

Proposed Israel-Jordan dam raising tension in ME

JERUSALEM, Aug 27: A dam meant to promote peace between Israel and Jordan is instead raising tensions between the Middle Eastern neighbours because of Israel's insistence to build the joint project on disputed territory claimed by Syria, reports AP.

Jordan has said building the dam under Israel's current plan is out of the question. Jordan, which borders Syria, fears the project could jeopardise the chances of peace between Israel and Syria.

However, Israeli Water Commissioner Meir Ben-Meir said in Tuesday's Haaretz newspaper that Israel will "continue to prepare the drillings for the dam." Israeli officials also said Jordan has approved the plan.

Israel's plan, revealed by Haaretz last week, is to build the dam on the Yarmouk, a tributary of the Jordan River that flows down a gully between Jordan's Irbid Heights and the

Golan Heights which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 war.

The chosen site is in the El-Hama enclave, a slice of land claimed by Israel and Syria.

The water cooperation project was meant to be a hallmark of the 1994 peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. Under the treaty, Israel promised to help Jordan solve its chronic water shortage, including building the dam to divert some of the Yarmouk waters to Jordan.

The government that signed the treaty, led by the dovish Labour Party, decided to locate the dam inside Israel's pre-1967 border to avoid prejudicing peace talks with Syria.

Those talks, which almost yielded a peace deal, broke down in early 1996 and have been frozen since the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu took office later that year.

Netanyahu sees the Golan, which overlooks northern Israel, as vital to security and has said he does not want the area returned to Syria.

With Netanyahu's approval, hard-line Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon has recently decided to relocate the dam about one kilometre (one-half mile) upstream, into territory claimed by Syria.

The new site is in an area that even the Labour government claimed was not part of the Golan and should remain in Israeli hands.

In a 1949 armistice agreement that established Israel, the area was declared a demilitarised zone. But Syrian forces entered it shortly afterwards in violation of the accord. Previously, the enclave had been part of British-administered Palestine.

"It is not Syrian land and never was part of Syria," Ben-

Meir said. He also said Jordan has urged Israel to speed up archaeological excavations on the site that are required under Israeli law.

Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Sharon, said the decision for the new site "was reached by agreement between Israel and Jordan."

Despite Israel's claims, Jordan's Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh was quoted as saying that building the dam in territory claimed by Syria would be "totally against the spirit" of the peace accord.

Meanwhile, state-run Damascus Radio reiterated on Tuesday Syria's offer of peace in exchange for "full and comprehensive" Israeli withdrawals from southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights.

It said that what prevents Netanyahu from pulling back are "his designs on hegemony, expansion and occupation."

Probe into UK's drug laws begins

LONDON, Aug 27: Britain's Police Foundation, an independent research charity, is launching a two-year inquiry into the UK's drugs laws, and it will review the workings of the 1971 misuse of Drugs Act, reports Xinhua.

Local press reports today said the study, funded by a number of charities, will be carried out by a 12-member panel including lawyers, academics and police officers.

The inquiry will consider whether policies pursued by successive governments have worked. It is also expected to focus on whether the 1971 misuse of Drugs Act needs to be changed in the light of the scale of illegal drug use today.

It will examine the possibilities of tougher enforcement, decriminalisation, legalisation and greater use of some drugs for medicinal purposes across the range of substances covered by the act.

The foundation said an independent and objective review in an area where there is little consensus was overdue, and the inquiry was set up partly because of the failure of politicians to address drug use in Britain.

DPRK calls on US to turn over defectors

TOKYO, Aug 27: North Korea urged Washington on Wednesday to turn over two diplomats who defected to the United States, claiming they are criminals fleeing prosecution for embezzlement, reports AP.

The North Korean Foreign Ministry said the former ambassador to Egypt, Chang Sung Gil, and his brother, Chang Sung Ho, a diplomat on a trade mission to Paris, escaped to the United States "for fear of legal punishment over their crimes," according to Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency.

The brothers had been dismissed from their posts in late July and been ordered to return home for judicial investigation for embezzlement of a large sum of public fund, the ministry said in the report, which was monitored in Tokyo.

The US State Department said Tuesday that the two North Korean officials and their families were granted asylum in the United States.

