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.

police said, reports AFP. The bus, carrying about 150 people according to witnesses, veered off a bridge into the water late Monday after one of its tyres burst, about 300 kilometres from Bangalore, the capital of the southern state of

Karnataka. Police said passengers were trapped inside the bus and drowned in only about eight feet (2.4 metres) of water.

"We cannot rule out the death toll going up," a police official told AFP. "A lot of people seem to be unaccounted for."

Abdul Rahman Infant, a senior Karnataka police official, said all the victims had drowned apart from one man who died of injuries later. He said 25 people had been rescued, including the driver.

"The dead include 35 women, 46 men, 10 boys and three girls," he said, adding that the passengers appeared to have been trapped inside the bus af-ter it fell into the reservoir, about 50 feet (15 metres) below.

"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

Imam Saab, the driver, tried to jump out as it fell off the bridge and seriously injured himself, police said, adding that according to witnesses some 50 people were sitting on top of the vehicle at the time of the accident.

A police official said that the disaster was "the worst in Karnataka in over two decades." He said the driver was being charged with negligence and that charges could be brought

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee Tuesday expressed "profound grief" over the tragedy. President K.R. Narayanan said he was shocked and conveyed his condolences to families of the victims.

against the bus owner as well.

India is one of the world's most accident-prone countries with an average of two people dying every five minutes on its

Vajpayee warns Pakistan against border attacks

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.

"India is always open to talks. But the talks must have a definite, specific purpose," Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said in a special broadcast to the nation on state television.

"In the present instance, the subject is one, and one alone: the intrusion, and how Pakistan proposes to undo it. To discuss this, our doors are always open and all dates are convenient to us," Vajpayee said in the speech, a copy of which was sent to AFP.

India began military opera-tions against islamic guerillas in Kashmir a month ago and said Pakistani soldiers were fighting alongside the guerillas in the mountains of Kargil. Batalik and Drass. Pakistan denies the charge.

Vajpayee said the "serious" situation in Kargil was "fraught with danger" and had arisen

NEW DELHI, June 8: India on from the "simple fact" that Pakistani soldiers decided to cross the 720-kilometre (446mile) Line of Control (LoC) di-

viding Kashmir. "I do 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.

"Therefore, I once again urge the government of Pakistan: undo the armed intrusion," the Indian prime minister said and added the intrusion was planned well in advance.

Vajpayee's statement came as the Indian army in a major shift said it was mostly Pakistani regular troops with a "sprinkling" of Islamic guerillas who were occupying the Kargil heights.

He said the Kashmir attacks occurred at a time when relations with Pakistan "were improving rapidly" following his landmark cross-border bus trip to Lahore in Pakistan in

February. Vajpayee also attacked Pakistan for challenging the mutually-accepted LoC in

ficial said.

Meanwhile. India staged air attacks against Islamic gueril-las in Kashmir for the 13th day today with two waves of fighters targeting frontier posts captured by the infiltrators, an of-

