

## Strike in Karachi

KARACHI, Sept 9: Six vehicles were torched as a general strike called by an ethnic-based opposition party against the killing of its activists hit business activity in Karachi on Thursday, police and residents said, reports AFP.

Police said groups of protesters belonging to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) exploded crackers late Wednesday when a police official was also shot dead by gunmen in a drive-by shooting.

They said a low intensity bomb planted in a parking lot gutted six vehicles in the city's southern district of Lyari, a stronghold of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

Officials said police had arrested 12 people for arson following a string of raids.

The MQM, which represents Urdu-speaking migrants from India after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, called for a day-long suspension of transport and business activity in Karachi and other cities of southern Sindh province to protest the killing of two of its workers on last Tuesday.

The party, politically strong in urban Sindh, has alleged the activists were killed by the local police. Police have denied the charge.

**Tight security in Yangon on uprising day**

YANGON, Sept 9: Troops manned roadblocks and patrolled the streets Thursday as authorities tightened a security net on Yangon after dissidents called for a nationwide uprising to end decades of military rule, reports AFP.

Soldiers were out in force at government buildings and other sensitive sites and few people apparently dared to venture outside with many shops and restaurants closed, witnesses said.

riot police also barred traffic and pedestrians from using the road leading to the downtown headquarters of the National League for Democracy (NLD) of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"There would normally be more people around than this, people have definitely stayed off the streets," said a Yangon-based diplomat.

"It is abnormally calm, there is very little traffic on the roads," said another foreign envoy, who said many people would normally have congregated outside as Thursday is a Buddhist holiday.

Activists hoped to incite unrest Thursday on the so-called Four Nines day or 9/9/99 in honour of hundreds gunned down in a student uprising on August 8, 1988 or 8/8/88.

Sources told AFP that dissidents would try to hold "cat and mouse" demonstrations in the suburbs to frustrate security officers.

However, few observers and diplomats expect mass protests due to the tight control exerted on the country by military intelligence.

Security was also beefed up in provincial cities and towns after the government threatened to mete out tough treatment to any protesters.

There were no reports of any incidents, although the military's control means it is often days before news of unrest reaches the outside world.

Sources in Yangon said however three foreigners tried to incite a protest in street close to the British and Australian embassies on Wednesday.

The unidentified group was chased into a nearby hotel but there were no reports of arrests.

**'Mahathir vital witness to Anwar sex trial'**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 9: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad would be an important witness in the sodomy trial of his ex-deputy Anwar Ibrahim and should have been called to the dock, a defence lawyer said Thursday, reports AFP.

Counsel Karpal Singh told the high court that former driver Azizan Abu Bakar had complained to the premier in a letter late 1997 that he was allegedly sodomised by Anwar.

"Why is the prosecution not prepared to call (Mahathir)? He is terrorising the country. People are so afraid of him. He is a material witness but not even a statement was taken from him," Karpal said.

"He was necessary to unravel the prosecution case," he said in his submission to the sodomy charge against Anwar thrown out at the end of the prosecution case.

Anwar, who was sacked and arrested last September and is serving a six-year sentence for abuse of power, is jointly on trial with his Indonesian adopted brother Sukma Darman for allegedly engaging in sodomy with Azizan one night between January and March 1993.

Sukma faces a further charge of abetting Anwar to sodomise the driver.

Karpal, who is also an opposition lawmaker, urged the high court to "disregard" Azizan's evidence as unreliable.

The witness says one thing today and another thing tomorrow. The evidence by Azizan ought not to be accepted," he said. "Both the accused should be acquitted and discharged. No defence should be called."

The lawyer also urged Justice Arifin Jaka to be independent urging him to be "on guard of the unseen black hand" that may affect the outcome of the trial.

"A judge should not view evidence with goggles on. He should go beyond the surface," he said.

## UN postpones pullout of E Timor for 24 hours

DARWIN, Australia, Sept 9: The United Nations said Thursday it had postponed for 24 hours plans to pull out of East Timor as fears grew in Dili that 2,000 refugees sheltering in its besieged compound could be massacred, reports AFP.

Indonesian Defence Minister General Wiranto had sought the postponement so that security could be tightened, the BBC quoted a spokesman for UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as saying.

"They are horrified by what's going on and horrified at what could happen ... the word is there will be a massacre."

The Indonesians appealed to us to give them a little bit more time to let the martial law go to work so that they can restore peace and security in East Timor, and we felt we could use the extra time to plan the evacuation a bit more carefully," UN spokesman Fred Eckhardt said.

News of the postponement came as Australia promised to help in an evacuation of the 2,000 refugees. Preparations are being made in Darwin to receive them during the next 48 hours.

UN officials here indicated Thursday that around 500 people would be involved in the evacuation.