Tidal waves leave 30,000 homeless in DPRK

TOKYO, Aug 27: Strong tidal waves have hit the western coast of North Korea, leaving nearly 30,000 people homeless, the country's official news agency reported, reports AFP.

The waves, which were "the highest ever in scores of years," affected 20 cities and countries of the provinces of South Pyongan, North Pyongan and South Hwanghae, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

More than 10,000 houses, nurseries, kindergartens, hospitals and other public buildings were flooded and 28, 800 people were left homeless, the KCNA monitored here, said.

There were 950 breaches of sea dikes over 288.8 kilometres (180 miles) while more than 107,600 hectares (265,800 acres) of arable land were submerged, it said.



Palestinian students overcome by teargas run out of the Dar Jasser girls junior high school in Bethlehem Tuesday after Israeli soldiers fired gas into the school near the Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

Sihanouk ready to meet Cambodian cabinet members Hun Sen continues attack on UN charter for human rights

PHNOM PENH, Aug 27: Second Prime Minister Hun Sen said Wednesday that he has sent a letter to a senior UN representative seeking the replacement of human rights workers who have accused the government of carrying out atrocities following last month's coup, reports AP.

Speaking at a graduation ceremony at the Ministry of Public Works, Hun Sen said he signed a letter to Thomas Hammarberg, special representative of the UN Secretary-General for human rights in Cambodia on Tuesday.

"I signed and sent (a letter) to Hammarberg, so he can replace some of the human right officers who intimidated people to flee and falsified information about the situation in Cambodia," said Hun Sen.

The second prime minister said he has received a report

from the UN Center for Human Rights in Cambodia documenting abuses carried out in the wake of the coup which resulted in the ouster of Prince Norodom Ranariddh as the country's first prime minister.

The report, which has not yet been released to reporters, includes some 40 documented cases of execution and torture allegedly carried out by forces loyal to Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party, or CPP, in the weeks following the July 5-6 putsch.

Many of the victims are members of the prince's FUNCINPEC party. In addition, hundreds of people loyal to the royalist party were reportedly detained and tortured in the weeks following the fighting.

"Last night, I received a report about human right abuses the UNCHR sent to the Royal Government," he said.

"Although there are some politically (motivated) issues and ambiguities in it, the report, however, contains information which requires the royal government to immediately forward it to the competent ministry so timely action can be taken."

AFP from Beijing adds: King Norodom Sihanouk said Wednesday he is prepared to meet members of the new Cambodian government when he returns to the country for up to three months on Friday.

"I have said that the top people in Phnom Penh can, if they wish, go to Siem Reap (in northern Cambodia) to meet me when arrive," he said in a statement faxed to the news agency.

The king, who has spent the past six months in Beijing, receiving medical treatment, is going to Siem Reap to take part in "prayers for peace."

US military gets its first look at high-tech Russian small arms

PANAMA CITY BEACH, Florida, Aug 27: The US military is getting its first look at Russian small arms being offered for sale overseas, including guns that shoot through water and cartridges that suppress noise without silencers, reports AP.

Such weapons are of particular interest to US military units involved in amphibious, underwater or clandestine operations such as the Marine Corps and the Navy's SEALs.

"We have nothing like them," said Don Wood, a Birmingham, Alabama, arms importer who helped set up demonstrations Tuesday through Thursday at a police firing range and Navy base in this Florida Panhandle city.

Lt Col Dennis Verdera, Marine Corps liaison officer at the

Naval Coastal Systems Station where underwater demonstrations were conducted called it "an opportunity of a lifetime" to fire high-tech weapons produced by a former Cold War foe.

"I never thought I would ever see a Russian team specifically demonstrate Russian weapons with the intent of potentially marketing them to the US," said the New York City native. "It's a new world order and both countries are cautiously going forward."

Marines and local law enforcement officials got a chance to shoot the weapons at the Panama City Beach Police Department's firing range and then the demonstration moved to a pool at the Navy base Tuesday.

Military experts from across the United States will observe

similar demonstrations Wednesday and they will have an opportunity to question Russian technicians through an interpreter Thursday.

Two chief designers, Pietre Serdioukov and Alexander Borisov, made the trip along with officials from Rosvoorouzhenie, the State Corporation for Export and Import of Armament and Military Equipment. None of the Russians would comment to reporters.

