

## Security forces strike militant positions in South Waziristan

THE DAWN, Islamabad

Security forces attacked the Taliban in their South Waziristan stronghold with aircraft and artillery on yesterday a day after militants launched multiple attacks killing more than 30 people.

The government says a ground offensive against the Pakistani Taliban in their South Waziristan lair is imminent and the army has been stepping up its air and artillery attacks in recent days to soften up the militants' defences.

The militants have launched a string of brazen attacks in the past 1 day, attacking the United Nations, the army headquarters, police and general public, apparently trying to stave off the army assault.

The government says

the violence has only reinforced its determination to defeat its enemies.

Aircraft and artillery struck militant positions in their strongholds of Ladha, Makeen and in the mountainous Shahoor region overnight, hours after killing 27 militants in the region in various strikes.

'We could see thick smoke and flames leaping into the sky from caves in the mountains after the bombing by jet fighters,' said a resident near Shahoor who declined to be identified.

Security officials said they had no information about casualties in the latest attacks.

'Some fleeing'

An army official in the region said some Taliban were trying to leave the area in disguise ahead of the offensive.

'They are now trying to run but we have tightened controls around their areas and are checking every person leaving,' said the military official in Wana, the main town in South Waziristan, where the army has a base.

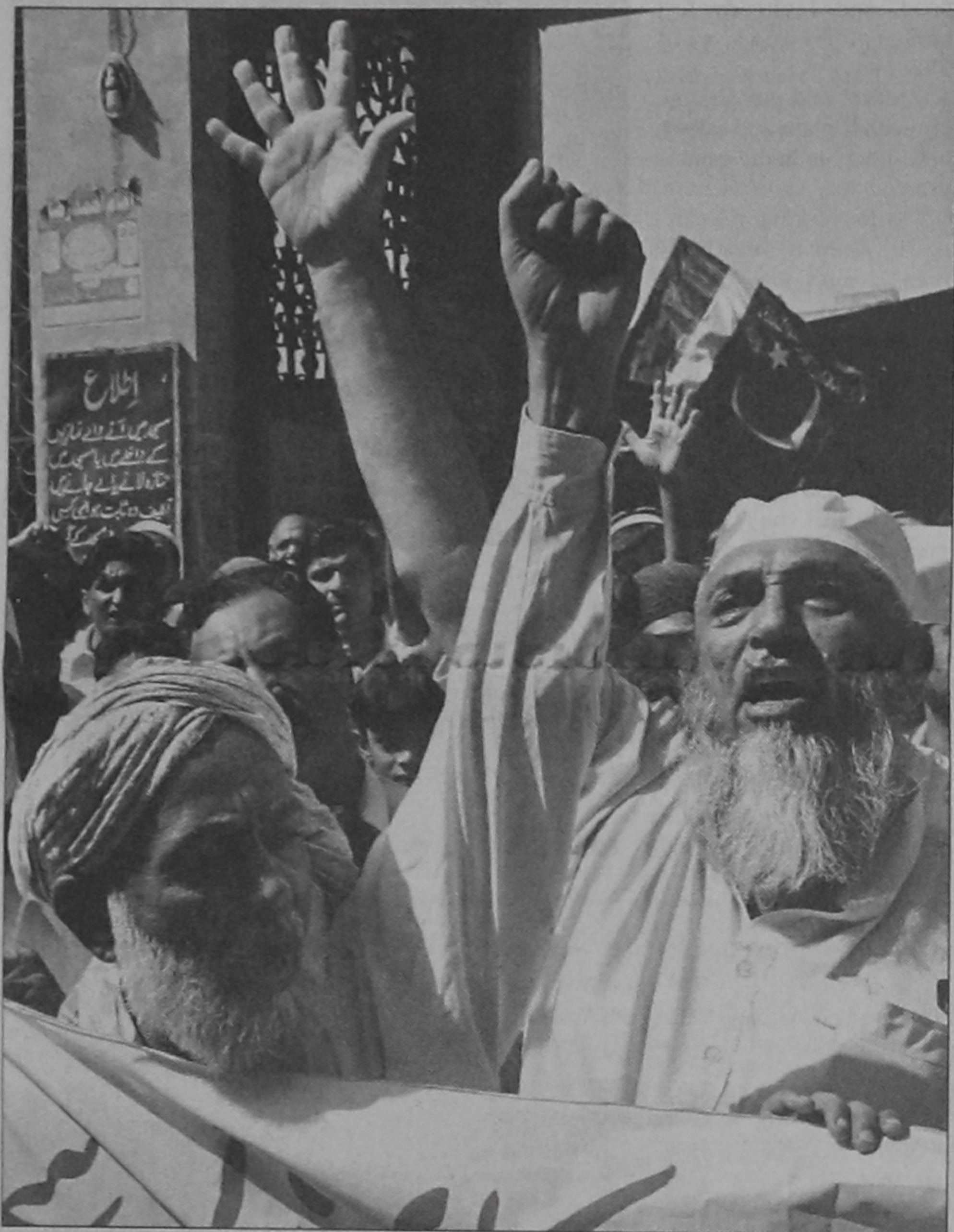
About 28,000 troops are in place to take on an estimated 10,000 hard-core Taliban, army officials have said.

