Britain passes bill to restore direct rule over N Ireland

LONDON, Feb 9: Britain edged closer on Tuesday to restoring direct rule over Northern Ireland in spite of a warning from the leader of the IRA's political wing that he may step down over the row, reports

British MPs in the lower House of Commons passed a bill enabling Northern Ireland minister Peter Mandelson to suspend the province's new power-sharing government by Friday if the Irish Republican Army (IRA) fails to provide assurances on disarmament.

The bill approved by 326 votes to seven and now goes to the upper House of Lords -- a formality -- before becoming law on Friday.

But as intensive talks continued to try to find a way out of the deadlock over disarmament, Mandelson said he hoped it would be unnecessary to implement the bill.

Announcing the legislation

BEIRUT, Feb 9: Israeli

planes attacked suspected

guerilla targets in south

Lebanon for a second time in 24

hours in further retaliation for

raids by Hezbollah guerillas

diers, mostly in the last two

tacks sparked international

anxiety over the future of the

Syria-Israeli peace talks, al-

ready stalled since January af-

ter a brief resumption last De-

cember after a 45-month break.

as the Israeli air force swept in,

hitting a building in the south-

ern city of Tyre just past mid-

night on Tuesday, wounding

Kamal Mroue and his two sons.

Mroue's flat was being used as a

communications centre for

Hezbollah but an official in the

Benazir vetoed

Kargil type

operation in '96

Pakistan Prime Minister Be-

nazir Bhutto has said that she

vetoed Kargil type operation

proposed by military top bras

The proposal was put to me

during her regime in 1996, re-

at Pakistan army general

headquarters in front of about

50 to 60 officers in the begin-

ning of 1996. But I vetoed it,

Bhutto told BBC World Service

that the then Pakistan army

chief of staff had come to her

with the proposal of the Kargil

sort, pushing either Pakistan-

based Kashmiri militants or

Pakistani regular forces

through the Line of Control, she

replied I was given a briefing

with maps, screens, slides, and

at the end I vetoed it. Without

elaborating why she had not

given the nod, Bhutto advocated

an open border policy with In-

to go to Kashmir as part of such

Bhutto said she was willing

We do have a dispute over

Kashmir, but we think the time

has come to have open borders,

open exchanges to free our peo-

ple, she said adding may be if we

Japanese

opposition

returns to

Asked whether it was a fact

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Former

Some security sources said

witnesses said.

ports PTI.

radio last night.

dia on Kashmir.

Three people were wounded

The attacks and counter-at-

that have killed six Israeli sol-

weeks, reports Reuters.

last week, Mandelson effectively gave the Irish Republican Army one week to produce something, such as a timetable, to prove that it was genuine

want to maintain British rule over the province, have threatened to collapse the two-monthold government if there has been no start to disarmament

Mandelson's bill would give him the power to avert that option -- seen as the worst possible outcome -- and "preserve the institutions, save them for the future and enable them to be revived at a future date".

"If the war is over, why do arms still need to be retained?"

warned that suspending the government would make the prospect of decommissioning even less likely.

Fresh attack on Hezbollah

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, who for more than a decade has been the key go-between with the IRA, warned that he might step down in frustra-

Prime Minister Tony Blair sought a last-minute breakthrough to the arms deadlock by meeting Adams, who warned that Northern Ireland's 1998 peace deal was facing its deepest crisis ever.

"In our view the Good Friday Agreement is under the greatest threat so far since it came into being," said the Sinn Fein leader after talks with Blair.

"No process can limp from crisis to crisis the way this one has. I don't intend to spend the rest of my life trying to shore up a process that is going to be in perpetual crisis," he later said on BBC Radio Ulster.

"Sinn Fein have done our best. We have honoured our commitments under the agreement. We have gone much fur-

ther than that and there is a collective responsibility in all of this, for all of the parties and the two governments to sort it out," he said.

"If we do that, even at this late hour, we can avert the crisis. If we do not do this, if the institutions are collapsed... then this party, and this party leader, is going to sit back and reflect in a very contemplative way (on) what role I have to play as a messenger who continuously gets shot," he said.

Adams has warned that restoring direct rule over Northern Ireland would leave the IRA less likely than ever to turn in their arsenal of guns, Semtex explosives, grenades. ammunition and detonators.

Under the 1998 Good Friday agreement, paramilitary groups have until mid-May to hand in the weapons that they used during decades of civil strife in the province.

