

Sharif reshuffles Cabinet

'Pakistan capable of defending itself without outside help'

ISLAMABAD, Aug 7: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Thursday said his country is fully capable of defending itself without any outside help, reports Xinhua.

"With the grace of Allah, we can defend ourselves on our own, it is a big achievement," Sharif said in reference to Pakistan's matching response to India's nuclear explosions on May 28 and 30.

He was speaking at the special session of the Senate marking the Silver Jubilee of the Parliament's Upper House.

The prime minister said that Pakistan was offered a lucrative package before May 28 to stave off a befitting response to India's nuclear explosions.

"But we refused to accept that in view of the track record of such assurances in the past," he said. "No country can survive as a sovereign and independent state by living on borrowed crutches."

Referring to his last week meeting with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Colombo, Sri Lanka, he said the core issue of Kashmir figure atop in the bilateral talks.

"I asked the Indian prime minister that official should start talks from where they were left off on June 23," he said. Pakistan and India's foreign secretaries sign an agreement in their talks here in June

last year with Kashmir and security related issues topping the list.

The Indian prime minister showed reluctance and said it is difficult to sell this in India, then I said it is difficult to sell vice versa in Pakistan," Sharif recalled.

Sharif also urged the international community particularly the UN Security Council to play its due role in the just resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Reuters adds: Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has reshuffled his Cabinet, taking the key Finance Ministry portfolio to himself and replacing his foreign minister as the country battles crippling international economic sanctions.

Sharif replaced Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub with Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz, official APP news agency said today.

The Cabinet posts were reshuffled late on Thursday, APP said. No information was immediately available as to why the changes had been made.

Sharif has been reported to be under tremendous political pressure to make Cabinet changes since several countries slapped sanctions on Pakistan for ignoring international pleas and going ahead with May nuclear tests in response to tests by arch-rival India.

The government says it may have to consider calling a moratorium on its 30 billion dollars debt because the United States had blocked disbursement of aid and depriving it of the 3 billion dollars it needs a year to service foreign debt.

The Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Hafiz Pasha, was made adviser to the prime minister on finance.

Government officials said Hafiz Pasha left for Jeddah on Thursday night to negotiate a 700 million dollars trade financing agreement with the Islamic Development Bank there. Aziz had earlier been scheduled to make the trip.

Former foreign minister Khan was made minister for Water and Power, replacing Raja Nadir Pervez who was shuttled to Minister for Communications, a post that had been vacant for some months.

Yaqub Khan Nasir, who headed the Railways Ministry, was dropped, APP said. Deputy Minister for Water and Power Halim Siddiqui had relinquished additional responsibilities at the Ministry of Communications.

Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, Minister of Sports, Culture and Tourism who also headed the Ministry of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis, retained only the Labour Ministry. No new inductions in the Cabinet were made.

Flood situation in Assam still grave

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: The flood situation in Assam was still grave as the rivers after receding in the last couple of days started to rise again threatening to engulf vast areas of human habitation and cropland, reports PTI.

Official reports reaching here said that in the worst-hit Nalbari district in lower Assam and Dhemajit in upper Assam the situation remained critical as the rivers had started again to rise.

In Dhemajit district, rail and road communication in several areas continued to remain disrupted as about 30 relief camps were opened by the district authorities.

The situation in other districts, however showed signs of improvement following cessation of rain.

BJP hits out at Congress for its negative attitude

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: BJP yesterday hit out at Congress for its negative role and unhelpful attitude and trying to create an impression of an unstable government in the minds of the people, reports PTI.

Congress has played a totally negative role and not that of a constructive opposition, party General Secretary Venkatesh Naidu told newsmen here.

The BJP had received a fractured mandate and therefore had to take help of the opposition on various issues, he said, adding the Congress and the left adopt double standards on each and every issue.

China comes up with mediation offer

US vows to block Iraq's bid to ease sanctions

WASHINGTON, Aug 7: President Bill Clinton on Thursday called Iraq's refusal to cooperate with UN arms inspectors "unacceptable" and vowed to block any bid to ease sanctions until Baghdad fully complies with inspections, reports Reuters.

"Unless Iraq reverses course and cooperates fully with international weapons inspectors, the United States will stop any and all efforts to alter the sanctions regime," Clinton said in a statement issued by the White House.

Iraq on Wednesday announced that it would no longer cooperate with UN arms inspection teams charged with ensuring its weapons of mass destruction are destroyed. It said the United States was delaying the process in order to continue sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"Iraq's latest refusal to cooperate with the international weapons inspectors is unacceptable," Clinton said.

