

9 militants, 2 BSF personnel among 15 killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Sept 28: Fifteen people including nine militants and two Border Security Force (BSF) personnel were killed and four others wounded since last evening as army stepped up anti-militant operations in Jammu and Kashmir, reports PTI.

Army busted six militant hideouts and recovered a huge cache of arms and explosives, while militants abducted a person in the state during the period, an official spokesman said here yesterday.

Two BSF personnel lost their lives when militants ambushed their patrol at warhops in Zakoora area on the outskirts of Srinagar yesterday, officials said.

The BSF troops returned the fire and subsequently threw a cordon around the area to flush out the militants.

Three militants were killed in two separate encounters with army as the latter stepped up anti-militant operations in frontier district of Kup Wara since Sunday.

Nobel Prize for Literature to be announced tomorrow

STOCKHOLM, Sept 28: The 1999 Nobel Prize for Literature will be awarded on Thursday, the Swedish Academy announced on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Announcement of the literature prize, worth around 960,000 dollars, will kick off the annual Nobel season and will be followed from October 11 to 15 by the awarding of the Nobel prizes for medicine, chemistry, physics, economics and finally the Nobel Peace Prize.

The literature prize will be announced Thursday at 1:00 p.m. (5:00 p.m. BST) in Stockholm.

Some of the names rumoured to be in the running are Milan Kundera of the Czech Republic, Tarek Ben Jelloul of Morocco, Guenther Grass of Germany, Michel Tournier and Jean-Marie Le Clezio of France, Hugo Klaus of Belgium, Cees Nootboom of the Netherlands.

Others include Danish writer Villie Soerensen, Swedish poet Thomas Transtroemer, Vassili Nagrodov of Russia, British author Salman Rushdie, Chinese writer Bei Dao and Norman Mailer of the US.

Linda Tripp sues White House, Pentagon for 'humiliation'

WASHINGTON, Sept 28: Linda Tripp, who secretly taped her friend Monica Lewinsky's confessions about sexual trysts with President Bill Clinton, filed a lawsuit Monday against the White House and the Pentagon alleging they leaked confidential information to discredit her, reports AFP.

Tripp wants the White House and the Pentagon -- where she has worked for years -- to pay an unstated amount for "extreme public embarrassment, humiliation, anxiety, ridicule."

Neither the White House nor the Pentagon has any comments on the lawsuit.

Golkar party may review Habibie's candidacy

JAKARTA, Sept 28: Indonesia's ruling Golkar party Tuesday hinted it may review its backing for beleaguered President B.J. Habibie's presidential candidacy at a party congress next month, reports AFP.

Although Golkar has no formal plans to raise the issue of Habibie's candidacy at the October 18 congress, chairman Akbar Tanjung said the party's constitution made it possible for a review to be called.

"There is no agenda to evaluate the candidacy in the congress," Tanjung told journalists after meeting with Habibie at the president's home.

But he added that as long as the demand for a review of the party's support for Habibie's presidential bid "is done through a decision-making mechanism,

16 Tigers killed in fresh clashes

COLOMBO, Sept 28: At least 16 Tamil Tiger guerrillas were killed in fresh clashes with government forces in northern Sri Lanka, the defence ministry here said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Government soldiers fired mortar bombs and small arms at positions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at the village of Nedunkerni on Monday and killed five rebels, the ministry said.

It said another three Tigers were killed when troops overran three rebel bunkers in the region of Welly Oya.

Another eight Tigers were killed in four separate confrontations with the troops in the past 24 hours, the ministry said.

Albright urges Aziz to sign CTBT US concerned at arrests of Pak opposition activists

NEW YORK, Sept 27 (AFP) - The United States on Monday expressed concern over the weekend arrests of hundreds of would-be anti-government demonstrators in Pakistan, saying the action seemed aimed at suppressing freedom of speech and assembly, reports AFP.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright raised the issue directly with her Pakistani counterpart Sartaj Aziz during a meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting here, the State Department said.

