

## International

# Sharif agrees to hold talks with opposition

ISLAMABAD, Sept 26: Amidst anti-government agitation, beleaguered Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has finally agreed to hold talks with the opposition on various national issues and will set up a three-member committee in this regard, reports PTI.

Sharif, during a meeting with the Parliamentary Secretary on Information, Anwar Haq Ramay said that he believes in talks and very soon he will set up a three-member committee for discussing national issues with the opposition, the Urdu Daily Jung said.

The prime minister agreed to hold talks on issues ranging from signing of CBT, establishment of an independent Election Commission and the passage of the controversial *Shariah* Bill from the

Parliament, it said. He said the agenda for the talks with the opposition parties will include signing of CBT, setting up of an independent Election Commission, preparing new voter list, *Shariah* Bill, Article 62 and 63 besides constitutional amendment with regard to tenure of the National Assembly.

The report said as per Sharif's plan, all political and religious parties will be called for consultations followed by party with no representation and finally the religious and regional parties will be called.

APP adds: The Pakistani opposition Sunday issued an

## Ultimatum for release of Pak leaders, workers

ultimatum to the government to release detained leaders and supporters within two days or face renewed protests.

But authorities in southern Sindh province said those arrested in a crackdown on an opposition rally Saturday would face trial.

Police prevented attempts by the opposition Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) to stage a "black chapter in the history of democracy" in Pakistan, he said the detainees must be released within 48 hours or a new wave of opposition protests would be launched.

Those detained were mostly from the 19-party GDA's key components, the Pakistani People's Party (PPP) of former premier Benazir Bhutto, and the ethnic-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM).

MQM leader Farooq Sattar

claimed more than 6,000 had been arrested in the past two days, while police sources put the figure at less than 1,000.

"It is the worst kind of state terrorism against political leaders and workers," Sattar said, accusing officials of trying to muzzle any dissent.

Calling the police action a "black chapter in the history of democracy" in Pakistan, he said the detainees must be released within 48 hours or a new wave of opposition protests would be launched.

Syed Ghaus Ali Shah, who is chief of the provincial administration in the absence of an elected government, told reporters the government would show no leniency to the detainees.

In a similar crackdown on September 11, authorities released hundreds of opposition supporters and leaders as a "gesture of goodwill."

### Two gunned down in Pakistan

Another AFP report adds: unidentified motorbike riders shot dead a Christian social worker and Sunni Muslim official in separate attacks in the central Pakistani province of Punjab, police said Sunday.

"I saw three men on a motorcycle opened fire on 62-year-old retired government official, Rana Ashraf, early Sunday when he left for dawn prayers in a mosque in Zikriya Town, Multan.



Polling officers wait with sealed ballot boxes overnight to deposit their respective ballot boxes at the main collection centre in Patna Sunday in Bihar state after voting came to an end late Saturday. Various parts of Bihar went to polls Saturday at the fourth phase of the general elections in India to elect a new central government.

— AFP photo

## Opposition concedes Taliban advance

KABUL, Sept 26: Afghanistan's opposition forces Sunday conceded the Taliban had made some advances after the hardline Islamic militia launched the second wave of its summer offensive, reports AFP.

General Sayed Hussain Anwari of the opposition's United Front said several posts were captured around Imam Sahib in northern Kunduz province where heavy fighting had entered its second day.

"We think they will continue their attacks in order to make up for their defeat in the Shamali areas. We believe they will be defeated in this region too," Anwari told AFP.

The Taliban launched its summer offensive on July 28 at front lines north of Kabul. Initially the militia made spectacular gains across the Shamali Plains in an advance on opposition strongholds in the nearby Panjsher Valley.

However, a counter-attack by forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Massoud cut Taliban gains in half and Kabul's notorious front lines were re-drawn about 30 km north of the capital.

Analysts say the second wave -- launched from three



Sun Chih-feng, a 25-year-old vocational school student, is pulled out alive from tons of debris Sunday, 130 hours after a 12-storey apartment building in Taipei collapsed in a powerful earthquake which struck September 21. His brother Sun Chih-kuang, 20, was rescued minutes earlier. Both are reported in good conditions by doctors who call the survival "miracle".

— AFP photo

### Rains kill 17

#### West Bengal seeks help of army, air force

CALCUTTA, Sept 26: The West Bengal government yesterday decided to seek help of the Army and Air Force in Burdwan and Birbhum districts, the two most affected, amidst fear that the state may see another spell of deluge as the low pressure which had headed towards Bihar on Friday, suddenly turned east during the day and is now moving towards Darjeeling and Cooch Behar, reports PTI.