Pakistan won't

sign CTBT

before Clinton's

S Asia visit

ISLAMABAD, Feb 9: Mili-

tary ruler Gen. Pervez Mushar-

raf yesterday categorically said

that it was not correct to say

that the CTBT would be signed

prior to the visit of US Presi-

dent Bill Clinton to South Asia

and Pakistan was not in a

hurry or under pressure to sign

hurry nor are we under any

pressure on signing of the

only after a national consensus

on the issue was evolved, Gen.

Musharraf said. Signing of the

CTBT was unconnected to the

visit of the US President, ac-

cording to official news agency

China, he said, more than 150

countries, including Beijing

had signed the CTBT, while a

major chunk of countries, in-

cluding the US had not ratified

it yet. Unless the treaty was

signed and ratified by all the

countries, it will not be imple-

to newsmen a Mohenjodero.

He was speaking at a function at Nawabshah and earlier

On electoral reforms, he said

we will not allow corrupt ele-

ments to win elections. 'We will

encourage voters to elect righ-

teous representatives who will

work with dedication to render

service to their electorate and

the country and not merely to

render service to their own

vested interests or petty gains

in this regard we are formulat-

ing necessary electoral re-

8 killed in

Kashmir

gunbattle

curity personnel and two for-

eign militants associated with

Lashker-E-Toiba (LET) outfit

were killed in two separate gun

battles here yesterday, reports

Kashmir, two Pakistani mili-

tants were shot dead in Jammu

region, while a militant hideout

was smashed in Badgam district

of central Kashmir Sunday

night, an official spokesman

were killed when militants

opened fire at them at fruit

He said two police personnel

said here today.

Elsewhere in Jammu and

SRINAGAR, Feb 9: Four se-

Giving the instance of

The CTBT would be signed

"Neither are we in a state of

it, reports PTI.

CTBT," he said.

mented.

forms.



Opposition leader and Congress party president Sonia Gandhi (L) talks to Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid at the presidential palace in New Delhi yesterday. Wahid is on a two-day official visit to India, as part of a larger world tour. - AFP photo

US, India to step up efforts to prosecute hijackers of IA

WASHINGTON, Feb 9: US and Indian officials met here Tuesday for the first gathering of a joint working group on counterterrorism and agreed to step up efforts to arrest and prosecute the hijackers of an Indian Airlines jet, the US State Department said, reports

"The two sides agreed to intensify their joint cooperation to ensure that the perpetrators of the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight 814 are brought to justice," spokesman James Rubin said in a statement.

Indian officials have accused arch-rival Pakistan of being behind the incident late last year while the United States has said it believes the hijackers were connected to a group supported by some elements of the government in Islamabad.

Rubin's statement made no

terrorism. The hijacking incident

ended on New Year's Eve in Afghanistan with the release of the all but one of the passengers and crew - one passenger was killed during the week-long saga - after New Delhi agreed to release several Muslim militants opposed to Indian rule in the disputed province of Kash-

The release of the men drew concern from some, including US officials, who believed it might encourage further hijackings or other terrorist acts and in January. Washington and New Delhi agreed to set up the counterterrorist working

During the meeting, chaired by US Coordinator for Counterterrorism Michael Sheehan

Official gives key evidence

Prasad, India agreed to an American offer of antiterrorism assistance programmes. Rubin said in the statement.

Specifics of the assistance are to be discussed at later meetings of the working group, he

The first meeting resulted in a statement of condemnation of all terrorist acts and an expression of rising concern over the "growing menace of international terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking."

"The two sides unequivocally condemned all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable" whatever the explanation for them, Rubin said.

The next meeting of the working group is to be held in India at a time to be determined later, he added.

lawn of the premier's residence

the army took charge of

Karachi airport and allowed the

plane to land safely at 7:48 p.m.

detained Sharif and took con-

controller told the court how he

trol of the country.

Shortly afterwards Musharraf

Earlier a Karachi air traffic

Other witnesses have said

and some were in the lobby.

but said the vow to increase coand Joint Secretary of the Inoperation was part of a "joint dian Foreign Ministry Alok efforts to combat international

mention of the Indian accusations or of the US suspicions

KARACHI, Feb 9: An official

working with deposed Pak-

stani prime minister Nawaz

Sharif gave key evidence today

at his hijacking and terrorism

death penalty if convicted of the

the coup Sharif sacked his

army chief General Pervez

Musharraf while he was abroad

and then ordered that the com-

mercial jet flying him home

passengers, the prosecutors say.