At the late Monday meeting Albright also urged Aziz to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which calls for a global nuclear test ban.

The crackdown in Pakistan "appears to have been an attempt to suppress a peaceful protest against the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif," State Department spokesman James Rubin said in a statement.

"As we have said in the past, the United States is concerned about the mass arrests of opposition political party members in connection with peaceful demonstrations," he said, urging Islamabad to protect internationally recognised human rights.

"We support the strengthening of democracy in Pakistan

and call upon Prime Minister Sharif and his government to carry out their responsibility to preserve the rights of free speech and press and peaceful assembly," Rubin said.

On Saturday in Karachi, police arrested several hundred people ahead of a planned demonstration called by the Grand Democratic Alliance, an umbrella group for 19 Pakistani religious and political parties, to press their demand for the ouster of Sharif's 31-month old government.

Authorities in southern Sindh province had declared the planned rally "unlawful" and police officials warned they would not allow the opposition to disrupt peace in Karachi.

Police foiled a similar demonstration attempt on September 11 when top opposition leaders were detained for a day and participants were subjected to teargas and baton charges.

Sharif sacked the Sindh government in October last year and placed the province under direct federal rule to curb lawlessness and acts of terrorism, after recurring political and ethnic violence here had claimed more than 4,000 lives.

At her meeting with Aziz, Albright urged Pakistan to quickly sign and ratify the CTBT.

"Pakistan has a great deal to gain by doing so, not only in

terms of world opinion, but also in terms of its own interest," a senior State Department official told AFP.

A total of 151 countries have signed the treaty since its completion and 45 have ratified the pact, including 17 of 44 nuclear-capable states.

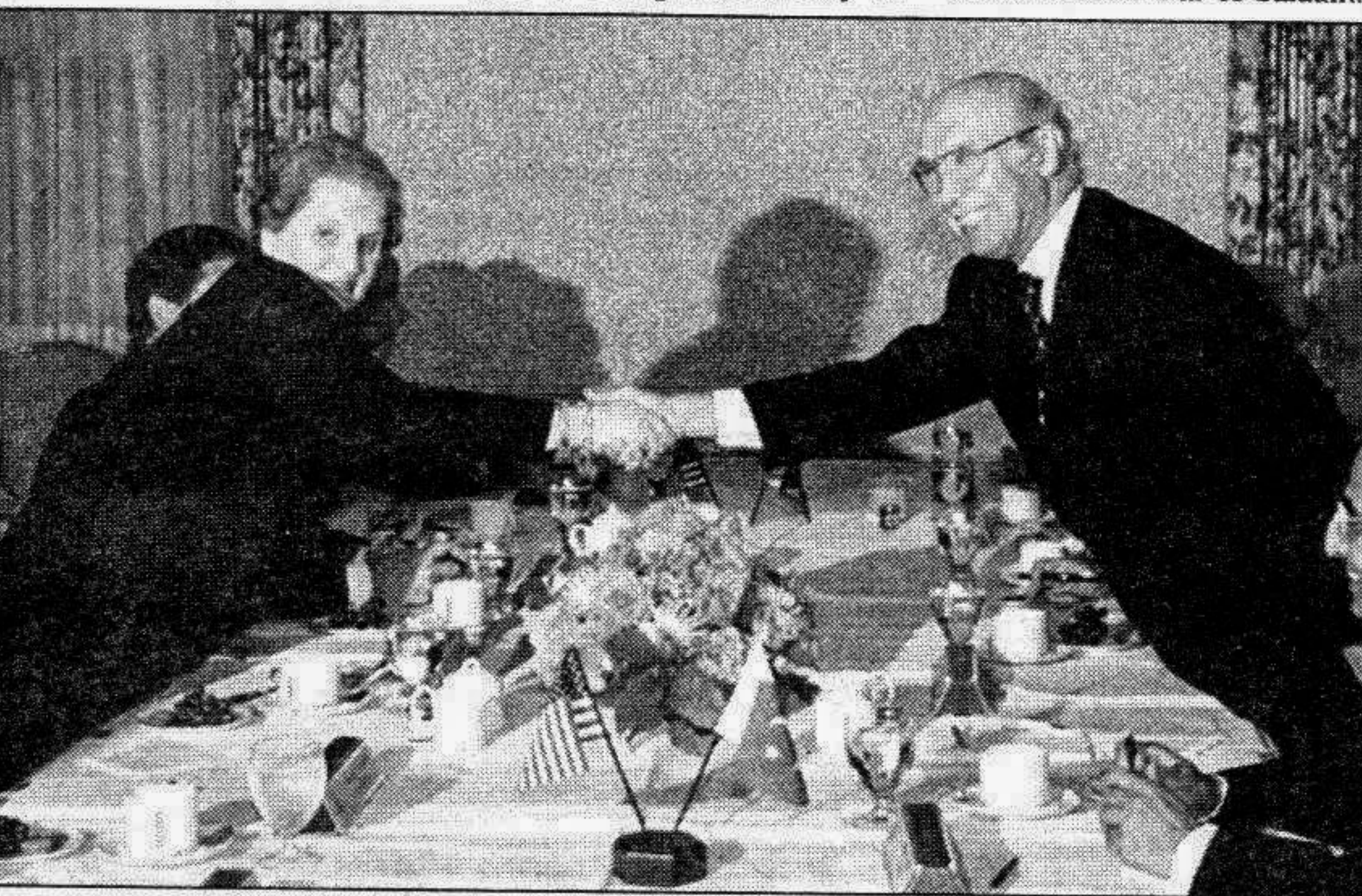
The five declared nuclear powers -- Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States -- have all signed the treaty, but China and Russia, like the United States, have not yet ratified it.

