

Sonia blasts BJP govt's handling of Kashmir conflict

# India urges Pakistan to show restraint

NEW DELHI, Aug 13: India said its military held back after Pakistani troops fired a missile at Indian aircraft flying near the border, and urged Pakistan to show similar restraint in the latest confrontation between the nuclear-armed rivals, reports AP.

Tensions rose between the neighbours after Indian fighter jets shot down a Pakistani military aircraft Tuesday, killing all 16 crew members. On Wednesday, Pakistan fired a surface-to-air missile that sailed short of Indian military helicopters flying journalists to the crash site.

India lodged a protest against the missile firing late Thursday. Responding to fears that tit-for-tat attacks could escalate out of control, it pressed Pakistan to "exercise due restraint."

India insists that it shot down the plane Tuesday because it veered inside Indian territory, violating a 1991 agreement that requires combat aircraft to stay 6 miles (10 kilometers) away from the border.

"We want a dialogue with Pakistan, but these kinds of provocations are not conducive to the normalization of relations," said Foreign Office spokesman Raminder Jassal.

The United States urged both sides "to avoid further loss of life and further escalation and heightening of tensions," State Department spokesman James P. Rubin said.

The UN Security Council also called on India and Pakistan "to settle the problem through bilateral consultations."

Speaking in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press in Islamabad, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz criticized India for violating the agreement as well, but did not specifically say that Pakistani aircraft were abiding by it.

Addressing whether the Pakistani aircraft violated Indian airspace, Aziz said, "Suppose it did. ... How can a propeller plane like this threaten a jet?"

He said Pakistan "would certainly not like to initiate any (incidents) and we hope India won't."

India's air force and western defenses were on high alert.

Thursday. In the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, Aziz said his country had increased air patrols near the border and had put its army on alert.

India said the Pakistani naval reconnaissance plane flew into its territory and returned to Pakistan after it was hit. Most of the wreckage was found inside Pakistani territory, but parts of the plane were scattered along the border, India said.

Pakistan accused India of stealing pieces of the wreckage. "It was such a cruel attempt to prove the Indian viewpoint," Aziz said. He said the plane was one mile inside Pakistan when it was attacked.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars during the last 50 years.

AFP adds: Indian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi yesterday blasted the Hindu nationalist government's handling of the recent Kashmir conflict and pledged stability if her Congress Party wins upcoming polls.

In a first formal news conference since entering politics last year, Gandhi said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee deserved no credit for the Indian military's success in ousting Muslim guerrilla infiltrators from Kashmir.

"The victory is that of our armed forces. They fought under extremely difficult circumstances," the Italian-born Congress president said at the release of her party's manifesto for the September-October elections.

"This victory is not that of the government which allowed the (Muslim) infiltrators to grab our land while it was sleeping," she said.

The 60-page Congress manifesto went a step further, saying the large-scale infiltration into Indian Kashmir could be directly attributed to the government's complacency as it sought to build bridges with Pakistan.

"Instead of keeping a vigil on the border, (the government) let down its guard. It said it would

give us a review of our security environment. All we have got are Pakistani intruders," the document said.

The fighting in Kashmir, which pushed India and Pakistan to the brink of war, "was a tragedy brought about by the cavalier functioning of the government and its criminal negligence," it added.

The Congress offensive appeared aimed at denting the psychological edge the Hindu nationalists have gained from the victory in Kashmir, ahead of elections starting September 5.

Opinion polls say the patriotic fervour sparked by the Kashmir conflict could give Vajpayee's coalition a clear-cut majority in what was expected to be a badly hung parliament.

Gandhi, who took to politics in January last year, also took pot shots at the constant infighting which marked the 13-month Vajpayee alliance until it collapsed in April, necessitating fresh elections.



Senior Congress (I) Party leader Pranab Mukherjee (L) discussing with party President Sonia Gandhi (R) during a meeting in New Delhi yesterday, ahead of India's September/October polls. — AFP photo

## Advani seeks to amend Indian constitution

NEW DELHI, Aug 13: India's Hindu nationalists will try to amend the constitution to ensure a fixed five-year tenure for parliament if they win upcoming elections, a minister said in remarks published today, reports AFP.

Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani told supporters in the western city of Gandhinagar that a federal government should not be voted out of power before completing its full five-year term.

A "fixed tenure legislation" was possible "within democratic norms," The Hindu quoted Advani as saying. The minister, however, did not specify how a government could remain in power if it was reduced to a minority.

India's September-October elections have been necessitated by the single-vote defeat in parliament of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist-led coalition.

The government's collapse renewed concern over political instability in India, which has seen three costly national elections and four short-lived governments since 1996.

Advani said the BJP was thinking of aping the American electoral system "where the president elected for a four-year term can be disturbed only in exceptional circumstances."

## Sept 9 uprising plot foiled, claims Myanmar junta

YANGON, Aug 13: The military government claimed Friday to have foiled a plot by dissident groups to incite a general uprising on Sept. 9 and announced the arrest of four people, reports AP.

The government accused the party led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi of joining with a government-in-exile, ethnic rebels, drug traffickers, die-hard communists and former students in fomenting the plot.

But the government stopped short of accusing Suu Kyi, the country's best-known opposition leader, of direct involvement, saying only middle-level officials of her National League for Democracy were involved.

Those who are trying to incite unrest and disrupt the prevailing peace and tranquility will be severely punished," chief spokesman Col. San Pwint told a news conference.

Exiled opposition groups have urged people in this numerology-obsessed country, also known as Burma, to take to the streets in a new revolt on what they claim is an auspicious date, 9-9-99.

Myanmar was calm last Sunday, but exiled dissidents in neighbouring Thailand marked the anniversary of an uprising launched Aug. 8, 1988

or 8-8-88 that was eventually crushed by troops. Thousands died.

Col. Saw Pwint, chief spokesman for the ruling State Peace and Development Council, said that plot for a new revolt on Sept. 9 had been plotted over the past 11 years and accused foreign radio stations of disseminating the call.

The alleged plot involved spreading rumors and the dispatch of "underground demolition squads" to frighten the public and spark civil unrest by instigating civil servants, workers, peasants, the military and police to rise up, the spokesman said.

Those arrested included Sein Aye, general secretary of the northern Myanmar All Burma Students Democratic Front, an opposition group formed by student survivors of the 1988 revolt, the spokesman said.

Sein Aye and Than Zaw, another ABSDF member, were arrested at Mu Se, near the border with China, on June 10, the spokesman said.

Zaw Win and Tun Kyi, two members of Suu Kyi's party, were reportedly arrested near city, Mandalay, in possession of three cameras and film rolls. San Pwint said that a so-

called "political defiance committee" had been formed March 28 by the ABSDF and the Karen National Union, the country's largest ethnic rebel army, in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai.

An unidentified non-government organization from Norway supposedly gave 1.7 million Thai baht (dhs 500,000) to the committee.

"Due to the timely exposure of the dissident plot, public interest in civil unrest and public concern to maintain peace and stability, there will be no upheaval and the public remains unperturbed," San Pwint said.

ABSD officials in Thailand were not immediately available for comment.

Price hikes for electricity, phone calls, rice and cooking oil have increased financial burdens on ordinary people. Activists outside the country have likened the problems to the atmosphere that preceded the 1988 uprising.

However, there has been no indication that people are ready to the army's guns again in a new revolt.

The military has ruled Myanmar since 1962 and has shown no signs of ceding power.

## Move to implement Wye River accord

### Arafat, Barak to meet soon

JERUSALEM, Aug 13: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak will meet early next week to set up a timetable for implementing the Wye River accord, Israeli public radio said Thursday, reports AFP.

The summit will take place "in the first half of the coming week," the radio reported senior officials in Jerusalem as saying.

Barak reiterated Thursday his desire to implement the accord while making a speech at the National Defence College.

"I'm convinced that together we will implement the Wye accord in all its aspects and that the negotiations which will be opened between us will move us toward concluding an accord in principle ahead of the final accord," he said.

Arafat said earlier in the day that the two sides were still far apart.

