

International

India calls for an end to all 'external interference'

Taliban duel with deposed govt troops on outskirts of Kabul

BRIEFLY

Egypt signs N-test ban treaty

Egypt signed Monday the nuclear test ban treaty, becoming the 124th signatory in one month, a UN spokeswoman said. AFP reports from United Nations.

Egypt's UN ambassador Nabil Elaraby, an expert on disarmament affairs, signed on his country's behalf, said spokeswoman Sylvana Foa. Israel signed on September 25 a day after the treaty was opened to signatures.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said that for the treaty to be ratified, Israel would have to take into account the attitudes of other countries in the region.

Chinese dissident leaves HK

Chinese dissident Wang Xizhe left Hong Kong for the United States overnight Monday, the government-run radio reported early yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Wang was put on a flight for California, it said. Wang, 47, arrived in the British territory on Saturday after going missing in China last week.

French newsmen on strike

French journalists went on strike yesterday over a plan to progressively scrap a 30 per cent rebate on income tax from which the profession has benefited for 60 years. AFP reports from Paris.

A demonstration was scheduled to take place Tuesday afternoon outside the National Assembly where parliament will open the debate on the 1997 budget which includes a reform of the tax system decided by Prime Minister Alain Juppe. Journalist unions say the removal of the tax rebate will mean the loss of a whole month's salary for some journalists.

14 rebels killed in Colombia

Soldiers killed at least 14 leftist guerrillas in two days of clashes, reports said Monday. AP reports from Bogota. Six rebels were killed by the army Saturday night near the town of Acacias, 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Bogota. They were carrying rifles with Venezuelan markings. Alfonso Ortiz, the local governor, told Caracol radio. They were members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, the largest and oldest rebel group. Colombia's military says it has been seizing Venezuelan weapons from FARC rebels for five years and periodically complains to the Caracas government.

Quake hits HK

A severe earthquake estimated at 7.0 on the Richter scale was recorded in the vicinity of Solomon Islands early yesterday. Hong Kong's royal observatory said. Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

The observatory said it determined the epicentre of the quake at about 560 km (350 miles) west-northwest of Honiara, the capital. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage. The Solomons are an island chain in the western Pacific Ocean north-east of Australia.

Landslide kills 5 troops in Turkey

A landslide buried 12 Turkish soldiers on Monday at a mountainside road near this southeastern city, killing five and injuring the others, the Anatolia news agency reported. AP reports from Diyarbakir.

The soldiers were trapped under rocks and debris as they were patrolling a rural area near the town of Egl, 50 kilometers (31 miles) northwest of here, the agency said. Four bodies were dug out from the heap of rocks but there was no hope for a fifth, crushed under the debris, Anatolia reported.

KABUL, Oct 15: Taliban fighters with heavy machine guns and rocket launchers duelled with former government troops north of Kabul on Tuesday as the battlefield moved nearer the Afghan capital, reports AP.

Kabul's new Taliban rulers were not allowing residents or reporters to move outside the city, but from the northern suburbs the sounds of battle could be heard.

The few travellers, who walked into Kabul from villages to the north, said there was a lot of fighting on the northern road, but the Taliban still controlled the important military air base at Baghram, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) away. Since being routed from Kabul by invading Taliban soldiers two weeks ago, troops loyal to former military chief Ahmed Shah Massoud have been waging an effective guerilla-type war north of the capital.

They have been hitting Taliban soldiers simultaneously at several places along the northern road, cutting the Taliban defence lines and trapping hun-

dreds of Taliban soldiers, say travellers arriving in the capital.

Most of the new arrivals in Kabul arrive by foot, many of them walking for hours to reach the city.

In the Pakistani city of Peshawar, a Taliban spokesman said reinforcements were being sent to the Afghan capital from elsewhere in Afghanistan.

Mullah Eid Mohammed Wahadyar said 4,000 Taliban fighters from throughout the country would arrive in the capital in the next two days when a counter attack would be launched against former government soldiers.

