

Lawmakers vote to elect new president in India

NEW DELHI, July 14: State and federal legislators voted Monday for a new Indian president, a post expected to go for the first time to a low-caste politician. Vice President KR Narayanan, rather than to a tough-talking former bureaucrat — the other contestant, reports AP.

At the daylong vote at New Delhi's red sandstone Parliament Building and in 27 state capitals, most of the nearly 5,000 lawmakers are expected to back Narayanan, a Congress Party politician, who received endorsement from many other parties.

Former chief election commissioner, TN Seshan, aided for cleaning up India's election system and reducing vote fraud, received the backing of only a small right-wing group despite months of campaigning.

Narayanan, the front-runner, was born in a village in southern Indian state of Kerala and comes from the untouchable caste.

One of the few politicians unainted by scandal, Narayanan is a mild-mannered, self-effacing former university professor, diplomat and legislator. Although he has been in the Congress Party, he is liked by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and most other leaders of India's governing United Front coalition.

Results from the vote are expected late Thursday when the counting is scheduled. The new president has to be installed before July 24.

When the race for a successor to President Shanker Dayal Sharma was announced, it attracted a wide assortment of contestants, including a granddaughter of India's independence leader, Mohandas Gandhi.

But as it became clear that the major political parties were backing the former diplomat-turned politician, most of them dropped out of the race. Some were disqualified from contesting because they did not have

the necessary endorsement from 100 legislators.

Although the presidency is largely a powerless ceremonial post, it has assumed importance as India grappled with unstable governing coalitions.

Because the president can make or break governments, seldom in India's 50 years as a republic has the top office been so important. When no single party commands a parliamentary majority, the president has discretion in deciding who should lead the next government. The president also has the power to dismiss a government not deemed stable.

PTI adds: Polling for the eleventh presidential election began this morning at Parliament House and at 27 centres across the country.

Among the first to vote at the Parliament House were the former Speaker Shivraj Patil, the former finance minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, the Chief Whip of Congress in Lok Sabha,

Santosh Mohan Deb and Congress MP, Madhavrao Scindia. At least 50 MPs had exercised their franchise in the first 45 minutes.

Polling which began at 1000 hours would continue till 1700 hours. Counting of votes will be taken up at the Parliament House on July 17.

Polling for the country's highest office also started at the 25 state capitals and at the Assemblies of Union Territories (UTs) of Delhi and Pondicherry.

The 4,848 strong electoral college comprises 543 elected members of the Lok Sabha, 233 members of the Rajya Sabha and 4,062 MLAs.

While, the value of each vote of an MP is 708, the vote value of MLAs on the basis of proportional representation varies from state to state.

The five-year term of the President Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma expires on July 27. Narayanan is expected to take oath of the highest office the next day.