"Unfortunately, until now, nothing has been achieved," on

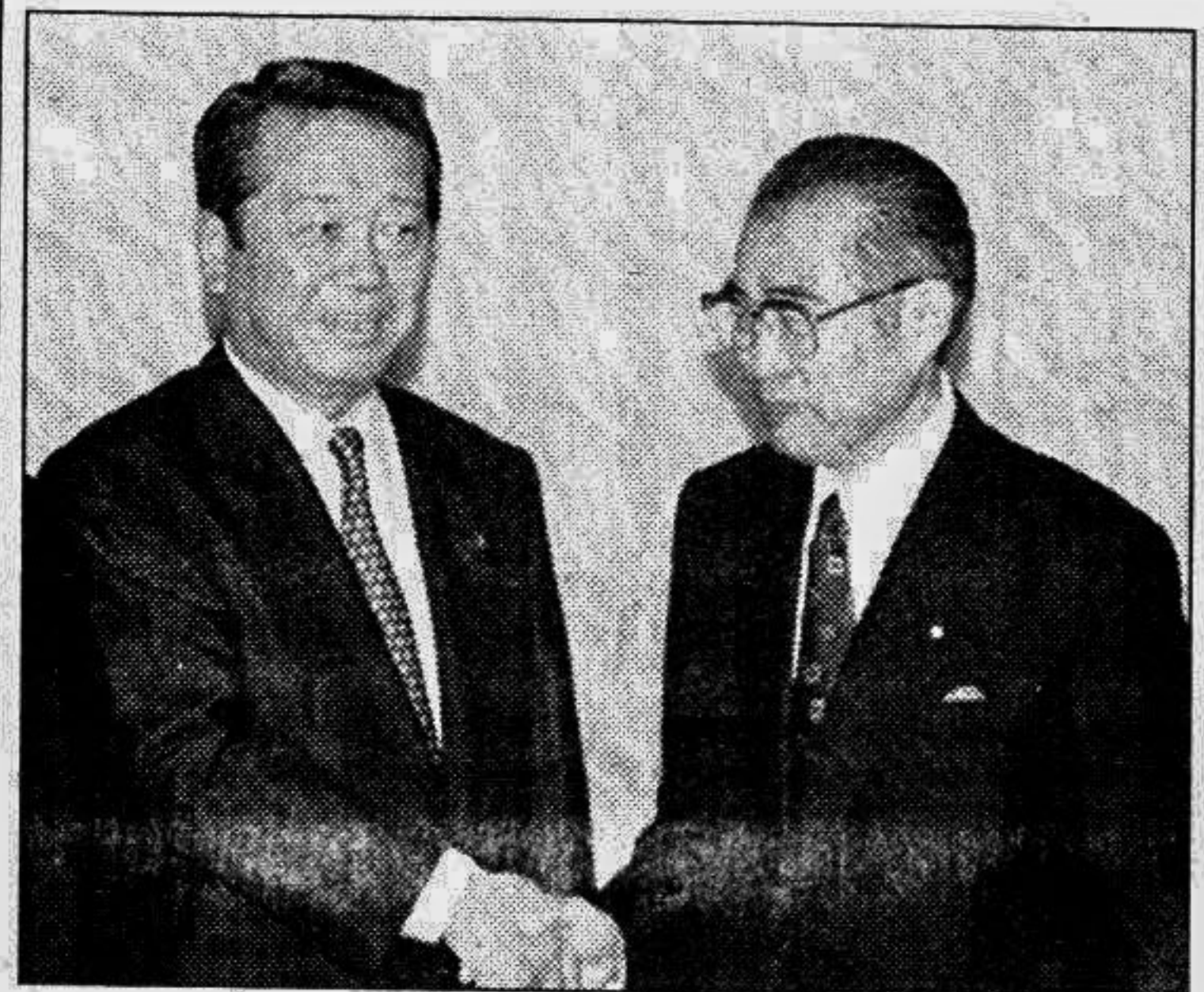
the timetable, Arafat told journalists in the West Bank city of Ramallah after holding talks there with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel Rafi Rawabdeh.