Amir Ali, who operates a rickety wooden tea house in north Kabul, said Taliban soldiers have been moving heavy equipment and soldiers to the frontline.

"What is left in Afghanistan except death and bombs and killing?" asked Ali. "We have nothing left. Even Ali has forgotten us."

development in Afghanistan at a joint session here, official sources said today.

President Feroz Ahmed Leghari, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and the Chief of the Army Staff, General Jahangir Karamat, met late Monday as fighting raged near the Afghan capital of Kabul between loyalists of ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani and the Taliban Islamic militia.

Rabbani government officials accuse Islamabad of providing military and financial support to the militia, born two years ago in Islamic schools in Pakistan. Both Islamabad and the Taliban leadership deny the charges.

The high-level meeting, lasting several hours, came three days ahead of President Leghari's scheduled trip to the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan.

No official statement was issued after Monday's session.

The Muslim Daily newspaper said the meeting included in-depth discussions on internal security and political and economic implications of the fast changing scenario in

Afghanistan.

The meeting, which was briefed on Masood's offensive and recapture of some key areas in the north by his forces, "endorsed" Pakistan's policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, it said.

The high-level meeting, which was also attended by Foreign Secretary Najmuddin Shaikh, as well as intelligence and Interior Ministry officials, reiterated Pakistan's call for the establishment of a broad-based government in Kabul through an intra-Afghan dialogue, the paper said.

Meanwhile, India on Monday called for an end to all "external interference" in Afghanistan and said it would reopen its embassy in Kabul after fighting in the war-torn country ends.

"We are strongly opposed to any outside interference in Afghanistan" External Affairs Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said, without elaborating.

India accuses Pakistan of supporting the Taliban fundamentalist militia which has put the Afghan government of

ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani on the run after attacking Kabul 18 days ago. Pakistan has denied supporting the hardline Taliban faction, but is seen to have a close rapport with the religious militia.

"India believes in a united and independent Afghanistan, and we are hopeful of the restoration of peace," Gujral said on his return from a trip to the United States and Canada.

The minister said India was worried by the continued violence and called on the Afghan parties locked in battle in Afghanistan's north to resolve differences through "peaceful dialogue."

India, which shut its embassy in Kabul just before the Taliban takeover, will re-open the mission but only after the situation improved in the country's capital, the foreign minister added.

India continues to recognise Rabbani's deposed government and condemns the Taliban militia for imposing "a harsh and fundamentalist ideology" on Afghanistan. New Delhi has said it is ready to help bring peace to that country.



US Supermodel Cindy Crawford holds hands with an unidentified United Arab Emirates national on a visit to a jewellery boutique at a shopping mall in Dubai on Monday to promote a new Omega watch. — AFP/UNB photo



An Afghan boy Habib Ullah (L) comforts his father by holding his amputated leg at a hospital in Kabul, on Monday. His father's leg was amputated after stepping on an anti-personal mine in the outskirts of Kabul. — AFP/UNB photo

Troops pullout from Hebron Israeli, PA leaders closer to agreement

JERUSALEM, Oct 15: Israel and the Palestinians are moving closer to an agreement on Israel's long-delayed withdrawal from the last major West Bank city it occupies, and both sides say a summit of their leaders is imminent, reports AP.

Officials were trying to arrange a meeting between Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with US envoy Dennis Ross shuttling between the two leaders Monday night.

Both sides warned of a possible last-minute snag, but the atmosphere appeared markedly improved over the past week's acrimony. Palestinians walked out of peace talks last week after Israel demanded better security for settlers in Hebron before it withdraws troops from the West Bank town as promised. They returned to the table the following day.

Foreign Minister David Levy said agreement on Hebron was expected within days.

Agreement on Hebron would go a long way toward rescuing the Mideast peace effort from the crisis brought on by Islamic militants' suicide bombings in Israel last winter, the May election of conservative Netanyahu and last month's deadly gun battles between Israeli and Palestinian forces.

