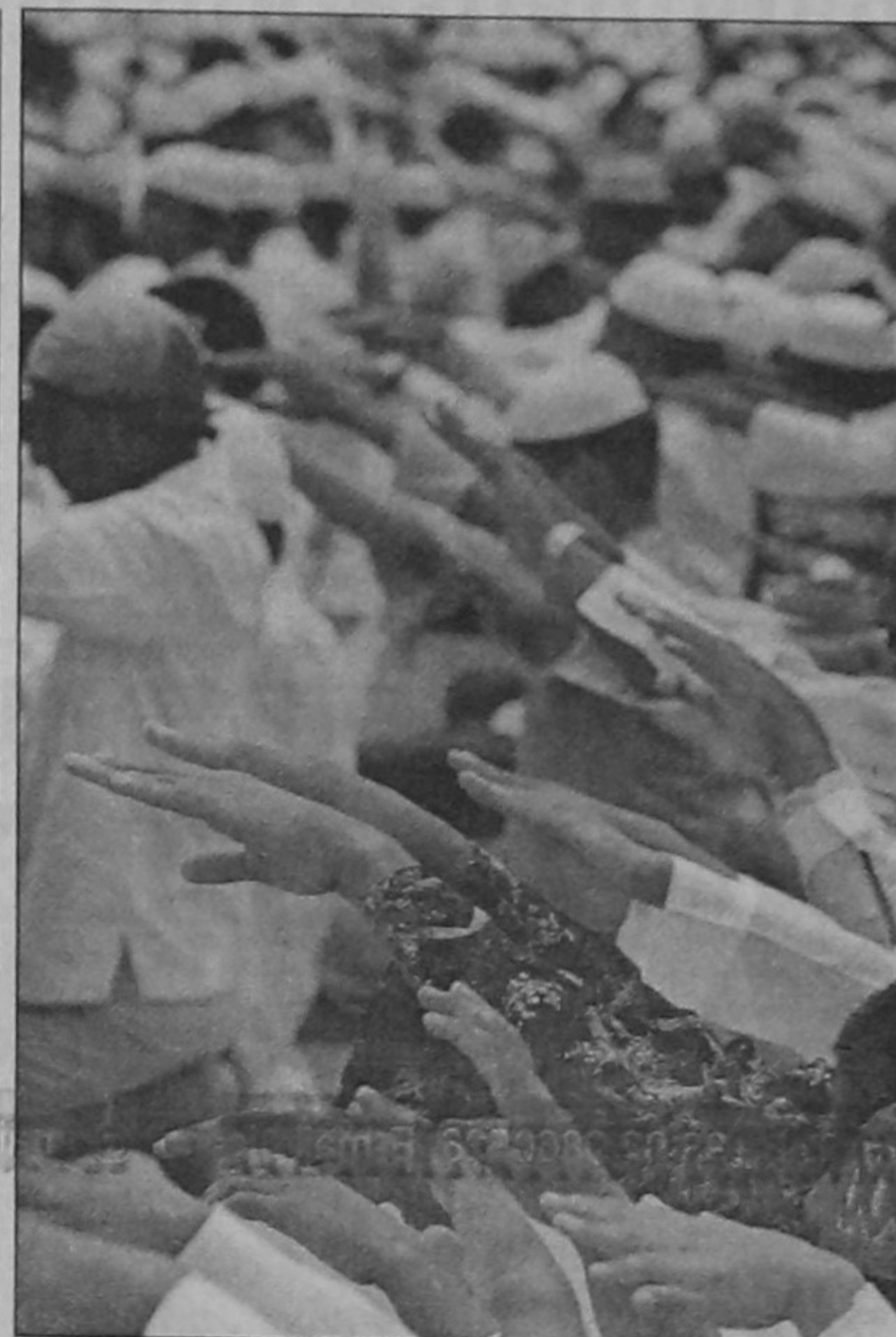
Sri Lanka defeated the Tamil Tigers last month but rebel remnants still posed a threat and could carry out assaults, the state department said in the latest travel advisory on its website.