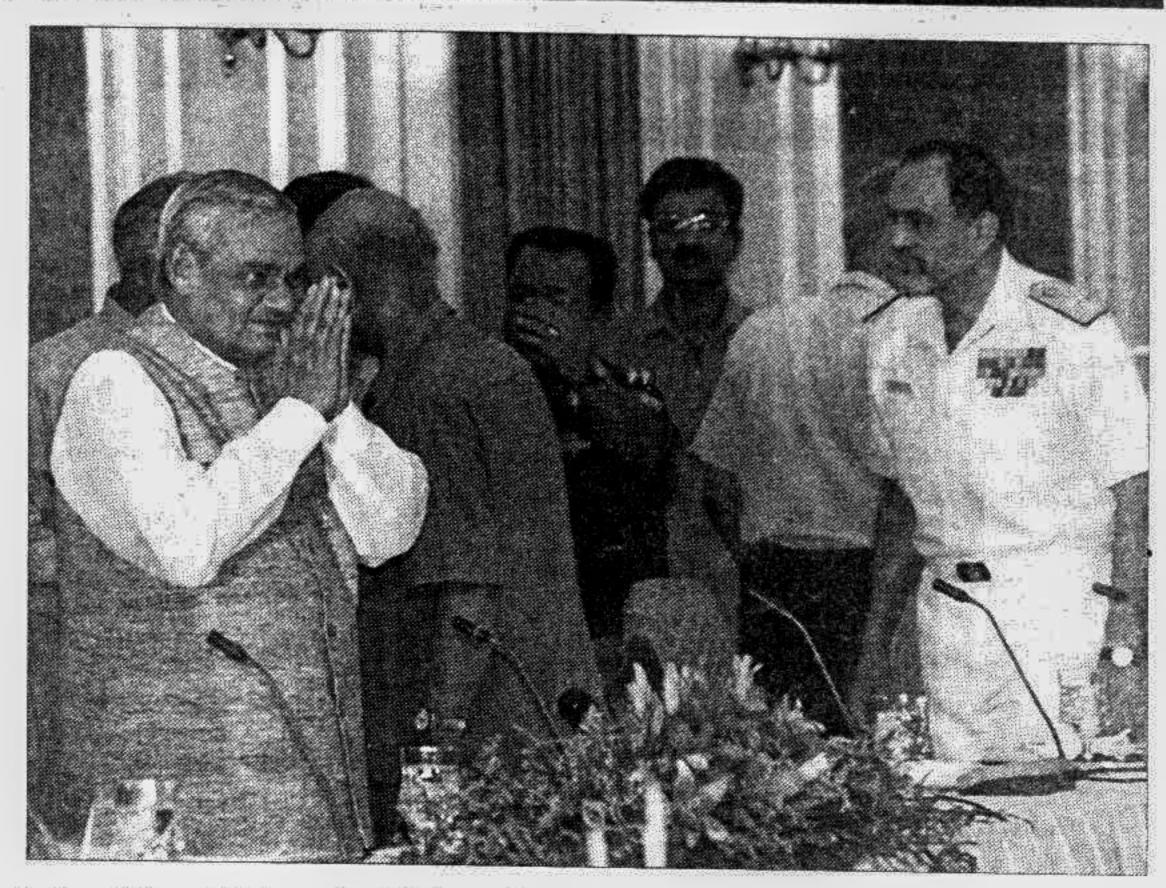
An air force spokesman said the "sorties are on" but refused to confirm whether Frenchmade Mirage-2000 jets were being used in addition to MiG fighters.

Air strikes against what India describes as Islamabadbacked guerillas and Pakistan army soldiers have been staged daily since May 26 apart from a break last Saturday.

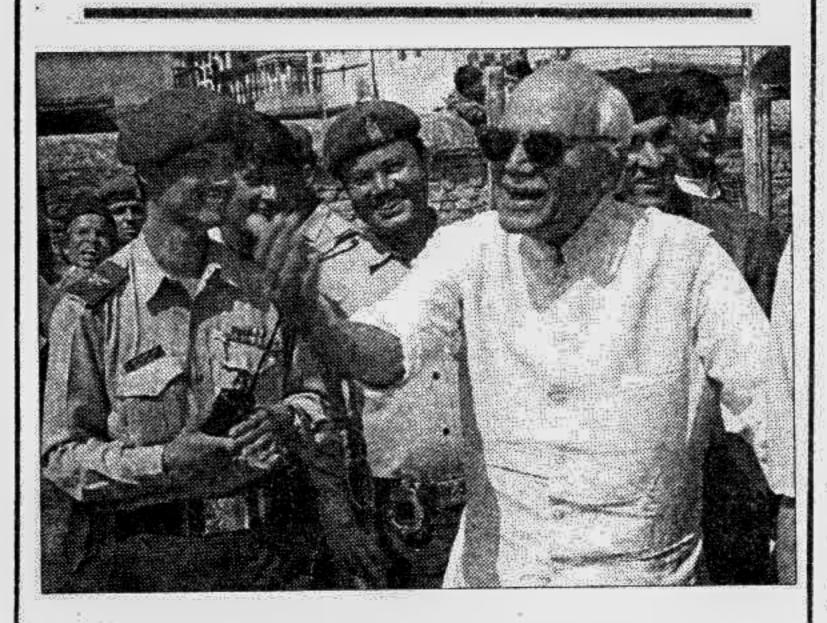
Artillery battles between the intruders and Indian forces started on May 9 and have been continuing without a break. Military sources have said

the Indian air force is using laser-guided rockets and cluster bombs against rebel targets. India on Tuesday said between 1,200 and 1,500 intruders

have infiltrated into its sector of Kashmir and occupied strategic mountain posts.