Arafat, who was in Jordan, planned to return to the West Bank town of Jericho on Tuesday with Jordan's King Hussein. Palestinian officials said a meeting with Netanyahu was possible, but an Israeli official said:

Lebed to head commission for Chechnya's post-war revival

MOSCOW, Oct 15: President Boris Yeltsin on Monday appointed national security chief Alexander Lebed to head up a commission to handle Chechnya's postwar revival, reports AP.

The commission was called for in the agreement Lebed brokered in August with Chechen separatists to end the war. It is responsible for all aspects of a peace settlement, including troop withdrawal and economic restoration.

The press service did not say when the commission would hold its first session.

The appointment came on the eve of closed-door hearings on Chechnya in the State Duma, the lower house of parliament, where Lebed was expected to testify.

Lebed demanded the hearings after many lawmakers in the largely hard-line Duma earlier this month assailed the peace agreement and Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov said it amounted to "high treason."

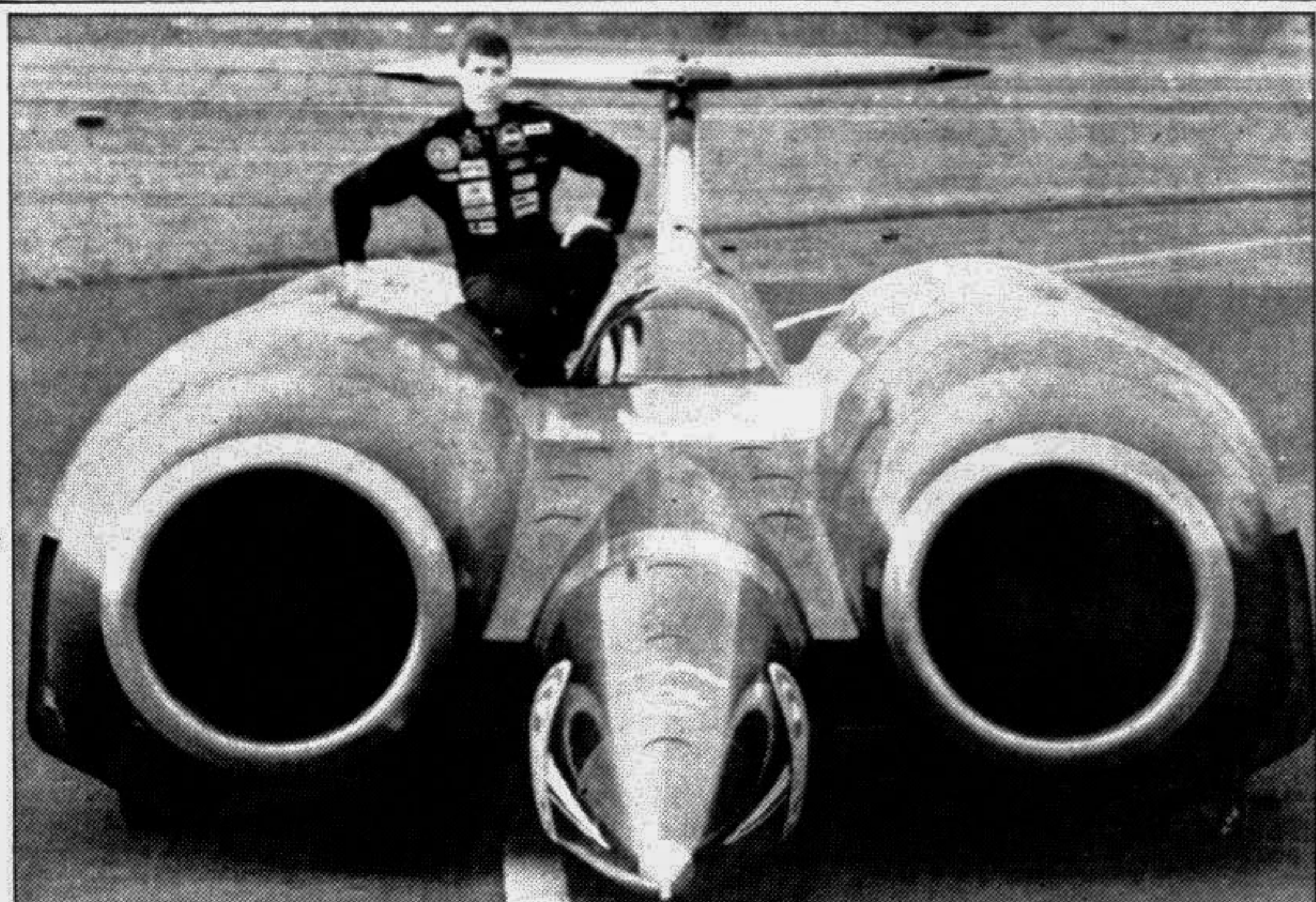
PUK rebels claim advance on Irbil

BAGHDAD, Oct 15: The US and Iraqi governments have found themselves in the curious position of agreeing on something. The leading Kurds should settle their differences to keep the conflict from spreading, reports AP.

New fighting is taking place in the same area where Iraqi troops intervened in late August, triggering an American missile attack on Saddam Hussein's forces in southern Iraq. In the latest battles, the Kurds fighters who seized large swathes of territory with Iraqi backing now appear to be losing ground.

Iraq, which claims Iranian backing, has warned Iran to keep out of the latest fighting. The United States says both Iraq and Iran should stay out of the new fighting.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which is battling a Kurdish faction allied with Saddam, said Monday that it was marching closer to Irbil, northern Iraq's principal city. However, there was no indication that PUK fighter planned an assault on the city — which is fortified by Iraqi tanks — or that Iraq was planning to intercede.



Squadron Leader Andrew Green sits on the Thrust SSC super car he drives before it's first public test run at Farnborough Airfield, West of London, on Monday. Andrew Green hopes to smash the world speed record in the Thrust SSC, by going over 850 miles per hour. — AFP/UNB photo