"Far from hastening the day the international Community lifts sanctions against Iraq, as Iraq intends, its failure to live up to its obligations will perpetuate those sanctions and keep the Iraqi economy under tight international control," he said.

Clinton blamed Baghdad for delays in ending broad economic sanctions and said "recent discoveries" of nerve gas residue on Iraqi warheads "only underscore Iraq's failure to meet its obligations to the world."

The latest round to tensions in the cat-and-mouse game between Iraq President Saddam Hussein and the UN Security Council flared when Iraq abruptly said it was suspending cooperation with the UN special commission that conducts arms inspections.

Baghdad insists the commission be "reformed" to eliminate US influence it blames for prolonging the disarmament process and sanctions.

Some diplomats and analysts speculated the timing of Saddam's latest actions may be linked in part to problems Clinton faces at home in a probe of his relationship with ex-White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

At the defence department, spokesman Ken Bacon said there were no current plans to increase the size of US forces in the Gulf, which currently include the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln and 167 warplanes in the region.

AP adds from United Nations: Choosing words over warfare, the Security Council called Iraq's refusal to allow arms inspections "totally unacceptable" but dangled the

possibility of UN concessions if Saddam Hussein cooperated.

The 15-member council on Thursday condemned Iraq's decision to snub weapons chief Richard Butler, but did not disclose what it planned to do about it, except to engage more closely with Iraq.

Iraq's actions run contrary to an agreement Secretary-General Kofi Annan struck with Saddam in February, the last time Iraq cut off the inspectors from doing their jobs, the council said. The deal averted an attack by the United States and Britain, who had sent forces to the Gulf to back their insistence on inspections.

Iraq told weapons inspectors Thursday that they cannot check new sites. It also banned surprise checks by the UN nuclear agency.

One option may be to consider proposals by some members, notably Russia and France, to alleviate some sanctions. Russia and France have pending financial interests in Iraq, while other nations are concerned about the effect of the sanctions, which the Iraqis blame for the deaths of 500 children a month.

The council's actions also reflected international weariness with the issue — a factor that the Iraqis hope will accelerate lifting of the sanctions, which have debilitated Iraq for eight years.

"We need to see deeds, not words," Said Hasan, the Iraqi Charge d'Affairs at the United Nations, said. "We are frustrated, we are fed up... it is now so clear Mr. Butler changes his declarations from time to time."

Another report from China says: China on Thursday offered to mediate a political settlement to the new rift in dialogue between Iraq and UN weapons inspectors, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

"We urge both parties to restore dialogue and cooperation at the earliest date, and to resolve disputes through consultation," the agency quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Tang Guoqiang as saying.

China is prepared to work with all parties to stop the situation from deteriorating further and promote a "comprehensive and balanced implementation" of UN resolutions on Iraq, it quoted Tang saying.

China, one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, has mostly sided with Russia and France in urging a speedy end to weapons inspections to allow the lifting of sanctions. That has sometimes set it against the United States and Great Britain, which have taken a harder line on Iraq cooperation with inspectors and compliance with disarmament demands.

Arafat, Netanyahu urged to reach accord

US close to declaring end to ME peace effort

WASHINGTON, Aug 7: The United States said Thursday it was close to declaring an end to its peace effort with Israel and the Palestinians despite Israeli assertions that a deal was within reach, reports AFP.

"We're not abandoning this current phase of our effort, but we're not far from declaring our judgement on it," said State Department deputy spokesman James Foley.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat during telephone conversations in recent days to reach agreement, Foley said.

"She urged both leaders to make additional efforts to achieve an agreement. We certainly think it is important that they do so," he said.

President Bill Clinton in January put forward a package of proposals to end a protracted deadlock in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

The proposals call for a 13 per cent Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank coupled with Palestinian steps to fight violence from extremists.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has accepted the US proposals.

Israel, which had long balked at the scope of the pullback, has recently offered to transfer 10 per cent of the territory to the Palestinian Authority while an additional three per cent would be turned into a "nature reserve".

Reuters adds: Israel's new ambassador to Washington said on Thursday gaps with the Palestinians on a new peace deal were "almost non-existent" and Israel was ready to give the PLO a map to illustrate a proposed troop pullback.

Speaking to reporters, envoy Zalman Shoval also confirmed Israeli press reports that Israel had offered a compromise in a dispute over changes to a Palestinian Charter that calls for the destruction of the Jewish state. But Shoval left open whether the US-backed talks between Is-

rael and the Palestinians would succeed or fail, the Palestinians charged this week that Israel had brought no fresh ideas to the talks and indicated they were going nowhere.

