

BRIEFLY



A man and the only woman of the Moroccan Royal Guard march on the Place de la Concorde during the French Bastille Day parade in Paris Wednesday. In a rare honour, Moroccan soldiers opened France's traditional celebrations, the first foreign troops to walk by themselves along the Champs-Élysées. — AFP photo

Amartya Sen arrives in Calcutta:

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen on Tuesday arrived in Calcutta on a three-day visit to see his ailing mother at Santiniketan, PTI reports from Calcutta.

Sen would hold a meeting with Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and Finance Minister Dr Ashim Dasgupta on July 17. The meeting would hold discussions on issues related to spread of primary education in the state, Sen told newsmen.

Blast kills one in Lanka:

A bomb explosion killed one man and wounded several others at a town in eastern Sri Lanka today, officials here said, AFP reports from Colombo.

The blast went off opposite a police station in the town of Batticaloa, 300 kilometres east of here by road, officials said. There were no immediate claims of carrying out the attack. The blast came as security forces and police remained on red alert for Tamil rebel attacks in the island's north-east as well as elsewhere during a month when the rebels celebrate two landmark anniversaries.

Morauta new PNG PM:

People's Democratic Movement leader Mekere Morauta was elected as new prime minister of Papua New Guinea (PNG) on Wednesday, Xinhua reports from Canberra.

PNG Parliamentary Speaker Iairo Lasaro announced Morauta had won the vote for the top job by 99 to 5. The only other nominee was East New Britain Governor Francis Koinanra, AAP said. Morauta becomes the sixth man to lead PNG since it gained independence in 1975.

Heavy rains kill one in Japan:

Heavy rains lashing Japan killed one man, injured three other people, triggered 94 landslides and flooded 192 homes, police and firefighters said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The rains, moving westwards across Japan since the previous evening, were held responsible for the death of a 64-year-old man in northern Japan's Iwate prefecture. "He left the house because he was worried his boat might have shifted away. He was found dead under a bridge by his niece," said a fire department official in Iwate.

Sudan peace talks Sunday:

The next round of peace negotiations between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) will be held in the Kenyan capital Nairobi from Sunday, the government has said, AFP reports from Khartoum.

Junior Foreign Minister Gebriel Rorec said that was notified of the date two days ago by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which sponsors mediation between the government and SPLA, according to Wednesday's Akhbar Al-Yom daily. The rival sides are due to resume discussions on a "declaration of principles" set by IGAD, Rorec said. The regional grouping, though some of its members are at odds, has been endeavouring to end conflict wracking south Sudan since 1983.

Indonesia polls fair, transparent: EU Megawati seen winner

JAKARTA, July 14: European Union observers said today Indonesia's June 7 election was fair and transparent despite a slow vote count and they expected populist opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri to win, reports Reuters.

"I am still a little concerned at the slowness, but I believe personally that the count will be finished in a very short space of time now," chief EU observer John Morgan told a news conference winding up the EU operation here.

"The count will reflect the vote cast by the people of Indonesia. Therefore, I believe the actual voting process was fair and transparent."

"The count is not finished yet, but I have little doubt myself that the results will differ from the percentages we have today by a maximum of two points."

So far, less than 60 per cent of votes have been formally tallied. The General Election

Commission (KPU) is due to announce the final result next Wednesday, after missing two deadlines.

The EU mission had expressed serious concerns at the slow pace of the count of the votes from the 116 million registered voters.

A semi-official count by the government's election committee could be finished as soon as today.

The delays have created unease among Indonesians as well as the country's stock and currency markets.

Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) holds a commanding lead over the ruling Golkar party, with almost 36 per cent of the vote to Golkar's 19 per cent.

Asked if Megawati's party would hold its lead, Morgan said: "Yes, I believe the voting pattern will not fluctuate by more than two percentage points."

Indian commandos free 12 hostages in gunbattle with militants

Shelling in Kashmir as infiltrators pull out

SRINAGAR, India, July 14: Crack Indian commandos on Wednesday rescued 12 people held hostage by Muslim separatists in Kashmir, reports AFP.

A source in the Border Security Force (BSF) said a unit of the elite National Security Guard flew in from New Delhi Tuesday and started the rescue operation at 5:30 a.m. (0000 GMT) Wednesday at the BSF camp at Bandipur.

The guerrillas had stormed the camp on Tuesday, killing four.

"There was intense firing for one hour in which we managed to free all the hostages, who comprised five children, four women and three BSF officers," the source said.