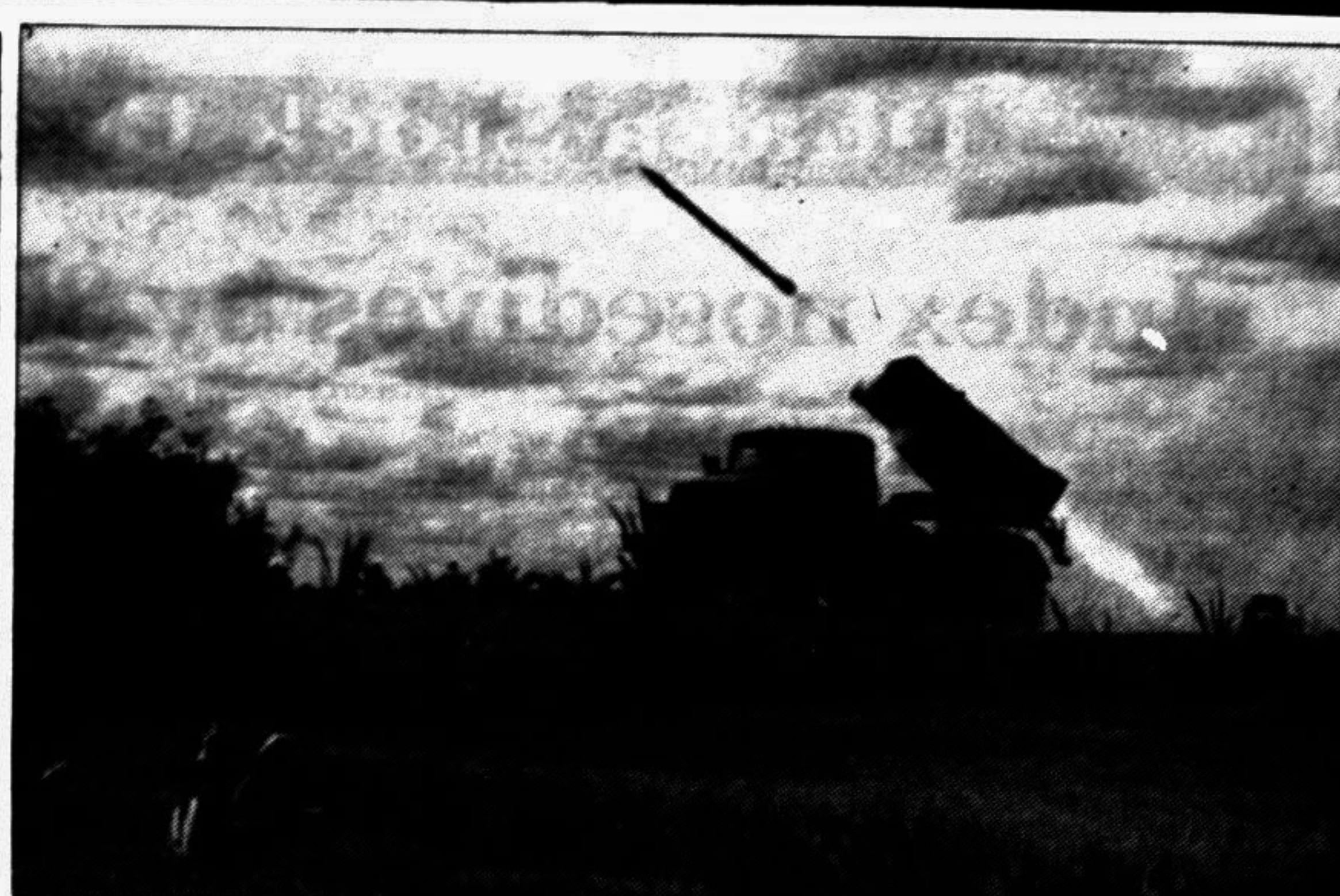
Nigerian troops clash with Sierra Leone army

FREETOWN, July 14: Nigerian troops and soldiers loyal to Sierra Leone's military rulers fought with heavy weapons south of the capital Freetown on Sunday sending civilians fleeing from their homes, witnesses said, reports Reuter.

The cause of the clash at Djui, which began late on Saturday 15 miles (24 km) south-east of the city near Hastings Airport was not immediately clear, but a spokesman for the military junta installed after a may 25 coup blamed the Nigerians.

Residents said crossfire between Nigerian troops at a nearby base and the newly constituted people's army — mad up of soldiers who backed the coup and their rebel allies — had killed at least eight civilians.

"The Nigerians started attacking our men on the ground," the junta's spokesman Allieu Kamara, told British Broadcasting Corporation radio, "the only thing that can bring this fight under control is for the international world to tell Nigeria to get out of our territory."



Forces loyal to Second Prime Minister Hun Sen launch a rocket out of a Russian-made BM-21 multiple rocket launcher (also known as Stalin's organ) positioned Sunday on National Route 6, some 35 kilometres west of the town of Siem Reap, best known for the nearby Angkor temple complex. Hun Sen's forces are rapidly pushing forces loyal to ousted First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh and, reportedly, Khmer Rouge troops away from Siem Reap town towards Banteay Meanchey province to the west and Thai border regions to the north. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Road mishap kills 10 in India: At least ten people including four children, were killed and 14 injured on Sunday in a collision between a Haryana Roadways bus and a truck near Panipat, a district official said, PTI reports from Panipat.

