

## Priyanka's poll campaign for her mother in Amethi

AMETHI, Sept 10: A nostalgic Priyanka Gandhi yesterday took Amethi parliamentary constituency by storm as she recalled fond memories of her father Rajiv Gandhi in her maiden speech at rallies in support of her mother and Congress nominee Sonia Gandhi, reports PTI.

For me, it is a journey down the memory lane. I had come quite often here along with my father when he represented this constituency for two terms. Priyanka said addressing rallies on her own for the first time without the presence of Sonia Gandhi.

Priyanka arrived here a day ahead of Sonia Gandhi who is scheduled to file today her nomination from Amethi twice represented by her husband.

I know this constituency had remained neglected all these years and I want you to support my mother who would file her nomination. Priyanka said at rallies of Congress workers in Jais and Gauri Ganj assembly segments for Amethi Lok Sabha constituency.

Appealing to the voters to rally behind her mother, Priyanka told them you are the strength of this constituency and you have to ensure her victory with the highest margin.

I shall be camping here for quite some time to mobilise support for my mother, she said adding Amethi Ki Shaan Ho Phir Se Likhna Hai (we have to re-write the glory of Amethi).

## US blasts BJP, other religious organisations

WASHINGTON, Sept 10: In a surprise development, the United States through a State Department survey yesterday launched a sharp attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the RSS and other Hindu organisations for their attitude towards religious conversion and non-Hindus, reports PTI.

The global survey on religious freedom like the one on human rights to mandated by the Congress. The survey, however, does not hold the central government but some of the militant organisations responsible for the recent attacks on Christians and Muslims and obstacles to religious conversions by Christian missionaries. It acknowledges that the constitution of India provides for freedom of religion and that the government respects this right in practice.

It finds that tension between Muslims and Hindus and to a lesser extent between Hindus and Christians continues to pose a challenge to the concepts of secularism, tolerance and diversity on which the state was founded. In addition, governments at the state and local levels only partially respect religious freedom.

The report says that the BJP, which headed a coalition government in an "offshoot" of RSS, which "espouses a return to Hindu values and cultural norms."

Members of the BJP, the RSS and other affiliated organisations have been implicated in incidents of violence and discrimination against Christians and Muslims.

"The BJP and RSS express respect and tolerance for other religions, but the RSS in particular opposes conversions from Hinduism and believes all Indians should adhere to Hindu cultural values. The BJP officially agrees that the caste ambivalence about this," the report said.

"Most BJP leaders, including Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani, are also RSS members, as are the chief ministers of the state governments in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh," it said.

## Beijing confirms war games

BEIJING, Sept 10: China announced for the first time Friday that it had successfully carried out air, ground and naval landing exercises earlier this month, in the wake of Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's assertions of statehood, reports AFP.

The military exercises took place at the start of the month on the coastline of southern Guangdong province and Zhejiang province close to Taiwan, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

Although the wargames were widely reported in Hong Kong media, China had so far not confirmed they had taken place.

"The successful exercise showed how the PLA has improved its joint military command capacity and the success of its modernisation drive and how it is ready to defend the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and to crack down on any separatist acts," the agency reported.

The exercises were overseen by General Zhang Wannian, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, China's highest military body. Zhang blasted Lee's remarks in July that relations between China and Taiwan should be conducted on a "state to state" basis.

Zhang warned Lee Teng-hui that he who plays with fire will get burnt," Xinhua reported.

China, which regards Taiwan as a renegade province, has refused to rule out the use of force to reclaim the island if Taiwan ever formally declares independence.

# UN begins evacuating staff from E Timor

## US suspends military ties with Jakarta

JAKARTA, Sept 10: The UN on Friday was evacuating all but a handful of staff from its besieged East Timor headquarters as Indonesia risked becoming a pariah state by spurning foreign peacekeepers, reports AFP.

US President Bill Clinton told Jakarta to stop the carnage in East Timor and was followed by New Zealand in suspending military ties with Indonesia.

Australia also cancelled joint military training activities with Indonesia and said it was reviewing its defence ties with Jakarta. But it went further by accusing Washington of not doing enough to support demands for an international peacekeeping force.