At least 17 people were killed so far and 10 lakh more were affected in the rain although the State Finance Minister, Asim Dasgupta, confirmed only eight. Fifteen districts were declared as "flood-affected" by the government. The minister said that the low pressure has turned towards North Bengal districts after wreaking havoc in the south.

Egyptians urged to back Mubarak for another term

CAIRO, Sept 26: Some 24 million registered voters were called to vote "yes" for a fourth, six-year term for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak when polls opened early Sunday, reports AFP.

Israel has invited tenders for no less than 2,600 settlement expansion projects in the occupied territories since Barak took office in July on a pledge to advance peace with the Palestinians, public radio reported.

At least a thousand of the tenders invited by the housing ministry concern West Bank settlements close to Jerusalem -- Maale Adumim, Givat Ze'ev and Betar Illit, the radio said.

The other expansion projects concern the settlements of Kiryat Arba and Otniel close to the southern West Bank town of Hebron, and of Qarne Shomron and Ariel in the northern West Bank between Nablus and Ramallah.

Further seven tenders have been invited since July for in-

## Thousands rally against Milosevic

BELGRADE, Sept 26: In the biggest turnout during daily rallies in recent days, at least 55,000 people marched Saturday through downtown Belgrade and several other Serbian cities to press their demand for the resignation of President Slobodan Milosevic, reports AP.

Curuvija's newspaper had been banned and fined for criticising Milosevic and other government officials after a strict media law was adopted in October 1998. He also had been at odds with ultranationalist leader Vojislav Seselj.

As they marched, their number swelled to more 40,000 people, the highest number in recent Belgrade protest rallies.

## Israel pressing ahead with expansion of settlements

JERUSALEM, Sept 26: Israel is pressing ahead with the expansion of Jewish settlements despite repeated Palestinian protests that it is one of the biggest barriers to Prime Minister Ehud Barak's pledge to advance peace, new figures revealed on Sunday, reports AFP.

Israel has invited tenders for no less than 2,600 settlement expansion projects in the occupied territories since Barak took office in July on a pledge to advance peace with the Palestinians, public radio reported.

The figures provoked an angry reaction from Israeli peace activists. "Housing Minister Yitzhak Levy is continuing the policies of the former right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu," the Peace Now group charged.

But a ministry spokesman vigorously defended the policies of the hardline Levy, whose National Religious Party is a strong supporter of the 160,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"Settlement" construction within Eretz Israel (Biblical Greater Israel) will continue in accordance with the government's programme everywhere where there is a demand for housing," the spokesman said.

Barak's government has pledged not to build new Jewish settlements in the occupied territories but has said it will continue to meet housing needs in existing settlements.

## Two brothers rescued from Taipei rubble

TAIPEI, Sept 26: Two brothers emerged alive from the rubble of their apartment block Sunday 130 hours after it was razed by the Taiwan earthquake and as another powerful aftershock brought further death and destruction, reports AFP.

The men's father Sun Cheng said the pair were found when Taipei deputy mayor Ou Chinchang stepped inside a tunnel dug by rescuers and came across a man who announced: "I'm Sun Chi-kuang, I'm one of those trapped here."

The 20-year-old had apparently dug his own way out after seeing light from approaching rescuers. He was able to walk out and thank his rescuers before being lifted down off the rubble in a crane's bucket and, grinning, embrace his family on the ground.

Soon afterwards Sun's brother Sun Chi-feng, 25, was also lifted out of the rubble.

He was blindfolded after five days in the dark following Tuesday's 7.6-Richter scale pre-dawn quake that killed more than 2,000 people. His condition was weaker than his brother's.

Taipei mayor Ma Ying-jeou said the pair "survived by eating rotten apples from a refrigerator buried with them, and drinking water we sprayed on the site and their own urine".

The pair were protected from tonnes of concrete and twisted metal by the refrigerator and a desk, and were able to talk to each other.

Japanese rescue specialists had declared there were no signs of life in the rubble on Wednesday.

Later at the capital's Suagshan hospital Doctor Su-chang-jan said: "The brothers both suffered smoke inhalation but otherwise they're OK except for a few bruises." They were also dehydrated.

Medical Sun Chi-kuang had told them: "Buddha told me in a dream that I would be rescued in the morning."

The pair's parents, also devout Buddhists, thanked God for their sons' lives. Father Sun Cheng said: "It's a miracle."

Mother Liou Luan-ruan said: "I did not believe heaven would take the lives of my two sons. When I heard someone had been rescued, I knew it was them."

As the rescue began early

Sunday, another massive aftershock struck central Taiwan. It came hours after President Lee Teng-hui declared a six-month state of emergency to help more than 100,000 homeless refugees.