Pakistan has called for a UN meeting of the world's nuclear powers on Wednesday to halt the arms race in southern Asia.

Albright also told Aziz that the United States believes the Kashmir dispute "must be resolved through negotiations between India and Pakistan, which take into account the wishes of the people of Kashmir and Jammu," the State Department official said.

Albright and Aziz also discussed Afghanistan, where Pakistan has links with the fundamentalist Muslim Taliban regime in Kabul.

Washington is uncomfortable with the Taliban's protection of alleged terrorist Osama Bin Laden, charged with masterminding several bombings including the August 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.



US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (L) shakes hands with Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz during a bilateral meeting at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel Monday in New York. Albright and Aziz attend the 54th United Nations General Assembly session. — AFP photo

Advani lashes Pakistan for fomenting election unrest

GUWAHATI, India, Sept 28: Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani accused Pakistan on Tuesday of trying to disrupt elections in the country's insurgency-racked northeastern states, reports AFP.

Advani told reporters in Guwahati, the capital of Assam state, that the Pakistani intel-

ligence agency, ISI, had masterminded militant boycotts of general elections in the north-east and Kashmir.

"The ISI is taking the help of some militant outfits in the northeast to spread their tentacles," Advani said.

"But ISI's designs to disrupt the poll process have not suc-

ceeded despite their best efforts."

India's staggered general elections began on September 5, with the first northeastern states entering the fray during the fourth and penultimate stage of voting on September 25.

Various militant groups in the northeast, who have been fighting Indian rule for decades, have boycotted the elections and threatened registered voters who turn out to cast their ballots.

Advani, a senior leader of the ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party, blamed the continued militancy in the northeast on the local state assemblies, all of which are controlled either by the main opposition Congress party or regional parties.

"The local governments have not been able to deal effectively with the militancy," Advani said.

Repoll begins in 3 states

Fresh balloting in India's marathon elections began Tuesday in 530 polling stations across three states.

The repoll was ordered by the independent Election Commission following complaints of vote irregularities during the fourth and penultimate round of balloting on Saturday.

