

News in Brief

Advani to launch another 'yatra'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader L.K. Advani is set to start another nationwide 'yatra' to boost the morale of members and search for talent in a bid to rejuvenate the party.

"He (Advani) will launch his 'yatra' around Sep 15. It will start from Jammu or Kerala," a source close to the veteran leader said here Saturday.

The source added that Advani would also visit the election-bound states of Maharashtra, Haryana and Arunachal Pradesh in the first week of October.

Bugti son's petition rejected

ANI, Quetta

A local court here has rejected the petition filed for registering a case against former President General Pervez Musharraf in connection with Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Bugti's killing.

The Sibi Session Court, in its verdict, said that since Bugti was killed in Taratani region, the case should be heard in the Kohlu District Court.

Ban on Jaswant's book lifted

AFP, New Delhi

A court in India's western state of Gujarat ordered the lifting of a ban on a controversial book about the 1947 partition of the subcontinent that angered Hindu nationalists, a report said Saturday.

The book, which praises Pakistan's founder Mohammed Ali Jinnah and is critical of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a revered nationalist of the partition era and India's first home minister, was banned on August 19.

Nato strike in Afghanistan a mistake: French minister

Afghans mourn dead

AFP, Stockholm/Kunduz

A Nato bombing in Afghanistan that killed scores of people was a major mistake, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said yesterday as Germany defended the strike which its troops instigated.

"This was a big mistake," Kouchner told reporters as he arrived for a second day of talks with his EU counterparts in Stockholm.

"We have to enquire and to denounce those responsible."

German troops had ordered the airstrike Friday because of the danger posed by Taliban militants who had hijacked fuel tankers in the northern Kunduz region of Afghanistan, Germany's Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung said Saturday.

He sought to justify the air strike say-

ing in the Bild newspaper: "When just six kilometres (four miles) away from us, the Taliban take two fuel tankers, that represents a serious danger for us."

Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn also denounced the Nato bombing on Friday that triggered an outcry over civilian casualties at the hands of Western troops in an eight-year war.

The airstrike destroyed two fuel tankers hijacked by the Taliban at a time when witnesses said villagers had rushed towards the vehicles, carrying any container they could to collect free fuel at the insurgents' invitation.

"I cannot understand that bombs can be dropped so easily and swiftly," Asselborn said.

"Even if there was only one civilian there, this operation should not have taken place."

Afghan officials said the dead were mostly insurgents, but Afghan President Hamid Karzai said any targeting of civilians was unacceptable. His office said 90 people were killed and hurt.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband on Friday called for an "urgent investigation" into the Nato airstrike.

"It's important that we are very open and clear about what happened and make sure that it doesn't happen again," Miliband told reporters in Stockholm.

On the other hand Afghans on Saturday mourned the dead from a Nato bombing that killed scores of people and renewed an outcry over civilian casualties at the hands of Western troops in an eight-year war.

Memorial prayers were heard Saturday in nearly a dozen villages for those killed in northern Kunduz province, where the atmosphere was highly charged, witnesses said.



German soldiers stand guard during a visit by Isaf officials to patients wounded during an airstrike carried out by Nato, in a hospital in the northern city of Kunduz yesterday while an Afghan youth, injured during the airstrike, lies in the hospital bed.

PHOTO: AFP

Bihar court issues warrant against Bal Thackeray

ANI, Bhojpur

A Sub divisional magistrate in Bhojpur in Bihar has issued a non-bailable arrest warrant (NBW) against Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray on Friday for his alleged uncharitable and inflammatory remarks against the Biharis.

Thackeray has made these remarks in his one of articles in Shiv Sena's mouthpiece 'Samna.'

Judicial Magistrate Rakesh Pati Tiwari issued NBW against Thackeray, after the later failed to appear before him in compliance with his July 7 order.

