

94 die in Indian bus plunge

BANGALORE, India, June 8: The toll in one of India's worst road disasters rose to 94 today with 66 more bodies fished out from a reservoir into which an overcrowded bus had plunged...

There was only eight feet of water there," Infant said. The front tyre of the bus burst due to overloading, he added. Infant said swimmers were "looking for more bodies stuck in the silt." He said the bus had been lifted from the water with a crane.

Vajpayee warns Pakistan against border attacks

NEW DELHI, June 8: India on Monday told Pakistan to halt cross-border attacks in disputed Kashmir and warned that peace talks would depend on how Islamabad ended the military standoff, reports AFP.

from the "simple fact" that Pakistani soldiers decided to cross the 720-kilometre (446-mile) Line of Control (LoC) dividing Kashmir. "I do not want to make it plain: if the stratagem now is that the intrusion should be used to alter the LoC through talks, the proposed talks will end before it has begun," he said.

Kashmir. Meanwhile, India staged air attacks against Islamic guerrillas in Kashmir for the 13th day today with two waves of fighters targeting frontier posts captured by the infiltrators, an official said. An air force spokesman said the "sorties are on" but refused to confirm whether French-made Mirage-2000 jets were being used in addition to MiG fighters.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee greets members of the National Security Council during an emergency meeting in New Delhi yesterday to discuss the situation in Kashmir. India has accepted a Pakistan proposal for peace talks to end the month-long fighting in the disputed state. — AFP photo

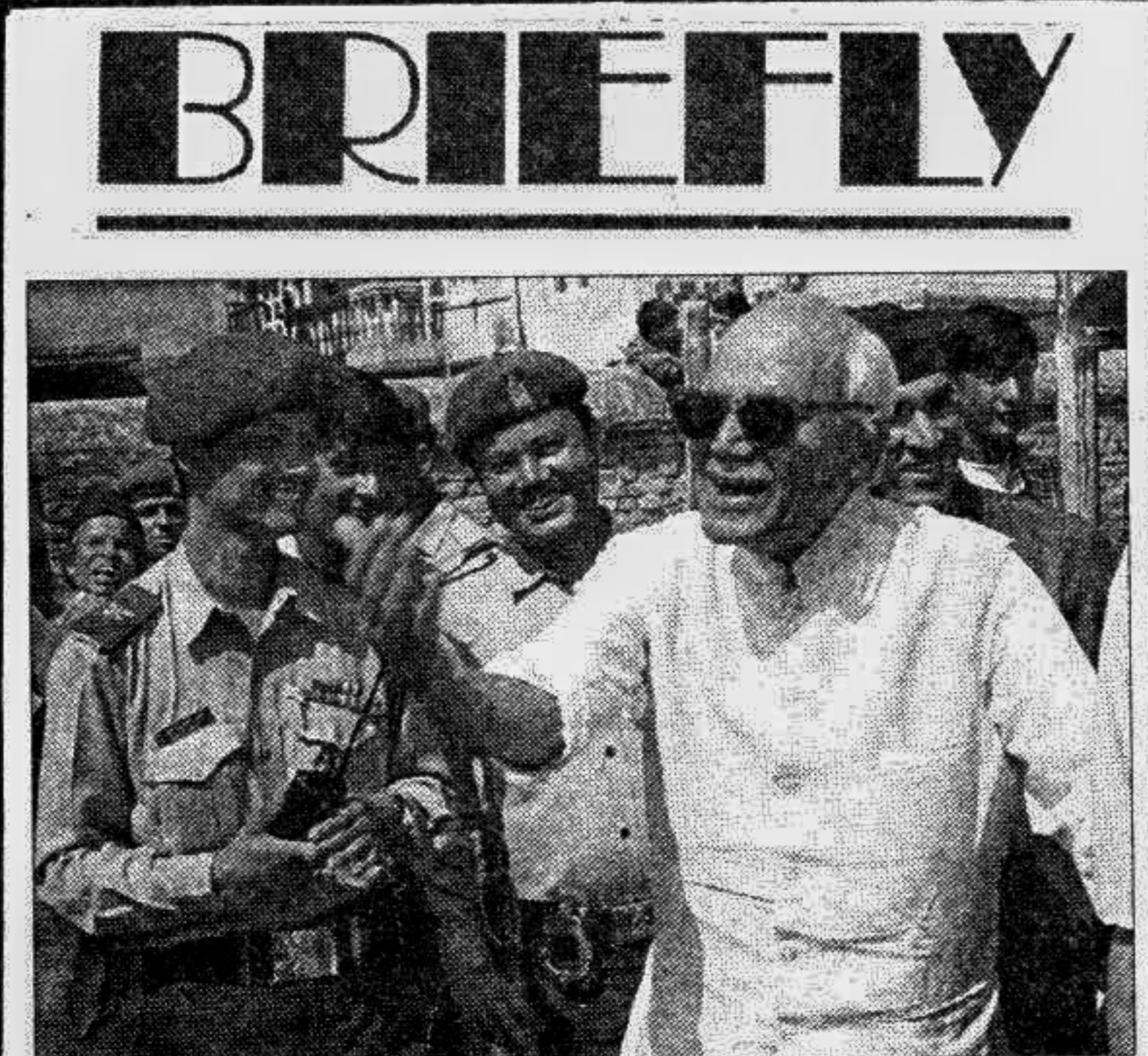
EU envoy seeks Chinese support for Kosovo peace plan

