

Red alert in Lanka amid fears of suicide bombings

Buddhist leaders oppose govt's power sharing plan with Tamils

COLOMBO, Sept 21: The Sri Lankan government's proposals for power-sharing with minority Tamils to halt decades of ethnic strife are facing mounting opposition from Buddhist leaders, analysts and press reports said today, says AFP.

A panel appointed by the majority Sinhalese Buddhist leadership describing itself as the Sinhala Commission, called in a report on Wednesday for protesters against the devolution plan which would turn the country into a federal state in all but name.

"The Sinhala Commission's interim report... is likely to stir the hearts and minds of the nationalists, thus fanning the flames of a political controversy across the country," The Sunday Times said.

The government said it was ready to send its draft plan to Cabinet and present it to Parliament by the first week of November.

"The moderates may strongly disagree with the Sinhalese Commission but its report cannot be wished away," an Asian diplomat here said.

"It will be a fresh challenge for the government to try and country this new development."

The Informal "Sinhala Commission" which has no legal status had been meeting for several months receiving evidence of discrimination against the majority Sinhalese since independence from Britain in 1948.

"The effect of the devolution package would be not to convert Sri Lanka even into a normal

type of federal state but a very special federal state, the like of which does not exist anywhere else," the panel reported.

Tamil politicians urged the government not to be deterred by "Sinhala chauvinists" and go ahead with the plan to end ethnic violence. More than 50,000 people have been killed since 1972.

The government has yet to announce details of the more crucial power sharing arrangements.

The Sinhala Commission said the proposals open the door for Tamils to establish an independent state called Eelam.

The government, which has a one-seat majority in parliament, is banking on opposition support to push the reforms through although there has

been no firm commitment from them yet.

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan police and security forces have been placed on maximum alert amid fears of suicide bombings by Tamil rebels to mark the 10th anniversary of the death of a top guerrilla, officials said today.

Police and troops have been told to further strengthen the already tight security in the capital because of the possibility of attacks by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), they said.

"There is an appeal going out to people to be on the look out for any suspicious activities in their neighbourhood and inform the authorities immediately," a senior police officer said.

Kalyan Singh replaces Mayawati as UP CM

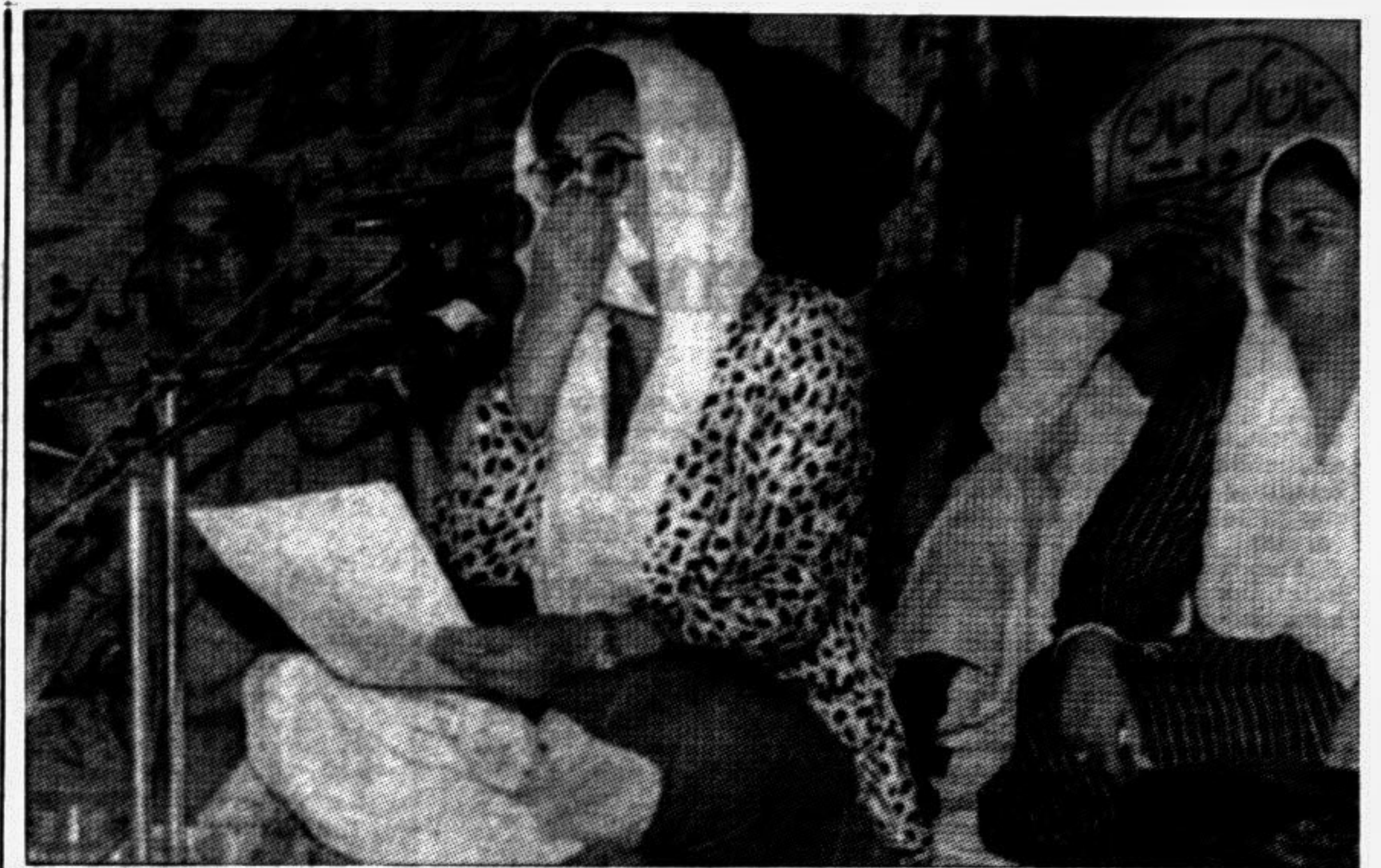
NEW DELHI, Sept 21: The first woman for India's "untouchable" caste to lead a state will be replaced today by a Hindu nationalist leader under a power-sharing agreement, officials said, reports AFP.

