

## UNP accuses Chandrika of inciting violence

COLOMBO, Sept 22: Escalating political killings in Sri Lanka have dimmed hopes of hammering out a national consensus to end the country's dragging Tamil separatist war, political analysts here said today, reports AFP.

Pro-government gunmen have killed six members of the main opposition United Nations Party (UNP) since Friday. UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has accused President Chandrika Kumaratunga of inciting her supporters to violence.

He said the attacks made it more difficult for his party to support the government in finding a solution to the separatist war.

The president has not only condoned the violence, she has actually incited the gunmen to unleash more terror," Wickremesinghe told AFP. "What we are seeing, now is the effects of her recent remarks."

Last week Kumaratunga at-

tempted to justify an attack on a Roman Catholic Church, in which two people died, while the UNP was staging a service to mark the party's 50th anniversary.

The president said UNP members had killed a supporter of her ruling party and government supporters were reacting to the killing by breaking up church service.

"We did not encourage anyone," Kumaratunga said. "If they (the attackers) had guns, then it is all right to shoot back or even chop them to pieces."

My party is not afraid, I am not afraid and my constituents know it," Wickremesinghe said. Kumaratunga's statements angered many UNP legislators who were bringing pressure on the party leadership not to cooperate with the government.

Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) has slender one seat majority in the 225-member National Parliament and re-

quires the support of the UNP to push through radical reforms aimed at ending the war.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is leading a protracted guerrilla war to press its demand for separation, and more than 50,000 people have died in bitter fighting in the past 23 years.

Tamil politicians said the widening rift between the two main Sinhalese parties, the PA and the UNP, was a death blow to a political reform package being discussed by a parliamentary panel.

"With this kind of violence, we can't expect the UNP to support the package," Tamil MP Dharmalingam Sidharthan said.

"If the situation continues like this, I think the package will come to end very soon," British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind earlier this month, underlined the need for national consensus on the Tamil separatist issue.



Women attempt to console the mother of a youth arrested by Indian government security forces (background) during a protest against state assembly elections taking place Saturday in northern Kashmir. The crucial polls were disrupted by a series of grenade attacks by separatist guerrillas who have been waging a bloody secessionist campaign in Kashmir since 1989. — AFP/UNB photo

## Pro-govt fighters urged to defect Taliban take control of Kunar province

ISLAMABAD, Sept 22: The Taliban Islamic militia has taken the eastern Afghan province of Kunar from pro-government elements, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported today, says AP.

The militia entered the province late Saturday almost without any resistance, the Private Information Service said.

But five people were killed during fighting in Khewa, the agency said. Unnamed Taliban officials here quoted as saying that a pro-government commander, identified as Shher Afzal, was one of the dead at Khewa.

The Taliban took the key eastern city of Jalalabad on September 10 and since then has claimed major gains in neighbouring provinces, including Laghman and Kunar.

The militia has vowed to rid the country of the rival mujahideen factions and set up an Islamic state.

Reuters adds, Afghanistan's powerful Taliban Islamic militia has urged pro-government fighters to defect to its side and promised them amnesty, a Pakistan-based Afghan news service said on Saturday.

A statement issued by Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar quoted by the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP), said he had instructed his militia to give full protection to the defectors.

"It is possible some people in the ranks of the so-called government are fighting against Taliban out of saying, 'But we have declared general amnesty for such people,'" Omar said.

Taliban forces, which now control more than half of Afghanistan, captured two eastern provinces in a quick sweep last week.

But fighting has continued in some parts of the two provinces, Nangarhar and Laghman.

## Race for Cong(I) leadership begins

NEW DELHI, Sept 22: A race for the leadership of India's oldest political party began today, a day after former premier P V Narasimha Rao resigned as Congress (I) chief after being named in a 100,000-dollar fraud case, reports AFP.

Senior leaders of the 111-year-old party rushed to New Delhi to elect a successor to Rao, who was scheduled to formally hand over his resignation on Monday to the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party think tank.

Sources said the shortest of successors included A K Antony, a former member of Rao's cabinet who enjoys a reputation for honesty, party treasurer Sitaram Kesri and former defence minister Sharad Pawar.

The 19-member CWC will choose a new president to lead the Congress until fresh party elections are held later this year, said Congress spokesman Vithal Narahari Gadgil.

Gadgil for the first time squarely blamed Rao, who is facing a plethora of corruption charges, for refusing to relinquish the Congress leadership earlier despite repeated calls to resign.

"The resignation will change our image for the better," he said. "Rao should have resigned a long time ago... I think it was done under pressure as it followed the court judgement," he said.