That risked the lives of the

But the defence argue the

army staged a coup at the news

Mahmood Zahid, the direc-

tor of protocol at Sharif's offi-

cial residence, said at 5:00 p.m.

on the night of the October 12

coup he heard state television

announce Sharif had sacked

on the commercial flight head-

ing back into Pakistan.

The general was at the time

Within 30 minutes Zahid

said he heard Sharif's military

secretary Javed Iqbal say army

troops had arrived at the state

Musharraf.

should not land in Pakistan.

Musharraf had been sacked.

Prosecutors say on the day of

hijacking charge.

rial in Karachi, reports AFP.

in trial of Nawaz Sharif television station. "It was 5:30 p.m. I was sitting By 7 p.m. troops were on the

at the military secretary's office and I heard the military secretary talking to someone about the troops' arrival outside the TV centre," he said.

Nawaz Sharif and six offi-Only 10 minutes later did cials are charged with hijack-Sharif order Musharraf's flight ng a plane, abduction, atempted murder and terrorism. be diverted away from Pakistan All seven men have pleaded to the Gulf, Zahid said. not guilty but they face the

"At 5:40 p.m. the prime minister asked me to find out the arrival time of flight PK 805. The prime minister asked me to contact the chairman of PIA and convey that this flight should be diverted to Muscat." he said.

The PIA chief, Khaqan Abbasi, is one of the accused. Zahid said Abbasi called

back and said the aircraft did not have enough fuel to fly to Muscat Sharif then ordered it

should refuel at Nawabshah airport, the emergency airport on the plane's flight plan, and then fly to Muscat. At 6:30 p.m. Zahid said he

went to the main gate of the prime minister's house and saw 12 to 15 soldiers there.

When I was about 100 ft short of the gate I saw an army. truck and some people coming out of the truck," he said. "Some were guarding the gate. One of the soldiers entered and asked

was ordered to divert the plane outside Pakistan. Manzoor Ahmad, who was

approach radar controller on that October night, said he was ordered to tell the plane's pilot he had no permission to land inside the country. The pilot said he had 40

minutes of fuel left and was carrying 198 passengers including the army chief. The plane's flight plan provided for a landing at nearby Nawabshah airport in an emergency. 'The pilot said he had no op-

tion to land at any airport other than Karachi or Nawabshah because of limited fuel." Ahmad

Later Ahmad said he heard an army officer, who he identified as Major General Iftikhar Ali Khan, telling the pilot he could now land at Karachi.

The hearing is expected to last several weeks.

Lankan Tigers step up bombing campaign

Two killed in landmine blast

Tiger rebels ambushed a police vehicle, killing two constables today as the death toll in overnight bomb attacks on rose to three, officials said, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTT) set off a powerful landmine in the northern peninsula of Jaffna, killing the two constables and wounding three others. officials said.

similar to the ambush of a military vehicle in which three soldiers died and 10 others were wounded on Tuesday in the northern town of Chettikulam. Sri Lanka's junior defence

minister Anuruddha Ratwatte told parliament Wednesday the LTTE had stepped up attacks in a bid to create panic among civilians. "The government is aware

that the aim of the LTTE is not only to eliminate political leaders, but also to bring the functions of the government to a standstill," Ratwatte said.

While addressing parliament during a debate to extend the country's state of emergency by a further month, Ratwatte said the LTTE has "adopted a method to create panic in the society by placing bombs in busses and elsewhere."

I independent homeland in the

The minister said the guerrillas, who are fighting for an

COLOMBO, Feb 9: Tamil island's northeast, also continued to blast electricity trans-

public transport on Tuesday buses in the capital Colombo night, three people were killed and 42 injured when bombs exploded minutes apart on two

Fowzie said he had urged bus crews to be more vigilant as the toll from the bombing campaign mounted. Police said they believed

They said the attack was Tuesday's explosions were the work of the LTTE, although there has been no claim of responsibility for the recent spate of bombings. The attacks came ahead of

> India, Nepal agree to strengthen cooperation

Nepal have agreed to strengthen cooperation to control undesirable activities and movement of terrorists and criminals across the border, reports PTI.