Mayawati who resigned as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh late Saturday after a six-month term, is set to be succeeded by Kalyan Singh, a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian people's party).

Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, majority people's party) espouses the cause of lower-caste Hindus. It forged an alliance with the BJP — seen as a supporter of upper-caste Hindus in March and staked claim to power in Uttar Pradesh.

Under the agreement the BSP was to lead the coalition government for six months and then be replaced by the BJP.

Officials said Singh was due to be sworn in as chief minister in the state capital Lucknow in the afternoon. The opposition said it would boycott the function to denounce what it terms an "unholy and opportunistic" alliance.



Benazir Bhutto, centre, former prime minister of Pakistan addresses crowd Saturday, in Karachi for the first anniversary of her brother Muratza Bhutto who was killed last year in police shootout in Karachi. Police is suspecting Benazir Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari in Muratza Bhutto's murder. — AP/UNB photo

Gujral likely to meet Clinton today

India won't accept 3rd party mediation on Kashmir issue

NEW YORK, Sept 21: India is expected to make it clear to the United States that it will not accept any third party mediation to resolve the Kashmir and other outstanding issues with Pakistan and will insist on signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in its present form, reports PTI.

The Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral who arrived here last night on a four-day visit from Dar-as-Salaam after a two-hour refuelling halt at Amsterdam, is scheduled to meet US President Bill Clinton tomorrow to discuss a wide range of issues including India's entry into the UN Security Council as a permanent member.

Gujral will have one-to-one talks with his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif, on Tuesday to discuss the outstanding issues between the two countries in the light of just concluded foreign secretary-level discussions which failed to make any

breakthrough.

Gujral is scheduled to address the UN General Assembly session on September 24 and leave for Rome the following day for a day-long visit to Italy before returning home.

Although there is no fixed agenda for the Indian prime minister's meeting with Clinton, there are indications that Gujral will apprise him of the deliberations between the two foreign secretaries.

During the 45-minute meeting with Clinton, Gujral will emphasise that there was no question of any third party mediation and the issues were purely bilateral between New Delhi and Islamabad.

The Indian prime minister is expected to pursue the US president about the need for expansion of the Security Council and India's entry to it as a permanent member.