Netanyahu govt survives no-confidence motion

JERUSALEM, Oct 15: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's beleaguered government survived a no-confidence motion Monday from opposition parties accusing him of destroying the peace process with the Arabs, reports AP.

"We express no-confidence in Netanyahu because he has no peace policy as we understand it," said Labour Party lawmaker David Libal, who was justice minister in the previous government that made peace with the Palestinians and Jordan.

Netanyahu survived by a 55-49 vote with two abstentions. Foreign Minister David Levy, heckled repeatedly by opposition lawmakers, blamed Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority for the clashes last month in which 79 people died.

The shooting erupted during Palestinian rioting over Israel's opening of an archaeological tunnel near Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites. It capped months of growing Palestinian anger over Netanyahu's reluctance to implement outstanding aspects of the Israel-PLO accords, such as the delayed pullout from He-

bron. Levy said that "weapons being aimed against our soldiers cannot be justified under any circumstances."

"Those who did that harmed the peace process, undermined the trust of the citizens of this country regardless of their political views," Levy said. "What is going to happen in the future? Will we see the same outburst of violence every time we cannot reach agreement? Can we accept this?"

"You should be ashamed of yourself!" shouted Abdel-Wahab Daraoushe, an Israeli-Arab lawmaker.

Netanyahu, who as opposition leader fought against the autonomy accords with the PLO, defeated peacemaker Shimon Peres by less than one percentage point in the May election.

Although he is backed by a relatively comfortable majority of 68 out of the 120 Knesset members, his coalition is a volatile mix that includes extreme nationalists as well as centrists who favor far-reaching compromise with the Arabs.

Off the Record

Unique way to improve test scores!

WASHINGTON: Eating breakfast close to test time may help students improve their test scores, according to study published in the October issue of the archives of pediatrics and adolescent medicine, reports AFP.