Rao's surprise announcement came 90 minutes after a New Delhi court formally named him co-accused in the case, ordered him to court on September 30 and said it would press charges for criminal conspiracy and fraud.

"I repeatedly went to him asking him to step down," Gadgil said. "He always said, 'come to me with an agreed name and I will see.' I don't know why he wanted a consensus candidate... it was just delaying tactics."

Gadgil said the likely successor would be 77-year-old Kesri, who has been in charge of the party's finances since 1985 and dubbed "Mr Moneybags" by detractors. "It will either be Antony or Kesri," he said. "Kesri has a better chance because he is the senior-most member of the CWC," he said.

Critics say Kesri's prospects

were marred by the myriad corruption scandals dogging the party and a recent claim by a corruption-tainted former minister who said huge sums raided in his house were Congress funds.

Antony, who was scheduled to fly into New Delhi late today, told AFP by telephone from the southern city of Thiruvananthapuram that he would not "comment on hypotheses" or comments by other people.

"The only thing I can say now is that we have seen so many ups and downs that we will be able to overcome this," he said. "The Congress has to fight for resurrection by tackling corruption and moral decay which have surfaced in the last few years."

London-based Indian businessman Lakshmi Pathak had accused Rao and controversial Hindu mystic Chandraswami of defrauding him of 100,000 dollars, promising lucrative newspaper and paper contracts which never materialised.

He said, however, retained his membership of the Congress parliamentary party.

## HC judge to probe into killing Another showdown between police, Murtaza men averted

LARKANA, Sept 22: Another showdown between police and supporters of the slain Murtaza Bhutto was averted this morning when police retreated after Murtaza's men attacked them, reports AFP.

Policemen had taken up positions at Murtaza's house ahead of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's visit to meet her mother Nusrat, which has apparently been postponed.

Murtaza's supporters started punching policemen and pushing them out of the house, at which point some policemen raised their guns. A showdown was narrowly averted as a senior police officer rushed forward and told his men to retreat, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

Earlier AFP report from Karachi says, the government has ordered a judicial inquiry into Friday's killing of Murtaza Bhutto, estranged brother of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

as police claimed his supporters were trained by Indian intelligence.

Justice Ali Mohammad Baloch, a judge of the provincial Sindh High Court, has been appointed to hold a judicial inquiry into the events of Friday night when Murtaza and six supporters were killed.

The one-man tribunal will submit its findings in one month, officials said.

Police will simultaneously conduct two separate internal inquiries into the incident.

City police chief Shoab Suddle said two senior police officers would conduct an inquiry to see if the use of force was excessive and unwarranted, and a second probe to investigate the circumstances leading to the clash and to determine if legal steps were followed.

Police maintain that Murtaza's security guards opened fire on the policemen forcing them to take defensive action.

Murtaza's supporters say the police initiated the shootout and Murtaza was callously shot.