The rifle can be fired by a swimmer or installed on underwater vehicles. It can fire single shots or automatically with a range in excess of the visibility distance in most transparent waters and is effective against mini-submarines, according to Rosvoorouzhenie literature.

BRIEFLY

Netanyahu leaves Japan for ROK: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu left Tokyo for South Korea yesterday after winding up a four day visit to Japan, Reuters reports from Tokyo.

Accompanied by Finance Minister Yaacov Neeman and a big delegation of Israeli business leaders, Netanyahu plans to spend two days in South Korea. Netanyahu, on mission to Japan and South Korea to promote economic ties despite a stalling of the Middle East peace process, ran into criticism in Tokyo over his policies, including the three-week-old closure of the West Bank and Gaza strip.

Girl kills schoolmate in Malaysia: A 10-year-old girl killed a 7-year-old schoolmate and injured another with an empty chili sauce bottle, it was reported Wednesday, AP says from Kuala Lumpur.

Mazida Suria, 7, died at a government hospital in Kuala Pilah, 120 kilometres (72 miles) south of Kuala Lumpur. The Star daily reported, Mazidah's classmate Aini Shafinaz Ruslan, also 7, survived the attack, but is now scared to go to school. Aini's mother, Hafziah Ibrahim, 36, said. The incident took place on Monday when Mazidah and Aini, who were neighbours at the Felda Serting agricultural farm settlement near Kuala Pilah, were on their way to a friend's house to finish their homework.

Cali mayor held in Colombia: A drug corruption scandal stung two more prominent politicians on Tuesday with the arrest of Cali's mayor and the sentencing of a former education minister to six years in prison for illegal enrichment, AP reports from Bogota.

Mayor Mauricio Guzman surrendered to police Tuesday after prosecutors ordered his arrest for allegedly accepting money from the drug cartel that long dominated his city and the international cocaine trade. Guzman, 42, who testified before prosecutors in Bogota last month, is suspected of taking \$200,000 from a Cali front company to finance his election campaign. He won office in 1994, when the now-jailed Cali cartel kingpins were at the height of their power.

Student killed in Congo violence: One student died of gunshot wounds when soldiers opened fire on Tuesday to break up a campus demonstration in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, witnesses said, Reuters reports from Kinshasa.

Hundreds of students gathered at the tense campus of the National Institute of Teacher Training to mourn the student after his body was returned there from hospital. Witnesses said Alexander Makolo, 28, has been rushed to hospital after the clash. He died on the operating table. Red Cross officials who brought his body back to the campus said.

3 die as scaffolding collapses in SA: Three people were killed and eight seriously injured Tuesday when the scaffolding of an office tower under construction in the Johannesburg suburb of Sandton collapsed, rescue workers said, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

Between 20 and 30 workers were on the scaffolding putting up marbler panels on the building at the time of the accident, emergency services spokesman Tim de Witt said. He said two people were killed in the accident and another died later in hospital.

64 more massacred in Algeria

BENI ALI, Algeria, Aug 27: Sixty-four villagers were massacred in a dawn attack Tuesday on Beni Ali, in the mountains south of Algiers, witnesses who escaped the slaughter told AFP.

They said 30 women were among the victims and that another four women were abducted by the assailants as Algeria's murderous cycle of violence continued unabated.

Reports of the latest massacre came hours after the government reaffirmed its determination to stamp out terrorism in a conflict which has claimed some 60,000 lives in five years, according to western estimates.

Since Sunday, according to preliminary figures, 181 people

have died in a series of village massacres and a car bomb attack in the capital Algiers, all blamed on Islamic extremists.

The Chrea mountain region where the latest attack took place, 60 kilometres (40 miles) south of Algiers, has been the scene of many previous massacres.

As usually happens in such attack, whole families were slaughtered, their throats cut before being decapitated by their assailants.

"They went into the houses and killed people. Then they lined up the heads outside," one witness said.

Villagers who tried to flee and raise the alarm were stopped initially by gunfire, then hacked to death.

Diana enters political fray?

LONDON, Aug 27: Diana, princess of Wales, looked set today to stir more political controversy after the British press homed in on an interview in which she hit out at the previous Tory government over its failure to ban landmines, reports AFP.