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



Prime minister barred from voting

Newly-elected Nepalese Prime Minister Krishna Prashad Bhattrai 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 - AFP photo 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. Balloting did not take place in the two seats during the staggered general election on May 3 and 17 because a candidate in both constituencies, former prime minister Man Mohan Adhikari, had died in late April. The constitution allows a

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

candidate to contest two constituencies.

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. Colonel Horacio Lapinid, spokesman for the military's 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 reintensifying on leaving Hong Kong, reports said today. The four were killed when the tropical storm struck eastern

Ming Pao daily said, AFP reports from Hong Kong. Several thousand houses were destroyed by wind speeds of between 41 and 62 kilometers per hour when it hit the area of Shaoshan, the reports said.

coastal Guangdong province late Sunday, the Chinese-language

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 reigning fury over a crime wave in one of the world's largest cities, Reuter reports from Mexico

Francisco "Paco" Stanley, 56, who became a household name as a presenter of successful game shows and comedy programmes, was the latest in a series of high-profile crime victims in the Mexican capital.

Ocalan trial adjourned

PKK armed wing warns against death sentence

IMRALI, 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 Volkan said that Ocalan had accepted responsibility for all terror acts carried out by the

Ocalan stands accused of treason, separatism and ordering rebel attacks that claimed thousands of lives .

In a written statement on Monday, the PKK's armed wing warned Turkey not to execute Ocalan, threatening to step up

its armed attacks. "A crazy attitude like eliminating our leader would mean suicide for the Turkish state," the Kurdistan People's Liberation Army (ARGK) said in a statement carried by the pro-

Kurdish news agency, Dem. In last week's court hearings on the prison island, Ocalan called on his rebels to lay down their arms and urged a peaceful solution to the Kurdish ques-

Turkish authorities have snubbed the rebel leader's call. and expressed Ankara's determination to "wipe out the through military EU envoy seeks Chinese support for Kosovo peace plan BEIJING, June 8: Finnish tanks, eight multiple rocket

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.

"We had a constructive discussion," Ahtisaari told reporters before boarding a plane to return to Europe.

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

The seven major industralised 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.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has the power to veto any resolution. But the Finnish president declined to say whether

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."

"The top priority is to stop bombing Yugoslavia," state-run television quoted Jiang as saying during a hotline conversation with Yeltsin.

"As long as we have the right idea we must support it to the end," he said.

Jiang said when the G8 peace plan resolution came to the UN Security Council, the top priority was to take into account the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Yugoslavia.

Ahtisaari declined to speculate on whether China would back a G8 resolution at the UN. Meanwhile, NATO resumed

air strikes on targets around Belgrade and across Serbia Tuesday as the allies sought to bomb Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic back into talks on a pullout from Kosovo. The attacks followed a four-

of the allies' air operations was significantly reduced and attacks concentrated on Serb forces in Kosovo. The decision to return to the intense level of bombing seen in the middle of last week followed Monday's breakdown in talks

between NATO and Yugoslav

generals on the technical de-

day period in which the tempo

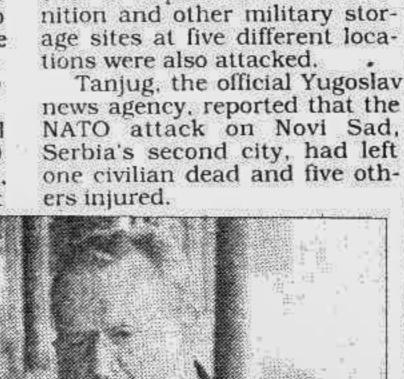
tails of a Yugoslav military withdrawal from Kosovo. In the 24 hours up to Tuesday morning, allied warplanes flew 658 sorties, 222 of them strike sorties and 65 designed to eliminate Serb air defences. The

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. Serb troops in the region have become more exposed to

attack from the air as they have been drawn into fierce exchanges with the rebels of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