BEIJING, June 8: Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, the European Union envoy on Kosovo, met Chinese leaders today to try to win support for a Kosovo peace plan drafted by the Group of Eight nations, reports AFP.

China had raised objections. During Ahtisaari's visit, President Jiang Zemin told Russian counterpart Boris Yeltsin that Beijing would carry through its stance on Kosovo "to the end."

number of bombing raids was twice as high as over the weekend but still down on last week's peak. Attacks were continuing Tuesday, day 77 of the air campaign. The overnight raids inflicted significant damage on Serb forces close to the Albanian border in southwestern Kosovo.

tanks, eight multiple rocket launchers as well as other Serb positions and vehicles. In the rest of Serbia, NATO targets included the Batajnica airfield on the outskirts of Belgrade and a petroleum storage site at Novi Sad.



Prime minister barred from voting Newly-elected Nepalese Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhatrai argues with polling officers after he was prevented from voting for failing to produce his voter's identity card in Kathmandu yesterday. Voting was not held in Kathmandu constituencies numbers one and three during the general election on May 3 and 17 because of the death of former prime minister and candidate for both seats Man Mohan Adhikari.

Voting begins in Kathmandu: Voting began in two constituencies of the Nepalese capital Kathmandu on Tuesday, with the ruling Nepali Congress hoping to increase its current overall parliamentary majority, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

ROK justice minister sacked: South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung Tuesday sacked his justice minister amid reports that his staff had orchestrated an illegal strike at state-run corporations, AFP reports from Seoul.

A presidential spokesman said Kim Tae-Joung had been replaced by Kim Jung-Kil, currently head of the prosecution office in the southern city of Kwangju. The replacement also came days after a "fur-cat scandal" involving the wives of a business tycoon, of a former unification minister and of Justice Minister Kim.

Strong quake rocks Philippines: A strong earthquake which rocked parts of the southern Philippines destroyed some buildings and caused injuries, officials said on Tuesday, AFP reports from Zamboanga.

Southern Command, said a shopping mall and a nearby building partially collapsed in the two of Bayugan in Agusan del Sur province on Monday due to the tremor, which measured 5.1 on the Richter scale. A cinema, a grocery store, a funeral home, the fire station and other structures in the town reported light to serious damage in the 30-second quake, Lapinid and disaster officials said.

Cyclone kills four in China: Cyclone Maggie killed at least four people in southern China after intensifying on leaving Hong Kong, reports said today. The four were killed when the tropical storm struck eastern coastal Guangdong province late Sunday, the Chinese-language Ming Pao daily said, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Mexican TV presenter killed: Gunmen killed a prominent Mexican television personality in a hail of bullets on Monday, ambushing his luxury car outside a Mexico City restaurant and reigniting fury over a crime wave in one of the world's largest cities. Reuter reports from Mexico City.

Ocalan trial adjourned PKK armed wing warns against death sentence IMRALLI, Turkey, June 8: The Turkish State Security Court trying Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan on Tuesday adjourned the trial until June 23 after the prosecution renewed its demand that he be sentenced to death for treason, the Anatolia news agency reported, reports AFP.