The interview, published Tuesday in the French daily Le Monde, was seen by some papers here as a sign that Diana had "entered the political fray" by praising the current Labour administration's support for her campaign to ban the deadly weapons.

The comments by the princess, who told Le Monde that the former government's policy on landmines was "hopeless," came just months after she provoked criticism from the Tory party for her call for a landmine ban during a visit to Angola.

The current Labour government banned the manufacture and sale of landmines soon after coming to power in May.

Diana also bemoaned in the interview with Le Monde the vi-

ciousness of the British press toward her and said she would have sought haven in a different country were it not for her two sons.

"I think in my place, anyone sane would have left a long time ago Diana said." But I can't, I have my sons."

The princess, whose reported liaison with a millionaire playboy has delighted British tabloids in recent weeks, added that she believes she bothers some circles because "I am much closer to people at the bottom than those at the top and latter won't forgive me for that."

"My father always taught me to treat people as equals," she said. "I have always done that and I am sure that Harry and William (her sons) have learned that."

She denounced the British press for taking out of context her every move or statement and said she felt much more comfortable overseas "where I am greeted kindly and taken as I am without any preconceived ideas."

Bosnian generals pledge support to Plavsic

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia, Aug 27: Bosnian Serb generals pledged support on Tuesday for western-backed President Biljana Plavsic in her power struggle with hardliners, sources close to the talks said, reports Reuters.

The outcome helped Plavsic firm up her control of Bosnian Serb territory, where she is seeking to break the stranglehold of indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic and his followers.

But the hardliner-controlled Bosnian Serb parliament, which Plavsic dissolved last month, sat in the town of Pale in defiance of her order and dealt her what could be a blow by rejecting international supervision of local elections next month.

"The national assembly abolished the agreement that President Plavsic made with

the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) for the organisation and supervision of municipal elections," Dragan Kalinic, speaker of the parliament, told reporters in Pale.

Western mediators had said the session carried no legal weight because Plavsic dissolved the parliament last month and called for early general elections.

Plavsic, whose stronghold is in the northwest of the Bosnian Serb republic, summoned the generals to an afternoon meeting in Banja Luka after some of them last week accused her of overstepping her constitutional authority.

A majority of the Bosnian Serb army's 11 commanding generals, representing at least two thirds of the army, attended.



Survivors from a massacre in Beni Ali, in the mountains 60 kilometres (40 miles) south of Algiers, load a van and a truck, Tuesday to flee their village. Sixty-four villagers were massacred in a dawn attack Wednesday. Reports of the latest massacre came hours after the government reaffirmed its determination to stamp out terrorism in a conflict which has claimed some 60,000 lives in five years, according to western estimates. — AFP/UNB photo

Chechen leader declares Chechnya, Dagestan united

MOSCOW, Aug 27: Chechen First Deputy Prime Minister Movlady Udogov on Tuesday declared Chechnya and Dagestan united, after he was elected head of the newly-founded Muslim nation movement, the Itar-Tass news agency said, reports AP.

The Muslim nation movement was founded in Grozny on Friday, since then, it has been holding its Congress in the Chechen capital attended by 35 Muslim parties or movements based in the North Caucasus republic and in neighbouring Dagestan, Itar-Tass said.

Udogov was elected head of the movement on Tuesday. His council chosen from among Chechen and Dagestan theologians, were also elected.

Off the Record

Only for fear of losing job

MANILA: A woman travelling to Saudi Arabia for employment as a maid aborted her 6-month-old fetus while waiting for her flight Tuesday, fearing she would lose her job because of the pregnancy, police said, reports AP.

Police said a janitor found the fetus wrapped in a plastic bag in a waste can inside a toilet at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