"No new terrorist incidents have occurred since the government's declaration of military victory over the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)," the advisory said.

"Despite the conclusion of hostilities, remnants of the insurgency group remain."

It also noted that Sri Lanka itself was maintaining a heightened state of security despite claiming it had ended the conflict, which lasted almost 40 years.

The US state department warned its nationals against travelling to the island's northern province and to much of the east where battles took place till mid-May between government forces and the Tigers.



Indian Muslims raise their hands to pray for rain at a mosque in Hyderabad yesterday. An acute heatwave roasting much of India has claimed at least 100 lives, with more deaths feared because of the annual monsoon rains have yet to start as usual.

PHOTO: AFP

Solana hopes Iran nuclear talks will resume soon

AFP, Corfu

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana expressed hope Sunday that nuclear talks with Iran will resume, despite unrest over a disputed presidential election.

"We would like very much that soon we will have the possibility to restart multilateral talks with Iran on important nuclear issues," he told reporters at a meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Solana, who will hold talks on Iran with EU foreign ministers later Sunday on the Greek island of Corfu, has been negotiating on behalf of major world powers to persuade Tehran to stop uranium enrichment.

The Europeans have been running the "talks about talks" since 2006, when Solana made a first offer to Iran of political and economic incentives in exchange for an end to enrichment.

Court battle looms over Jackson kids

AP, Los Angeles

Given the secrecy surrounding Michael Jackson's children throughout his life, it's no surprise that there are lingering questions about who will care for them after his death. What is almost certain is this: their fate will be decided in a courtroom, with several people possibly vying for custody.

Experts say the person who has the strongest legal claim to Jackson's two oldest children is their mother, Deborah Rowe. As for the youngest child, Jackson's wishes will be more influential.

It remains unclear who Jackson designated as potential guardians for his children. Those details likely contained in the 50-year-old singer's will have not been released.

Rowe's attorney, Marta Alml, wrote in a statement on Saturday that "Ms Rowe's only thoughts at this time have been regarding the devastating loss Michael's family has suffered. Ms Rowe requests that Michael's family, and particularly the children, be spared such harmful, sensational-

ist speculation and that they be able to say goodbye to their loved one in peace."

Jackson never told his family who he had in place to handle his business affairs, a person close to the family said on Friday. The person, who requested anonymity because of the delicate nature of the situation, said they were told by the singer's phalanx of advisers that he likely had a will, but it may be many years old.

The person also said that the children are still in the care of the extended Jackson family for the moment.

Jackson left behind three children: Michael Joseph Jackson Jr., known as Prince Michael, 12; Paris Michael Katherine Jackson, 11; and Prince Michael II, seven. The elder children were born to Rowe, while the youngest is his biological son, born to a surrogate mother.

Prince Michael II's mother has never been identified, and while she may surface, it is likely that she signed away her rights, said Stacy Phillips, a Los Angeles divorce attorney who has represented numerous high-profile clients.

Jackson tops charts, memorabilia sales surge

AFP, Washington

Like Elvis before him, Michael Jackson is topping the charts in death as in life.

And the "King of Pop" is rivaling the "King of Rock 'n' Roll" in another category as well -- posthumous sales of memorabilia.

Over 45,000 Michael Jackson-related items were being offered for sale on Saturday at online auction house eBay.com, two days after the sudden death of the singer at his rented Beverly Hills home at the age of 50.

They ranged from Web domain names -- michaeljacksonmemorial.com, for example -- at hopeful prices of one million dollars or more to copies of US newspapers featuring front-page news of his death for as little as 99 cents.

Of the products offered for sale, nearly 17,500 were music recordings and nearly 17,000 were memorabilia.

Ebay's home page displayed a special "Remembering the King of Pop" category offering "Memorabilia, Music, Autographs, Records."