The court's decision to adjourn the trial on the prison island of Imrali came after a request by the defence team to be given time to prepare their case. The court gave Ocalan's lawyers 15 days -- the maximum time allowed under Turkish law -- to prepare. The sixth hearing of the Ocalan trial opened with the prosecutors summing up the charges against the 50-year-old leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), during which they said he should be sentenced to death under Article 125 of the penal code. The article addresses the offence of "attempts to divide Turkish territory with the aim of setting up a separate state." Chief prosecutor Cevdet

Asked if China was likely to use its Security Council veto to block a UN resolution on any G8 peace plan, Ahtisaari said he was "not that pessimistic." "It was very important that we should not waste time, and I hope the Security Council will discuss the resolution this week," he said. "I am absolutely convinced that China has always insisted it wanted a peaceful settlement. There is no question about that."

The seven major industrialised nations -- Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States -- with Russia have agreed a draft resolution for a Kosovo peace plan to submit to the UN Security Council, according to US State Department spokesman James Rubin. "We will have a resolution today that meets all of our objectives and that will have all the necessary decisions to allow for the peacekeeping force with NATO at its core to operate in Kosovo," Rubin said at a G8 meeting in Cologne Tuesday.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin (L) welcomes Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari to a meeting at the Zhongnanhai leadership compound in Beijing yesterday. — AFP photo

Security agents cordoned off the area as Justice Minister Joseph Shaoul rushed from Beirut to Sidon with general prosecutor Adnan Addoum and military prosecutor general Nasr Lahoud. A judicial source told AFP that eight Lebanese and Palestinian suspects were in the court room at the time of the attack and were being tried in separate cases on charges of drugs, forgery and murder.

Abuse of children high in Australian welfare care

BRISBANE, June 8: An investigator who uncovered cases of physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children in welfare care in one Australian state said Tuesday the problem probably extends nationally, reports AP. The Queensland state government said it expects criminal charges to be laid after the release of the Forde Inquiry's report into child abuse in welfare institutions such as detention centers for juvenile criminals and some orphanages.

tutions had failed to provide for the basic needs of children -- emotional warmth, food, clothing and education. In addition to blaming individuals responsible for abusive acts, Forde criticized institution managers and church leaders for turning a blind eye to abuse, the state department responsible for children's services for failing to adequately monitor children's care and "society, which ignored or accepted what happened to children in the care of the state." She said the problems uncovered during nine months of hearings were likely to exist nationally. "I'm sure this is not just a Queensland problem. I'm sure that this is happening in a lot of places," she said. "We turned a blind eye in the

past. Maybe this report will make the other states aware." The Queensland government immediately apologised to anyone who may have been abused, but said a recommendation to increase childcare funding by 100 million Australian dollars (65 million US dollars) would not be adopted. "The report concludes that significant numbers of children in Queensland institutions suffered serious physical, sexual and emotional abuse," Families Minister Anna Bligh said. The report found the risk of child abuse in the system remained unacceptably high. The report calls for more counseling and educational programmes for children in care and for staff in children's institutions to be screened for criminal records.

Malaysia's ruling party expels 73

KUALA LUMPUR, June 8: The ruling party of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has expelled 73 members for supporting opposition parties, news reports said today, reports AFP. The report said the supreme council of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) expelled the members during a monthly meeting chaired by Mahathir on Monday night. Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said more than half of those were expelled for activities during elections in the eastern state of Sabah in March. "Forty-one of them are permanently sacked for standing as opposition candidates and supporting opposition candidates in the state election," he was quoted as telling a news conference late Monday. Others were expelled for breaching party regulations and joining a new party formed by the wife of jailed former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, the reports said, adding the names of those expelled were not immediately available.