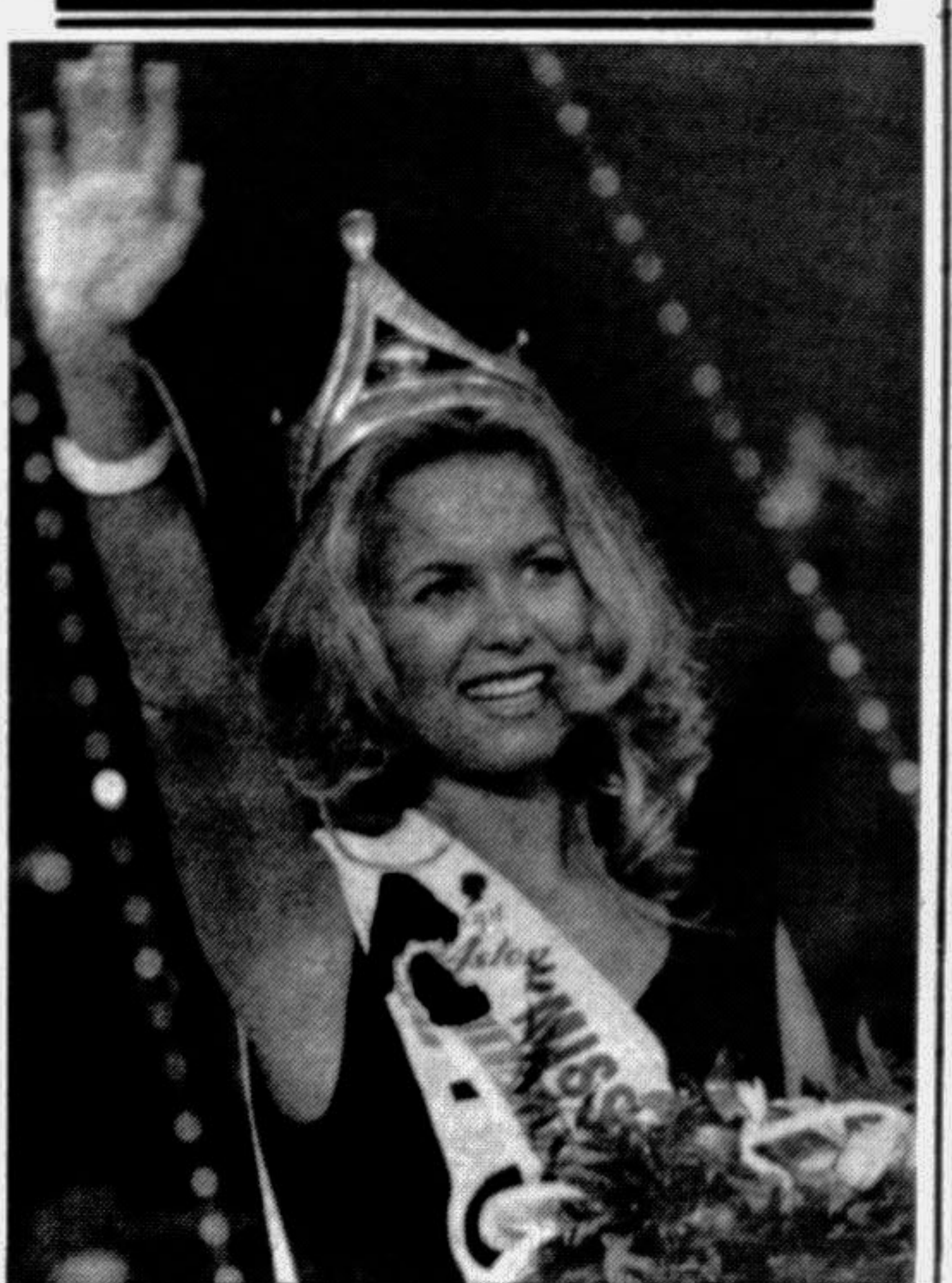
Police also said that three of Murtaza's supporters were trained by the Indian intelligence agency known as Research and Analysis Wing.

"We know that some of Murtaza's men had been trained by RAW. Two of them were killed Friday night and the third is under arrest," one senior official claimed.

Police officials also say a large cache of weapons, including two Uzis, three sub-machineguns and five handguns were recovered from the three cars used by Murtaza and his supporters.

The ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has announced a three-day mourning period, during which black flags will be hoisted at party offices, party secretary general Shaikh Rafiq said.

## Off the Record



Twenty-year old student Agnieszka Zielinska from Poznan acknowledges the applause after being elected Miss Poland 1996 in Warsaw Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

## More than 30 times the annual salary of....

BEIJING: Kevin Costner, the Duchess of York and Michael Caine appeared Saturday at the opening of a Beijing club with a membership fee more than 30 times the annual salary of the typical Chinese worker, reports AP.

Sarah Ferguson and Costner visited the Great Wall before attending the club opening.

"China's one place I've always wanted to see," said Costner. "It's a big mystery here."

Hong Kong businessman David Tang formed the China Club in a huge mansion that was renovated at a cost of dollars 8 million.

The club's membership fee is 15,000 dollars with a 100 dollars monthly charge. The average income for city people in China was around 470 dollars last year.

## 3rd wave of US troops lands in Kuwait for war games

KUWAIT CITY, Sept 22: A third wave of US troops landed in Kuwait Saturday for war games near the Iraqi border, while an Iraqi opposition group charged that Baghdad launched an attack in southern Iraq, reports AFP.

About 300 US soldiers arrived in this oil-rich emirate Saturday afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Nickerson said.

Another 100 US soldiers were brought in earlier Saturday aboard two small planes, US Army Captain Timothy Raymond said, bringing the total to 1,500 troop reinforcements.

But while US troops prepared for manoeuvres in the desert at Udder about 50 kms from the Iraqi border, in the marshes of southern Iraq, Baghdad's military has launched a 'massive' attack on the Shiite Muslim population, according to the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, an Iraqi opposition group based in Iran.

Earlier in the week, the opposition coalition Iraqi National Congress said about 3,000 elite Iraqi Republican Guard troops were shifted from Baghdad to within 15 kms of the border with Kuwait.

Washington had previously confirmed that there had been troop movements in southern Iraq.