Three of the injured have been admitted to the Rohtak Medical College Hospital where their condition was stated to be serious, Deputy Commissioner Jaiwanti Sheokand said. The mishap occurred on Asandh Road, about 10 km from here, the Deputy Commissioner, who visited the spot, said.

36 killed in China bldg collapse: A five-storey residential building in China's eastern Zhejiang province collapsed during the weekend, killing 36 people and injuring three others, a news paper reported yesterday, AFP reports from Shanghai.

The Xinmin Evening News reported that the building, which was completed in 1995 and inhabited by 30 households, toppled over with little warning. Authorities are still investigating the reasons for the collapse, the report said.

Manila police kill 6 kidnapers: Police killed six suspected kidnapers in a clash early Monday in a residential area just outside Manila's international airport, AP reports from Manila.

A group of police, responding to a tip, ordered occupants of a car that was suspiciously cruising the streets inside Multinational Village in suburban Paranaque to stop for inspection, said investigator Raden Amora. But before the officers could approach the car, the occupants opened fire, hitting the officers' vehicle. Police retaliated by peppering the other vehicle with automatic weapons fire.

Mandela arrives in Jakarta: President Nelson Mandela arrived in Jakarta for a three-day official visit yesterday which Pretoria has said underscored the importance of south-east Asia for South Africa, AFP reports from Jakarta.

PA deploys police in Hebron PLO, Israel agree on airport in Gaza Strip

GAZA, July 14: Israel and the PLO have agreed on takeoff and landing procedures and a name for an airport in the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian negotiator said today, reports Reuter.

Fayez Zidan, head of the Palestinian Civil Aviation Authority, said after talks on Sunday with Israeli negotiator Shaul Mofaz that security and customs issues still needed to be resolved.

"The Israeli side promised to present written proposals before the end of the week," he told Reuters.

Noting that "some progress" had been made, Zidan said: "We consecrated the name 'Gaza International Airport' and also agreed on procedures for take-offs and landings."

He said Israel for the first time presented a position paper on aviation issues, agreeing to let Palestinians import equipment for the airport from Spain and Germany, except for radar whose purchase is still under negotiation.

"We disagreed on other points, such as who is going to sign aviation agreements with other countries," Zidan said.

The meeting followed talks last week between Israeli Defence Chief Yitzhak Mordechai and Palestinian Cabinet Minister Nabil Shaath on opening the airport, a Gaza sea port and a corridor between the Strip and the West Bank.

AFP adds: Around 200 Palestinian police deployed in the centre of Hebron today after a late night meeting with Israeli troops aimed at quelling four weeks of rioting, witnesses said.

The police lined up on the dividing line between the Palestinian and Israeli-controlled zones of the West Bank city, where almost daily clashes have injured some 300 people in the past month, said the sources.

It was the first time Palestinian police have intervened to stop the violence, and followed a warning from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday that unless the Palestinians reined in the violence they would pay a heavy price.

Labour gov plans to set up 'people's panel' to test public reaction

LONDON, July 14: Britain's Labour government is planning to set up a 5,000-strong 'people's panel' to test public reaction to the government's policies and to the performance of public services, reports Xinhua.

British government officials were quoted by local press reports as saying that the initiative, the first in the world, is expected to be fully operational by the end of this year.

Government ministers agreed that the brand-new project was aimed at keeping the government in tune with public opinion between elections.

Peter Kilfoyle, the Public Service Minister, said that it was also an important way of addressing the gulf between politicians and voters.

"Too often the assumption is made that Whitehall knows best. We think it is a good idea to consult people regularly rather than waiting until once every five years to find out if we are right," Kilfoyle said.

Under the Cabinet office proposals, members of the panel would be asked their opinions on the level and quality of service provided by utility companies — gas, water and electricity — and of public transport.