Opposition leading in Indonesian polls

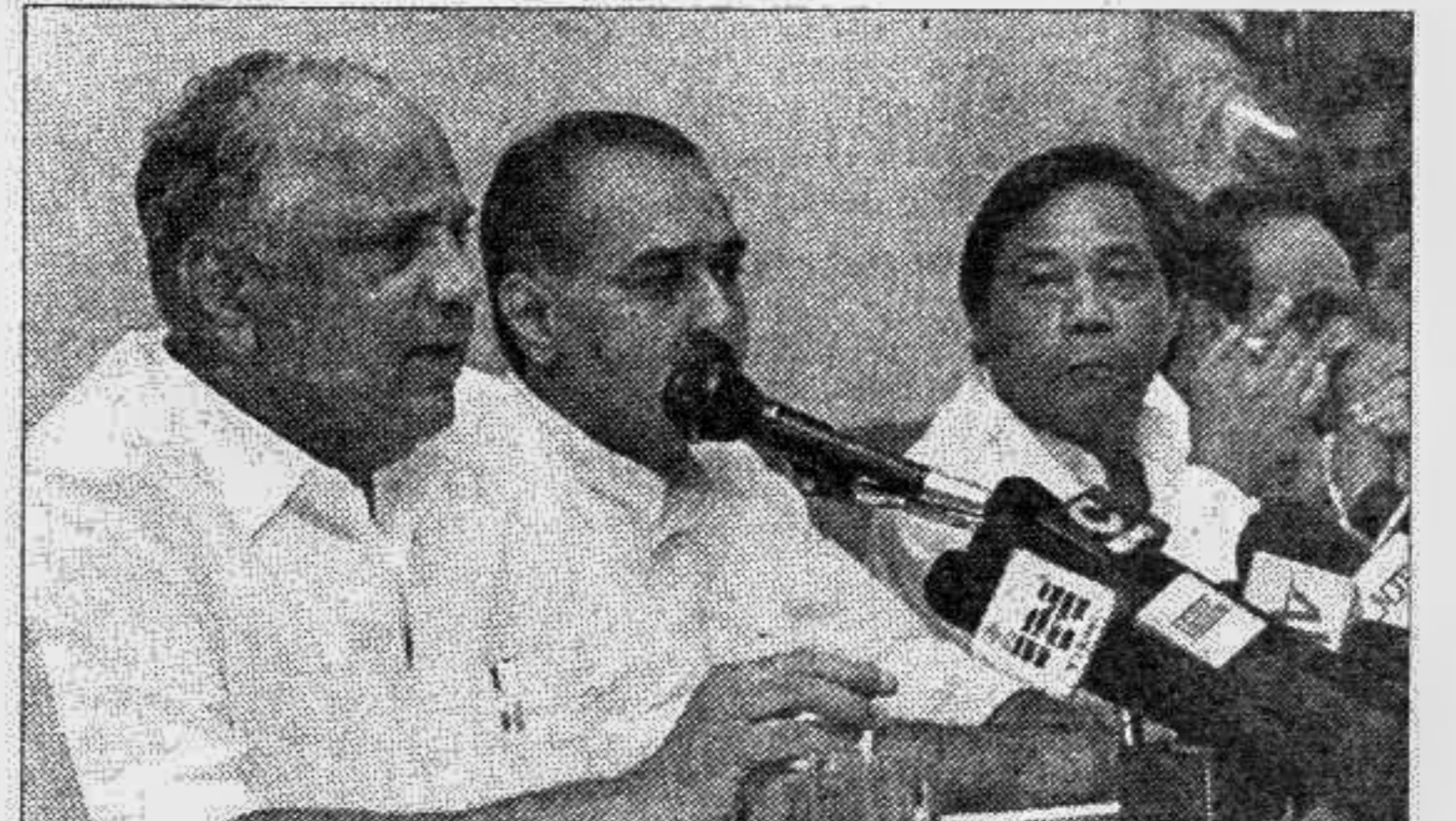
JAKARTA, June 8: Fledgling Indonesian opposition parties snatched a commanding lead Tuesday over the ruling Golkar party in early results from the first elections since the fall of former president Suharto, reports AFP. With 577,166 ballots counted, the secular Indonesian Democracy Party-Struggle (PDI-P) of Megawati Sukarnoputri held a 74.073 vote lead over the National Awakening Party (PKB) of moderate Muslim leader Abdurrahman Gus Dur Wahid. The ruling Golkar party, which held a majority during the three decades of Suharto's rule, was in third place trailing the PKB by more than 79,514 votes. But the count was painfully slow as Indonesians waited to see whether the first democratic elections in more than 40 years would usher in a new political era in a country squeezed for decades by Golkar and Suharto, who Tuesday celebrated his 78th birthday.