Nachum Vaisman, of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, reported that children who ate a half-hour before taking an academic test had significantly better test scores than those who had eaten two hours earlier or had skipped breakfast altogether.

"These differences may indicate the importance of timing or the possible importance of breakfast content in these processes, the researchers wrote, adding that a high level of glucose in the blood may explain the results of the study.

The research was conducted on 569 children between the ages of 11 and 13.

Chinese woman sprouted horns

HONG KONG: A 99-year-old woman in eastern China has sprouted horns, a Chinese news agency said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Horns started growing on Zhang Taoqiang's head after she developed a lump in her forehead in 1992 and they grew to 2.5 millimeters, the Hong Kong branch of China news service said.

One horn disappeared a year ago, but a replacement appeared and Zhang, who lives with her son in Shengdang in Zhejiang province, has suffered no illness, the report said.

It's not a secret ballot

WASHINGTON: Americans can vote by fax from anywhere in the world in the November 5 election, but it's no longer a secret ballot if they do, reports AP.

For the millions of potential voters who will not be at home on Election Day, the Federal Voting Assistance Program has set up an electronic transmission service.

It has also sent out a reminder to Americans who want to use it that they must submit with their ballot an official waiver of secrecy.

The waiver form varies from one US state to another. If the voter does not know the proper form, he or she can write on the cover sheet: "By faxing this ballot, I hereby waive my right to a secret ballot."

The statement should be signed and dated. Copies of the ballot should also be sent by mail to local election boards in the United States.

US embassies and consulates will help voters get their ballots. The FVAP has also set up a system of toll-free telephone numbers in many countries where more information is available.

Commons Speaker calls for probe British MPs take money for planted questions in House

LONDON, Oct 15: The House of Commons Speaker called Monday for an investigation into allegations that some lawmakers accepted payments from businessmen for asking planted questions in the House, reports AP.

Speaker Betty Boothroyd told the Commons: "Very serious allegations have been widely made about the conduct of a number of members. Indeed, the reputation of the House as a whole has been called into question."

The accusations date back to 1994 when lawmaker Neil Hamilton resigned as Corporate Affairs Minister in Prime Minister John Major's Conservative government. He quit following allegations by Mohamed Al Fayed, Egyptian-born owner of the London department store Harrods, that he gave Hamilton

cash and favours for asking planted questions aimed at embarrassing a business rival.

Fresh accusations concerning Hamilton and other lawmakers, most of them members of Major's governing Conservative Party, surfaced this month in The Guardian and other London newspapers.

A total of 11 ministers have quit Major's administration in the last four years over sexual or financial scandals. The so-called sleaze factor has harmed the government, which trails the opposition Labour party by around 27 points in opinion polls ahead of the next national election, which must be held by next April.

"I hope the (Commons) Committee on Standards and Privileges will find it possible to make an early special report to the House."

Cong (I) suffers setback, loses seat in by-polls

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: India's Congress (I) Party, dogged by a string of corruption scandals, suffered further humiliation here today by losing the parliamentary seat formerly held by PV Narasimha Rao, reports AFP.

Officials announced that the regional Telugu Desam Party, a member of India's ruling United Front Alliance, had taken the Nandayal seat, in the former prime minister's southern home state of Andhra Pradesh, in by-elections held Friday.

Desam nominee Bohooma Nagi Reddy defeated Ranganadh Naidu of the Congress by 441,000 votes.

The result was interpreted as a symbolic rebuff of both Rao and his party.

Rao, who remains in charge of the Congress parliamentary wing, was first elected to parliament from Nandayal in 1991 by about half a million votes.

He was re-elected from there in May, but gave up the seat after he was also elected in another constituency.

Rao has been under intense pressure since he lost prime minister ship after the April-May general elections and faces possible arrest in two cases relating to forgery and fraud.