Hun Sen may withdraw membership plea ASEAN accused of meddling in Cambodia's affairs

BARAY DISTRICT, Cambodia, July 14: Cambodia's coup leader Hun Sen lashed out Monday at a trade group of Southeast Asian nations that had stalled his nation's membership, accusing it of meddling in Cambodia's affairs, reports AP.

Hun Sen said his new government would withdraw its request for membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, which decided last week to delay Cambodia's entry into the regional economic bloc.

The decision was a response to Hun Sen's bloody coup d'etat that left dozens dead in the capital of Phnom Penh and deposed his rival co-premier.

"If ASEAN continues to interfere in the internal affairs of Cambodia, I want to withdraw from ASEAN," Hun Sen said during a speech at a temple opening ceremony in Kompong Thom province north of the capital.

The move is likely to lead to further isolation for Cambodia, which within days of the coup has faced economic sanctions and condemnation from a growing number of countries.

In addition to ASEAN's punitive move, the United States, Japan and Germany froze their aid to Cambodia.

Hun Sen also used his public appearance Monday to step up his rhetoric against the deposed former First Premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

He called Ranariddh a "terrorist" and accused him of having direct links to organised crime in Taiwan.

"I repeatedly propose to the Cambodian courts to build a case and try Ranariddh. I want to send an arrest warrant overseas for him," Hun Sen said.

He went to great lengths during the speech to differentiate Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party from the prince's actions, saying the party still had a legitimate role in national politics.

"One must clearly see that Ranariddh's actions were purely individual and not that of FUNCINPEC party," he said.

Ranariddh traveled to France one day before the July 5 coup and has since been trying to lobby support against Hun Sen's actions.

Stepping up his charges against Ranariddh, Hun Sen claimed a corrupt Taiwanese army general had supplied the prince's top military chief with financing to build up a militia force.

Fighting spreads in North

AFP adds: Fighting raged in northern Oddar Meanchey province today after troops backing Cambodian strongman Hun Sen pushed royalist forces out of their former stronghold in Seim Reap province, military sources said.

Troops loyal to Second Prime Minister Hun Sen were locked in combat with heavy weapons with soldiers backing royal First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh at the strategic town of Samrong, the sources said.

Prince Ranariddh's loyalist FUNCINPEC troops retreated to Samrong after losing more than 40 kilometers (25 miles) of ground to forces of Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) in Seim Reap Sunday.

'Modern' Indians shying away from Gandhi's philosophy?

NEW DELHI, July 14: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi would have despaired had he survived to see India's 50th year of independence, according to his great grandson, reports AFP.

The father of the nation would have seen India 1997 as a personal betrayal, according to Tushar Gandhi.

Sadly, however, the memory of the man they once called "Bapu" (father) and Mahatma (great soul) and who undermined an empire armed only with a loincloth, a spinning wheel and at the time unique commitment to non-violence, now appears to leave many Indians cold.

Tushar, a graphics designer from Bombay, believes his great grandfather, ironically, would have campaigned as actively against today's Indian leaders as he did against the British colonialists in 1947.

Then, the issue was independence. Today it would be "The total lack or decay of values in public and political life."

Tushar says that Gandhi would have argued modern Indians, hero-worshipping "swindlers, criminals and crooks," have got the leaders they deserve, adding, "he would have spent all his energy awakening and educating people.

Gandhi was already at loggerheads with Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress movement in 1947, his vision of an agrarian, self-sufficient utopia free of Western influence ridiculed by his colleagues.

Those ideas today — in a country which has put satellites into space, developed a nuclear capability and begun developing and economy of massive proportions — are seen as the prescriptions of a crank.

Tushar concedes: "For the second generation of Indians who grew up after independence Gandhi is only a fable or a figure in history text books, who is assigned marks at examinations.

"I feel Gandhi will be either forgotten in India or be reduced to being a cult figure, nobody here wants to debate and discuss his philosophy."

Gandhi's critics today include Indian nationalists — who accuse him of having been pro-Muslim — oppressed low-caste Hindus — who blame him for preaching them patience rather than revolution — and gay activists.