### Three more die in latest quake

The death toll from Taiwan's devastating earthquake rose Sunday as the island was hit by another massive aftershock, officials said.

Officials listed 2,024 people as dead, up by around 20 overnight. Three more people were confirmed to have died in Sunday's early morning aftershock, which measured 6.8 on the Richter scale.

Local media reports spoke of several more deaths and around 20 more injured.

The official toll on Sunday at noon (10:00 am BST) also included a further 8,565 people listed as injured, 207 as missing or trapped in rubble, and 1,065 stranded in remote areas.

The earthquake which struck central Taiwan registered 7.6 on the Richter scale.

## Pro-Jakarta militias urged to lay down arms

DILI, East Timor, Sept 26: Multinational peacekeepers Sunday urged militias to disarm ahead of Monday's change of command as Indonesian troops torched city buildings in an angry farewell to the territory they ruled for 24 years, reports AFP.

Curuvija's newspaper had been banned and fined for criticising Milosevic and other government officials after a strict media law was adopted in October 1998. He also had been at odds with ultranationalist leader Vojislav Seselj.

As they marched, their number swelled to more 40,000 people, the highest number in recent Belgrade protest rallies.

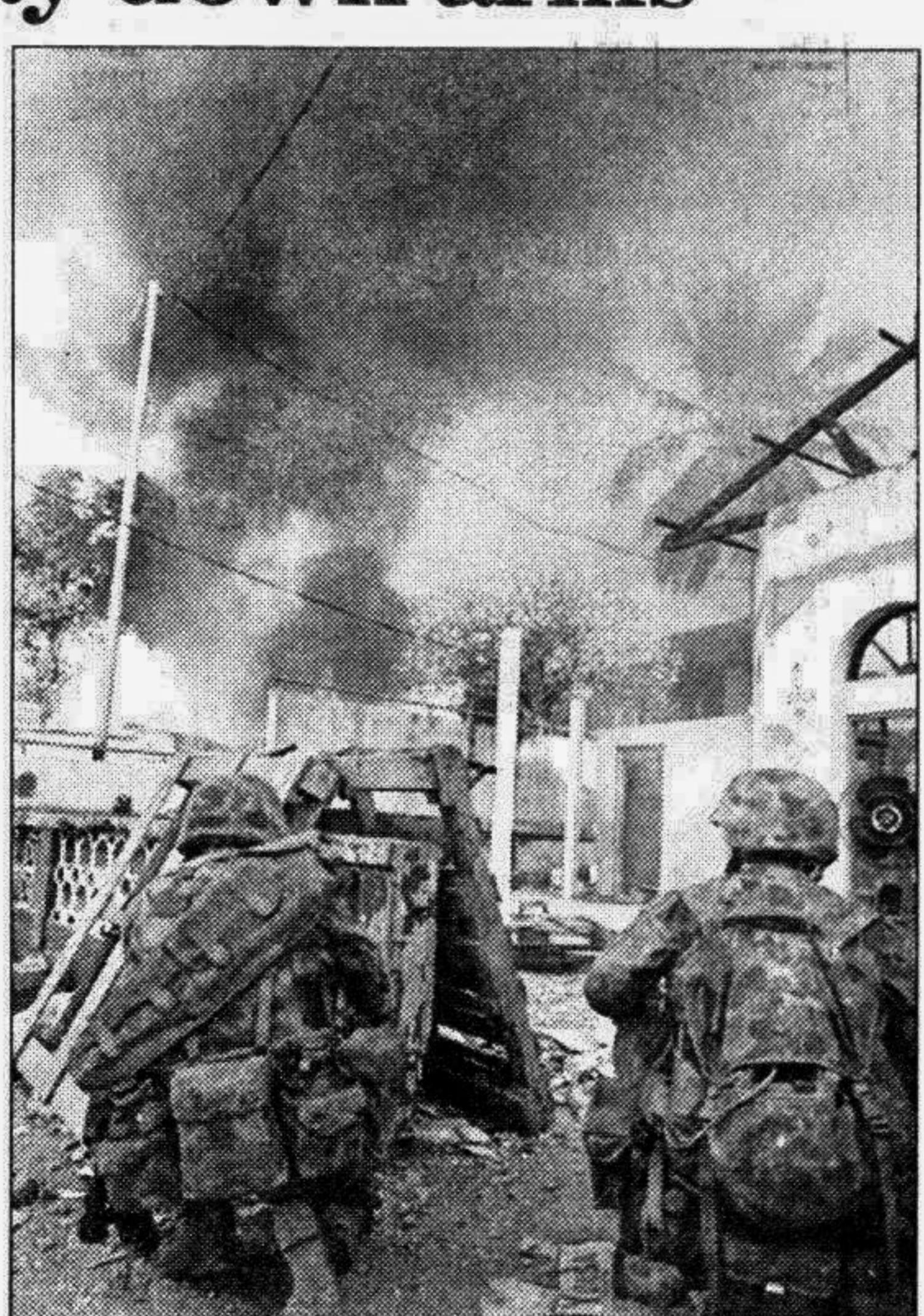
Now we would welcome militia to come along back into the political debate, to come back in unarmed, to come back into their communities," said Major General Peter Cosgrove.