The commission said fresh polling was necessary in 481 polling centres in the eastern state of Bihar, where poll-related violence has claimed more than 40 lives, amid widespread allegations of electoral fraud.

BRIEFLY

Quake rocks Solomon Islands

Emergency officials said Tuesday they have received no reports of any damage or injuries following an earthquake that shook the capital, Honiara, AP reports from Honiara, Solomon Islands.

The offshore earthquake, with a magnitude of 5.6, occurred at noon (0000 GMT) Monday about 20 kilometers (12 miles) north-northwest of Honiara at a depth of 60 kilometers (36 miles), according to the United States Geological Survey.

Fire in Britain's nat'l library

Fire broke out Monday night at the British Library a new brick structure built to house the national book collection, AP reports from London.

5 slain in Philippines clash

Three soldiers and two suspected Muslim extremists were slain in separate incidents in the southern Philippines which also left four people wounded, a military spokesman said in Zamboanga, Philippines, AFP reports from Philippines.

Record number seeks asylum in Britain

A record number of people sought asylum in Britain last month, government figures showed yesterday, AFP reports from London.

A total of 7,120 applications were received in August, up from 6,440 in July and a new monthly record. The surge in applications brings the backlog of cases waiting to be dealt with to 86,065, the Home Office said.

50,000 fled into Ingushetia

MOSCOW, Sept 28: Russian Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu vowed Tuesday to avert a humanitarian "catastrophe" threatening to envelop southern Russia as a result of a flood of refugees fleeing the rebel republic of Chechnya, reports AFP.

As Russian air forces pounded the Chechen capital Grozny for the sixth day, officials estimated that up to 50,000 people had already fled the devastated separatist state into the neighboring southern Russian republic of Ingushetia. Ingushetia's leaders late Monday appealed for assistance

from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, saying it did not have the means to cope with the flood of refugees.

Shoigu, who paid a flash visit to Ingushetia on Tuesday, promised to deliver some 40 tonnes of humanitarian aid to the republic, including blankets and tents.

"The government will not allow for a catastrophe," Shoigu was quoted by Interfax as saying.

He estimated that some 15,000 Chechen refugees had already crossed into the republic. But one Ingush migration

Kashmiris plan march across disputed border

ISLAMABAD, Sept 28: Kashmiris who want outright independence from uneasy neighbours Pakistan and India will press their demand by attempting to cross the disputed Kashmir border next week, said Amanullah Khan, the group's leader, reports AP.

The march to be held on Monday will begin in Pakistan-ruled Kashmir. Demonstrators will try to march into India, across a border patrolled by tens of thousands of soldiers from both nations.

Pakistani officials have asked Khan's group to call off the march and have promised to stop them from crossing.

"We want the reunification of our motherland which is divided between Pakistan and India," said Khan, who is chairman of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, an organisation with headquarters on both sides of the disputed border. Khan's group wants an independent, secular Kashmir.

Khan's group spearheaded a decade-old secessionist movement in Indian-held Kashmir. However the movement has since been taken over by Islamic groups demanding union with Islamic Pakistan.

India accuses Pakistan of giving military aid to Islamic insurgents a charge denied by Islamabad.

Pakistan and India lay claim to united Kashmir, divided between the neighbours after British colonial rule of the subcontinent ended in 1947. Pakistan wants a United

Nations sponsored vote held on both sides of the disputed border to allow Kashmiris to decide whether they want a united Kashmir to join India or Pakistan.

Khan's group wants outright independence.

The flash point of two previous wars between India and Pakistan, Kashmir was the scene of a bitter border dispute this summer that world leaders feared could escalate into another all-out war.