Pakistani Taliban fighters made advances towards Islamabad early this year, raising fears about the stability of the country.

But significant military gains in the Swat valley, from where militants have largely been driven out in recent months, have reassured the US and western allies about Pakistan's commitment to fighting terrorism.



Indian schoolgirls share a light moment as they play with sparklers at a function in Amritsar yesterday, on the eve of The Diwali Festival. Indians throughout the country are preparing to celebrate Diwali, the Festival of Lights on October 17.



Pakistani activists of Islamic fundamentalist party Jamaat-i-Islami shout slogans against the US Kerry-Lugar Bill during a protest in Karachi yesterday.

## Final rehearsals for underwater cabinet meeting on Oct 24

AFP, Colombo

Ministers in the Maldives dived in their final rehearsals yesterday ahead of an underwater cabinet meeting this weekend aimed at drawing attention to the dangers of global warming for the island nation.

Ministers in full scuba gear dived six metres (20 feet) for the dress rehearsal near the Girifushi island, 25 minutes by speed boat from the capital island Male, coordinator of the event Aminath Shauna said.

## Mixed messages in ActionAid hunger report

India, US, New Zealand criticised

BBC ONLINE

Brazil and China have been praised for their efforts to tackle hunger, in a development charity's report released to coincide with UN World Food Day.

But the ActionAid report criticises India and others countries for not doing enough to alleviate the problem.

The agency also ranked rich countries, saying Luxembourg is trying hardest to end global hunger, while the US and New Zealand rank bottom.

Studies estimate that one

billion people are malnourished globally.

That figure, given in studies by a number of think tanks and aid agencies, represents roughly one in seven of the world's population.

ActionAid's report, Hunger Free, says hunger is 'a choice that we make, not a force of nature'.

'Hunger begins with inequality,' it says, and then grows because of 'perverse policies that treat food purely as a commodity, not a right'.

'It is because of these policies that most developing

countries no longer grow enough to feed themselves, and that their farmers are amongst the hungriest and poorest people in the world,' says ActionAid.

Among the developing countries ranked, Brazil wins the top spot, with the aid agency praising President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's support for land reform and community kitchens for the poor.

ActionAid said Brazil's success shows 'what can be achieved when the state has both resources and political will to tackle hunger'.

## Afghan envoy says election run-off likely

AFP, Washington

A senior aide to Afghan President Hamid Karzai has for the first time conceded that disputed elections could enter a second round and pushed to hold the run-off quickly.

Said Tayeb Jawad, Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States, said Thursday he has not personally spoken to election authorities who are expected to make an announcement within days.

But Jawad, who has served as Karzai's chief of staff and press secretary, became the

first member of his circle to speak publicly of plans for a new vote after Western-led allegations of major fraud in the August 20 polls.

'A run-off is a likely scenario,' Jawad said at the US Institute of Peace.

'If that's what it is, everyone should work very hard to make that happen.'

Jawad said the next round of presidential elections should be held quickly, charging that a delay would create headaches for other nations -- including the United States, as it mulls sending more troops to fight Taliban insurgents.

## After a long wait two Koreas hold talks

AFP, Seoul

A South Korean team began talks in North Korea yesterday on family reunions and other humanitarian issues, after a week of mixed signals from the communist state about its willingness to improve frosty ties.

The meeting in the town of Kaesong just north of the heavily fortified border is the second this week. During talks on Wednesday the North made a rare expression of regret to the South for causing a cross-border flood, which killed six people.

But Pyongyang began the week by test-firing five missiles. On Thursday its navy accused the South of sending warships across the disputed sea border and warned of possible armed clashes.

Unification ministry official Kim Eyi-Do and Red Cross official Kim Seong-Kuen began talks with North Korean officials at 10:00 am (0100 GMT), the ministry said.

As part of a series of conciliatory gestures, the North last month allowed the resumption of a reunion programme for families separated since the 1950-1953 war.

## Indian probe against toxic US ship

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian government has ordered a probe into reports that an allegedly radioactive ship from the United States has anchored off the Alang coast in western Indian state of Gujarat.