The collectibles for direct sale or auction included Michael Jackson posters, dolls, ticket stubs, concert programmes, newspapers, magazines, tote bags, pins, badges, stickers, T-shirts and other clothing.

Nine of the top 10 selling albums at Apple's iTunes music store were from the "King of Pop" with "The Essential Michael Jackson" leading the way.

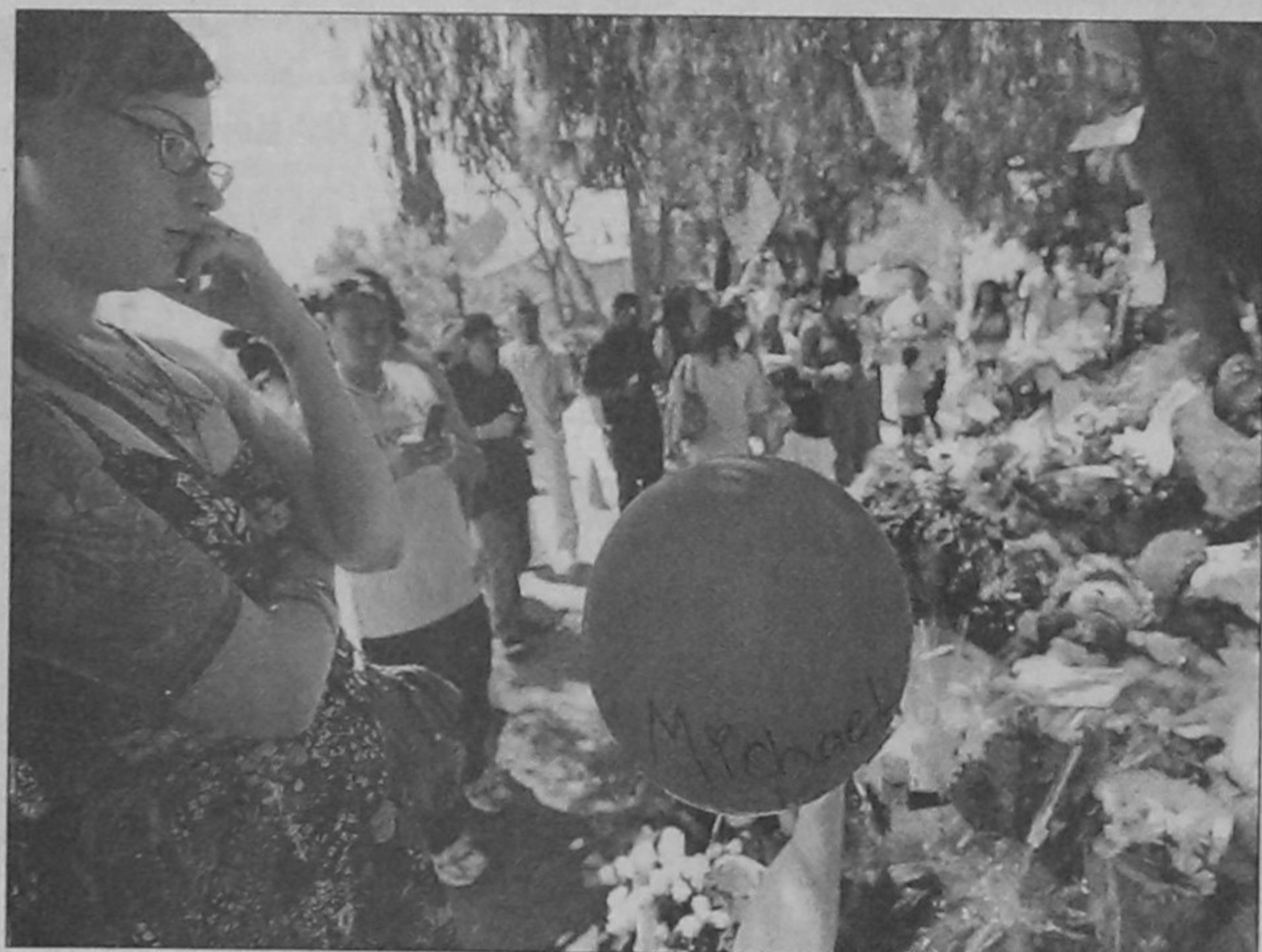


PHOTO: AFP

Michael Jackson fan Arica Hanley from Canada is pensive at a makeshift shrine and memorial to music legend Michael Jackson, outside the Jackson family compound in Encino, California on Saturday. Jackson, "the King of Pop" died on June 25 at the age of 50.