"After that we blasted the house in which they had taken shelter with the hostages. We think there could be a few militants buried under the debris."

He added one of the hostages

takers was killed trying to escape on Tuesday and another was killed on Wednesday morning. "There appear to be no (militant) survivors," he said.

Another official said three militants, whom he claimed were backed by Pakistan, died in the gunbattle about 65 kilometres north of the Kashmiri summer capital Srinagar.

The rebels had occupied the first floor of a two-storey building at the high-security military camp.

Tuesday's rebel attack on the camp was the first of its kind since a Muslim secessionist campaign broke out in Indian Kashmir in 1989.

Reports from Islamabad said a Pakistani militant outfit called the Lashkar-i-Taiba said it carried out the attack, which came two days after Islamic militants began to withdraw from Kashmir after two months of fighting Indian troops.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan traded artillery fire over the Kashmir border Wednesday, as Islamic infiltrators continued to withdraw on foot from Indian territory.

Three Indian military personnel were injured when a Pakistani shell hit their vehicle during the night at a checkpoint near Kargil on the main Srinagar-Leh highway that runs through Kashmir.

Indian guns opened up in retaliation Wednesday morning, military officials said.

While the artillery units continued their daily duels, air and ground assaults remained suspended ahead of the Friday morning deadline set by India for the complete withdrawal of all Islamic infiltrators to the Pakistani side of the border.

The withdrawal came after two months of intense fighting, which cost more than 1,000 lives on both sides, as India sought to evict the infiltrators

who had set up bunkers on strategic heights in Indian Kashmir.

Indian officials have confirmed that the intruders are pulling back, although a senior Pakistan official angrily denied that. New Delhi had ever informed Islamabad of a deadline for the retreat.

"That is just a pack of lies," foreign secretary Tariq Altaf said in a radio interview on Tuesday.

"It is absolutely wrong on the part of India to make such a claim."

India said the deadline was accepted by Pakistan during a meeting at the weekend of senior military officials from both countries.

It also warned that any infiltrators remaining on the Indian side of the border after the expiry of the deadline would be "treated as hostile and dealt with accordingly."

Khamenei orders clampdown

Hundreds of thousands attend rally

TEHRAN, July 14: Iran's supreme leader ordered a clampdown on violent anti-government protests on Wednesday as hundreds of thousands of people attended a rally here called to show support for the Islamic regime, reports.

"The people will not allow acts of destruction and the Islamic regime will repress it," Iran's supreme leader and spiritual guide Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a message to the nation broadcast on radio.

Another senior member of the Islamic regime warned

meanwhile that persons arrested during rioting here over the past two days would face trial as "counter-revolutionaries."

Those responsible for violent clashes with the security forces here on Monday and Tuesday are "bandits and saboteurs," conservative deputy speaker of parliament Hassan Rouhani told a huge rally at Tehran University.

Conviction on charges of engaging in "counter-revolutionary" activities is punishable by the death sentence in the Islamic Republic.

Rouhani also issued a stern warning against "foreign interference" in the unrest which has rocked the Islamic Republic and said Tehran would respond to any country supporting the demonstrations.

"We expected the reaction from the United States and the Zionist regime (Israel) but certain other countries are making a mistake by lending their support," he said.

He warned that Iran would "respond at an opportune time" but did not cite any country by

name other than the United States and Israel.

Several hundred thousand people, many carrying pictures of Khamenei and his predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, attended the mass rally at Tehran University called by the Organisation for Islamic Propaganda, the government's main propaganda body.

"My life belongs to the guide," read messages on some of the pictures carried by the demonstrators.

"Death to America," "Death to Israel" and "Death to the hypocrites," the demonstrators shouted in a reference to the People's Mujahadeen, the armed opposition movement based in Iraq.