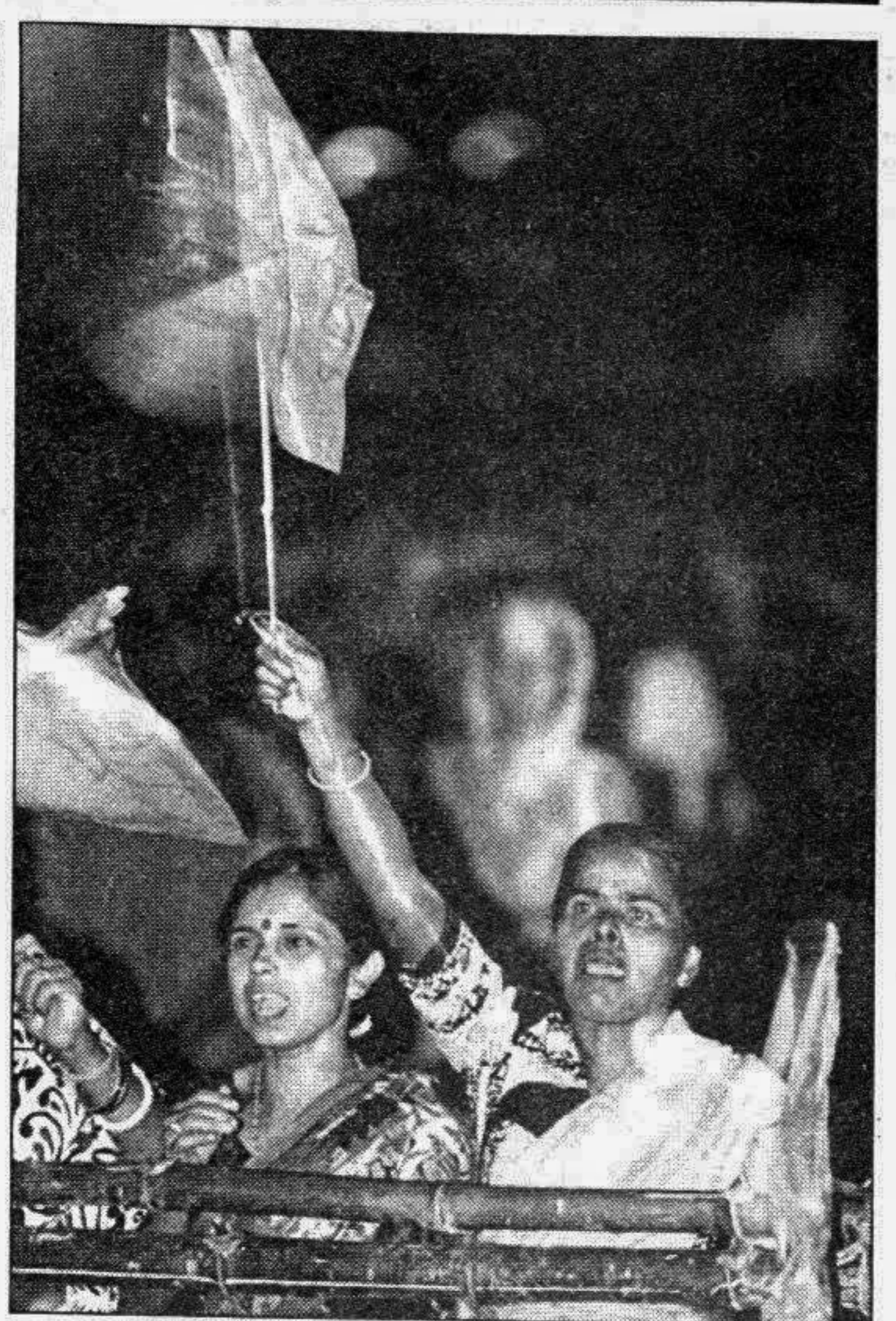
The Kashmir dispute shot to international prominence following last year's testing by both India and Pakistan of underground nuclear devices. The two neighbours declared themselves nuclear power and said they possessed nuclear weapons.

The aim of the march is to draw the world's attention to the protracted Kashmir problem and show that Kashmiris do not accept the Line of Control," he said, a reference to the disputed border.