Indonesian newspapers continued to report a "bloodless coup" had taken place and said the military was now predominant.

Armed forces chief General Wiranto said the government welcomed international aid for East Timor but again ruled out accepting peacekeepers, after

Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy urged Jakarta to agree to a security cordon to allow aid into the devastated territory.

Wiranto said international aid groups, which have pulled out in the face of terrifying intimidation from pro-Jakarta militias, would be welcome to return to East Timor.

But speaking after a meeting with a senior UN delegation here, he said now was not the "appropriate time" for foreign armed intervention.

Indonesia insists no decision on UN peacekeepers can be made until its next legislature convenes next month to ratify the outcome of East Timor's overwhelming vote for independence on August 30.

As three convoys of UN staff left for the airport in East Timor's capital Dili, pro-Jakarta militiamen and soldiers entered the compound and shots were fired, people inside the compound told AFP by telephone.

The Alitak (militia) came into the car park... and started smashing the cars," UN official Rick Curnow told AFP.

"They started smashing the car windows. Then they threatened to throw grenades if we didn't give them the car keys. It got tense for a while," he said.

UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) spokesman David Wimhurst said in Darwin, northern Australia, that troops guarding the compound did "absolutely nothing" to stop the attack.

The UN was evacuating about 350 foreign and local workers to Darwin on Friday, and six flights had arrived by early evening.

Up to 80 UN staff, including UNAMET chief Ian Martin, remained in the compound sheltering about 1,000 refugees from militias who have been rampaging, killing and burning since the landmark vote.

One source inside the compound said some UN staff had insisted on staying to protect the refugees.

Pope John Paul II joined mounting calls for Indonesia and the international community to "put an end to the slaughter and find effective ways to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Timorese population."

But Indonesia stuck to its position that the military, which is now openly complicit in the terror engulfing East Timor, could restore order under martial law.

Television footage has shown soldiers joining militiamen in marching residents out of Dili at gunpoint, to join thousands of others being deported to Indonesian West Timor.

The Australian-based National Council for Timorese Resistance said two truckloads of East Timorese women and children were taken in recent days from refugee camps in West Timor and slaughtered by militiamen.



East Timorese refugees upon their arrival at a transit centre in Darwin following their evacuation from the violence-ridden territory yesterday. The UN said it hoped to evacuate all 171 local staff workers and more than one hundred family members from the UN compound in Dili.

— AFP photo

## Anwar suffering from arsenic poisoning, trial adjourned

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 10: Malaysia's jailed former finance minister Anwar Ibrahim was taken to hospital today after his lawyer said he was believed to have been the target of arsenic poisoning, reports Reuters.

High Court Judge Arifin Jaka adjourned Anwar's sodomy trial after defence lawyer Karpal Singh said a pathologist in Australia had certified that an excessive level of the poison had been found in Anwar's urine.

"We have obtained a pathologist's report from Melbourne which certifies that there is an excessive level of arsenic poison in Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's urine sample," Karpal told a stunned court on the 51st day of Anwar's sodomy trial.

The judge ordered Anwar taken to hospital.

"I'm granting a postponement immediately until such time that a doctor certifies Datuk Seri Anwar is fit to attend court," the judge said.

Anwar was taken to National University Hospital

(UKM) on the outskirts of the capital.

Before the trial was adjourned, Anwar told the court he had not been feeling well.

"I'm not feeling any pain or what, but certainly I'm not my usual self," he said haltingly. "There has been weight loss, hair loss, I think as a result of this."

The judge asked: "Is it worrying you?"

Anwar replied: "Of course, when I saw the report yesterday, I was disturbed. But having gone through what I went through last year, I'm not surprised."

Anwar was sacked by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in September 1998 and arrested later that month after leading thousands of anti-government protesters through the capital.

Anwar was sentenced in April to six years in jail for corruption. He says he is innocent and he victim of a plot by political opponents led by Mahathir to sideline him from power.