The Wye agreement, which was concluded in the United States in October, calls for three more interim Israeli pullbacks in the West Bank and the release of Palestinian prisoners in three groups.

Former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu released the first group of prisoners and carried out one withdrawal before freezing implementation of the rest of the accord, saying that the Palestinians were not holding up their side of the deal.

The radio said the upcoming summit would focus on Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank.

A meeting Monday of Barak and Palestine Liberation Organisation "number two" Mahmud Abbas paved the way for an accord on implementing Wye River, the radio said.



Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi (R) shakes hands with Ichiro Ozawa, head of ruling coalition Liberal Party, prior to their policy talks at prime minister's official residence in Tokyo yesterday. The Liberal Party decided to stay in the coalition with Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito. — AFP photo

## Turkey, Iran sign deal against Kurdish rebels

ANKARA, Aug 13: Turkey and Iran signed a deal today pledging to cooperate against Kurdish rebels and Iranian armed dissidents, but appeared unable to agree on their exact location and activities, reports Reuters.

The border cooperation accord was clinched after three days of lengthy and difficult talks between teams from Islamic Iran and officially secular Turkey in the Turkish capital.

Ties between the neighbours are plagued by Turkish charges of Iranian shelter for Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas and Iranian complaints of Turkish backing for members of Iran's Mujahideen Khalq armed opposition and other dissident groups.

Both sides deny the charges. Today's agreement, however, includes pledges that both sides will carry out "simultaneous operations" against the PKK rebels and the Iranian opposition.

"Simultaneous operations mean the commanders on both sides decide to hold an operation at the same time in their own region. It is not a joint operation," the head of the Turkish delegation, Interior Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Yahya Gur, told reporters at the signing ceremony.

Gur said the operations would be directed against "terrorist elements", a standard Turkish phrase for condemned rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan's PKK rebels.

But the head of the Iranian delegation denied Turkish allegations of a PKK presence on

Iranian territory. "If you have the address of these places, such as campus and hospitals, then let's go and see together. There are no such places," Deputy Interior Minister Gholamhossein Bolandian said.

The two sides exchanged files containing information on PKK and Mujahideen activity on each other's soil, said Bolandian.

## 40 burnt alive in DRC

KINSHASA, Aug 13: Rwandan soldiers fighting Congolese rebels burned 40 men, women and children alive in an attack in the Shaba region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the country's official radio reported Thursday, reports AFP.

Voice of the People radio quoted its correspondent in the region as saying the victims were shut into their houses which were then burnt.

The incident happened at Kasala, in the Malemba-Nkula territory, north of Katanga, on the night of July 28.

One person escaped the massacre and made it to the town of Lubumbashi, where she was treated at the local medical centre, said the report.

Rwandan soldiers carried out the attack because the villagers had refused to join their cause.

The report accused members of the rebel Congolese Rally for Democracy of doing nothing to prevent the massacre.

## Violence in Ambon: 89 die so far

AMBON, Indonesia, Aug 13: At least 89 people have died in the latest round of religious violence in Indonesia's eastern Maluku province, as overwhelmed security forces denied Friday allegations of a massacre at a church, reports AP.

Witnesses said the death toll from clashes between Muslims and Christians included 24 people shot by troops on Tuesday and Wednesday in and around a Protestant church in Galala, a suburb of Ambon.

Church secretary Benny Tamala said he saw security forces shooting at battling mobs armed with homemade spears, bows and arrows and gasoline bombs.

Two were killed Tuesday and 22 on Wednesday, he told The Associated Press. They all were shot to death, and it was very much regretted that some were shot inside the church.

Most of the dead were Christians, he said. Other witnesses claimed that Muslim rioters broke into the church and disfigured some bodies.

Police spokesman Jekriel Philip said at least 89 people had died and 455 were wounded since the rioting erupted on July 24. They included one dead soldier and 35 other security personnel injured.

He said a total of 46 people had been killed this week alone. Philip denied accusations of a massacre at the Galala church, saying the rioters had been killed in surrounding neighborhoods, one of the worst-hit parts of the riot-torn city. He said several of the dead Christians were subsequently brought to the church.