On the CTBT, Gujral will make a forceful plea that India

favours total elimination of nuclear weapons within a fixed time-frame and the present form of CTBT would not be acceptable.

Besides these issues, both India and the US are expected to discuss several bilateral matters mostly related to trade and commerce.

Clinton may suggest that the pace of economic reforms be accelerated including opening up of the insurance and banking sectors in India.

Besides his meeting with Clinton and Sharif, the Indian Prime minister is scheduled to meet the foreign ministers of China, France, Bangladesh, Iran, Russia, Indonesia, the United Kingdom and Italy to discuss bilateral matters during his four-day stay.

He will have separate meetings with the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson.

Di-Dodi's car crash in Paris Lawyer saw a car escaping at high speed from scene

LONDON, Sept 21: A British lawyer saw a car escaping at high speed from the scene of a Paris crash that left Princess Diana and two others dead last month, a press report said today, says AFP.

Gary Hunter told the Sunday Times he saw the fleeing car from the window of his third floor hotel room, less than 100 metres (yards) from the crash at the Alma tunnel in central Paris.

French police have this week concentrated on evidence suggesting that the Mercedes 280s Diana was travelling in may have collided with a second car, a dark coloured Fiat Uno, moments before it crashed.

Hunter told the weekly that he was in Paris for the weekend to celebrate his wife's birthday and was watching television when he heard the crash.

"I went to the window and saw people running towards the tunnel," he said.

Seconds later he saw "a small, dark car" turning from the area by the tunnel exit and

roaring down the Rue Jean Goujon, the street below his hotel.

"My own feeling is that these were people in hurry not to be there," Hunter 41, "I am confident that car was getting off the scene."

"It looked quite sinister I can't recall the type of car but it was a small dark vehicle it could have been a Fiat Uno or a Renault."

He said the car was being shadowed by a second vehicle a white Mercedes.

Hunter told the Sunday Times he had given a detailed account of the crash to lawyers acting for Mohamed Al Fayed, whose son Dodi was killed in the accident.

The Sunday Mirror meanwhile quoted a British secretary living in Paris who said she had seen a dark coloured car following Diana's Mercedes.

Brenda Wells said that she was driving toward the Alma Tunnel when she was forced off the road by two motorbikes chasing a large car and that she then saw a black car pass her.



Miss Polonia 96 Agnieszka Zielinska, left, crowns her successor Miss Polonia 97 Rokkana Jonek, during the finals of the Miss Polonia beauty contest in Warsaw Saturday. — AP/UNB photo

Jain Commission to examine Tamil Nadu leaders

NEW DELHI, Sept 21: The Jain Commission of inquiry is likely to examine next week a host of leaders from Tamil Nadu, who are said to be sympathetic towards the Sri Lankan Tamils' cause, reports PTI.

The one-man panel of Justice Milap Chand Jain, which began probing the conspiracy angle following submission of its interim report to the government last month, would record statements of MDMK leader, V Gopalasamy, P Nedumaran and Koval Ramakrishnan next week, sources said.

Their statements are likely to be recorded in-camera, sources said. While Gopalasamy, a former Rajya Sabha member, had made a secret trip to Jaffna and visited LTTE camps, Redumaran and Ramakrishnan were supportive of the LTTE cause at that time, sources added.

The panel started recording the statement of the special investigation team chief, D R Karthikeyan last week. The in-camera hearing is still underway, they said.

Troops kill 21 militants in Algeria

PARIS, Sept 21: Algerian security forces, backed by crack troops, have killed 21 Muslim rebels in north Algeria, including three guerrillas near a mosque in Algiers, national newspapers said today, reports Reuters.

Government forces, combating Ath Yahia Moussa forest in Tizi-Ouzou province, 90 km (60 miles) east of Algiers, shot dead seven rebels on Saturday, Liberte newspaper said.

They also killed a similar number of guerrillas on Thursday in the neighbouring area of Lakhadaria, said Al Khabar newspaper.

In Algiers, security forces killed four rebels in a battle lasting several hours on Friday in Oued Ouchaleh district, Liberte said.

The four men belonged to El Mujahidine, a splinter faction from the radical armed Islamic group (GIA), said Liberte, adding that El Mujahidine was suspected of being behind the killing of Algeria's main workers' union leader Abielhaq Benhamouda earlier this year.