Karpal said the pathologist's report on Anwar's urine, which the lawyer said had been obtained in August, showed a level

of 230, far higher than the normal level of three.

"It's a level that goes beyond danger," Karpal said.

"His life is in jeopardy. If he's slowly being poisoned, something must be done about it," he said.

"If someone is trying to get rid of him, it's a shame because this is the very conspiracy we have been alluding to all this while. This person must be brought to book, even charged with murder. I suspect some people in high places, in all likelihood, are responsible for his condition," Karpal said.

Attorney-General Mohhtar Abdullah, who is leading the prosecution in the landmark case that has divided Malaysia, said it was a serious matter if Anwar was being poisoned.

But he said it was too early to conclude that Anwar was the victim of a government conspiracy, and said the former minister had received food in the court room and was allowed to mingle with family and friends, against the rules.

## 'All nines' bug holds up lottery draw

BEIRUT, Sept 10: Lebanese gamblers were unable to watch the state lottery draw live on television Thursday, after its computer suffered a glitch caused by the four nines in the date, the popular An-Nahar daily reported Friday, reports AFP.

"Several computer experts set to work immediately, and managed to solve the problem very quickly," the lottery said in a statement.

The results of the draw were issued later in the evening.

The lottery's computer problem was the only one reported in Lebanon.

Worldwide warnings had been issued that the "all-nines" date of the ninth day of the ninth month of 1999 could be misinterpreted by some computers as the "9999" end-of-file command sequence used in some software to bring certain processes to an end.

## N-programme US bill to punish Russia for aiding Iran

WASHINGTON, Sept 10: Brushing aside White House objections, the House International Relations Committee Thursday overwhelmingly recommended passage of a bill that would punish Russia for aiding Iran's nuclear weapons development efforts, reports AFP.

"Passage (by the full House next week) at this point seems nearly a foregone conclusion," a committee aide said, citing support from leaders of the Republican majority and co-sponsorship by some 220 of the chamber's 400 members.

While the measure targets any non-US entity carrying out such sensitive technology transfers and requires the US administration to report to Congress whenever they occur, it singles out Moscow as a primary culprit.

The bill would bar Washington from spending not required under existing agreements with Moscow on the International Space Station unless the White House certifies that Russia is not passing Iran technology that would further its weapons programme.

The Senate has begun work on a companion bill, the aide said.

It was not immediately clear whether President Bill Clinton would veto a final version, but a State Department official who spoke at the hearing said administration officials "strongly oppose" the measure.

The official warned against creating onerous reporting requirements, saying the department would prefer "fighting proliferation rather than writing reports."

## Ricky Martin, Lauryn Hill sweep MTV awards

NEW YORK, Sept 10: Lauryn Hill and Puerto Rican musical sensation Ricky Martin outstripped the competition by sweeping seven out of the 16 1999 MTV awards here late Thursday, reports AFP.

Hill made off with Video of the Year, Best Female Video, Best RetB Video, and Best Art Direction in a Video, while Martin took Best Pop Video, Best Dance Video and the International Viewer's Choice Award.

Martin dazzled the crowd at the New York Metropolitan Opera with renditions of his hit tunes, "She's All I Ever Need," and "Livin' La Vida Loca."

Madonna won an award for Best Video From a Film for her, "Beautiful Stranger," multi-talented rap star Will Smith took the Best Male Video award for "Miami," and the Beastie Boys took home the Best Hip-Hop Video award.

Fatboy Slim took two awards for Best Director and Breakthrough Video; Backstreet Boys took the Viewer's Choice award; TLC took Best Group Video; Korn, Best Rock Video, and Eminem, Best New Artist in a Video.

## Arafat approves Israel's WB pullout plan

GAZA CITY, Sept 10: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat gave his stamp of approval on Friday to the first of Israel's three West Bank land transfers pledged under their breakthrough peace accord, reports AFP.

Maps detailing the seven per cent of the West Bank to be handed over to Palestinian self-rule were approved by Arafat at a meeting with Israeli officials, his top aide Nabil Abu Rudeina said.

"What's important for us is to recover every square centimetre of our land," Abu Rudeina told AFP.