Philip said tensions had eased considerably Friday, with troops patrolling the streets. Police have been reinforced in past days by a battalion of Indonesia's toughest soldiers. The unit was one of two deployed after local security forces proved incapable of quelling the running battles.

Media reports said that an additional 600-man marine battalion was on its way to boost the security forces.

## Yeltsin confident of Duma's approval of PM

MOSCOW, Aug 13: President Boris Yeltsin said Friday that the Communist-dominated lower house of parliament wouldn't dare opposing his new choice for prime minister, reports AP.

"It would be preferable if (Vladimir Putin) is approved on the first attempt," Yeltsin said at the start of a meeting in the Kremlin with Alexander Kotenkov, his envoy to the lower house, the State Duma.

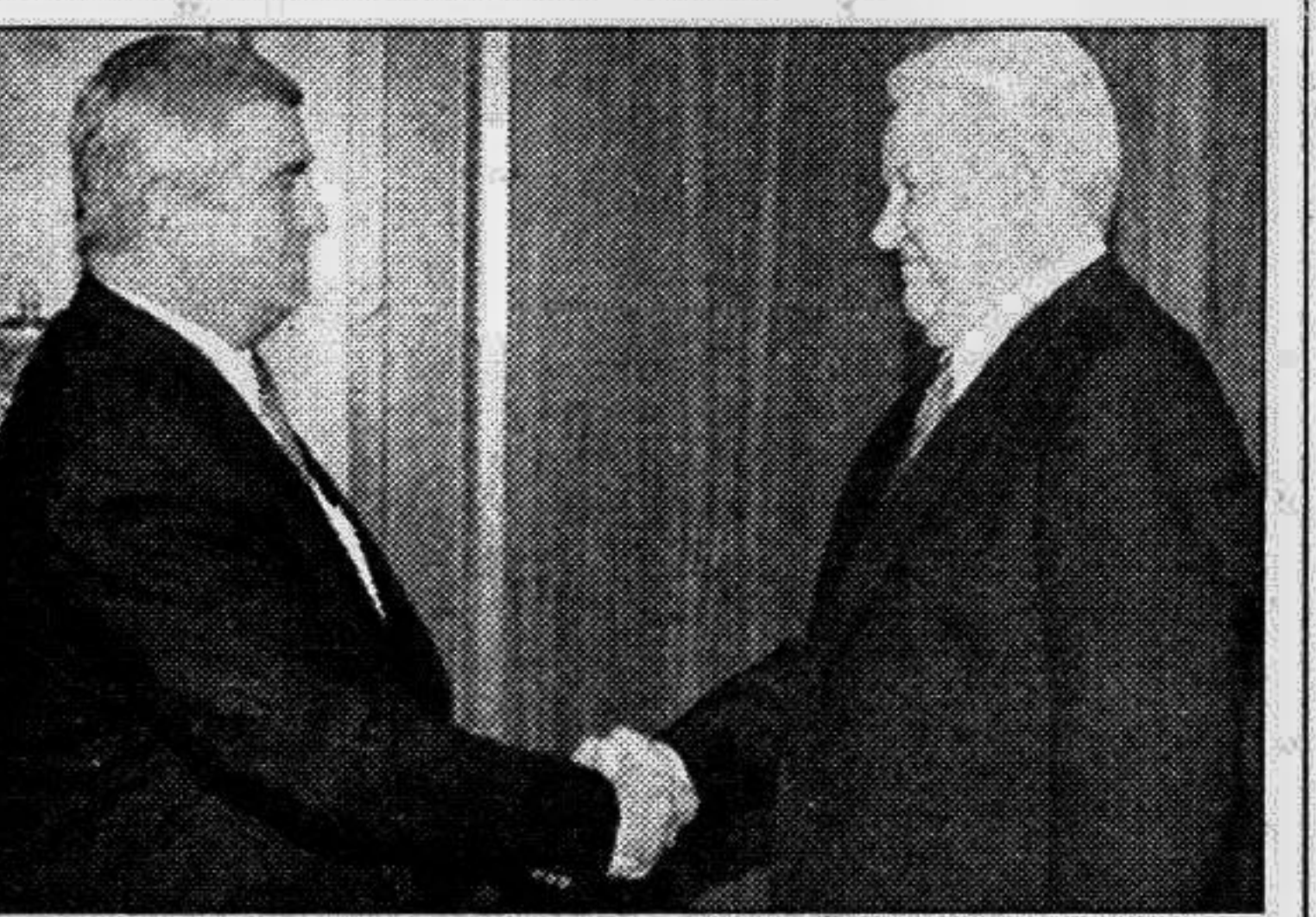
If he isn't, "there will be no tragedy," Yeltsin added. "He will pass on the second try."

