

Republicans score big in US polls

AFP, New York

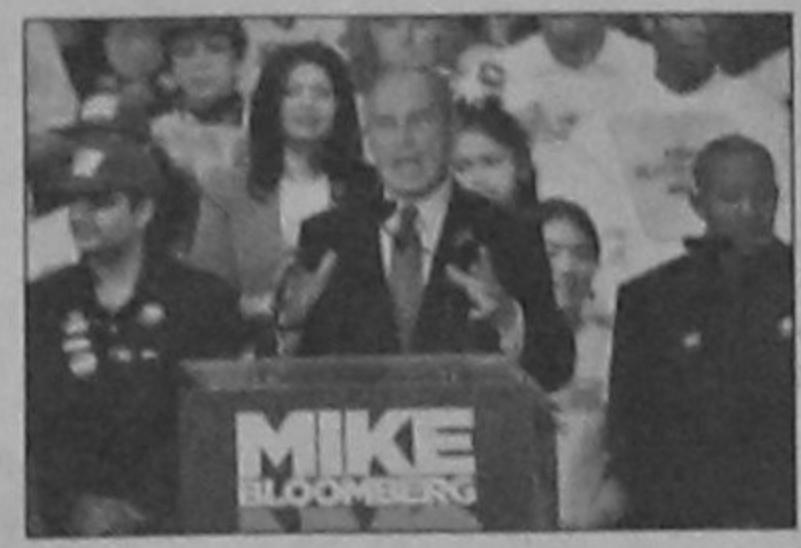


PHOTO: AFP

Republicans won two governors' seats

Tuesday in off-year elections that dealt

a

stinging blow to President Barack

Obama and his Democrats exactly 12

months after they swept into power.

But

Democrats

did

eke

out

a

single

win

in

a

race

for

a

vacant

congressional

seat

in

a

strongly

Republican

district

of

upstate

New

York.

In

New

Jersey,

Republican

Chris

Christie

pulled

off

an

upset

to

defeat

Jon

Corzine,

the

incumbent

governor

in

the

heavily

Democratic

state,

by

a

margin

of

55-44,

according

to

preliminary

results

showed.

The

results

were

setbacks

for

Obama,

who

had

campaigned

in

both

states

on

behalf

of

his

party's

candidates,

and

will

help

buoy

Republicans

left

reeling

by

the

scale

of

his

historic

White

House

victory

on

November

4,

2008.

Virginia

is

a

pivotal

state

and

a

year

ago

helped

propel

Obama

into

office

as

the

nation's

first

black

president,

the

first

time

it

had

backed

a

Democratic

presidential

contender

in

more

than

four

decades.

The loss in New Jersey was likely more devastating for Obama, who had some political skin at stake as he campaigned heavily there on behalf of Corzine, including at a rally with 11,000 people over the weekend. The state has long been dominated by the Democratic Party.

Preliminary results gave Democrat Bill Owens 49 percent to 46 percent for his main challenger Doug Hoffman, who ran on the tiny Conservative Party ballot, but was backed by senior figures from the right of the Republican Party.

With mid-term nationwide elections to Congress due next year and Obama bogged down in confrontations over the economy, health care reform and the Afghanistan war, many saw Tuesday's off-year races taking on突出 importance.

The Republican Governors Association quickly congratulated McDonnell in Virginia, saying his victory gave the party "tremendous momentum heading into 2010."

Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs earlier played down the wider significance of the three races.

"I don't think the president is looking at these and believes that they say anything about our future legislative efforts or our future political efforts," he said.

But if the races showed that Obama's Democratic machine is not invincible, they also bared rifts in the Republican Party over how to rebuild after last year's drubbing in presidential and congressional elections.

In the New York special congressional race, the official, moderate Republican candidate withdrew in the face of the insurgent Conservative candidate.

Hoffman's storming run made him a standard bearer for the wing of the Republican Party organising nationwide "tea party" protests against Obama. Among his high-profile, out-of-state backers was Sarah Palin, the former vice presidential candidate.

Iran 'must choose' its future path: Obama

AFP, Washington

Iran "must choose" whether to open the door to opportunity and prosperity, President Barack Obama said yesterday in a statement marking 30 years since the storming of the US embassy in Tehran.