UN envoy to brief Ban on Myanmar visit

AFP, Yangon

UN troubleshooter Ibrahim Gambari was expected to brief UN chief Ban Ki-moon Sunday on his recent visit to Myanmar, before the secretary general heads to Asia and possibly to the military-ruled nation.

Gambari flew out of Myanmar on Saturday following a two-day visit aimed at paving the way for Ban's prospective trip early next month, which would come against the backdrop of the trial of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Nigerian diplomat met twice with Foreign Minister Nyan Win in the junta's remote administrative capital Naypyidaw before holding talks with Singapore's ambassador and UN staff in Yangon, Myanmar officials said.

N Korea vows to bolster nuclear deterrence against US

AFP, Seoul

North Korea threatened Sunday to bolster its nuclear deterrence against the United States as the leaders of key US allies South Korea and Japan were set for a summit meeting.

Pyongyang's ruling communist party newspaper Rodong Sinmun said the North's nuclear drive could be justified by the "US introduction of nuclear weapons into South Korea."

"We will strengthen our nuclear deterrence further for our self-defence to cope with outright US nuclear threats and nuclear war attempts," Rodong said.

Seoul and Washington have long denied there are US nuclear weapons on South Korean soil and insist they have no plans to invade the North.

The latest threats come as South Korean President Lee Myung-bak is in Tokyo for talks with Prime Minister Taro Aso on North Korea and a number of other issues.

Tensions have mounted here since the North's long-range rocket launch on April 5 and its second nuclear test on May 25, which resulted in new tougher UN Security Council sanctions on the impoverished communist

state.

Pyongyang on Saturday threatened to shoot down any Japanese plane entering its air space, accusing Japan's AWACS aircraft of spying on missile bases on its east coast.

It "will not tolerate even a bit the aerial espionage by the warmongers of the Japanese aggression forces but mercilessly shoot down any plane intruding into the territorial air of the DPRK (North Korea) even 0.001 mm," read an air force statement carried by the North's official news agency.

The North has often denounced US aerial espionage, but rarely Japanese.

Seoul officials believe the North will fire short-range or mid-range missiles off its east coast from June 25 to July 10, after it warned foreign ships to stay clear of a specific area during the period.

Washington has said it is prepared for Pyongyang's possible firing of a long-range missile towards Hawaii, perhaps on July 4, US Independence Day.

As part of efforts to curb the North's weapons programmes, a US destroyer is shadowing a suspicious North Korean cargo ship last reported heading for Myanmar.



PHOTO: AFP

Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso (R) and visiting South Korean President Lee Myung-bak (L) shake hands at the beginning of talks held at Aso's official residence in Tokyo yesterday. South Korea and Japan "will never tolerate" a nuclear-armed North Korea, Lee said after talks with Aso.

Now, scientists to hunt for aliens by analysing reflected light

ANI, London

A new technique for detecting signs of life on distant planets by analysing reflected light could soon lead astronomers to extra-terrestrial life.

According to a report in the Telegraph, when scientists tested the method on Earth, they found unmistakably strong signs of life in the form of chemical "fingerprints".

They believe within one or two decades the same technique could reveal life on worlds orbiting stars far beyond the Sun.

Reflected light was already known to contain valuable information about a planet's atmosphere.

But, at distances of many light years the signals, from light wavelength patterns called spectra, are very faint and difficult to read.