A Palestinian official who requested anonymity said the Israeli withdrawal should take place by Monday, but was not able to be more specific.

After Arafat's nod of approval, the maps were signed by Palestinian national security commander in the West Bank, Ismail Jaber, and Moshe Yaalon, head of Israel's Central Command which covers the West Bank, said Abu Rudeina.

Prime Minister Ehud

Barak's office had said Thursday that the maps would come into effect "immediately after they are signed by the parties."

Under Sunday's Sharm el-Sheikh accord, Israel is to withdraw from a total of 11 per cent of the West Bank in three stages, giving Palestinians total or partial control over 40 per cent of the territory.

The first pullout covers almost 400 square kilometres (160 square miles) in small pockets across the West Bank and will give the Palestinians civilian but not security control of the area.

Barak's office said a section of the territory to be transferred will maintain the status of a nature reserve.

The transfer will take place "between now and Monday," an Israeli government spokesman told AFP on Thursday.

The next two withdrawals are set for November 15 and January 20.

"We are giving away land that is dear to us... and for which we have fought," Barak said on Wednesday.

"But we are a responsible government and are due to move forward to a permanent settlement and peace accords across the whole region to assure Israel's security and its future," he said.

The withdrawal follows the release on Thursday of almost 200 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails, the first step since the Sharm el-Sheikh peace accord was signed in Egypt on Sunday.

Under Sharm, the two sides also committed to reaching a framework agreement in February with a final settlement due in September 2000 and are due to formally launch final status talks on Monday -- the sixth anniversary of the signing of the 1993 Oslo peace accords.

The negotiations will cover the most contentious issues including the future of Jerusalem, Palestinian statehood, the return of Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements, water rights and final borders.

## Russian forces recapture village in Dagestan

GAMBIYAKH, Russia, Sept 10: Russian forces recaptured this village in western Dagestan on Friday, pushing back Islamic rebels who were still holding on to six villages after six days of bloody fighting, reports AFP.

The village of Gamiyakh has been completely liberated. It has been returned to civilian authorities," said a spokesman at the interior ministry in Khasavyurt, the largest city in western Dagestan.

In the Chechen capital of Grozny, the press center of rebel command confirmed its forces had abandoned Gamiyakh "for strategic reasons."

But the 2,000 Chechen rebels who crossed into western Dagestan on Sunday still maintained their hold on six villages in western Dagestan, Russian sources said.

The rebels led by warlord and former Chechen prime minister Shamil Basayev and Jordanian-born Khattab are seeking to restore a 19th cen-

tury Islamic state that encompassed Chechnya and Dagestan.

The capture of Gamiyakh followed several days of bombings that left the village partly destroyed but nevertheless marked a victory for the Russian forces struggling to crush the Islamist insurgency in the northern Caucasus.

Over the past 24 hours, fighting has left some 30 dead among Russian and Dagestani forces, according to the rebels, who said they also destroyed five armoured vehicles and a T-72 tank.

Russian forces did not confirm the figures but an AFP correspondent saw several ambulances carrying wounded from the front on Thursday and Friday.

With Gamiyakh in hand, Russian forces moved towards Novolokoye, Duchy and Chapayev, launching bomb and missile strikes by helicopter before sending in troops backed by armoured vehicles.

Fighting was also continuing Friday around the villages of Karamakhy and Chabanmakhy, two Islamist strongholds that have been under Russian attack since August 28, Russian military sources said.

Worries over the war effort in Dagestan are running high following an explosion in a Moscow apartment building Thursday that some saw as linked to the Russian campaign in the northern Caucasus. According to the latest toll 80 people were killed in the blast.

Meanwhile, the Russian forces continued their attacks on positions in Chechnya, according to Chechen officials, pounding villages considered to be rearguard bases for the rebels.

Russian warplanes bombed two Chechen villages near the border with Dagestan overnight and also ventured deep into Chechnya, hitting targets west of Grozny.