"We have heard for thirty years what the Iranian government is against; the question now is, what kind of future is it for," Obama said.

"It is time for the Iranian government to decide whether it wants to focus on the past, or whether it will make the choices that will open the door to greater opportunity, prosperity and justice for its people."

Radical Islamist students captured the city-centre US embassy on November 4, 1979 -- just months after the Islamic revolution toppled the US-backed shah.

The students, who took 52 American diplo-

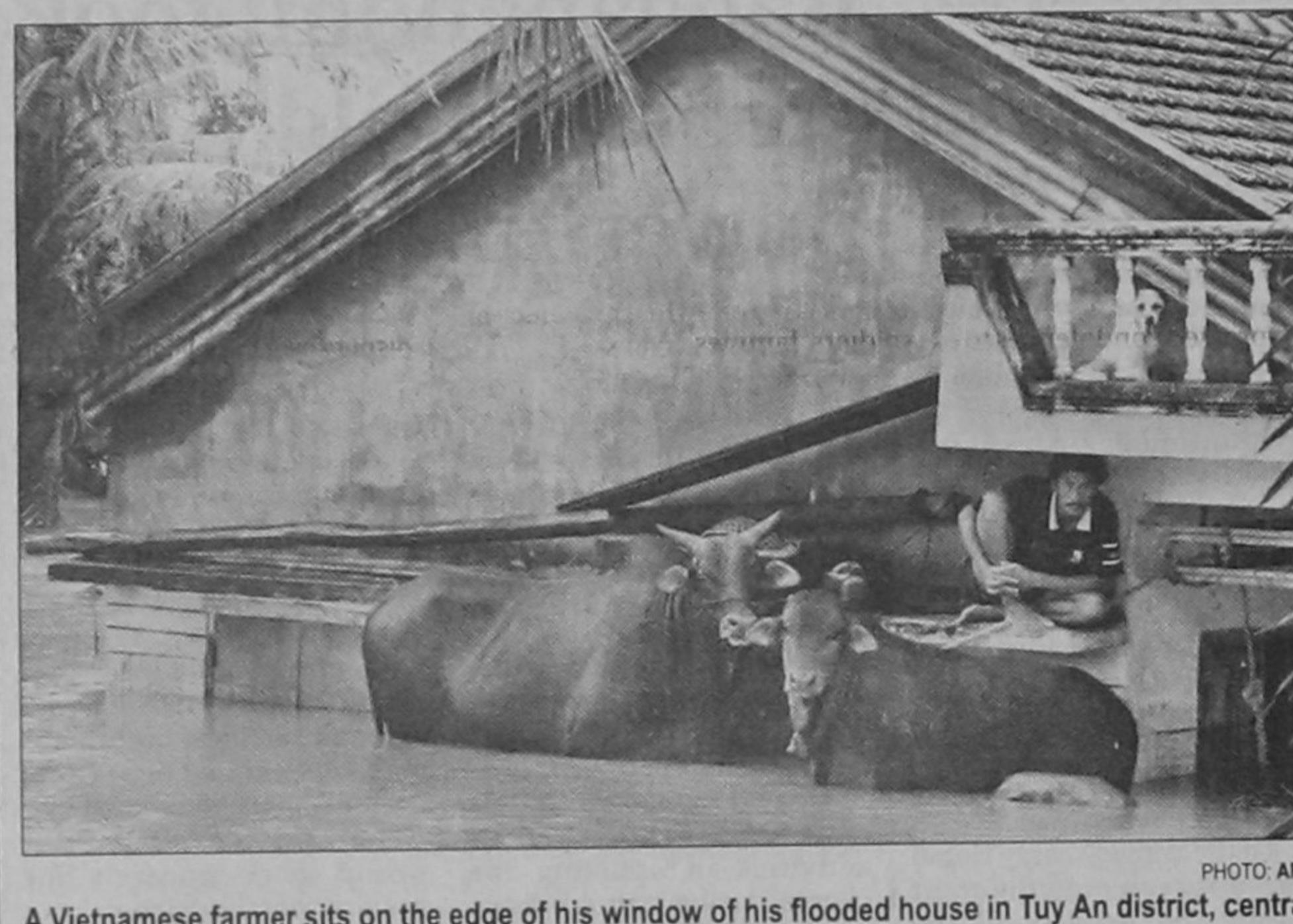
mats hostage and held them for 444 days, said they were responding to Washington's refusal to hand over the deposed shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

Obama paid tribute to the hostages and their families for "their extraordinary service and sacrifice."