Three gunmen, holed up in the cellar of a carpentry plant near Sunan Mosque in central Algiers, were shot and killed after several hours of siege by security forces backed by elite army troops, Le Matin newspaper said.

Taliban fight foes in north: 50 killed, 300 captured

ISLAMABAD, Sept 21: The purist Islamic Taliban militia battled its foes in northern Afghanistan today, but each side gave conflicting accounts of the outcome, reports Reuters.

A spokesman for opposition leader Ahmad Shah Massoud told the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) that opposition forces had retaken the town of Hairatran on the Uzbekistan border.

The spokesman, based in the eastern Iranian city of Mashhad, said the opposition now controlled the area between Hairatran and the opposition capital of Mazar-i-Sharif, 75 km (47 miles) away.

However, a Taliban spokesman denied the loss of Hairatran, saying Taliban forces there had repulsed an opposition attack.

There was no independent account of the fighting.

The Taliban spokesman, quoted by AIP, also reported artillery exchanges with forces loyal to opposition leader General Abdul Rashid Dostum in northern Balkh province.

He said the shelling, at Kamperak and Shahrak villages, about 15 km (nine miles) north of Mazar-i-Sharif, followed what the Taliban said was a victory against Dostum on Saturday.

Taliban-controlled Radio

Kabul said pro-Taliban forces led by Hazrat Mohammad Gardezi had killed 50 of Dostum's troops and captured 300, including several senior officers.

The broadcast late on Saturday said Dostum's forces in Balkh province had been "completely defeated."

AIP said 15 Taliban fighters had been killed and several wounded in Saturday's fighting.

Opposition spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment.

Dostum arrived back in his former bastion of Mazar-i-Sharif about 10 days ago after a Taliban advance towards the northern city touched off clashes among opposition factions there.

His rival for control of the mainly ethnic Uzbek Junbish-i-Milli faction, General Abdul Malik, made a short lived alliance with the Taliban in May to force Dostum into exile.

Malik is now believed to have withdrawn his forces to Shiberghan, 125 km (78 miles) west of Mazar-i-Sharif.

AFP said Taliban militia Saturday claimed having killed 50 opposition forces in the fighting in northern Afghanistan, Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said.

It quoted the Taliban Infor-

mation Minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi as saying opposition forces led by Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum launched a big offensive against the Taliban in the north and west of Mazar-i-Sharif, the bastion of opposition.

The attack mounted by opposition forces in Balkh and Chemical districts of northern Balkh province was repulsed by Taliban militia, Muttaqi was quoted as saying by AIP, a private pro-Taliban information service based in Pakistani northwestern city of Peshawar.

Dostum returned to Afghanistan last week after living in exile for four months in Turkey.

Mulla Muttaqi said the Islamic militia had captured some 300 opposition soldiers.

The Taliban information minister told AIP from the Pakistani city of Quetta in southwestern Baluchistan province that the Taliban also seized 50 vehicles and some 400 rifles in the attack.

However, Muttaqi did not mention the losses suffered by the Taliban forces, but AIP reported they to sustained casualties.

Independent confirmation of the attack was not immediately available.

1m Italians march in support of nat'l unity

MILAN, Sept 21: Hundreds of thousands of Italians took to the streets of Milan and Venice on Saturday in support of national unity and against independence for the rich, industrialised north, reports AFP.

Organisers said that nearly one million people took part, including 80,000 in Venice independent observers put the overall turnout at around 700,000.

Hundreds of thousands of us have come from all over Italy with one single aim — to say no to the division of our country, said Pietro Larizza, general secretary of the UIL labour federation.

Many had come from other parts of Italy, travelling in chartered trains and coaches.

Under the slogan "Italy goes forward united, the twin demonstrations were called in response to a push by the secessionist Northern League to forge a new country out of northern Italy that would be known as Padania.

The leader of the secessionist Northern League, Umberto Bossi, claimed Saturday's event did not change anything.

He conceded that the demonstrations were well-organised, but argued that if a referendum were held on self-determination for Padania, some 70 per cent would back the idea.

President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro said that even if the Northern League disagreed in a democracy figures count, and ten people who does not have the same weight as 1,000 who applaud."