## Pakistan slates India for refusing to allow UN mission

ISLAMABAD, Sept 10: Pakistan yesterday criticised India for refusing to allow a fact-finding mission from the United Nations to look into the shooting down of a Pakistani Naval Aircraft last month and claimed New Delhi's assertion that the plane was shot down when it violated Indian airspace despite warnings was incorrect, reports PTI.

Foreign office spokesman Tariq Altaf told reporters here that the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had responded to a complaint by Pakistan about

the issue in which he had been informed about the Indian response.

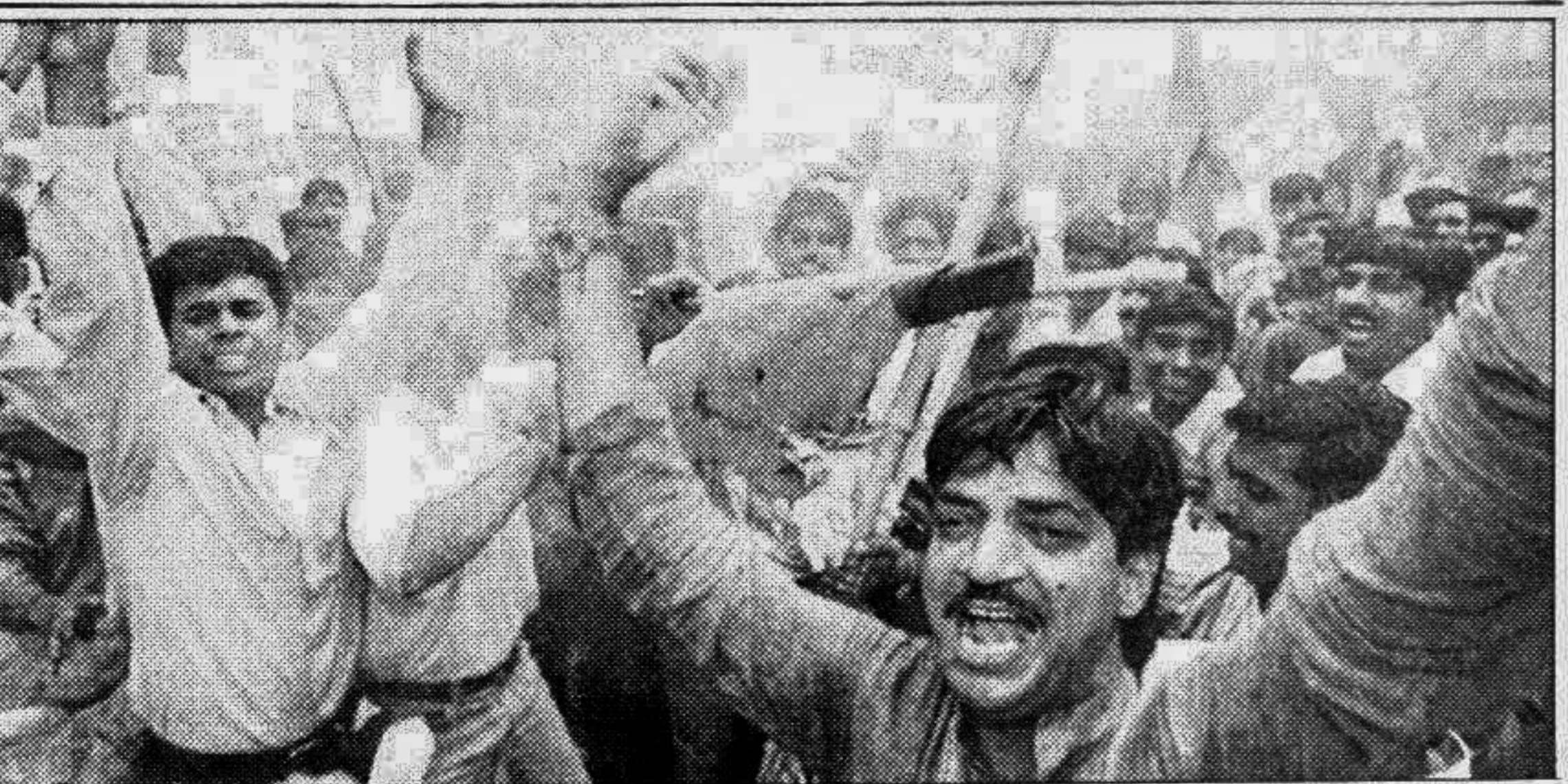
Yes, we have received a response from the UN secretary-general expressing his concern over the incident, Altaf said, adding he had referred the matter to India but India has refused to receive a UN fact-finding mission.