The nine-kilometer (5.4-mile) march will end at Tatrnot in Indian-held Kashmir.

"India and Pakistan have one thing in common... they both are against the JKLF because it stands for Kashmir's independence," Khan said.

This is the second attempt by Khan's group to cross the disputed border. In 1992 eight demonstrators were killed when Pakistani security troops stopped the pro-independence march.



Enthusiastic women yell slogans and wave flags of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during a rally attended by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee Monday in Calcutta. The rally was a part of the BJP election campaign for the polls to be held in Calcutta on October 3. — AFP photo

Japan edges closer to lifting sanctions on North Korea

TOKYO, Sept 28: Japan will await further progress in US-North Korea talks before deciding whether to scrap sanctions imposed on Pyongyang for launching a ballistic missile, the government said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The North Korean foreign ministry announced Friday it would suspend long-range missile tests under an agreement reached in talks with the United States in Berlin early September.

"We welcome (North Korea's) announcement of a missile test freeze) as one positive sign," Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura told a news conference.

"If further developments are made at the US-North Korea talks, there will arise a need to discuss lifting sanctions which we have imposed since last year's launch of a Taepodong missile," he added.

"But a little further review is still needed while talks are on-going between the United States and North Korea."

Tokyo froze food aid to Pyongyang, stopped efforts to normalise relations and banned charter flights after North Korea fired a suspected medium-range Taepodong I missile over Japan in August 1998.

In response to promises made by Pyongyang in Berlin, the United States eased sanctions that had been in place for nearly 50 years since the beginning of the Korean War.

But North Korea's official Rodong Simun newspaper attacked Japan for "meddling" in the US-North Korea talks, according to Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The KCNA report, monitored here, said Japan asserted North Korea had yet to freeze its missile program.

Shi'ite leader, 2 others shot dead in Pakistan

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Sept 28: Gunmen on Tuesday shot dead a key Shi'ite Muslim leader, his daughter and a guard in an ambush in the northwestern Pakistani town of Dera Ismail Khan triggering demonstrations in the area, police said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Khurshid Anwar, secretary general of the Shi'ite political party, Tehrik-i-Jafria Pakistan (TJP), was driving his daughter to the college when three men armed with automatic weapons opened fire on his car, police said.

Anwar, who was also a lawyer, his student daughter and a guard died on the spot while his wife sustained serious injuries in the attack, they said. The gunmen fired on a motorbike, police said, adding they had launched investigations into the incident.

Local lawyers condemned Anwar's murder and boycotted

courts in protest, residents said. TJP workers staged a protest march and blocked the roads, blaming extremist Sunni Muslims for the killings.

Angry party workers, chanting slogans torched a newspaper stall and ransacked the shop of a local leader of a radical Sunni faction Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), residents said.

Residents said markets were closed as tensions gripped the city.

Police have stepped up security but sporadic aerial firing continued in the city, they said.

Police have detained for questioning the owner of a roadside restaurant where the assailants were said to have taken tea before the early morning ambush in Dera Ismail Khan, a small town some 330 kilometers (206 miles) south of Peshawar, the sources said.

Interfet seeks to stamp authority

DILI, East Timor, Sept 28: The international force in East Timor, under growing pressure to extend its authority beyond Dili, said Tuesday it had detained 15 armed men in a helicopter raid in the far east of the territory, reports AFP.

The arrests were made at the town of Com, a stronghold of anti-independence militias close to the eastern edge of Timor island, nearly 200 km east of Interfet's main base in the East Timorese capital.

It is also in an area close to where church sources have said two nuns and three other church workers were killed over the weekend by departing Indonesian soldiers.

The raid, carried out late Monday, was led by Australian Blackhawk helicopters and was the second operation of its kind mounted by Interfet outside of Dili.

On Monday, the force raided the militia stronghold of Liquisa, 35 km east of Dili, forcing local militiamen to flee to the hills.

Interfet's Colonel Mark Kelly said the arrests at Com had been made without a shot being fired.