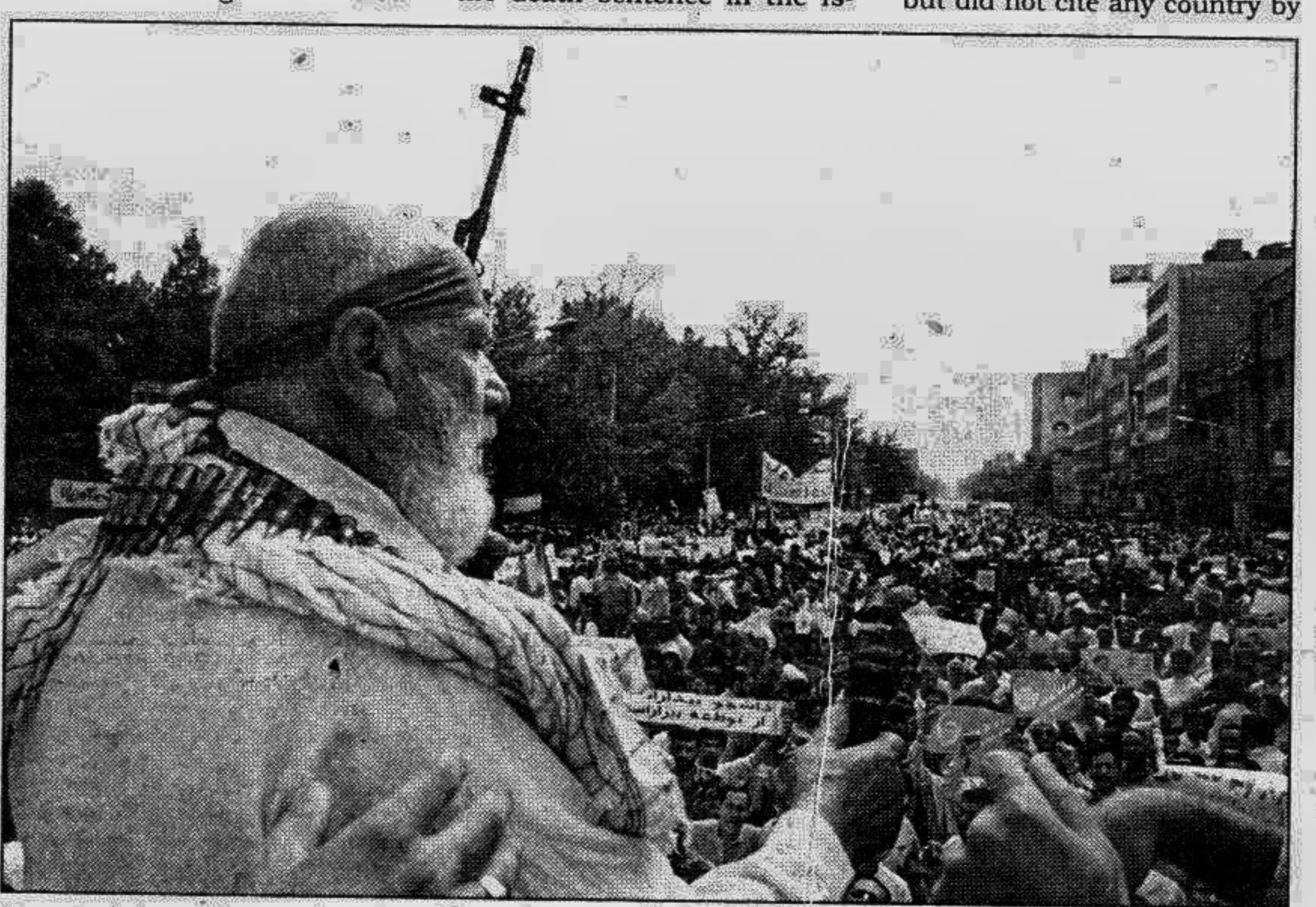
Khamenei, who is also commander in chief of the armed forces, ordered the security forces and Islamic militia volunteers to "repress corrupt and counter-revolutionary elements" and "reestablish public order."

He accused "bandits supported by bankrupt political groups and encouraged by foreign enemies" of being behind the unrest.

"Mean and wretched enemies of Islam and the revolution imagine that Iran's revolutionary people would let them pave the way for the dominance of the criminal US over Iran through their mischievous acts," he said.

"They imagine that the people have grown tired of Islam and the Islamic revolution and want to take revenge on the revolution," he added.

"(But) the faithful, brave and vigilant people of Iran will not permit them, their masters and their supporters to go on with their vicious acts and the powerful Islamic system will severely crush them down," he warned.



A pro-regime demonstrator with a bandolier of bullets around his neck takes part in a massive rally called by the Organisation for Islamic Propaganda, the government's main propaganda instrument, Wednesday, near Tehran University, the main focus of six days of student protests which have shaken Iran's Islamic regime. — AFP photo

US envoy, Japan warn DPRK against fresh missile launch

TOKYO, July 14: Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi today warned North Korea against launching a long-range missile and said the move would hurt security in the region as well as Pyongyang's own interests, reports Reuters.