Journalists manning the commission joked it was the first time in decades the votes had to be counted. It was hoped a clearer picture of the results would emerge by late Tuesday. Undeterred by the slow count, Jakarta shares soared 12.1 per cent, reaching a 22-month high not seen here since the early days of the regional economic crisis in 1997 brought the Indonesian economy to its knees. More than 100 million people registered to vote in Monday's landmark polls, touted as the most democratic since the 1955 elections under founding president Sukarno. With 577,166 votes, or less than one per cent, counted since the polls closed Monday, the PDI-P, led by Sukarno's daughter Megawati, had garnered 232,599 votes, with 158,436 for the PKB. The PDI-P was expecting clinch up to 30 per cent of the national vote and up to 40 per cent of the vote in greater Jakarta, according to the capital's PDI-P chapter chairman Rdy B. Janis.

Gunmen kill 4 judges in court room

SIDON, Lebanon, June 8: Four judges, including the chief prosecutor for Sidon, were killed and five other people wounded today when gunmen sprayed a court room in this port city with machine gun fire, police said, reports AFP. The two unidentified gunmen opened fire with machine guns through the ground floor windows of Sidon's main court building, the Judicial Palace, police said. Judge Hassan Othman, head of the Sidon Criminal Court, Judge Assen Abu Daher, the Sidon chief prosecutor, Judge Walid Harmush and Judge Imad Shehab, were killed, police said. The wounded -- a lawyer, two security agents, a Lebanese woman and a Lebanese man -- were rushed to hospital. The lawyer, Salem Slim, was in critical condition, according to hospital sources. Police said the assailants

abandoned their weapons, which included several machine guns and a rocket-launcher, at the scene and escaped. Security agents cordoned off the area as Justice Minister Joseph Shaoul rushed from Beirut to Sidon with general prosecutor Adnan Addoum and military prosecutor general Nasr Lahoud. A judicial source told AFP that eight Lebanese and Palestinian suspects were in the court room at the time of the attack and were being tried in separate cases on charges of drugs, forgery and murder. Sidon MP Bahi'a Hariri visited the scene of the shooting and said the cases being heard at the time were "not very important." The state television station, Tele-Liban, described the unprecedented attack as a "horrible crime."



Osama bin Laden on FBI's most wanted list

WASHINGTON, June 8: The Federal Bureau of Investigation added Saudi fugitive Osama Bin Laden, sought for his part in the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Africa, to its "Ten Most Wanted List" Monday, reports AFP. The FBI also offered five million dollars reward for any information leading to Bin Laden's capture -- a record for the US federal agency. Bin Laden, 41, is believed to be the mastermind behind last year's bloody attacks against US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The August 7 bombing in Nairobi killed 213 people, 12 of them Americans, and wounded some 5,000 others while another the same day in Dar-es-Salaam killed 11 people and wounded 70. Bin Laden, who according to the FBI heads the terrorist Al Qaeda organisation, continues to be "a serious concern," Bureau director Louis Freeh told journalists here. "The FBI continues to receive a high number of threats from individuals and organizations with ties to Bin Laden," he said.

Expelled leader of India's main opposition Congress Party Sharad Pawar (L), and now the president of the newly formed Nationalist Congress Party, answers questions at a press conference in Bombay yesterday. — AFP photo

Pawar rules out poll alliance with BJP

BOMBAY, June 8: An expelled leader from India's main opposition Congress, who formed his own party after a spat with Congress president Sonia Gandhi, today ruled out an alliance with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's party for September-October national elections, reports AFP. Sharad Pawar said his new party, floated with two other former Congress leaders who were kicked out for questioning the Italian-born Gandhi's leadership, would not join hands with the Hindu nationalist BJP. "We are not going to associate with the BJP in any way. We believe India is a multi-cultural, multi-religious country and not just a Hindu country," Pawar told reporters here. Pawar, a former defence minister, is chief of the newly-floated Nationalist Congress Party. On Tuesday, he reiterated a demand for legal changes to bar foreign-born nationals from occupying top posts -- a move which had earlier led to his ouster from the Congress. "We will demand that the constitution be amended to allow only natural born Indians to occupy top posts of president, vice-president, prime minister," he said, adding: "We are fighting for the cause of nationalism and national self-respect." Pawar said his party would "focus on decentralisation of power." He claimed that large numbers of Congress party members agreed with his view that Sonia Gandhi, who acquired Indian nationality in 1986, was unfit to become prime minister. He claimed the dissidents would soon join his party.



Supporters of former Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto try to remove the barbed wires in Karachi during a demonstration against the conviction of their leader for graft yesterday. Around 20 workers of Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) were arrested as they tried to defy security measures to reach the residence of the provincial governor. — AFP photo