After intensive rounds of discussion at the third meeting of the Indo-Nepal Joint Working Group (JWG) held in Kathmandu from February one to

plans by Norway to bring the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government to the negotiating table in a bid to end decades of ethnic bloodletting that has claimed more than 55,000 lives

Diplomats had expected an escalation of violence by the LTTE and increased military operations by government forces before the talks as both sides wanted to negotiate from a position of strength.

On Monday, one passenger was killed and 51 injured when two bombs exploded on buses in Monaragala, 254 km east of

The toll could have been higher had it not been for a mechanical failure on one of the

'The driver had asked passengers to get off because of a

problem with the gearbox," a police spokesman said. "A total of 51 people were wounded in Last Thursday, bombs ripped

Police said they had also warned bus crews to be more vigilant for unattended luggage. and passengers were urged to be

"Because of difficulties in getting a seat in a crowded bus. passengers are usually more vorried about securing a seat," a police official said.

Musharraf keeps nuclear option open

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Virtually declining to make any commitment on nofirst use of nuclear weapons against India. Pakistan's military ruler Gen Pervez Musharraf has kept the nuclear option open saying we will take a decision when the

occasion arises, reports PTI. Asked why Pakistan was not taking credible steps for reducing tension such as declaring that it would not be the first to use Nuclear weapons Gen Musharraf told Karan Thapar in an interview telecast by Doordarshan Monday night: "I have said very clearly that nu-clear power should not be used."

"However, when our national integrity is threatened, then we will take a decision (on exercising nuclear option) at that time. We will take a deci-

sion when the occasion arises." Gen Musharraf's remarks come close on the heels of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee asserting that India was prepared to meet any eventual-

On the possibility of a nuclear flare-up, Gen Musharraf said, "I wouldn't say there are chances. If India escalates (the situation) on the line of control in Kashmir, there can be

On India returning bodies of Pakistani soldiers from the Indian side of the LOC, he said they had died in action on the

Anwar trial Defence plans to put up Mahathir as witness

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 9: The defence in the sex trial of former Malaysian finance minister Anwar Ibrahim said today it planned to call Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad as a witness within the next week, reports Reuters. "We plan to call the PM by

Friday, after we finish with two more witnesses", Jagdeep Singh Deo. one of the Anwar's lawyers, told Reuters during a break in the 8-1/2-month old trial that has exposed political divisions in Malaysia.

"The subpoena has been served," Jagdeep said. "He (Mahathir) is on standby. They (prosecution) have not disputed

But another lawyer said it could take longer before the

prime minister appeared. "It could take another week before we call him as there are other matters for us to sort out first," defence lawyer S N Nair said without elaborating.-

An appearance by Mahathir in the High Court trial would

mark the first time the two men have been seen together in nearly 1-years. It would also throw a spotlight on Anwar's trial, which

has fallen somewhat out of the public eye after months of tes-Mahathir sacked his former heir-apparent in September

1998. He later said Anwar was morally unfit and accused his ex-protege of trying to topple

his government. Anwar was arrested later

that month after leading 30,000 protesters through the capital calling on Mahathir to step

Online attacks spread to four more Web sites

NEW YORK, Feb 9: Four of the Internet's most popular sites fell prey to hackers who nanaged to ' ... the Web sites to a temporary standstill Tueslay, the day after a similar atack paralysed Yahoo, reports

The hackers sent enormous waves of data pouring through he online auctions site eBay, shopping sites Amazon.com and Buy.com, and news Web site CNN.com, giving their computers far too much information to handle at once and making it almost impossible to enter the

The companies call the probem a "denial of service attack" because their computers' security systems are never actually penetrated, but hackers send so much information through that practically no one else can use

the site. If a user did manage to enter the site, they would be able to

continue normally. "At 7:00 p.m. (0600 BST), we

were attacked by hackers. A denial of service attack occurred until 8:45 p.m. We were seriously affected", CNN Interactive's director of public relations Edna Johnson said in a statement

"Preliminary indications show that that we are having problems called a denial service attack, just on the static pages. It's not affecting our search or bidding or listing," said eBay spokeswoman Kristin Seuell.

eBay posted a message on its site informing users of the problem around 0601 BST Wednesday, Seuell said.