Yeltsin abruptly sacked Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin and named Putin, a

former KGB spy, as his successor on Monday — the fourth Cabinet reshuffle in 17 months.

Under Russian law, the Duma is disbanded if it rejects a presidential candidate for prime minister three times. Communists and other hardliners, who dominate the house, appear reluctant to defy Yeltsin because they need their parliamentary offices and other privileges of incumbency to campaign for December's parliamentary elections.

Kotenkov told reporters after the meeting that Yeltsin would "never" disband the Duma.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (R) shakes hands with the president's representative in Russian State Duma Alexander Kotenkov yesterday in the Kremlin in Moscow. The meeting is to discuss the voting on designated Premier Vladimir Putin's candidacy in the State Duma on August 16. — AFP photo

## Four killed as militants attack army camp in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 13: Suspected Muslim militants attacked another army camp in Kashmir today — the latest in a campaign of assaults on military facilities in the divided Himalayan region, reports AFP.

Two army personnel were killed as heavily-armed militants attacked the camp of the 34 Rashtriya Rifles in Beerwah in central Kashmir at 4:00 am (2230 GMT Thursday), military officials said.

Two militants were killed, the officials said, adding that the entire area had been cordoned off by the army and paramilitary troops.

More than 80 militants, security personnel and civilians have been killed in a dramatic rise in violence in Kashmir this month.

## Taliban recapture airbase

ISLAMABAD, Aug 13: Afghanistan's Taliban fighters recaptured the key Bagram airbase of opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood early today, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency said, reports Reuters.

AIP said Masood's forces vacated the key supply installation, some 60 km (35 miles) north of Kabul, within 30 minutes of being overrun by advancing Taliban fighters. The Taliban, who are fighting to crush Masood in their bid for total domination of the country, seized Bagram earlier this month in an offensive involving thousands of its Islamic fighters.

But they were forced to retreat from Bagram after Masood, an ethnic Tajik, mounted a counter-attack which forced the Taliban back to front lines 25 km (15 miles) north of Kabul.

## E Timor security talks resume

JAKARTA, Aug 13: Talks to prevent violence following East Timor's Aug 30 independence referendum entered their final day on Friday, after the United States demanded that Indonesian officials stop predicting civil would erupt if the territory opts for independence, reports AP.

Officials from the United Nations, Indonesia and Portugal are trying to hammer out security arrangements in East Timor, which has been wracked by continuing violence during the lead-up to the vote.

East Timorese will choose between autonomy within Indonesia or full independence in the UN-supervised ballot.

Indonesian forces and anti-independence militiamen killed two students Wednesday, and UN officials said that Indonesia must continue to improve security in the province.

## US blames Saddam for high child mortality rates

WASHINGTON, Aug 13: The United States blamed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein for the high child mortality rates in Iraq described in a UN survey released on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The survey, by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), said the mortality rates in the government-controlled south and centre of the country had more than doubled in the nine years since the United Nations imposed economic sanctions.

But in the northern Kurdish-controlled regions of the country, where the United Nations runs the distribution of food and medicine, the rate had fallen in the years since the UN "oil-for-food" programme began in 1996.

US State Department spokesman James Rubin said that in its areas the Iraqi government had obstructed the distribution of medicines available to Iraq under the programme.

"The bottom line is that if Saddam Hussein would not continue to hoard medicines and capabilities to assist the children of Iraq, they wouldn't have this problem. Clearly the blame for the suffering of the Iraqi people falls squarely on the shoulders of its tyrannical leader," he said.