In Kosovo, NATO said it had struck 20 artillery pieces, 10 armoured personnel carriers, nine mortar positions, six



launchers as well as other Serb

targets included the Batajnica

airfield on the outskirts of

Belgrade and a petroleum stor-

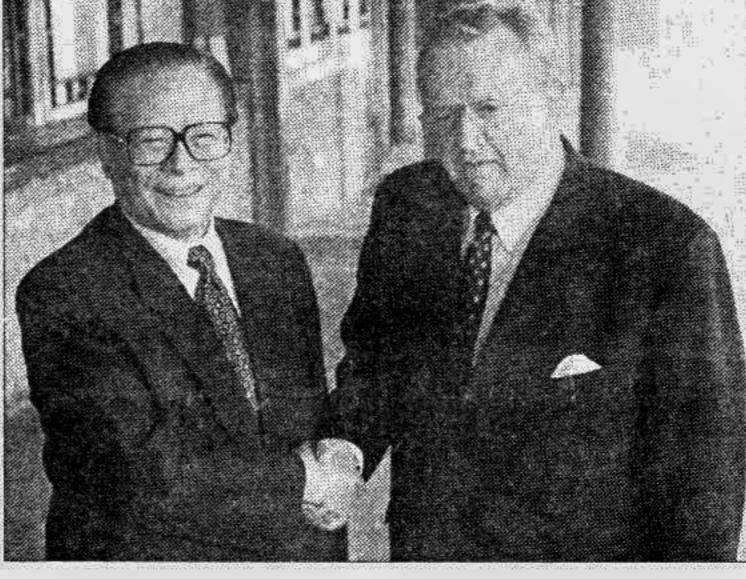
In the rest of Serbia, NATO

Sjenica airfield, air defence

sites at Kapaonik, and ammu-

positions and vehicles.

age site at Novi Sad.



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

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.

Inquiry head Leneen Forde detailed disturbing tales of abuse and neglect, including the story of a 12-year-old boy who was sexually assaulted by a priest on 14 occasions over a 2 1/2 year period.

Her report said some insti-

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

Supporters of former Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto try to remove the barbered

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.

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 dlrs) 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.

- AFP photo

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 reports 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

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

expelled for activities during

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.

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.

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 (PDIP) of Megawati Sukarnoputri held a 74,073 vote lead over the National Awakening Party (PKB) of moderate Moslem 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

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.

Election Commission member Andi Malarangeng said counted votes were pooled at subdistrict or district offices to be entered into tables before be-

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 22month 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 PDIP, led by Sukarno's daughter Megawati, had garnered 232,509 votes, with 158,436 for the PKB.

The PDIP 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 PDIP chapter chairman Roy 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 gun-

men 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 Assem Abu Daher, the

Sidon chief prosecutor, Judge

Walid Harmush and Judge Imad

Shehab, were killed, police

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.

abandoned their weapons, which included several machine guns and a rocketlauncher, at the scene and escaped.

Security agents cordoned off

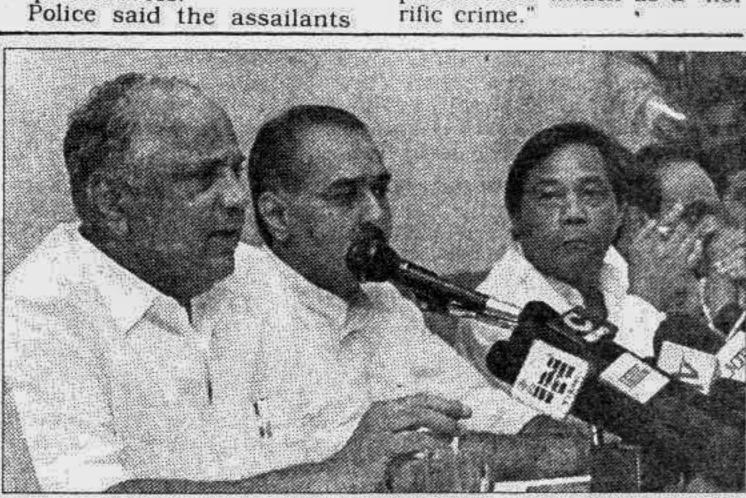
the area as Justice Minister

Joseph Shaoul rushed from

Beirut to Sidon with general prosecutor Adnan Addooum and military prosecutor general Nasri 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 Bahia 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 "horrific crime.



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 newlyfloated Nationalist Congress

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 al-

On Tuesday, he reiterated a

low 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 num-

bers 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.