The State Department said on Thursday Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had telephoned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in recent days and won assurances that they would pur-

sue talks.

"They agreed to keep at it," spokesman James Foley said.

Foley said an agreement was possible, but added: "We don't have illusions that though the gaps are not large, they may turn out to be unbridgeable."

The two sides are discussing a US proposal for Israel to withdraw from another 13 per cent of the West Bank in return for tougher Palestinian moves against anti-Israeli guerrillas.



Socialist Party members burn a copy Thursday of a government report, rejecting the Srikrishna Commission probe indicting the right wing ruling Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party for inciting the 1992-93 Hindu-Muslim riots in Bombay. Human rights groups have criticised the government for the delay in publishing the probe report. More than 800 people were killed in Bombay in the 1992-93 communal riots. — AP/UNB photo

Cambodian polls were not perfect, but went reasonably well: UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 7: Elections in Cambodia were not perfect, but went reasonably well, the UN Security Council said, reports AP.

"In essence the election results, and the existing assessment of the election process were what could be expected," Danilo Turk, the Slovene delegate and current council president, told reporters Thursday.

Co-Prime Minister Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party emerged as the winner of the July 26 election when long-delayed complete preliminary results were announced Wednesday.

The main opposition parties are alleging there was rampant fraud in voting and ballot-counting, and that international observers to oversee the polls were inadequate.

The main group of international observers who helped monitor Cambodia's parliamentary election defended the quality and coverage of its work, saying the observers were experienced.

The opposition parties have threatened to block the formation of a new government by boycotting the new National Assembly session if their complaints are not properly investigated.

Turk said it was time to move on.

'Pakistanis captured in battlefield'

UN demands immediate end to Afghan fighting

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 7: In a sharp statement singling out the Taliban for criticism, the Security Council demanded an immediate end to fighting in Afghanistan and called for renewed peace talks under the UN mantle, reports AP.

Forces opposed to the ruling Taliban religious militia are backed into a small corner of northern Afghanistan, and the Taliban appears poised to capture all of the country.

In fierce fighting this week, it advanced on Mazar-e-Sharif, the stronghold of the northern alliance.

The council "demands an urgent and unconditional ceasefire leading to a final end to the hostilities," its statement said.

The Afghan crisis can be settled only by peaceful means, through direct negotiations between the Afghan factions under United Nations auspices," it said.

Thursday's statement singled out the Taliban for last month's expulsion of non-UN and non-Red Cross aid workers.

"The council deplores the measures taken by the Taliban, which have made it impossible for nearly all humanitarian organisations to continue their work in Kabul."

Taliban officials have been insisting that aid agencies that want to work in Kabul must move from offices and homes scattered throughout the Afghan capital to dilapidated dormitories on the campus of Kabul Polytechnic, which has been heavily damaged in the years of civil war.

International aid groups say they are committed to providing education and other services to all Afghans, while Taliban officials accuse the agencies of flouting the country's laws and traditions.

Taliban officials have imposed a strict interpretation of Islam since capturing Kabul in 1996, barring girls from school

and restricting most women to their homes.

The Security Council also called on "all states to refrain from any outside interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, including the involvement of foreign military personnel."

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's northern alliance said Friday it captured several hundred Pakistanis who were fighting alongside extremist Islamic Taliban troops.

The anti-Taliban coalition did not say where or over what period the Pakistanis were captured. Neighbouring Pakistan has denied its troops are helping the Taliban.

Taliban leader Mullah Omar, in a statement Friday, also rejected claims his fighters were aided by the Pakistani military in the bloody conflict in northern Afghanistan.

Another newspaper employee held for probable link with Tamil Tigers

COLOMBO, Aug 7: Police have detained a fourth employee of a Tamil newspaper on suspicion of having links with the outlawed Tamil Tiger separatists, an official said Friday, reports AP.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, refused to elaborate on the allegations against K. Manickavasagar, who worked in the printing department of the Virakesari newspaper.

Three other employees of the respected Tamil-language daily — two of them journalists and a former astrology columnist — were detained earlier on suspicion of being involved in a plot to assassinate President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the Sunday Times newspaper has reported.

'Kashmir dispute may cause N-war'

Japan offers to host Indo-Pak talks

ISLAMABAD, Aug 7: Japan has offered to host talks between India and Pakistan on Kashmir but said it was not in a position to mediate between the two nations on the issue, according to a Japanese diplomat, reports PTI.