As marchers made their way to the Santa Elena in Venice the city's mayor Massimo Cacciari said: "I have never seen such an imposing demonstration."

This is not only a strong message against secession, but also for democratic reform that is federalist and autonomist and in which municipalities are involved, he added.

In Milan five big separate processions made their way towards the Cannone and Duomo squares brandishing green white and red Italian national flags in a mood that was lively and peaceful.

"I'm here to defend the values of solidarity and unity, one retired man said.

Supporting the marches were Italy's centre-left coalition government and sectors of the centre-right the post fascist national alliance, traditionally opposed to secession, was organising its won demonstration in Milan.

Bossi's Northern League won about 10 per cent of the national vote in the 1996 general election and is strongly represented in certain northeastern areas.

BRIEFLY

16 killed in Kashmir bus plunge: At least 16 people were killed yesterday when a bus plunged into a gorge in the northern Indian state of Kashmir, the United News of India said, AFP reports from Jammu.

Officials in this state winter capital said 17 others were seriously injured in the accident, which occurred near the town of Bandarkot a rescue operation has been launched, they added.

Floods kill 4 in Sikkim: Four people were washed away when flash floods hit their riverside village Mangley Sincuthang in south Sikkim on Friday night. The bodies are yet to be traced, PTI reports from Gangtok.

All the four dead whose bodies were yet to be traced belonged to one family. A fifth member, a 17-year-old girl, who was critically injured has been admitted to the Singtam Hospital.

Militant shot dead in Lebanon: One person was killed and three wounded yesterday after security forces fired on militants trying to stop them closing down a television station run by Muslim fundamentalist, security sources said, Reuters reports from Tripoli, Lebanon.

The sources said security forces fired on members of the Al-Tawheed Movement who had begun gathering outside the Al-Hilal Television station on Saturday. One source said the security forces opened fire after Muslim fundamentalists hurled rocks at them.

Journalist jailed in Iran: An Iranian court sentenced Saturday Faraj Sarkouhi, Chief Editor of the Persian weekly Adineh, to one year in prison on alleged charges of involvement in anti-state propaganda, Xinhua says from Tehran.

The Islamic Revolution court said that the Iranian editor was found guilty of having secret contacts with some European nationals. The trial was held behind closed doors at Sarkouhi's request, according to a statement released by the court.

Thai chopper crash kills 14: Lightning may have downed a helicopter transporting a royal entourage over rugged terrain near the Thai-Malaysian border, newspapers said Sunday. Fourteen persons died in the crash, AP reports from Bangkok.

Ramos yields to 'people power'

MANILA, Sept 21: For the second time in 11 years, a Philippine president yielded Sunday to "people power" as tens of thousands of people protested efforts to extend his term, reports AP.

As crowds gathered for the protest, President Fidel Ramos told reporters he will no longer seek to amend the constitution during his term, which ends next June.

Ramos' supporters have been trying to remove a clause from the constitution that limits presidents to a single term. That campaign has aroused a powerful national groundswell of protests against "cha-cha," the popular abbreviation for charter change.

Priests, nuns, business leaders, and tens of thousands of ordinary Filipinos marched to a seaside park for Sunday's rally, called by the country's two most prominent democracy activists — former President Corazon Aquino and Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin.

Mrs. Aquino, Sin and Ramos were all key leaders of the massive "people power" rallies in 1986 that toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

The current constitution, approved a year later, included term limits to discourage new dictatorships.

Organisers, decided to proceed with Sunday's rally despite a statement by Ramos on Sat-

urday that he will not run for re-election — a reversal of his earlier commitment to keep his options open until a party convention in November.

"I will not run for re-election — period, period, period," Ramos said.

Ramos went further in his comments Sunday, saying he had listened to the people, and they had said they did not want constitutional change before next May's elections.

The charter change campaign

Polling begins in Poland

WARSAW, Sept 21: Poles began to vote today in elections to choose the third freely-elected Parliament since the fall of Communism in 1989, reports Reuters.

The elections chiefly pit the ex-Communist Party of Social Democrats, in power since 1993 along with a peasant grouping, against parties rooted in the Solidarity Movement that toppled the old undemocratic system.