"And if this is done then Timor has an early rosy future. If it's not done then this will drag on like this for a long time."

More evidence of the carnage emerged Sunday with the discovery of the bodies of two East Timorese people murdered during the militia rampage, which were exhumed from graves on the outskirts of Dili, the United Nations said.

A torture device was also found in an abandoned Indonesian barracks.

Interfet has tried to stamp its authority on the capital Dili before formally assuming responsibility for security in the territory on Monday.



Australian soldiers take cover in front of a blazing building while searching for suspected pro-Indonesian militia activity Sunday after unknown assailants set an official building on fire. Almost all official buildings and army or police barracks on the East Timorese capital, Dili, have been set alight whilst the Indonesian army pulls out its remaining personnel.

— AFP photo

## Russia prepares plans for invasion of Chechnya

MOSCOW, Sept 26: Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev said Sunday that his forces had prepared plans for a ground invasion of the rebel republic of Chechnya, Russian media reported, says AFP.

"We have versions of a ground operation planned, which will be realised depending on the situation," Sergeyev said.

"Our main goal is to destroy the bandits," ITAR-TASS news agency quoted him as saying.

Russia has blamed Chechen gunmen of organising raids in the southern Russian republic of Dagestan and orchestrating terrorist attacks on Russian apartment blocks that have killed some 300 people.

Earlier reports say, Russia shut down one of the last refugee escape routes out of

Chechnya on Sunday as a bombing campaign against the rebel Muslim republic continued for the fourth day.

Russian air strikes also took out Chechnya's only cellular phone tower, making Russian news reports of the fast-escalating military conflict nearly impossible to confirm for western news agencies working out of Grozny.

The Russian new agency Interfax reported out of the Chechen border by Saturday, Moscow news reports said. The line of cars waiting to go through the checkpoint was 15 km long on Saturday evening.

"We are on the verge of a humanitarian disaster, we can't provide them with food and housing," Ingush Prime Minister Akhmed Malsagov told Interfax.

Earlier, Russian reports said

that officials had closed the border between Chechnya and the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia late Saturday to stop Chechen refugees from entering Russia.

The road remained the last way for Chechen refugees to leave the republic, which has been bombarded by Russian military jets and artillery since September 5.

Some 20,000 Chechen refugees had crossed the Ingushetia-Chechen border by Saturday, Moscow news reports said. The line of cars waiting to go through the checkpoint was 15 km long on Saturday evening.

"We are on the verge of a humanitarian disaster, we can't provide them with food and housing," Ingush Prime Minister Akhmed Malsagov told Interfax.

## Horse trading to sail Lankan budget

COLOMBO, Sept 26: Sri Lankan parties are in moves to win over rivals before the crucial budget vote in parliament where the ruling party has a slender one-seat majority, political sources said here Sunday.

The main opposition United National Party (UNP) has begun lobbying ruling party back-benchers to defeat the national budget to be presented in the first week of November and force a parliamentary election, the sources said.

They said the ruling People's Alliance (PA) of President Chandrika Kumaratunga has already mounted a counter-offensive to ensure opposition defections to avoid an embarrassing upset in the House.

The moves were heightened when unexpectedly a key coalition partner of the government, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), clashed with a government minister Friday forcing

the abrupt suspension of sittings in parliament.

The SLMC which holds seven in the 225-member assembly said it will reconsider supporting the government and in theory any pull out by the minority Muslim party could see the government fall.

"We can leave the government anytime," SLMC leader M. H. M. Ashraff said after Friday's rumpus in parliament. However, he said they were deferring a decision out of respect for President Kumaratunga who is now in Washington.

Diplomats here said political manoeuvring has also pushed back efforts to resolve the country's long running Tamil separatist conflict which has claimed more than 55,000 lives in the past 27 years.

"It is difficult to expect them to take a stand on contentious issues when they are facing problems of political survival," a Western diplomat here said.

"So the peace process is most likely to be delayed."

The parliamentary elections are due by August next year while the presidential election must be held by November, but the government can hold the two votes anytime before that.

Ruling party sources said the government was keen to hold a snap vote in January in a bid to arrest its declining electoral fortunes at local elections.