'We have got complaints that a radioactive contaminated ship has anchored at Alang. We have already ordered an inquiry into the matter and hope to get the report in the next couple of days', Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh told reporters here on Thursday.

## Lawsuit seeks to halt US swine flu vaccination campaign

AFP, Washington

New York medical workers took legal action Thursday to halt a massive swine flu inoculation program being rolled out across the United States, claiming the vaccines have not been properly tested.

Lawyers for the group filed a temporary restraining order in a Washington federal court against government medical regulators they claim rushed H1N1 vaccines to the public without adequately testing their safety and efficacy.

'None of the vaccines against H1N1 have been

properly tested,' attorney Jim Turner, one of half a dozen lawyers working on the case, told AFP.

The complaint filed Thursday argued that far from preventing a massive outbreak of swine flu, the 'live attenuated influenza virus nasal mist vaccine could trigger' an H1N1 pandemic.

'I don't know of another live vaccine for flu. So you have immediately a new problem you don't have with a killed vaccine,' Turner told AFP.

Officials at the National Institutes of Health have said

that trials of swine flu vaccine began in August and delivered results last month, showing that the vaccine was well tolerated and produced a robust immune response in older children and adults in good health with just a single dose.

But Turner insisted, 'The FDA did not do the proper testing to show safety and efficacy of this vaccine, which is under the law a new drug.'

'When I say test data, I don't mean some professor at some medical school somewhere infected some students and said 'I don't see any problems.'

## Earthquake rocks western Indonesia

AP, Jakarta

A strong undersea earthquake caused minor damage and made buildings in Indonesia's capital sway yesterday, but there were no immediate reports of injuries.

The quake came as Indonesia is still recovering from another, more powerful earthquake that killed more than 1,000 people last month, not far from Friday's tremor.

The epicentre of the latest quake was in the Sunda Strait off the western coast of Java and had a preliminary magnitude of 6.4, Indonesia's Meteorology and Geophysics Agency said.

## Queen Nefertiti on show again in Berlin

AFP, Berlin

Closed for 70 years following heavy bomb damage during World War II, Berlin's 'Neues Museum' throws open its doors again on yesterday, with 3,400-year-old Egyptian beauty Queen Nefertiti star of the show.

The 19th century UNESCO world heritage site on the city's renowned Museum Island, restored to its former glory by British architect David Chipperfield, is the final resting place for the bust of Nefertiti, in Germany since 1913.

The bust was spirited out

of Egypt and arrived in mysterious circumstances, with German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt bringing the figure to Berlin, a year after it was unearthed on the banks of the Nile.

Since then, Nefertiti, renowned as one of history's great beauties, has been a source of ugly friction between Egypt and Germany.

Cairo alleges that Borchardt spirited it fraudulently out of the country and has demanded its return.

But despite her advanced years, Nefertiti is far from the oldest object on display at the museum.

## Passive smoking may cause heart problems

ANI, Washington

Increased exposure to secondhand smoke can result in heart disease in non-smoking adults, says a new study.

Case study, titled Secondhand Smoke Exposure and Cardiovascular Effects, reviewed available scientific literature to assess the relationship between secondhand smoke exposure and acute coronary events.

The findings come in line with the 2006 Surgeon General's Report conclusion that there are increased risks of coronary heart disease morbidity and mortality among men and women exposed to secondhand smoke.

## Obama signs huge Pakistan aid package into law

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama signed a 7.5 billion dollar aid package for Pakistan after the US Congress acted to placate critics in the strife-torn nation who warned it violated Pakistani sovereignty.