But International Federation of Journalists official Heather Patterson said from Dili the UN staff there had signed a petition opposing the evacuation because they feared for the safety of the East Timorese refugees.

"It is obvious to us that the

international community that sent us in there to do this job that we have now completed must protect the fruit of that work.

The UNAMET evacuation was announced late Wednesday as provisions for its besieged compound ran out. Attempts to load food at a UN depot for staff and refugees had to be aborted on Wednesday morning because of threats by pro-Jakarta militia.

Wimhurst said the evacuation had been delayed after talks between the chief of the UNAMET Ian Martin and Indonesian commanders in Dili, including two army generals.

The UN says Dili is now totally devastated with all or most of its main buildings burnt out, shops destroyed or looted by military and militia and hundreds of vehicles destroyed.

Tens of thousands, and possibly hundreds of thousands of East Timorese have been deported by truck and ship to the Indonesian territory of West Timor.

The Australian government was still trying Thursday to build support for an international peacekeeping force to which it will commit 2,000 troops.

The troops, who would lead a UN force of up to 7,000, remained on a high state of readiness.

Wimhurst appealed for support from UN member countries.

He said the international community sent the UN into East Timor to organise an electoral process which at the time seemed impossible.

"It is obvious to us that the



Indonesian presidential hopeful Megawati Sukarnoputri plays with refugee children from East Timor during a brief visit to a camp at Noeltaki in West Timor yesterday. At least 60,000 East Timorese have fled the territory either voluntarily or forcibly in the wake of violence by rampaging militias after the self-determination referendum overwhelmingly supported independence from Indonesia.

— AFP photo

## Rebels blow up gas pipeline in Myanmar

BANGKOK, Sept 9: Karen rebels blew up a natural gas pipeline in southern Myanmar, temporarily halting supplies to a number of factories, official and guerrilla sources said Thursday, reports AFP.

The attack, near the town of Bilib in Mon State, occurred Sunday, shutting down supplies for about 24-hour to some industries, including a French-built cement factory and a gas-powered turbine.

"We did it, we are responding with guerrilla operations to our enemy (the junta) which has launched an offensive against the Karen people in that area," Karen National Union (KNU) spokesman Pado Maahn Sha told AFP by telephone from the Thai-Myanmar border.

He said more attacks were planned and accused Yangon troops of looting, killing and raping in villages in Karen.

Official sources said the attack had taken place but stressed all damage had been fixed quickly.

The KNU is the main ethnic minority rebel group yet to sign a ceasefire with the ruling military.

## Thais seize missile launchers

BANGKOK, Sept 9: Thai police have seized two surface-to-air (SAM) missiles and a launcher allegedly destined for Myanmar insurgents trafficking drugs along the border, officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

Two Thai men arrested in northern Chiang Mai province said the Russian-made SAM-7s were to be delivered to the insurgent United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Myanmar, they said.

Narin Yeunyong, 29, and Paitoon Phupae, 31, allegedly said they bought the two-metre-long weapons from Cambodian soldiers in the eastern border town of Aranyaphathet.

Five militants had been shot dead in the Jammu region since Tuesday night, police said, including three killed in a dawn raid by paramilitary troops in Rajouri district.

Polling in Kashmir's six constituencies has been staggered over three voting days, with no more than two casting their ballots at the same time.

Police said 200 amphetamine pills were found at the men's apartment in Chiang Mai.

## Lanka says no to Dalai Lama

COLOMBO, Sept 9: Sri Lanka will not allow Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, to visit the island despite the government launching a peace drive endorsed by the Buddhist leader, officials said, reports AFP.

"Sri Lanka does not encourage the Dalai Lama to visit us," foreign ministry spokesman Ravinath Arayasingha told reporters here as a United Nations agency announced plans to launch a peace drive.

The government is backing the UNESCO move to declare the country's north-eastern town of Trincomalee as a "Peace City" in line with a global call made by Nobel peace laureates, including the Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela.

Sri Lankan Buddhist leaders last month asked the Colombo government to grant a visa for the Dalai Lama to visit the island. Local media reported that the request had been vetoed by the foreign ministry after pressure from China through its embassy here.

## Ex-Khmer Rouge torturer charged with genocide

PHNOM PENH, Sept 9: Former Khmer Rouge executioner Kang Kek Ieu, better known as Duch, was formally charged with genocide Thursday and faces up to three years in jail without trial, officials said, reports AFP.

Duch has been formally charged with genocide this morning under the same law as (captured rebel army chief) Ta Mok," his lawyer Ka Savuth told reporters.

Duch, who already faces a charge of treason, was arrested four months ago after he was tracked down selling juice in the west of the country where he was living as a born-again Christian.