The US soldiers arrived at Camp Doha in Kuwait to retrieve propositioned military equipment and will be directed Saturday night or Sunday morning to the field to begin live-fire exercises, Nickerson told AFP.

AP adds: US warplanes roared off the deck of the Enterprise to patrol the skies over Iraq on Saturday, fully loaded to retaliate if they're fired on.

Commander Alex Hnarakis, chief of the aircraft carrier's squadron of F-14B Tomcat jet fighters, said pilots were scouting out potential targets in case Iraq fires at US planes again or takes other offensive action.

## 'Settlement expansion leads Jews, Arabs towards confrontation'

GAZA, Sept 22: Senior Palestinian officials warned Israel today that its expansion of Jewish settlements was leading Jews and Arabs towards "confrontation and disaster", reports Reuters.

"The continuation of settlements buries any hope for the peace process," chief Palestinian peace negotiator Saeb Erekat said after a weekly Palestinian cabinet meeting.

"They (Israel) should keep in mind that the continuation of such policies is taking both people, Israelis and Palestinians, back to the circle of confrontation and disaster," Erekat told reporters in self-named Gaza.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat convened his cabinet to discuss Jewish settlement expansion at the end of a

week in which news emerged that Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai had approved 1,800 new homes for Jews in the West Bank and that plans for 2,000 more homes were in the pipeline for Mordechai's approval.

"We made a clear decision for the complete refusal of expansion and thickening of settlements which the Israel government is taking," said Palestinian Minister of Public Works Azzam Al-Ahmed.

Erekat said he had sent a letter to his Israeli counterpart, Dan Shomron, asking Israel to revoke recent orders to build new Jewish homes in West Bank lands that Israel occupied in the 1967 Middle East war.

Palestinian warning on settlements were given moral sup-

port on Saturday by key Arab peace mediator Egypt.

In Cairo, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa condemned right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's settlement policies as "rejection and obstinacy."

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak told the German news magazine Der Spiegel in an interview released ahead of publication on Monday that Jewish settlement expansion would lead to a renewed Palestinian uprising.

"Planting time bombs such as the unfettered construction of Jewish settlements on the West Bank and ignoring treaties will lead to a new Intifada sooner or later," Mubarak said. "And this time it won't be limited to throwing stones."



Demonstrators, including those from Hong Kong and Macao, on Sunday march in Taipei's street, chanting "in defence of Diaoyu Islands," while unfurling banners condemning Japan's claim of the disputed island group in the East China Sea. Some 8,000 protesters took part in the march. The fishing resource rich Archipelago is claimed by Taiwan, Japan and China. — AFP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY

21 executed in China: Some 21 people have been executed in the eastern Chinese province of Zhejiang, a report said Sunday, indicating no let up in the government's crime crackdown, AFP reports from Beijing.

The death sentences were passed on Wednesday by Hangzhou intermediate court and the executions carried out immediately, the Zhejiang daily reported.

2 US soldiers held in Okinawa: Police in the southern Japanese island of Okinawa have arrested two US soldiers who allegedly assaulted a Japanese man in a pub brawl, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Michael Nail, 23, and Benjamin Becker, 20, both from the US air force stationed in Okinawa, were arrested as they ran from a pub Okinawa City, north of the prefectural capital of Naha, they said.

Blast kills woman in Armenia: A woman was killed and eight other people were wounded Saturday when a bomb exploded in southern Armenia, near the border with Georgia, the government said, AFP reports from Yerevan, Armenia.

The explosion in the border village of Bagratashen occurred close to a bridge linking the two former Soviet republics, according to the government's press service.

60,000 Kurds attend peace festival: More than 60,000 people turned out Saturday for a day of music, dance and political speeches at a "Peace Festival for Kurdistan" at a Cologne stadium, police said, AP reports from Cologne.

Police reported no problems during the event, which was advertised with the motto "For the ending of the war and a political solution in Kurdistan." More than 21,000 people have died since Kurdish rebels began fighting for autonomy in Turkey's southeast in 1984.

Presidential vote begins in Armenia: Armenians vote Sunday in a tight presidential race to elect a new leader for the former Soviet republic plagued by economic woes, AP reports from Yerevan, Armenia.

Four candidates are running, including Armenia's incumbent President Levon Ter-Petrosian, who the opposition faults for failing to resolve the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia and Azerbaijan have been at war since 1988 over the territory, which is in Azerbaijan but populated mainly by ethnic Armenians. A cease-fire has largely held for two years.