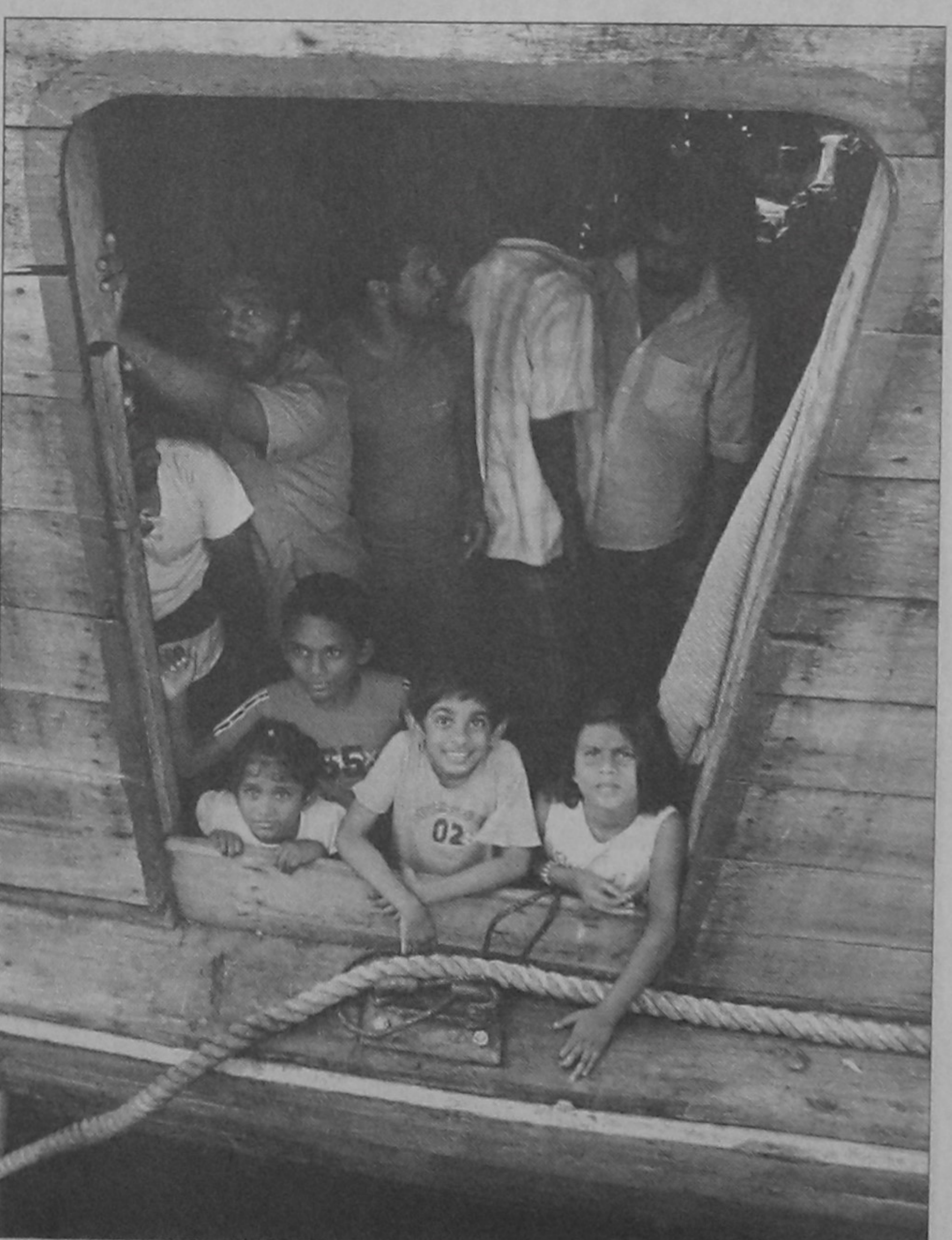
Obama's move followed days of disputes over the package, which sparked a showdown between Pakistan's government and its powerful military.

Tensions in Pakistan are mounting with a wave of attacks over the past 11 days have left 170 dead, the latest a double suicide attack on a police compound in which 11 died.

The US package aims to help the Pakistan government, a key ally in the battle against al-Qaeda, meet the insurgent challenge by tripling non-military US aid.

'This law is the tangible manifestation of broad support for Pakistan in the US, as evidenced by its bipartisan, bicameral, unanimous passage in Congress,' White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said in a statement.

The measure offers 1.5 billion dollars a year for five years to improve Pakistani schools, to fund groups that defend the rights of women and children, and to train and modernize the Pakistani peace force.



Sri Lankan asylum-seekers look out from their boat in Serang, Indonesia. Two asylum-seekers were hospitalized from a boatload of 255 Sri Lankans who have declared a hunger strike in Indonesia to demand UN refugee status, an official said.

### News in Brief

#### Top Indian Maoist couple arrested

BBC ONLINE

Police in the Indian state of Jharkhand say they have arrested an agricultural scientist and his wife who are believed to be senior Maoist leaders.

Ravi Sharma, 50, and his wife B Anuradha were arrested from the forests near Hazaribagh town last week.

The couple were involved in many recent acts of violence in Jharkhand and Bihar, police said. They have described the arrests as 'a good catch'.

A rebel spokesman in Jharkhand described the arrests as 'illegal'.

Last month, police arrested top Maoist leader Kobad Ghandy from Delhi.

#### Babysurvives after train hits stroller

AP, Melbourne

Police in Australia say a 6-month-old baby has miraculously survived a train hitting his stroller that had rolled onto the tracks.

The train pushed the stroller about 40 meters along the tracks before it stopped.

Security video footage released Friday shows the mother looking away for a moment when the stroller suddenly rolls off the edge of a station platform and onto the tracks.