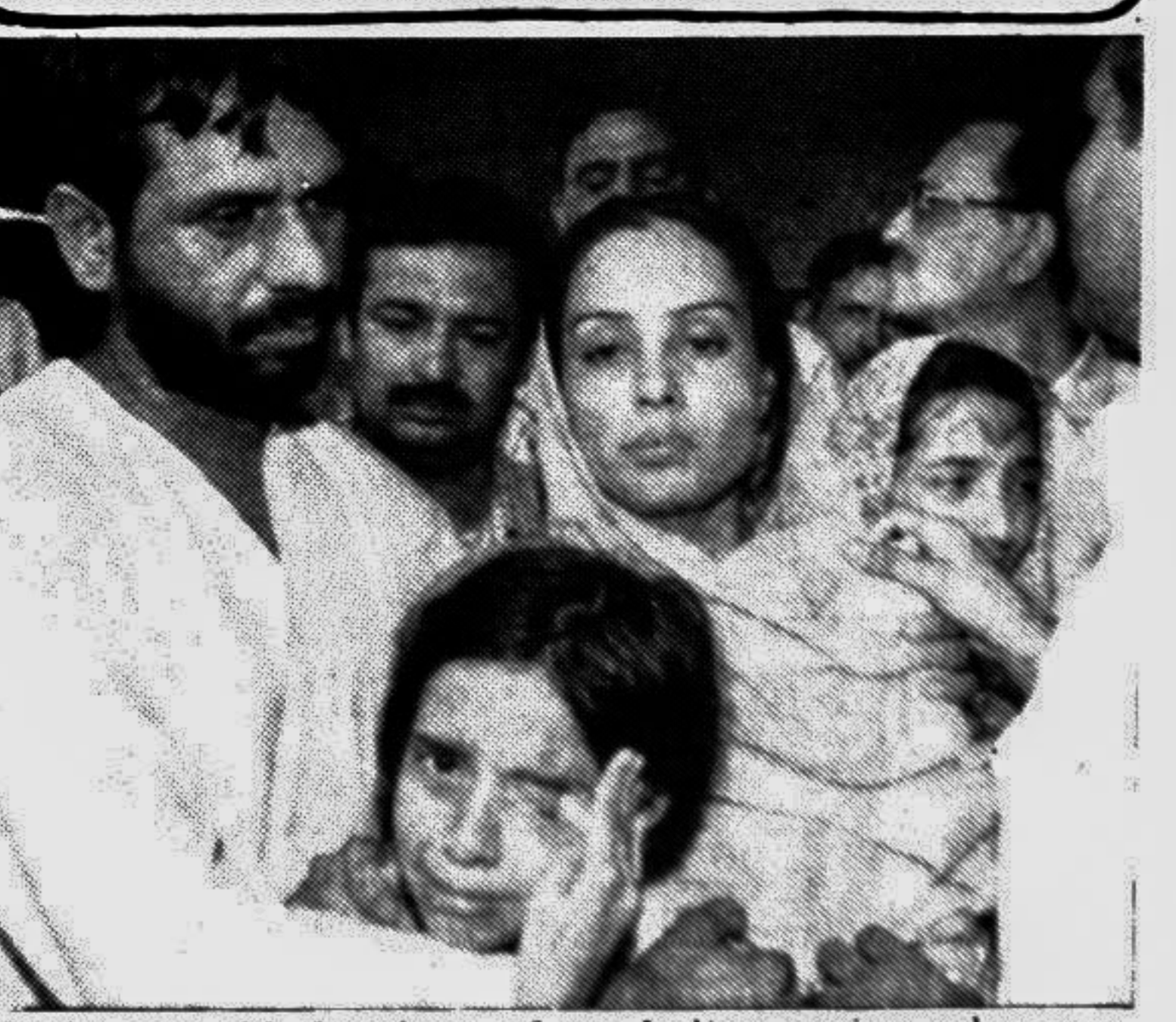
Airport police chief inspector Rizalino Roxas said the maid admitted taking abortion-inducing pills hours before her flight and went into a toilet at an airport waiting area.

Informed of the discovery of the fetus, police checked waiting passengers and found the 29-year-old woman writhing in pain and her clothes stained by blood.

The maid later told airport doctors she was supporting three children and was afraid to lose her job. Crying and covering her face, she was taken to a hospital in an ambulance because of excessive bleeding, Roxas said.

Abortion is outlawed in the Philippines and the maid could be jailed up to six years for aborting the fetus.

Poverty and unemployment have forced millions of Filipinos to seek mostly menial jobs abroad.



Eight-year-old daughter of an Indian major, who was killed in the frontier state of Kashmir during border clashes with Pakistani guards, weeps while waiting at the New Delhi airport Tuesday for the coffin of her late father. The border skirmishes claimed the lives of five Indians, including two soldiers, and some 70 Pakistani troops, according to Indian Defence sources. — AFP/UNB photo

Indian lawmakers' review of half a century of progress

A unique review by India's lawmakers of half a century of progress has seen candid admissions of collective failure, but is also being used by parties to gain political mileage.