Japan is ready to host the talks between the two countries at Tokyo as we want to encourage both India and Pakistan to negotiate on outstanding issues, including Kashmir, at a diplomatic level, Japanese Charge d'Affairs in Islamabad Hiroyasu Kobayashi told newsmen yesterday.

However, he said Japan is not in the position to mediate between Pakistan and India.

Terming Kashmir as a flash point between India and Pakistan, Kobayashi urged both the countries to settle the issue through negotiations.

Tokyo is much worried on the war-like situation at the Line of Control and tension there could result in a nuclear conflict in South Asia, he said.

He said that Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi would soon be writing separately to Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Reuters adds: India and Pakistan could wage nuclear war over the disputed territory of Kashmir, the leader of the separatists in Indian-controlled Kashmir said.

"The situation is going from bad to worse... Kashmir is the root cause of the tension between India and Pakistan. If the

problem is not solved both the countries could wage nuclear war," Syed Ali Shah Geelani said in an interview.

Geelani is chairman of the All Parties Hurriyat (freedom) Conference, an umbrella grouping of 14 separatist parties.

The bearded, 68-year-old Geelani, wearing a flowing white robe, spoke at his home in a suburb of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar of the "right path" of secession from India.

He called the Muslim militants who have waged a fierce eight-year revolt against Indian security forces in the Kashmir Valley "freedom fighters."

"Peaceful means have not worked. We do not call the militants' activities violence. It is violence by the Indian side. The militants are fighting for a just and noble cause."

Indian and Pakistani troops have over the past week exchanged artillery fire across a 'Line of Control' marking the point at which in 1948 they stopped fighting in their first war over Kashmir.

During the interview, Geelani repeatedly referred to a United Nations Security Council 1948 resolution asking both countries to withdraw their troops and allow Kashmiris to decide in a plebiscite on whether to accede to Pakistan or India.

"I assure you that the majority of the Kashmiris will accede to Pakistan," the separatist leader told Reuters.



Satellite television trucks are parked near Federal Court in Washington Thursday as Monica Lewinsky testified inside before a Grand Jury investigating her alleged affair with President Clinton. More than a hundred reporters, 22 satellite trucks, even a mechanical hoist for a birds-eye camera view, were assembled outside the court for Lewinsky's arrival. — AP/UNB photo

Suu Kyi orders guards to leave her compound

Opposition groups call for uprising to oust junta

BANGKOK, Aug 7: Myanmar opposition groups today called for a nationwide uprising to remove the country's junta from power, reports AFP.

"Nowadays it is not for the people to fear the SPDC military dictators, but it is for the military dictators to cravenly fear the people," the major opposition umbrella group National Council of the Union of Burma said in a statement received here.

"Therefore we call upon the political parties in towns and cities, the people from all walks of life, the Buddhist monks, youths and students, Burmese communities overseas, ethnic

nationalities in ceasefire, and pro-democratic elements in the armed forces, to be on the alert to join force with the NLD led by Daw (honorable) Aung San Suu Kyi for the historic struggle to completely wipe out the domination of the SPDC military dictatorship.

"In conclusion, we would like to announce that we have started the launching of 'PP-21' — Operation People's Power 21 — according to plan."

The statement did not elaborate on the plan and opposition officials based in Thailand could not immediately be reached for comment. Junta officials in Yangon were also un-

available.

The call came on the eve of the politically-charged 10th anniversary Saturday of a military crack-down on pro-democracy demonstrators which left thousands dead, according to unofficial tolls. It also came ahead of an August 21 deadline set by the opposition for the junta to convene Parliament or face unspecified consequences.

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) is the official name for the junta. The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, won 1990 polls by a landslide but the junta has refused to relinquish power.

Earlier report says, Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was in a new stand-off with the country's junta Thursday ahead of the 10th anniversary of a military crack-down on pro-democracy demonstrators which left thousands dead, officials from her party said.

The latest confrontation was sparked when the Nobel Peace laureate ordered junta security guards to leave her compound and they refused, the National League for Democracy (NLD) officials added.

The stand-off came as reports of protests, detentions and security clamp-downs swirled through Yangon, but the streets remained calm ahead of the August 8 anniversary, residents and foreign diplomats said.

