

Gandhi charges plot, division

NEW DELHI, India (AP) — Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in a speech commemorating the 67th birthday of his assassinated mother, declared Monday that she was killed as part of a far-reaching conspiracy to dismember India.

A series of unconfirmed news reports since Indira Gandhi's death Oct. 31 pointed to a foreign-based plot by Sikh

separatists. But Gandhi's speech was the first time his government said publicly that there was a conspiracy.

"Her assassination was not just to remove a person but to divide India into pieces," Gandhi told more than 200,000 people who gathered at the rally near Parliament.

"This conspiracy to kill beloved Indira, to divide the country, to weaken it — we are seeing the far-spreading tentacles of this," said Gandhi, 40, who was sworn in as his

mother's successor within hours of her slaying.

The senior Gandhi, who governed India for 15 of the past 18 years, was gunned down on the lawn of her residence by two men identified by authorities as Sikh members of her security detail.

Referring to a wave of arson, looting and killings in which more than 1,000 Sikhs died following the assassination, Gandhi said violence is counter-productive.

"Her death can only be

avenged in one way — if we put all our might to end the inter-communal forces and keep India united," he said. "Only in this way can we truly remember beloved Indira."

"The foundation of India is not so weak that it will be shaken by a few bullets," he said. "We showed the world that our country is stronger than bullets."

One of the alleged assassins, 36-year-old Beant Singh, was

shot dead at the scene by other security guards. The second, identified as 22-year-old police constable Satwant Singh, was seriously wounded. He is being interrogated.

Several Indian newspapers have carried reports quoting unidentified sources as saying the assassins were part of a plot by Sikh separatists seeking revenge for a June army assault on extremists holed up in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikhs' holiest shrine.

An Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman said Monday he could not confirm newspaper reports that India had started extradition proceedings against Harinder Singh from Norway or Jagjit Singh Chauhan, from England.

The government has not commented on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's statement that Libya may have been involved in the assassination plot, a charge denied by Tripoli.

India has accused neighboring Pakistan of sheltering and training Sikh extremists waging a violent campaign for autonomy in the border state of Punjab, where Sikhs are a majority. Pakistan has denied the Indian charges.

Israel says no to reparations

NAQOURA, Lebanon (AP) — Israel on Monday rejected Lebanon's demand for up to \$10 billion in war reparations and insisted that security of Israel's northern border was the primary goal of negotiations on withdrawal of Israeli troops.

But Lebanese negotiators argued that their country would not be "Israel's policeman" after removal of Israeli occupation forces from southern Lebanon.

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