Telescreen live spurs the nation, the four-day special session of Parliament to mark India's independence golden jubilee has also provided an opportunity to political rivals to impress voters ahead of expected mid-term polls later this year or next year.

India's preoccupation with corruption and the criminalisation of public life has expectedly figured prominently in the special session with some members hitting out at Prime Minister I.K. Gujral for evading his responsibility in cracking down on these two big afflictions of the political system.

However, the thin attendance on the opening day, with less than a fifth of the 524 Lower House members present in the post-lunch session, and the disinterested looks on the faces of those attending, showed that MPs were not impressed by the exercise in parliamentary

introspection.

Meant to be a non-partisan evaluation of 50 years of governance, the session was kicked off yesterday by a first time address by a Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) Speaker, with Purno Sangma bemoaning the decline in India's parliamentary standards.

India can be proud of its robust democracy as evident from 11 general elections and 300 state assembly polls with the voter turnout climbing from 45 per cent to over 60 per cent in the past 50 years, Sangma said, but added the House has much to be ashamed of.

He is receiving complaints from the public about the "frequent bouts of pandemonium" which hold up parliamentary business. With each minute of a House sitting costing Rs 7,000, people feel that such disruptions are a "costly luxury that our country can ill-afford," he said.

"It is quite understandable that the complexion of this eleventh House is significantly different in that a large majority of them are real sons of the

Mahesh Uniyal writes from New Delhi

soil in their constituencies and first timers as well and that they are impatient to improve the lot of the masses they represent," he said.

A member of Prime Minister Gujral's Janata Dal (JD) party said that MPs were making a "laughing stock" of themselves in "the eyes of the public" by their behaviour in the House.

It is to prevent such behaviour holding up consideration of national issues that the special session is being held without the usual question hour and a bar on members interrupting speakers.

In the ongoing debates, the leaders of the main parties expressed concern over growing corruption, criminalisation of politics, the increasing assertiveness of the judiciary, poverty and unchecked population growth. The lawmakers are also discussing fundamental issues like education and progress in science.

Some members criticised

Gujral's recent call to the public to launch a crusade against corruption. They said it amounted to an admission of helplessness by the head of government that he was unable to do anything to tackle the problem.

Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said Gujral was only making grand announcements to combat corruption, but was yet to order the long-delayed prosecution of 149 public officials implicated in graft. A member of the Prime Minister's party did not approve of Gujral's decision to set up a special anti-corruption cell in the Prime Minister's office.

However, another former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar did not think that corruption is a big problem as most Indians are honest. Addressing the Lower House today, he said Gujral had blown the corruption issue out of proportion. During his brief tenure as Prime Minister in 1990-91, Shekhar had been quoted as saying that catching the corrupt was the job of a policeman and

not the head of government.

For the former ruling Congress party, the session has become an opportunity to unveil its election agenda with senior Congress leader Mahabir Singh Scindia making what observers said was a virtual poll speech. Scindia, a scion of a former princely family who political observers think is being projected as a future prime ministerial candidate, reminded the House of the contribution of the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty and said his party alone could provide stable governance.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has also come under attack during the special session for its Hindu nationalist views with its opponents accusing it of using religion for political gain.

The United Front (UF) government's endorsement of its predecessor Congress regime's economic liberalisation policies was expected to come under attack during a discussion on the state of the economy. Samata Party leader George

Fernandes set the ball rolling towards the end of the opening day by accusing the government of neglecting the majority poor in the country in its preoccupation with luring foreign investment.

Referring to Speaker Sangma's speech which said India must aim have home-grown multinational companies, Fernandes said, to the thumping of desks from all members, that a more noble ambition would be to ensure that no Indian ever went to bed hungry.

The session has also brought up differences within the centre-left ruling alliance over economic liberalisation. Agriculture Minister Chaturanan Misra, who belongs to the Communist Party of India (CPI), told the House that after half a century of political freedom, India was heading for economic slavery by rolling out the red carpet for multinational firms. "No nation can be built with foreign help. We need our own soil, our own people and resources," he reminded lawmakers.

— India Abroad News Service