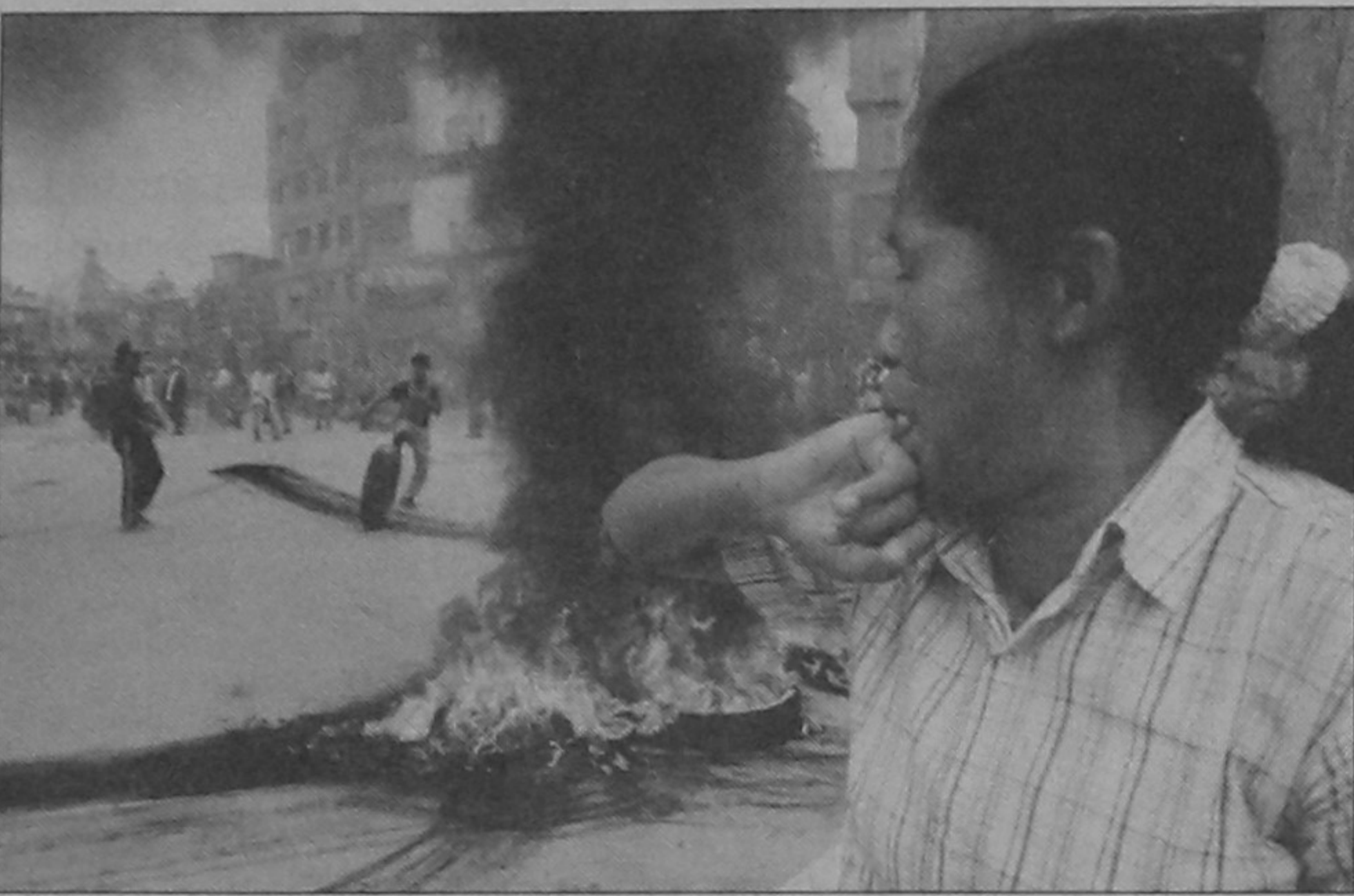


PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese Maoist agitators burn tyres against the appointment of two new Indian priests at Pashupatinath, the main Hindu temple of the Himalayan nation in Kathmandu yesterday. The post-Maoist government appointed the Brahmin priests from south India upon the recommendation of the Ministry of Culture - a decision which has received flak from the Maoists.

Afghanistan postpones vote result release

AFP, Kabul

Afghan electoral authorities have cancelled the scheduled release on Saturday of the latest tranche of results from controversial elections that have been overshadowed by fraud allegations.