The fresh charge of genocide under a revised version of a defunct 1979 law leaves the 56-year-old facing up to three years in jail without trial under a pre-trial detention law rushed through parliament last month.

Rebel military chief Ta Mok was charged on Tuesday under the same law, just weeks after Premier Hun Sen called for his trial to be delayed for fear it would "embarrass" former allies of the Khmer Rouge at home and abroad.

Previously under Cambodian law the pair should have stood trial within six months of their arrests.

During Pol Pot's 1975 to 1979 "Killing Fields" regime, Duch was head of internal security and is accused of overseeing the torture and execution of up to 20,000 suspected opponents.

The total toll of the fanatical Maoist regime is put at up to two million dead from starvation, execution, disease and overwork.

Duch's Tuol Sleng "S-21" prison, in the heart of the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh, is now a gruesome genocide museum displaying the portraits of inmates before their execution and horrific torture instruments.

## Hearing of Suharto case against Time delayed

JAKARTA, Sept 9: The central Jakarta district court on Thursday postponed until October 14 the first hearing of a 27 billion dollar damages suit filed by former Indonesian president Suharto against Time magazine, reports AFP.

Chief Judge Sihol Sitompul said the delay in the trial, which was scheduled to start Thursday, was necessary because not all of the defendants had been properly served with legal notices.

Suharto's lawyers, headed by Juan Felix Tampubolon, sued Time here for a story in its May 24 edition claiming that the Suharto family was sitting on a 15 billion dollar fortune.

The US magazine said that nine billion dollars of the 15 billion dollars had been transferred from a Swiss bank to an Austrian bank shortly before Suharto stepped down on May 21 last year amid major rioting.

Doctors are trying to determine whether another person who died Tuesday in Flushing, Queens, was also a victim of the disease.

Officials say there are some

## NY City continues war on mosquitoes

40 other suspected cases.

Hundreds of city workers were mobilised to distribute leaflets throughout affected areas. Helicopters have been spraying the pesticide malathion across a four-square-mile (10-kilometre) area of the city since Friday.

Meanwhile, New Yorkers were complaining to radio talk shows and elsewhere, demanding to know why city officials hadn't acted earlier to prevent the outbreak.

The city ended its fumigation programs back in 1983, when state officials banned the practice due to environmental concerns, said Bronx councilor Peter Vallone.

Bronx borough councillor Fernando Ferrer pointed a finger directly at Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Officials say there are some

Symptoms of encephalitis

include fever, stiff muscles and headaches. It is fatal in up to 20 per cent of cases involving the elderly.

"They seem to have an increased vulnerability to the virus, perhaps due to a decreased immunity," Dr. Cynthia Harden, a neurologist from New York's Weill Medical College of Cornell University, told WCBS television.

The outbreak has even left a mark on the US Open Tennis Tournament, being played in Queens this week.

City and Open officials have quietly taken steps to safeguard the tournament site, the National Tennis Center, against the disease, with helicopters dousing a park adjacent to the facility with malathion.



A rescue worker clambers amid rubble, twisted metal and a destroyed vehicle as search continues for survivors of an apartment building explosion in the Pechatniki district of Moscow yesterday.

— AFP photo

## Blast in Moscow kills 15

MOSCOW, Sept 9: Hundreds of rescuers using sniffer dogs and heavy lifting gear searched Thursday for survivors trapped in the debris of a Moscow apartment block that collapsed in a blast that killed at least 15, reports AFP.

Federal investigators said the explosion that occurred shortly after midnight may have been caused by a bomb but Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said a gas leak was the most likely cause.

The extent of the destruction and the number of victims points to the possibility that a powerful explosive device may have been used, a spokesman for the Federal Security Service (FSB) was quoted by ITAR-TASS as saying.

Seven bodies were visible in a makeshift morgue in the back of a van, with rescue workers warning that there would be many more.

The explosion came amid heightened security fears across Russia linked to the ongoing crisis in the southern Russian republic of Dagestan and the August 31 bombing of a shopping centre near the Kremlin that left one dead and 40 injured.

Local residents, rescuers and

journalists on the scene soon after the explosion spoke of a strong smell of gas, fuelling speculation that a gas leak was the most likely cause of the tragedy.

Putin said a gas leak was the probable cause of the blast but he cautioned that authorities are verifying all leads to shed light on the cause of the incident, ITAR-TASS reported.

The prime minister briefed President Boris Yeltsin and Moscow leaders who conveyed their condolences to the families of the victims.

Two eight-storey sections of the prefabricated housing estate, a total of 72 apartments, were totally destroyed, leaving an adjoining section exposed to the night, the wall sliced off by the blast.

FSB investigators were on the blast site, which was visited by Interior Minister Vladimir Rushinov and Lyudmila Zhuravleva, head of the criminal probe into the disaster.

Local residents, rescuers and