In the back garden of a house in a street known as Tees January Marg in commemoration of the incident, his final

Demonstrators protest killings, block commuter rail tracks in Bombay

BOMBAY, July 14: Demonstrators protesting the deaths of low-caste Indians during riots blocked commuter rail tracks in Bombay Monday, keeping thousands of office workers from their jobs in the country's financial hub, reports AP.

Bombay was to have been exempt from the strike called for the rest of Maharashtra state by opposition political parties. But the atmosphere was tense in the city's eastern slums, where police shot and killed at least 12 people in an attempt to quell rioting Friday and Saturday.

In addition to laying on tracks to stop commuter trains from passing through their neighborhoods, slum dwellers threw stones at police and blocked a stretch of highway. No injuries were reported by midmorning.

Police also were stoned Sunday, when some 8,000 people attended the cremation of 10 people shot by police Friday.

The rioting broke out when residents of a shantytown rioted after finding the statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar — the messiah of low-caste people — draped in a garland of shoes, considered a vulgar insult in India. Police opened fire on the crowd, killing eight adults and two children.

Two other people died in continued rioting Saturday.

Sporadic class-related violence also was reported in four other Maharashtra state cities Sunday. Bombay is the state capital.

While no one has claimed responsibility for desecrating Ambedkar's bust, the slum had been the site of clashes between low-caste Indians and members of the right-wing Shiv Sena party.

India has thousands of Hindu castes that signify a person's traditional occupation status and even hometown. Although caste discrimination is now against the law, prejudice continues, and low-caste Indians are likely to be poor, uneducated and underemployed.

Upper caste, right-wing Hindus have objected to increasing demands from the lower classes for rights and opportunities, which they see as a challenge to their own position and to their understanding of religious doctrine.

Ambedkar, the poor people's hero, was born to a class so low as to be without caste. He campaigned alongside Mohandas Gandhi for India's independence from Britain, and to raise the status of his class, once called "untouchables" but now referred to as Dalits.

Serbs bury another suspect killed during arrest effort

Bosnian Serb sentenced to 20 yrs jail for war crimes

THE HAGUE, July 14: The UN war crimes tribunal today sentenced Dusko Tadic, a Bosnian Serb convicted of wartime atrocities, to 20 years in prison, reports APF.

Prosecutors had sought a life term for the 41-year-old Serb who was convicted in May of war crimes. He had served as a guard at a Serb-run detention camp.

Tadic was arrested in February 1994 in Munich by German police and transferred to the city in April 1995.

In the ruling on May 7, the court found him guilty on 11 counts of war crimes but found that other charges were not applicable under international law.

Earlier AP says: For the first time since the aftermath of World War II, an international court sentences a war criminal convicted after a full-length trial.

Bosnian Serb Dusan Tadic was found guilty May 7 of five war crimes and six crimes against humanity for atrocities including torturing and killing his non-Serb former neighbors in northwest Bosnia in 1992.

He maintains his innocence and has appealed the conviction.

Many of those targeted by Tadic, a karate expert and former cafe owner with no military rank, were his friends and neighbors.

Prijedor was at the scene of last Thursday's raids by British troops serving with the 30,000 strong NATO-led peace stabilization force in Bosnia in which one indicted suspect was arrested and another killed.

Meanwhile, carrying candles and portraits of former leader Radovan Karadzic, Bosnian Serbs gave a hero's funeral Sunday to another war crimes suspect — one killed resisting arrest by NATO.

About 2,000 people attended the funeral in the northwest town of Prijedor for Simo Drljaca, the 50-year-old former police chief.

A few hours after the funeral, an explosion occurred outside the UN police headquarters in Zvornik in a Serb-controlled area of eastern Bosnia on the Yugoslav border, the British Broadcasting Corp. reported.

Few details were available on the explosion. The Bosnian Serb news agency said a UN vehicle was blown up.