The next batch of results from polling stations would be released on either Sunday or Monday, a spokeswoman for the Independent Electoral Commission said.

"It is because of a technical problem that we will not be able to make any announcement today," Marzia Siddiqi told AFP.

She said the IEC hoped to be able to release the preliminary result at its next announcement. Final results are not due before September 17.

The IEC has been releasing the results piecemeal since the elections for president and provincial councillors were held on August 20.

Throughout the laborious process of grad-

ual announcements, the two main contenders for the presidency, incumbent Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, have each claimed victory.

Abdullah, formerly foreign minister, has also alleged widespread vote-rigging by Karzai's camp and has threatened to reject any result he regards as compromised.

The latest results were released September 3, and showed Karzai maintaining a lead with 47.3 percent of the results from 60 percent of the polling stations used in Afghanistan's second only direct presidential election.

Out of 3.69 million valid votes, Karzai won 1.74 million and Abdullah 1.2 million or 32.6 percent, the IEC announced.

The winner needs to secure an outright majority of 50 percent plus one vote in order to avoid a run-off, which many observers have warned could be damaging if turnout proves even lower a second-time round.

Pakistan is epicentre of terror in the region

Says Krishna

ANI, Bangalore

External Affairs Minister SM Krishna attacked Pakistan yesterday by calling it epicentre of terror in this region, and said it's for Islamabad to decide what kind of ties it wants with India.

Speaking to the media here, Krishna said: "Pakistan is an epicentre of terror in this region. We told this to Pakistan as well and also to our friendly countries."

Krishna also criticised the approach of the Pakistan government towards the perpetrators of 26/11 attacks on Mumbai.

"India has provided enough evidence against the conspirators of the Mumbai attack. If Pakistan is serious on terror then this is the time to show that they are," Krishna said.

He added "There is enough, substantive information available with Pakistan. We would like Pakistan to take action."

On Friday, Pakistan described the latest dossier provided by India on 26/11 attacks as a rehash of information contained in previous documents, indicating that it is inadequate for taking action against Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) founder Hafiz Mohammad Saeed.

Pakistan will continue to support the Kashmir cause: Gilani

ANI, Karachi

Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has once again said that Islamabad would continue its support to the Kashmiri people and the government's decision to give autonomy to Gilgit Baltistan does not mean that it has shelved the Kashmir issue.

"We gave internal autonomy, sovereignty to Gilgit Baltistan which was a long standing demand of its people but this does not mean that we have forgotten the Kashmir issue. We will continue to give moral and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri people," Gilani said.

The prime minister said the government had not altered its stance on the Kashmir issue by awarding autonomy to the Northern Areas.

He said Kashmir was the cornerstone of the PPP's foreign policy, and support to the cause would continue.

Interacting with media persons during an Iftar dinner hosted by Sindh Governor Dr. Ishratul Ebad Khan, Gilani stressed that Pakistan was not a 'failed state', saying the country has a 'strong democratic government, independent judiciary, free media'.

Oil was part of Lockerbie talks: UK official

AP, London

Trade and oil considerations played a big part in the decision to include the Lockerbie bomber in a prisoner transfer agreement between Britain and Libya, a senior British official said in an interview published yesterday.

Justice Secretary Jack Straw said trade, particularly a deal for oil company BP PLC, was "a very big part" of the 2007 negotiations that led to the prisoner deal. The agreement was part of a wider warming of relations between London and Tripoli.

"Libya was a rogue state," Straw was quoted as saying by The Daily Telegraph newspaper. "We wanted to bring it back into the fold and trade is an essential part of it and subsequently there was the BP deal."

The British government has faced intense criticism over the release of Abdel Baset al-Megrahi, a Libyan convicted in the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. The attack killed 259 people aboard the plane, most of them American, and 11 on the ground.

Last month Scottish officials freed al-Megrahi, 57, on compassionate grounds because he is dying of prostate cancer.

Although he was not released under the prisoner transfer agreement, opposition politicians, and many victims' families, claim business considerations influenced the decision to free him.