"This event helped set the United States and Iran on a path of sustained suspicion, mistrust and confrontation," he said.

"I have made it clear that the United States of America wants to move beyond this past, and seeks a relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran based upon mutual interests and mutual respect."

The president stressed that Washington has "recognised Iran's international right to peaceful nuclear power. We have demonstrated our willingness to take confidence-building steps along with others in the international community."



Storm kills 90 in Vietnam

AP, AFP, Hanoi

The death toll from Tropical Storm Mirinae rose to 90 in Vietnam on Wednesday as authorities stepped up rescue and relief operations in affected areas of the central region.

In the hardest-hit province of Phu Yen, 26 more deaths were reported as information trickled in from isolated areas, bringing the death toll there to 65, disaster official Dang Thi Lan said Wednesday. An additional 13 people were missing.

Elsewhere in the region, the storm and flooding left another 22 people dead and six others missing, according to disaster officials and the government's Web site.

18 people killed in Mexico's north

AFP, Ciudad Juarez

A total of 18 people, including a police officer, were murdered between Monday and Tuesday in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, state authorities said.

The police officer was killed in the border city of Ciudad Juarez by "a group of armed men who shot him nine times" after confronting him inside a beauty salon where he was accompanying his wife, said the state's deputy attorney general's office.

Man jailed for laser attack on jets

AFP, Los Angeles

A California man who aimed a handheld laser at two passenger jets arriving at John Wayne Airport south of Los Angeles has been jailed for two-and-a-half years, justice authorities said Tuesday.

Dana Welch, 38, was sentenced after being convicted at a trial in April where he was accused of shining a laser at two Boeing jets as they approached the airport in May last year.



Iranian members of the Basij militia burn a US flag outside the former US embassy in Tehran yesterday during a rally to mark the storming of the American embassy by Iranian students 30 years ago.

Police and protesters clash in Tehran

Huge crowds stage noisy anti-US rally

AFP, Tehran

Police used batons and teargas to break up an opposition protest in central Tehran yesterday, while huge crowds staged a noisy anti-US rally nearby to mark the storming of the American embassy by students 30 years ago.

US President Barack Obama, meanwhile, in a statement marking the anniversary of the event that sparked decades of hostility between America and Iran urged Tehran to make choices that would end its international isolation.

Witnesses said the violent clashes occurred at Haft-e-Tir square in the heart of the capital when riot police armed with batons and firing teargas moved in on a crowd of several hundred opposition supporters staging a protest.

The protesters, who were chanting "Death to the dictator," refused to disperse and dozens were beaten or arrested. Groups of pro-government hardliners also gathered at the square chanting "Death to America."

Opposition website Mowzcamp.com reported that opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi was among the protesters at the square but left quickly after he and his supporters came under attack by the hardliners.

Qaeda blasts Saudi king over mixed university

AFP, Riyadh

The Yemen-based branch of al-Qaeda has accused Saudi King Abdullah of violating Islam by launching the kingdom's first public university where men and women can mix, SITE Intelligence reported.

Ibrahim al-Rubaish, a Saudi member of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), said in an audio message posted on the internet that the new King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, where post-graduate science students and researchers will work together, violated Islamic Shariah law.

ME peace talks must include Jerusalem, says Hillary

AFP, Cairo

Middle East peace talks must include the disputed city of Jerusalem, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in Cairo on Wednesday, stressing Washington is determined to push for a Palestinian state.

"There is no doubt that moving toward a state that reflects the aspirations and the rights of the Palestinian people must include all of the issues that have been discussed and mentioned by President (Barack) Obama, and that includes Jerusalem," she said.