By 7 p.m. (0900 BST) all services except for some graphics files had been restored, eBay said in a statement.

eBay had 10 million registered users by the end of 1999 and says that it has 1.5 billion page views a month. "Today like several other

major Internet Web sites. Amazon.com came under a denial of service attack," said company spokeswoman Patty Smith. "A large amount of junk traffic was directed to our site, resulting in degraded service for

about an hour.

can free our people, something between Delhi and Lahore, helps in the smuggling of fake better can be achieved than all currency notes to India, claim the demonstrators. the governments of the past.

parliament TOKYO, Feb 9: Japan's opposition parties returned to parliament today after agreeing to abandon their unprecedented two-week protest boycott, re-

ports AFP. Members of all three opposition parties were seen sitting in their seats as the televised plenary session began.

The opposition parties had been boycotting the parliament to protest an alleged lack of debate over a law to reduce the number of lawmakers in the lower house of the parliament,

or Diet. The prime minister's Liberal Democratic Party and its allies, the Liberal Party and Buddhistbacked Komeito party, enacted the law February 2 in spite of

the Diet boycott. But the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan accepted a compromise Tuesday which gave them a greater input in deciding the Diet timetable

and more opportunities to guestion Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. Two smaller opposition parties -- the Social Democratic Party and Japan Communist

Party -- rejected the deal but agreed to drop their boycott of the parliament anyway. Obuchi welcomed the return of opposition parties. "It is gratifying delibera-

tions on the budget are now expected to proceed smoothly," he told reporters before the session opened. The government has said it

will press ahead with efforts to

pass a record 84.99 trillion yen

(780 billion dollar) budget for

the financial year starting

April 1.

about disarming. Protestant Unionists, who

by this weekend.

he demanded earlier.

However Sinn Fein has

ME peace process shattered again Iranian-backed guerrilla group

targets in Lebanon

The planes struck after Hezbollah guerrillas on Tuesday had killed an Israeli soldier and a pro-Israeli militiaman.

Those attacks followed a night of bornbing by warplanes of the Jewish state which carried out the heaviest raids in eight months, destroying three power stations and wounding 15 people

In another raid, early today, Israeli helicopters and jets fired more than six rockets at the outskirts of Ain Bouswar, a village which has Hezbollah camps nearby, security sources said. There were no immediate

reports of casualties. Besides the human and physical impact of the attacks. a vital element of the Middle East peace process appeared un-

Israel believes Damascus.

der threat, yet again.

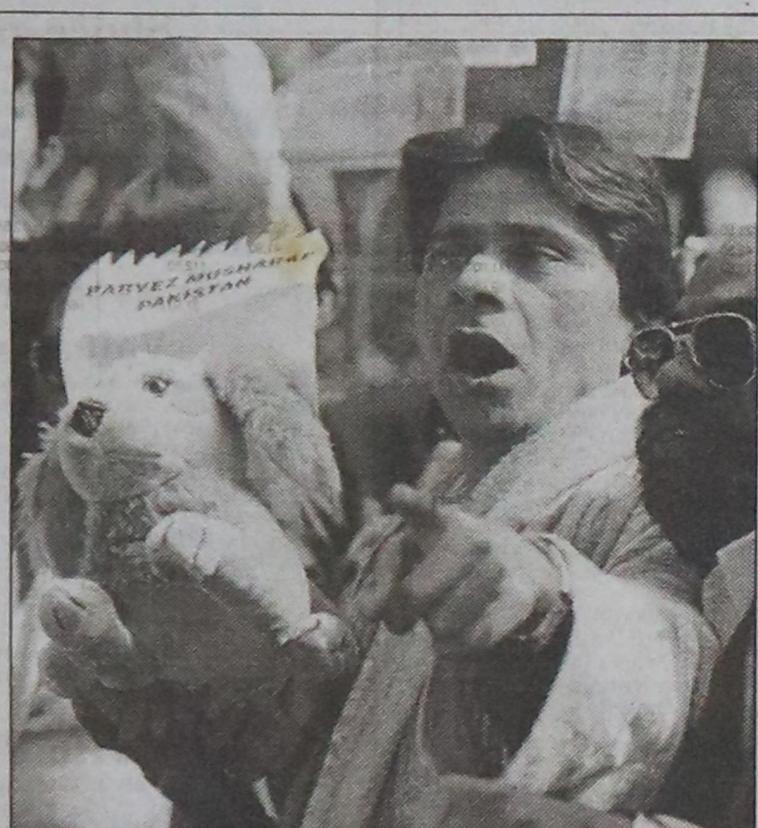
the main power broker in Lebanon, uses Hezbollah as a covert policy weapon and could rein in the guerrillas. Syria says it does not control the pro-

Iranian group.