"In places where Saddam Hussein isn't manipulating the medicines and the supplies, this (the program) works. We can't solve a problem that is the result of tyrannical behaviour by the regime in Baghdad," he added.

The UNICEF survey found that in the south and centre of Iraq, under-five mortality more than doubled from 56 deaths per 1,000 live births in the period 1984-1989 to 131 per 1,000 in the period 1994-1999.

Mortality among children in their first year increased from 47 per 1,000 live births to 108 per 1,000 live births within the same time frame, it added.

In northern Iraq, which has been outside the control of the Baghdad government since the 1991 Gulf War, the under-five mortality rate rose from 80 deaths per 1,000 in the period 1984-1989, but then fell to 72 in the period 1994-99. "Infant mortality patterns followed the same pattern," UNICEF said.

Although the survey did not directly blame increasing mortality rates on sanctions, it said the Iraqi people "would not be undergoing such deprivations in the absence of the prolonged measures imposed by the (UN) Security Council."

But Rubin said: "They (the Iraqi rulers) are responsible for their people. We can work very hard to put the maximum pressure on them, we can provide oil-for-food programmes, we can provide medicine. But if Saddam Hussein is going to restrict that medicine to his own people then he is responsible."

## Colombo peace walk Aug 29

COLOMBO, Aug 13: Over 100,000 representatives from over 10,000 villages in Sri Lanka are to converge in Colombo on August 29 to press for an early end to the civil war in the north and east of the country, reports Xinhua.

A statement issued today by Dr A T Ariyaratne, president of the Sarvodaya or All People's Prosperous Movement, said that delegates from all parts of the country will gather at a Colombo park after a two-kilometre, meditative peace walk through Colombo.

Religious dignitaries, political leaders, representatives of peace organisations and voluntary organisations will join the walk.

Sri Lankan President Chan-

## ROK pardons 3000 convicts

SEOUL, Aug 13: South Korea today pardoned nearly 3,000 convicts including the son of former president Kim Young-Sam in a move which sparked immediate accusations of political foul play, reports AFP.

Seoul included 56 political prisoners in the amnesty of 2,864 people to mark Sunday's anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule, but rights groups demanded the release of 241 others.

"President Kim Dae-Jung decided to grant this amnesty to make a fresh start through forgiveness and reconciliation on the last Liberation Day of the 20th century on this eve of the new millennium," Justice Minister Kim Jung-Kil said.

Sri Lanka has been plagued by a 16-year-old civil war fought between security forces and Tamil rebels.



A veiled Muslim woman (R) holds a banner high-up in front of security forces standing guard during a demonstration in front of the Defense Ministry in Jakarta yesterday. Muslim groups held separate protests in front of the office of military chief Wiranto, accusing him of the killing of Aceh people and to demand a referendum in the troubled province of Aceh. — AFP photo

## BRIEFLY

**Estrada extends reprieve for 3:** Philippine President Joseph Estrada granted an additional one-month reprieve Friday to three convicted rapists scheduled for execution next week, AP reports from Manila.

The move will enable a presidential committee reviewing their sentences and the lawyers for the defendants to study the results of DNA tests, presidential spokesman Jerry Barican said. Estrada had granted a 60-day reprieve to Jurry Andal, his brother Ricardo, and Edwin Mendoza to allow DNA tests on semen found in the body of a woman they are accused of raping and killing.

**Mass graves unveiled in Luanda:** Some 100 bodies have been found dumped in four wells in war-torn central Angola, public television reported on Friday, AFP reports from Luanda.

The bodies were found Thursday in wells in the Chipeta region of Bie province, the television station reported, broadcasting pictures of the scene. Angolan authorities blamed the killings on the rebel National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which controlled the region before being forced out by the army two months ago.

**9 killed in Beijing blast:** Nine people were killed and seven injured when an oil tank exploded at a gas station in Nantong city in China's eastern Jiangsu province, state press reported on Friday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The Tuesday night explosion levelled seven houses near the gas station, with rescue workers pulling out 16 people from the debris, the China Daily reported. The cause of the explosion was still under investigation, it said.