The ex-Communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the strongest opposition group, the Solidarity Election Action (AWS) have enjoyed similar support of around 30 per cent in recent opinion polls.

paigned Ramos' frequent reversals regarding his future plans have greatly diminished his once-great popularity and credibility, at least with his critics.

"I don't believe the president," one of the protesters, Solidad san Luis, said Sunday. "We are here to ensure that Ramos' periods remain periods."

Despite Ramos' concessions, protests were also scheduled Sunday in many other cities, including Cebu, Bacolod and Cagayan de Oro. In the southern city of Iloilo, a strike by drivers against charter change halted most public transportation on Saturday.

Ramos' supporters say he should be allowed another term to continue popular economic and political reforms that have saved the country from years of stagnation.

Opponents of charter change say the amendments threaten the Philippines' young democracy by setting a bad precedent, opening the democratic constitution to other changes, and distracting the government at a time when it needs to respond to an Asia-wide currency crisis.

Ahead of Sunday's demonstration, yellow ribbons the symbol of the Philippines' successful struggle for democracy a decade ago — were tied on the streets of Manila, back to every thing from trees to car antennas.



Leann Rimes performs at the Academy of Country Music Awards April 23, 1997, in Universal City, California. Rimes, 15, is nominated in three categories for the Country Music Association Awards in Nashville: Female Vocalist of the Year, Album of the Year for "Blue," and the Horizon Award for most career progress in the past year. — AP/UNB photo

Ranariddh's forces take 2 pockets of territory from govt troops

PHNOM PENH, Sept 21: Cambodian opposition troops loyal to deposed Prince Norodom Ranariddh have attacked government forces under Premier Hun Sen in an attempt to cut a key supply route in northwest Cambodia, government officials said today, reports Reuters.

Ranariddh's fighters and their Khmer Rouge allies had taken two small pockets of territory, Ku and Koak Khpho, just to the north of the route 69 supply road in clashes since late on Friday, they said.

The government army uses the road to re-supply forces attacking opposition troops around the contested border town of Osmach.

"The Royalist group and Khmer Rouge forces are now controlling two areas. They're trying to cut route 69 from Banteay Chmar to Samrong," General Chea Sarron, a senior operations commander, told Reuters.

The opposition fighters were also laying mines on the remote stretch of road to block government re-supply convoys travelling to their base at Samrong, said another commander, General Mao Chhem.

Che Sarron said government forces in Samrong and around Osmach were being re-supplied by transport helicopter and the estimated 100

opposition fighters would be pushed back from route 69 within days.

Sen's Prime Minister Hun Sen deposed first Prime Minister Ranariddh on July 6 after two days of fighting in Phnom Penh. The two had shared power in a coalition government set up after UN-run elections in 1993.

Days after the prince was ousted, fighting erupted in

Voting begins in Serbia

BELGRADE, Sept 21: Serbia went to the polls today in parliamentary and presidential elections likely to strengthen the hand of Yugoslav strongman Slobodan Milosevic, who is not a candidate, reports Reuters.

Some 10,000 polling stations in this country of 10.5 million opened at 7 am (0500 GMT) in brilliant sunshine, watched by nearly 200 international monitors from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The electorate of just over seven million will choose a new president for a four-year term and a new 250-seat Parliament from over 2,500 candidates from some 90 parties.

northwestern Cambodia and Ranariddh's fighters withdrew to their Osmach stronghold.

Ranariddh's men, with the help of Khmer Rouge guerrillas, have withstood repeated government attempts to force them from the Osmach area.

Che Sarron said clashes around Osmach were continuing and that today, opposition fighters had launched a fresh attack to push government troops from the approaches to Osmach.

The clandestine Khmer Rouge radio said today that the guerrillas had won control of the western district of Smailaut, 220-km (140 miles) southwest of Osmach.

There have been intermittent clashes between a Khmer Rouge faction loyal to Ranariddh and government forces in the Smailaut area since August, but government commanders dismissed the rebel radio report and said the situation around Smailaut was quiet.

The Khmer Rouge, responsible for the death of more than one million people during their disastrous 1975-79 "killing fields" rule, broke with their notorious leader Pol Pot in June and urged him from their ranks the following month.

Ranariddh says the Khmer Rouge fighters helping his forces have defected from Pol Pot