Lanka imports machines to clear mines

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has imported equipment to speed up mine clearing in the former war zone in the island's north, the defence ministry said yesterday.

The mine-clearing machines imported from Slovakia would be used to accelerate resettlement of people driven out of the area during the height of fighting, the ministry said in a statement.

Sri Lanka's army and eight other organisations were involved in removing thousands of mines, but most of the work was done manually, K Kumarasiri, secretary to the Nation Building Ministry, told AFP.

'Musharraf must be prosecuted to end Army interference'

ANI, Lahore

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif has said that prosecuting former President General Pervez Musharraf under high treason charges for taking 'extrajudicial' actions on November 3, 2007 would help resolve all crises facing the country currently.

Interacting with party workers at his Raiwind residence, Sharif said trying Musharraf would ensure that the door to military interference in the country's politics would be closed for good.

"Today's Constitutional crisis is the result of the military coup on October 12, 1999," The News quoted Sharif, as saying.

"If common people and former prime ministers can face trials then why a military dictator, who violated the Constitution twice, should not be prosecuted?" the former Prime Minister asked.

Cong MLCs back Jagan as Andhra CM

PTI, Hyderabad

Majority of the Congress members of the Andhra Pradesh legislative council today unanimously backed the demand for making Y S Jaganmohan Reddy the new Chief Minister to succeed his late father Rajasekhara Reddy.

As many as 33 of the 54 party MLCs met here and passed a resolution unanimously in support of Jaganmohan as the new chief minister, Mohd Jani, Council's Deputy Chairman, told reporters after the meeting.

He said other MLCs could not attend the meeting because they were out of the state capital. 20 of them supported the resolution over telephone.

The decision would be conveyed to the party high command, he said.

Earlier supporters of YS Jaganmohan Reddy yesterday sought to step up the campaign for

making him the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh even as the interim incumbent K Rosaiah ruled out the possibility of any division in the party.

A day after Rajasekhara Reddy was buried in his home district, Union Law Minister and Congress party in charge of the state M Veerappa Moily said that the party was not going to apply its mind on the issue of succession.

In significant remarks, Rosaiah said there was unity in Congress in Andhra Pradesh which stood solidly behind Sonia Gandhi and that was the reason "we were able to get 33 Parliament members elected from this state". The Congress high command's reluctance to get into the succession issue did not deter MLCs, slowly trickling into the city after the burial of YSR's body in Idupulapaya in Kadapa Friday evening, did not deter the MLCs from pursuing their campaign.



PHOTO: AFP

A group of Sri Lankan Muslims stage a protest against the alleged killing of Muslims in the guise of a police crackdown on underworld criminals in Colombo on Friday.