Layda Sansores (R), former gubernatorial candidate for the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), salutes the crowd Sunday in Campeche on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, during a protest rally demanding the invalidation of the July 6 elections because of fraud. Some 30,000 PRD and National Action Party supporters demonstrated against the victory in the gubernatorial race by Antonio Gonzalez Curi of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. — AFP/UNB photo

37 crewman handed over to ICRC 2 LTTE boats guarding hijacked DPRK ship destroyed

COLOMBO, July 14: Sri Lankan Navy gun boats opened fire and sank two Tamil guerrilla vessels guarding a North Korean merchant ship which the rebels hijacked, the Defence Ministry here said today, reports APF.

The navy opened fire on four boats of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) near the MV Morang Bong which the rebels seized six days ago off the island's northern coast.

"Naval craft engaged the LTTE boats and destroyed one terrorist boat" the ministry said in a statement. It said another Tiger boat was destroyed in a second confrontation in the same area Sunday.

There were no immediate reports of rebel casualties.

One crewman of the North Korean ship was shot dead by the LTTE when they hijacked the ship. The remaining 37 crew members were released to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on Saturday.

ICRC officials here said the rebels have not decided whether they will release the ship which is now anchored near the rebel stronghold of Mullaitivu in the island's north-east.

Meanwhile, a Greek-registered ship, the MV Ethina which was hit by a sea mine outside the northeastern port of Trincomalee, local officials said.

They said the cargo of 52,000 tonnes of wheat brought on board the craft had been unloaded in Trincomalee. Despite the hole in the hull the ship could be salvaged, officials said.

Xinhua adds: Sri Lanka's rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have stepped up attacks in the east of the island country.

According to reports reaching here today, the rebels mounted twin attacks Sunday, killing a policeman and a civilian and wounding four police constables at Ampara, and wounding four police constables and wounding a home guard and three civilians at Valachena in the same district.

At the Ampara check point, the rebels had removed a radio transmitter and had set fire to the check point, the reports said.

Suu Kyi's party denounces terrorism in Myanmar

YANGON, July 14: The embattled political party of Myanmar pro-democracy campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi denounced terrorism on Monday and pledged to fight against it, reports AP.

The party's statement comes less than a month after the chief of Myanmar's military intelligence accused the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner of accepting money from what he called terrorist groups.

"The National League for Democracy strongly condemns any act of terrorism. It will neither encourage nor support terrorism or will ever use such means," the statement said.

"We pledge to efface terrorism from our country together with the people."

Suu Kyi and her party adhere to a philosophy of nonviolence in their efforts to bring democracy to Myanmar, which has been ruled by the military since 1962.

In a news conference in June, Gen Khin Nyunt, the head of the Myanmar military intelligence, charged that Suu Kyi had accepted 85,000 dollars from representatives of American labour and pro-democracy groups funded by the US government.

He alleged those groups were involved in plots to bomb embassies and the homes of government leaders in Yangon, the Myanmar capital.

Suu Kyi has denied the charge. Washington has denied that the groups it funds are engaged in terrorist activities.

The US government has accused the Myanmar government of trying to deflect attention from its own human rights abuses.

Although the statement from the National League for Democracy or NLD, was released Monday, it was dated July 19, which will be the 50th anniversary of Martyr's Day in Myanmar.

It was on that day in 1947 that Suu Kyi's father, Myanmar's independence hero Aung San, and six of his Cabinet ministers were assassinated by a political rival.

Aung San advocated democracy for his country, but his death plunged Myanmar into a period of instability and insurgencies that culminated in the 1962 military coup.

Referring to the assassination of Aung San, the statement said: "The NLD will never forget the heinous act of terrorism. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Martyr's Day, we strongly urge that political problems be resolved through political means and not by force."

Suu Kyi has repeatedly called for a dialogue with Myanmar's military rulers since her release from six years of house arrest in July 1995.

But the generals have spurned her and conducted mass arrests of NLD members and supporters in an attempt to break the democratic movement.

"We will pay our respects to the fallen leaders by continuing with our efforts to achieve democracy and human rights in the country," the party statement said.