"This swift action has provided immediate support to the many hundreds of people in the location who have clearly been under threat and duress throughout the period."

Kelly said the operation had been mounted after the force received reports of "ongoing murder, arson and violence," in the area but he could not confirm if the operation was linked to the killing of the nuns.

Interfet, which now has 4,500 troops in the territory, is under pressure to quickly fill the security vacuum left by the departure of most of the Indonesian army, which

handed effective control of East Timor over to the international force on Monday.

Aid workers have expressed frustration at the slow pace of moves to open communication lines to refugees in outlying areas of the territory.

Ross Mountain, the UN humanitarian coordinator, said there were some 3,000 to 5,000 displaced persons in Com in desperate need of food and other supplies.

Militia leader calls on his men to prepare for guerrilla war

An East Timorese militia leader has called on his men to prepare bases for a guerrilla campaign to reclaim their territory, a report said Tuesday.

Erico Guterres, deputy commander of the Front for Integration Fighters (PFI), the organization grouping all pro-Jakarta militias, made the call

to war at a rally in the West Timorese border town of Atambua after dusk Monday, the Indonesian state Antara news agency said.

"After receiving instructions from the commander of the battalions and after a strong consolidation, the entire PFI personnel will immediately open guerrilla bases," Guterres said.

He also expressed his thanks to PFI members who stayed loyal to the front.



Relatives mourn the loss of nine people, including two Catholic nuns and two priests in waiting, killed by pro-Indonesian militia Tuesday during a memorial service in this town some 120 km East of Dili. Residents of Baucau found the bodies of the nine victims near the town of Los Palos, after they were executed by bullets most likely on Saturday while driving back to Baucau. — AFP photo

Fighting eases as anti-Taliban forces re-grouping troops

KABUL, Sept 28: Fighting in Afghanistan's far north eased Tuesday as the ruling Taliban and opposition troops began re-grouping after four days of pitched battles, the opposition said, reports AFP.

Opposition spokesman Mohammad Habel said the front lines had shifted to the border of Takhar and Kunduz provinces, some 400 km north of here, after the Taliban captured the provincial centres, Dasht-i-Archi and Imam Sahib, in Kunduz on Monday.

He said the decision to retreat was made by the military council of the opposition's United Front whose members, wanted to avoid further civilian casualties and destruction to villages and farms by the advancing Taliban.

"No heavy fighting is going on at the moment. Only the sporadic exchange of artillery is going on between us and the Taliban," Habel told AFP.

"Our forces still hold their defence positions on the hills outside the centre of Dashi-Archi. We are also making preparations for a counter attack," Habel said.

A Taliban spokesman has been unavailable for comment since the militia launched the second wave of its summer offensive on Saturday, aimed at severing northern supply routes held by the United Front.

After five years of civil war with the United Front, the militia has gained control over most of Afghanistan and imposed its own ultra-orthodox Islamic laws.

Malaysian opposition warns of massive crackdown

BANGKOK, Sept 28: Two prominent Malaysian opposition figures said here Tuesday Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was planning a massive crackdown and a "dirty campaign" to hold onto power, reports AFP.

Tian Chua, vice-president of the National Justice Party (Keadilan) and human rights lawyer Sivarasa Rajah were among several opposition figures detained for taking part in mass rallies this month.

They said a wave of arrests was underway aimed at eliminating the opposition before upcoming national elections, due by next June.

"Very dirty and very unprecedented methods have been used to destroy opposition leaders," said Chua, a close ally of

jalled former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim. "He will be tightening the screws and trying to intimidate and pressure the opposition and a massive crackdown might be on the way," Chua told reporters here.

The two men travelled to Bangkok claiming they have been denied access to the media in Malaysia.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said there would be no series of arrests under the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA) similar to a crackdown in the 1980s.

But human rights lawyer Sivarasa Rajah said opposition leaders had been charged under separate unlawful assembly laws.