The Israeli army warned Hezbollah against escalating the violence while Prime Minister Ehud Barak blamed the bloodiest guerilla attacks on Israel and its allies in months on

Hezbollah vowed no let-up in its war of attrition designed to force Israeli troops and its client militia, the South Lebanon Army, out of the Israeli occupation zone in the

The United States, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Russia called for restraint, seeing in the escalating violence a diminishigh chance of resumed talks on the Syria-Israeli track.



A Congress party supporter holds a stuffed dog in his hand mocking Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf, luring a demonstration in New Delhi yesterday. The protestors called for a halt to the train service between Delhi and Lahore. The Samjhauta Express, which runs

- AFP photo BRIFFY

Russian FM in N Korea: Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov arrived in Pyongyang on Wednesday at the start of the first high-level visit by a top

Moscow official in 10 years, North Korea's official media said. AFP reports from Seoul. Ivanov and his Russian delegation were received at the airport by North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Ri In-Gyu, the Korean Central News Agency said. The foreign minister's two-c'ny visit was seen as crucial to redefining relations between forn er

communist allies Moscow and Pyongyang, who will sign a new friendship treaty to replace their Cold War pact during his trip. Wahid postpones visit to Australia: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid has postponed a visit to Australia from March until May, Indonesia's ambassador in Canberra said Wednesday, AFP reports from

Canberra. But he remained keen to make the trip and become the first Indonesian president to visit since former strongman Suharto in 1975, according to Indonesian ambassador to Australia Arizal Effendi. He said Wahid was too busy to fly next month, as originally suggested.

VP Singh flays Gujarat, UP govts: Former Prime Minister VP Singh yesterday criticised BJP governments in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh for allowing government employees to associate themselves with RSS activities, saying it could prove dangerous for parliamentary democracy, reports PTI from New Delhi. "If this trend continues, governance itself will become very difficult and dangerous in the parliamentary democracy."

Singh told reporters here. Maintaining that to call RSS a socio-

cultural organisation will be a travesty, he said if other states

start following BJP style, then can you imagine a situation

where in Haryana 'Green Brigade' has its say in Bihar Laloo

Prasad Yadav runs a social organisation of his own. 11 soldiers killed in Manipur: In the first major pre-poll strike by insurgents in Manipur, 11 army personnel were killed in an ambush in Tamenglong

district on Tuesday, PTI reports from Imphal. About 50 armed insurgents of United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and NSCN (K) opened fire on an army patrol from both sides of the road at around 12.15 pm killing the personnel on the spot at Keimai. The army returned the fire and the encounter lasted more than an hour before the insurgents escaped into nearby thick jungles .official sources said.

market in the jurisdiction of police station Parimpora in Srinagar yesterday. Wiranto attends

cabinet meeting JAKARTA, Feb 9: Indonesia's Security Minister General Wiranto, under strong pressure to resign over his alleged involvement in last year's Timor violence, entered a cabinet meeting today saying he was awaiting the return of President

Abdurrahman Wahid, reports "Please be assured that .'m waiting for the president to come back," Wiranto told journalists as he made his way to the weekly meeting chaired by Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri at the presiden-

tial office here.

port not only in my capacity as security minister during his absence, but also as acting foreign minister. "I will also report my position on the legal process I'm facing now, especially related to

the case of human rights viola-

"Then I will, as his aide, re-

tions in East Timor. You will find out yourselves later.' "Resign or not, active or not, let's wait for a fair legal process. I didn't make any comment, but there appear comments which are attributed to me."

It was the second cabinet

meeting Wiranto had attended

since Wahid first called on the

former armed forces chief to

quit his cabinet post pending a full inquiry into the Timor violence. But Wiranto said the violence issue was only part of the picture.

"In discussing the issue of East Timor we have to look into it comprehensively (based on) causes and effects. For example someone has to do a violent act to defend his rights. "So don't only look into the violence but what's behind it. I

hope there will be a comprehen-

sive and impartial investiga-

formers and other utilities. In the latest attack against

crowded buses in Colombo. Transport Minister A. H. M.

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: India and

three, the two sides reiterated their determination not to permit the use of their respective territories for activities directed against the other.

since 1972.

here.

buses.

he first bus and in the second plast there are no casualties." hrough three buses in Sri Lanka wounding at least 30 passengers.

on the alert.