The warning echoed remarks by the US envoy to Seoul and comes amidst signs that the United States, Japan and South Korea are stepping up efforts to coordinate their stance towards a possible missile test by the reclusive Stalinist state. "The government has judged that a North Korean missile attack is not imminent. But if North Korea does launch another missile, it will have serious effects on Japan's security and North-east Asia's peace and prosperity," Obuchi told a parliamentary panel.

"It would also definitely have effects on North Korea's relationships with other nations. That would not be beneficial to North Korea either," Obuchi added.

"Such a clear-cut assurance from a world power like America is not a small thing," Sharif said.

C. Raja Mohan, an advisor to India's National Security Council, reacted indignantly to any suggestion that the Indian

win was anything but total. "These people crossed into our territory and we booted them out, plain and simple," Raja Mohan said.

"I don't care if it took 60,000 or one million troops to do it, the fact is that it was done and done successfully."

However, Raja Mohan admitted India had learned some harsh lessons in a conflict that claimed the lives of nearly 400 Indian troops.

"The fact is we didn't discover the incursion in time. Unilateral measures will have to be taken, like establishing permanent posts and bringing in better surveillance," Raja Mohan said.

"That may be expensive, but fighting is even more expensive."

The one sure winner has been the Indian army, which not only did its job, but can now expect a significant rise in its budget, with experts predicting an increase to three per cent of

GDP, up from the current 2.3 per cent.

"I wouldn't call it a hollow victory," said a general in military intelligence.

"We taught the Pakistanis a lesson. Okay, we were caught napping, but if we want to improve surveillance, we need more money."

Some analysts believe real victory can only be won if India follows up on its military offensive with a dose of economic and diplomatic warfare.

"The perfect war is subjugation of the enemy without going to battle," said defence expert K. Subrahmanyam, who advocated bankrupting Pakistan by announcing a sharp rise in defence spending which Islamabad would feel obliged to match.

But for analyst Chellaney, the question of who won or lost in Kashmir is secondary to the damage the conflict inflicted on the chances of a stable and peaceful Indo-Pakistan relationship.

"The biggest loss has been the loss of trust between the two sides," he said.

10 killed in Kathmandu fighting

KATHMANDU, July 14: Ten people including seven Maoist guerrillas, two civilians and a policeman have been killed in firefights between police and the rebels over the past few days, a home ministry source said yesterday, reports PTI.

Five Maoists, including a woman, were shot dead in fighting at Sindhu District 390 kilometres (118 miles) east of Kathmandu on Saturday, the source said.

Two civilians and a policeman were also killed in the encounters, the source said.

More than 850 people, the majority rebels but also including civilians and policemen, have been killed since the Maoists launched a people's war in February 1996 to campaign against the monarchy and parliament.

The Maoists launched the insurgency to protest high unemployment and poverty in the kingdom's far north-west and north-east where there are few modern schools or health services and transport infrastructure is very poor.

Congress, AIADMK to contest polls together

NEW DELHI, July 14: India's main opposition Congress party forged an electoral alliance today with the regional party held responsible for toppling the Hindu nationalist-led coalition government, reports AFP.

The Congress party and the regional AIADMK party agreed to contest the staggered September-October elections together after a 45-minute meeting between their leaders in the southern city of Madras, the United News of India said.

The AIADMK, based in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, is led by a film actress-turned-politician, Jayalalitha Jayaram.

The mercurial Jayalalitha played a key role in bringing down the government in April when she withdrew the support of her 18 MPs from the coalition.

Senior Congress leader Manmohan Singh said his party would contest 12 of the 40 parliamentary seats in Tamil Nadu state, of which Madras is the capital.

He also said Sonia Gandhi,

the Italian-born Congress president, would tour the state as part of the joint electoral campaign with the AIADMK.

The Hindu nationalist government lost a parliamentary confidence motion on April 17 by a single vote, sparking the third elections since 1996.

The first stage of polling in the general elections will take place on September 4.

PTI adds: The Congress would project Sonia Gandhi as its Prime Ministerial candidate to provide a stable and strong Government at the centre, former union minister Kalpana Rai said yesterday.

The Congress election slogan for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections would be "Sonia, Lao, Desh Bachao, Sone ke Wagt Nahin Hain" (bring Sonia as the leader, save the nation, this is not the time to sleep) Rai said addressing a press conference at the (Gandhi Bhawan) MPCC office in south Mumbai.

He expressed the view that there was a Sonia wave in the country which would enable the Congress to sweep to power at the centre.

Barak sets out conditions for ME peace: NY Times

WASHINGTON, July 14: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, in an interview with the New York Times, set out conditions for moving the Middle East peace process along, including a less prominent role for Washington, reports AFP.