The Congress, however, had the consolation of wresting back a parliamentary seat in the adjoining state of Orissa from Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's centrist party, but was routed by Hindu nationalists in a third seat in the western state of Gujarat.

The balloting in Orissa and Gujarat also took place Friday. The Congress, Deve Gowda's ruling United Front and Hindu nationalists shared the honours evenly in by-elections to 66 state assembly seats which also took place Friday across 15 of the country's 25 states.

Orphan children doing work of women sent home by Taliban

KABUL, Oct 15: Parwaneh is barely 7 years old, but she has a lot of grown-up chores to do at the orphanage in the beleaguered Afghan capital, report AP.

Since the arrival of the Taliban religious army in Kabul more than two weeks ago, the older of the 500 children left at the orphanage have had to take care of the younger ones.

The women who once fed and cared for them are kept away by the new rulers, whose strict version of Islam won't let women work outside the home.

With a chubby 2-year-old propped on her tiny hip, Parwaneh carefully descended the dirty cement stairs to a communal bathing area where she scrubbed her new charge.

"I have to take care of the babies, because we have no one to take care of them", she said. Life in Kabul has changed

drastically since the Taliban took over on September 27. In addition to being kept from work, women have been forced to cover themselves from head to toe. Schools for girls have been closed and men, forced to wear beards, have been dragged off the streets for prayers.

The Red Cross is negotiating with the Taliban, who control roughly two-thirds of Afghanistan, to let women return to work in the capital.

Until then, the children without parents will take care of themselves.

Parwaneh shares her dormitory-style room at the four-story brick orphanage with about a dozen other girls between 11 and 16 years old.

Lunch of broth and bread is served in a large, dark dining hall, where the only light comes from a tiny window high above the old wooden tables and benches.

On the wall outside, children using black chalk have drawn a helicopter dropping bombs. Nearby, there is a child's drawing of a Kalashnikov rifle next to a tank. There is nothing more.

"Everything is in disarray," said Mirza Mir Bhaluli, the deputy director of the orphanage, which was home to about 900 children before the Taliban arrived.

"I don't know what to do. We need women to take care of these children", he said. Women made up more than 85 per cent of his staff.

But the women of Kabul are afraid for the Taliban fighters have been uncompromising. And the Taliban doesn't seem to realize that education for boys will also suffer in Kabul, where 70 per cent of the teachers were women.

"We don't even have teachers for these children," Bhaluli said.

About 400 orphans were removed after the Taliban victory by relatives who had left them there, hoping the state could give them what they couldn't — most notably an education.

Some of their guardians were so unhappy with the conditions that they decided they could care for these children better than we could," said Bhaluli.

One elderly woman, who has cared for the orphans through the worst of the fighting in the Afghan capital, has defied the Taliban edict.

"I am afraid of no one, she said, stroking the head of a tiny boy. "How will I answer to God if I leave these small children who have no one? They can't run away. They are helpless."

Civilian use of N-energy Canada will resume cooperation with India

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Canada is to resume cooperating with India on the civilian use of nuclear energy, frozen 22 years ago when New Delhi tested a nuclear device, External Affairs Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said Monday, reports AFP.

Gujral told reporters that a former Canadian minister — whom he did not name — will talk with officials in India's atomic energy establishments on cooperation in "non-weapons" sectors.

The minister gave no further details of the agreement with Canada and Canadian officials were not immediately available for comment or confirmation.

India's first nuclear power plant was made in the mid-1960s with technology given by Canada, which cut off supplies to the project in western state of

Maharashtra after India exploded a nuclear bomb in 1974.

"This development belies the fears that India will be isolated following its refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)," the Foreign Minister said on his return from a trip to Canada and the United States.

He described as a "media-myth" the worries that India could be isolated due to its refusal to endorse the nuclear test ban treaty and allow its unambiguous adoption in the United Nations General Assembly last month.

"I got an opportunity to present India's viewpoints on the CTBT during bilateral talks with as many as 79 foreign ministers on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly," he said.