Polling begins in Greece: Greeks began voting in general elections yesterday in what was forecast to be a tight left-right contest between Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis's Pan Hellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) and the opposition New Democracy (ND) Party of Mitsotakis Evert, AFP reports from Athens.

The capital wore a relaxed and holiday air, with more than half a million citizens having left for their home towns and villages where they were registered to vote. For the first time in more than 50 years bars and clubs were open for business on election day, the government having scrapped an old ban on drinking alcohol in public during the vote.

## Election of new UN chief tops agenda of UNGA session

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 22: World leaders gather in New York on Monday for the UN General Assembly session which is to focus on terrorism and nuclear disarmament, but above all on electing the next UN chief, reports AFP.

US President Bill Clinton will be the first to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) on Tuesday, providing for an end to nuclear test explosions worldwide, which constitutes the ceremonial centre-piece of the week's events.

The pact has the explicit backing of all five declared nuclear powers -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- which will all sign the treaty on Tuesday, enshrining their political commitment to stop all explosive tests.

Nuclear threshold state Israel is to sign on Wednesday. But the other two threshold powers, India, which argues that laboratory testing by the five will continue, and Pakistan, which fears India's nuclear ambitions, are blocking the treaty's entry into force by refusing to sign.

US officials say that Clinton will also push for the General Assembly to provide an impetus toward an international convention to fight terrorist bombings.

They say the initiative arises from a June meeting of the Group of Seven industrialised nations, also attended by Russia and UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, which pledged to take concrete

measures to combat terrorism. The total lifting on UN sanctions against former Yugoslavia is also expected to be decided this week, following the September 14 elections in Bosnia which produced a three-headed presidency to be led by Alija Izetbegovic, a Muslim.

On the agenda in ministerial bilateral talks will be a territorial dispute between Japan, China and Taiwan, the incursion of a North Korean submarine into South Korea, and the crisis with Iraq triggered by Baghdad's offensive into Kurdish areas last month.

EU ministers and Iran could meanwhile reach a final agreement next Tuesday on lifting the six-year old death sentence proclaimed by Tehran

against British writer Salman Rushdie for allegedly blaspheming against Islam in his book "The Satanic Verses," diplomats said in Brussels.

And all eyes will be on Colombian President Ernesto Samper, who is due in New York after nearly four kilos (8.1 pounds) of heroin were discovered in the presidential plane that was to bring him here.

Samper, forced to take a commercial flight while investigators probed the incident, said the "rogue" act was designed to sully Colombia's image.

The United States has led moves to isolate Samper, who has rebuffed repeated calls for his resignation because of drug money allegations. But the main thrust of con-

versations between foreign ministers, led by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, is expected to be the fate of Boutros-Ghali.

Washington, which questions Boutros-Ghali's commitment to reform, has vowed to veto a second term for the 73-year-old Egyptian diplomat who is seeking reelection when his current mandate expires on December 31.

The General Assembly, whose session runs until December 17, appoints the UN chief on recommendation of the Security Council.

So far, Washington's partners on the 15-member Security Council have preferred to ignore US appeals to begin discussions on alternative candidates. But diplomats say that the

wall of support for Boutros-Ghali appears to be cracking in the face of the US insistence that its decision to veto the UN chief is irrevocable.

On UN envoy said it was time for Boutros-Ghali to step aside in the interests of the organisation, in the hope that Washington would finally pay its UN dues which would be a decisive step in overcoming the world's body's financial crisis.

"Let's not go for a bloodbath. Let's finish this early," he told AFP. "We've got to bring the United States back to the United Nations."

Alternative candidates are also beginning to surface, but none emerging at this stage are considered to be serious contenders.

## Thousand stage rally against Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Sept 22: One thousand demonstrators marched Saturday to denounce Russian President Boris Yeltsin on the third anniversary of the struggle between the head of state and the former parliament which ended in a bloodbath, reports AFP.

"We have come to stand up for the law," declared one protester, clad in a Cossack uniform, who in 1993 was among the "defenders" holed up in the building of the former parliament.

Between 150 and 1,000 were killed, according to different sources, in armed clashes between forces loyal to President Boris Yeltsin and rebels protesting against his suspen-

sion of parliament begun on September 21, 1993.

"I am here to pay homage to those who died for the constitution and stood up against this authoritarian regime, against the executioner who massacred the innocents," said Irian Sibova, a teacher of French.

"Nobody knows how many died. They speak of at least 1,000, some say even 1,500 or 2,000," she added.

On September 21, 1993, Yeltsin decided to end months of constant struggle with the Russian parliament inherited from Soviet times by ordering its suspension. The parliament immediately denounced the decision as unconstitutional.