"I don't think the CIA should be involved in counting the number of policemen in the Gaza Strip to check up on the Palestinians," Barak told the daily Tuesday, on the eve of his weeklong visit to the United States.

He described the US role in the region as "overly involved," suggesting the Americans should stop acting as "arbitrator, policeman and judge," and return to their "special roles as facilitators."

"I think the American role should be more special. This is the reason I'm going to Washington tomorrow. I want to share ideas and build an overall strategy," Barak said.

He said he wanted to persuade Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat to abandon his demand for full and immediate implementation of the Wye River memorandum.

Barak also said he wanted to negotiate on several fronts simultaneously -- with the Palestinian, the Syrians and the Lebanese.

The prime minister said he was trying to convince the region's players that he was a different kind of leader from his predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu; that he can be trusted to take a different path to peace.

Barak told the daily he did not want to impose an Israeli blueprint for peace, because "coming from me, that blueprint will have a virus."

London pushes ahead with N Ireland law

LONDON, July 14: The British government on Wednesday pushed ahead with a draft law to install a power-sharing Belfast executive by the end of the week, hoping against the odds to win over Northern Ireland's Protestant leaders, reports AFP.

The bill will spend two days in the upper chamber, the House of Lords, after being rushed through the lower house of parliament, the House of Commons, where it was approved late Tuesday by 343 votes to 24 after eight hours of impassioned debate.

But British Prime Minister Tony Blair's goal of devolving powers to a Belfast executive on Sunday looked in difficulty as Protestant leader David Trim-

ble -- whose support is essential -- attacked the legislation.

Trimble told MPs late Tuesday the safeguards supposed to ensure that the IRA's political wing Sinn Féin could not carry on in government if the Irish Republican Army did not disarm were "flawed and unfair."

Blair and Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam sat grim-faced across the floor of the Commons as Trimble accused them of being prepared to take an "active terrorist organisation" into the government of the British province.

Trimble's Ulster Unionists and the British opposition Conservative party unsuccessfully moved two amendments to the bill which aimed to toughen the government's safeguards.

16-member new govt appointed in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, July 14: Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah appointed on Tuesday a 16-member new government with nine new faces following last week's Cabinet resignation, reports Xinhua.

Sheikh Jaber made the appointment based on a proposal presented by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, the official new agency KUNA reported.

There are still six members of the royal Al-Sabah family who were named in the new cabinet. Former ministers of foreign affairs, defence and interior, all senior members of the ruling family, all retained their key portfolios.

Oil Minister Sheikh Saud Nasser Al-Sabah also remained in his post. However, Minister of Finance and Minister of Communications, Sheikh Al-Salem Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah was replaced by Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, a banker.

Former Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, Ahmad Deifallah Sharar succeeded Abdul Aziz Al-Dahl as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs.

Other new comers are Minister of Justice Saad Jassem Youssef Al-Hashel, Minister of Information Saad Mohammad Bin Teflah Al-Ajmi, Minister of Health Mohammad Ahmad Al-Jarallah and Minister of Education and Higher Education Youssef Ahmad Al-Ibrahim.

Former foreign undersecretary Suleiman Majid Al-Shahin was named Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

Minister of Public Works is parliament member (MP) Eid Hatha Al-Rashidi, the only lawmaker who was selected in the new cabinet.

Abdul Wahab Mohammad Al-Wazzan was named as the new Minister of Commerce and Industry, and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs.

Kuwait's last cabinet resigned under the constitution on July 4, after final results of the country's parliament elections were officially announced.

No winners in Kashmir war

istan has been internationally isolated, but nobody will remember this six months down the road.

Meanwhile, India will be forced to pour enormous resources into Kashmir, and maintain a permanent forward deployment of troops at substantial cost, in order to prevent a similar infiltration in the future," he said.

India was taken by surprise by the incursion across the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Indian- and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

The infiltrators were only detected on May 9, although reports suggest they first began setting up mountain-top bunkers on the Indian side of the LoC in early winter last year.

The resulting battle was fought on Pakistan's terms, in a place and at a time chosen by the intruders.

While Pakistan was viewed globally as the aggressor, the

News Analysis

In an address to the nation on Monday, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif played up US President Bill Clinton's promise to encourage a permanent resolution in Kashmir.

"Such a clear-cut assurance from a world power like America is not a small thing," Sharif said.

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Belgrade residents sign a petition demanding the resignation of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic in the centre of Yugoslav capital, Tuesday, despite a warning by police in Belgrade to opposition activists that their action was banned. — AFP photo