We are not surprised at the Indian response, he said, rejecting the Indian contention that the Pakistani Atlantique aircraft was shot down only after it had violated the Indian airspace.

Asked what other options Pakistan had after India's refusal to allow a UN fact-finding mission, he said, we will continue to consider further actions in this regard.

Pakistan had earlier lodged a formal complaint with the UN secretary-general for the shooting down of its aircraft in which 16 of its navy personnel had been killed on August 10.

Pakistan had also urged Annan that in view of claims and counterclaims by both India and Pakistan, the UN should send a fact-finding mission to ascertain the truth.



Members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) youth wing shout anti-Congress Party slogans during a demonstration in New Delhi yesterday.

— AFP photo

## BRIEFLY

**Moscow blast death toll rises to 80:** The death toll from Thursday's bomb blast at a Moscow apartment block, the worst in the capital, climbed to 80, the emergency ministry was quoted by Interfax as saying, reports Reuters from Moscow.

Authorities earlier declared a national day of mourning for the victims of three recent bombings, news agencies reported.

On Monday, Russia will mourn the victims of Thursday's blast, of the September 4 bombing of a military apartment building in Dagestan that killed 64 and of the August 31 bombing of a Moscow shopping mall that left one dead and 40 injured.

**US, British jets hit Iraq:** American and British warplanes on Thursday bombed military targets in the northern and southern no-fly zones of Iraq in response to anti-aircraft fire against jets patrolling the zones, the US military said, Reuters reports from Washington.

In Baghdad, Iraq said 11 people were injured when Western planes attacked targets in the south of the country. The Iraqi news agency quoted a military spokesman as saying the planes attacked a number of military and civilian installations in the south.

**13 die in Brazil bus mishap:** At least 13 mainly elderly people died and more than 30 required hospital treatment after their bus fell off a highway during heavy rain in the early hours on Thursday in Brazil's Ribeirao Preto region, police said, Reuters reports from Sao Paulo.

The bus was carrying 46 passengers of advanced age, they were going on a tour to the state of Golas, said a duty officer in the police department in the village of Aramina in the southwestern state of Sao Paulo.

**3 executed by hanging in Japan:** Japan hanged three death row inmates on Friday in the country's first executions this year, a Justice Ministry spokesman said, AP reports from Tokyo.

The spokesman refused to confirm the names and gender of the three who were put to death, nor the crimes for which they were executed. Unidentified Justice Ministry sources quoted by Kyodo News agency identified the three as Masashi Sato, 62, Kabsutoshi Takada, 61, and Tetsuyuki Morikawa, 69.

## Annan calls for renewed talks on Cyprus autonomy

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 10: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan hopes to restart talks in autumn between the Greek and Turkish communities on the divided island of Cyprus, his office said Thursday, reports AFP.

"He hopes to energize the process in the autumn, since a settlement could only be found through negotiations (which could take many forms) between the two sides," Annan's office said.

The brief statement was issued after Annan met Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denkash earlier Thursday.

In June the UN Security Council asked Annan to invite Denkash and Cyprus President and Greek-Cypriot leader Glafcos Clerides to unconditional talks this autumn.

But Denkash has said he will not enter into talks unless the breakaway state he declared in 1983 receives recognition from the international community.

"I have already said that I will not enter negotiations (with Clerides) unless we have equal status," he told Turkish news channel NTV from New York Wednesday.

Annan's office said simply that Denkash "stated his position in familiar terms."

Cyprus has been divided since 1974, when Turkish troops occupied its northern third in response to a coup d'etat that aimed to unite the island with Greece.