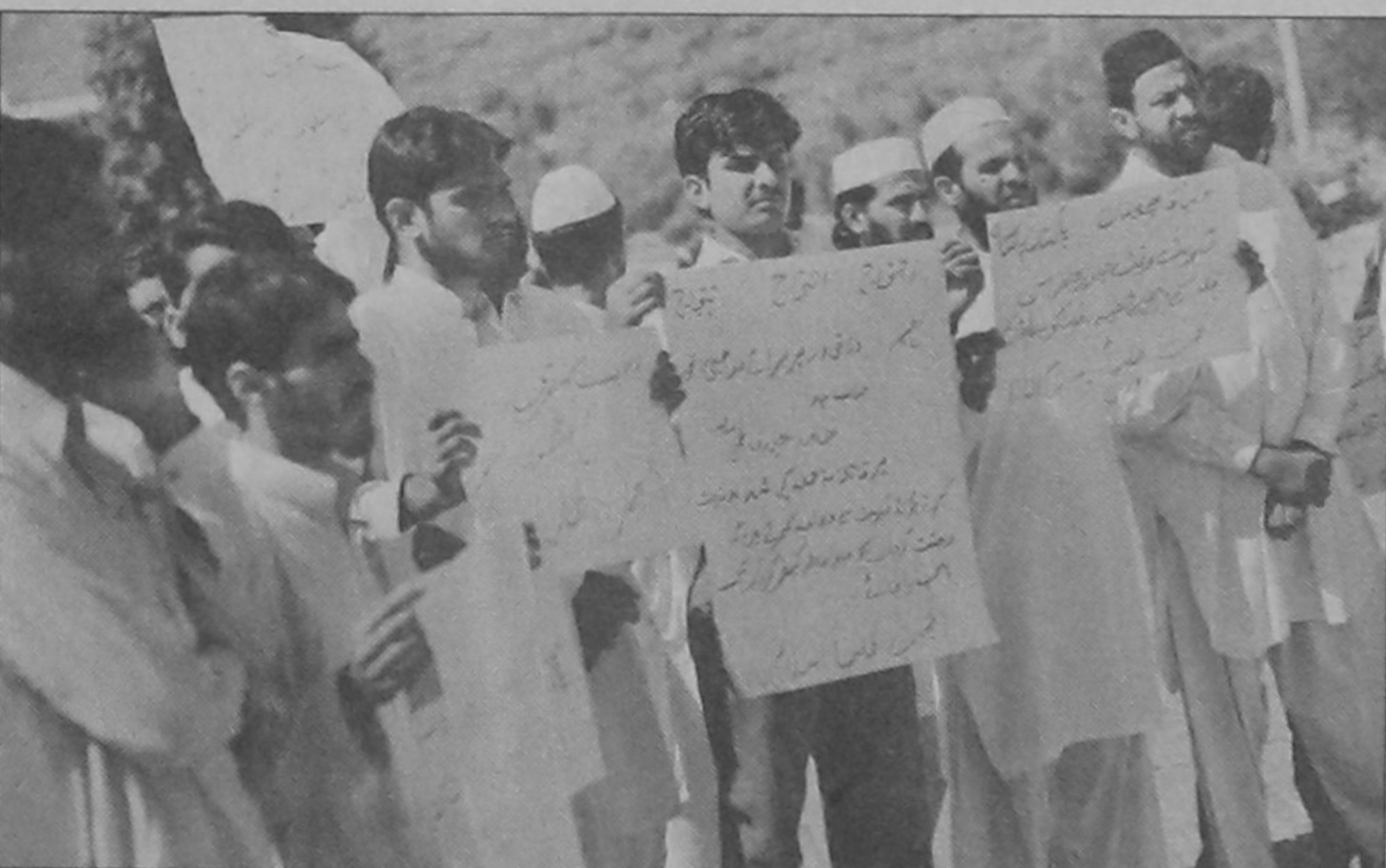


PHOTO: AFP

Activists from the Pakistani Anjuman Talab-e-Islami protest outside Faisal Mosque following Juma prayers in Islamabad against an attack on the Minister for Religious Affairs Hamid Saeed Kazmi.

Monster exotic fish found in HK ponds

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong has launched a search of ponds in public parks after at least 16 fish of an exotic species that can grow up to three metres (10 feet) long were discovered, apparently dumped by their owners when they grew too big.

A metre-long alligator gar was caught Friday in a park pond after reports that visitors feared for their safety, the South China Morning Post reported on Saturday.

The fierce-looking creatures get their name from their long snout, which resembles that of an alligator. While they are an aggressive and carnivorous species, they are not known to attack humans.

Iraq sends thousands more police to Syrian border

AP, Baghdad

Iraq has deployed thousands of reinforcements along its border with Syria to prevent insurgents from crossing the desert frontier, as the government said Friday it has provided Syria with evidence linking Iraqis there to bombings.

Extra police were sent to the border this week on the prime minister's orders in response to the government's assertion that former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party based in Syria planned and financed last month's attacks against the foreign and finance ministries, said Maj Gen Tariq Youssef, the police commander in western Iraq.

Iraq is seeking the extradition of two suspects, but Syria has refused, demanding to see proof of their involvement. The dispute has strained relations between the two countries and again put Syria on the defensive over accusations it is not doing enough to stop cross-border attacks.

The Aug. 19 truck bombings outside the government ministries in Baghdad killed about 100 people. Iraq has blamed an alliance between al-Qaeda in Iraq and the outlawed Baath Party.