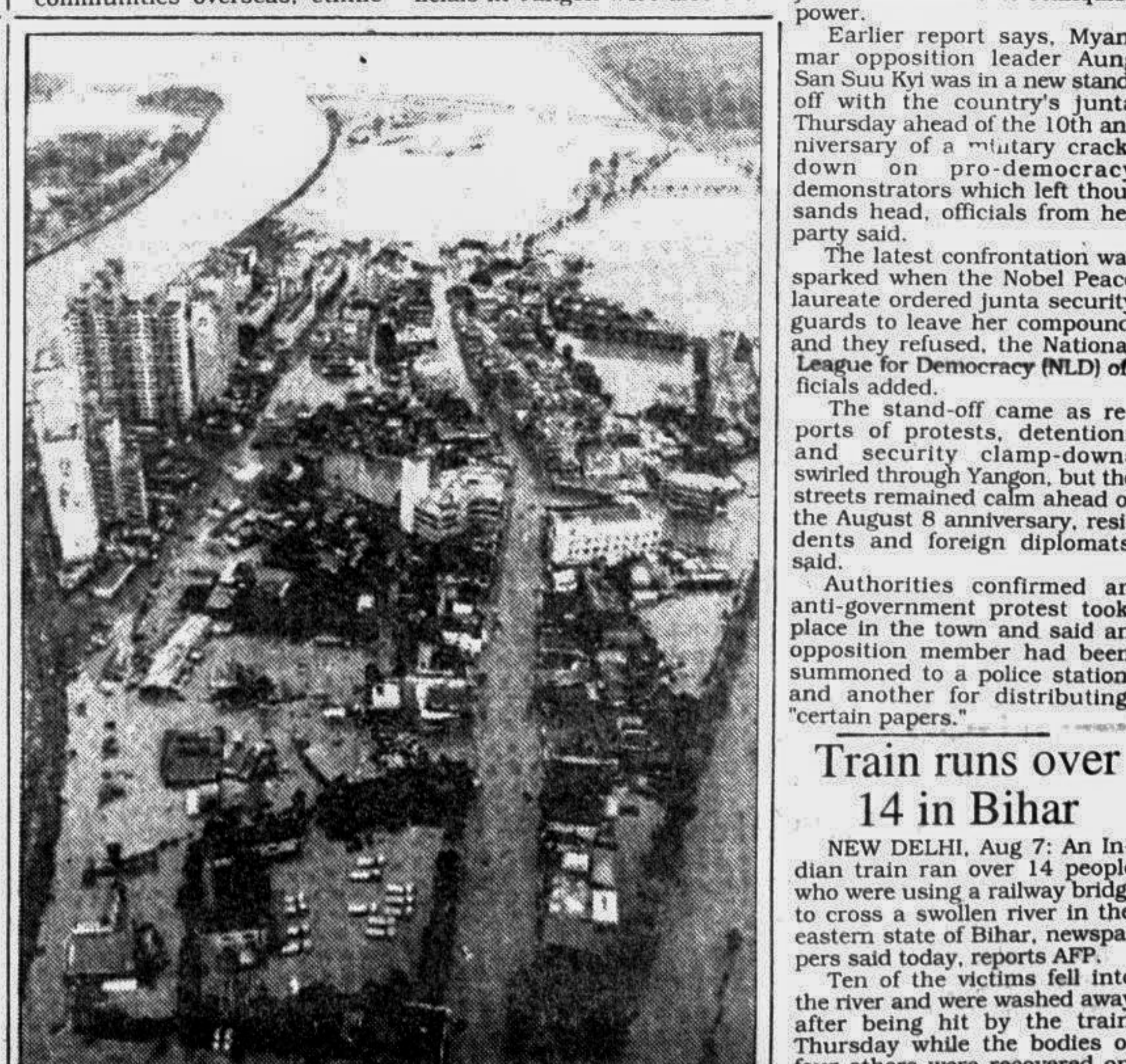
Authorities confirmed an anti-government protest took place in the town and said an opposition member had been summoned to a police station and another for distributing "certain papers."

Train runs over 14 in Bihar

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: An Indian train ran over 14 people who were using a railway bridge to cross a swollen river in the eastern state of Bihar, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

Ten of the victims fell into the river and were washed away after being hit by the train Thursday while the bodies of four others were recovered on the bridge. The Hindu and other dailies said.

The dead people had been using the railway bridge because a bridge used by motorists and pedestrians had been washed away by floods.



This is an aerial view of the flooded area in Paju City, north of Seoul, Thursday. Torrential rains triggered floods and landslides in Seoul and surrounding provinces, killing at least 40 people, leaving 20 missing and submerging thousands of homes. — AP/UNB photo