

29 foreign mercenaries killed in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, July 23: Indian security forces fighting Muslim separatists in Kashmir have killed 29 foreign mercenaries and caught 14 others in the troubled state, the Times of India newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

The dead included 13 Afghans, two Bahrainis and 14 Pakistanis, the Times quoted intelligence sources as saying. The arrested included 12 Pakistanis, one Afghan and one Lebanese.

Indian intelligence estimated the number of mercenaries from Islamic countries fighting alongside the Kashmiri militants at about 1,500, out of which only 29 had been identified by name, the daily said.

They include some from Uzbekistan and Sudan.

Indian authorities have reported the presence of scores of foreigners, chiefly Afghans, in Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in India.

"Their steadily increasing numbers is definitely adding to an already complex scenario," Prakash Singh, the head of India's Border Security Force (BSF), told AFP earlier this month.

The Times said some 3,000 mercenaries were now in Pakistan-held Kashmir, waiting to cross over into the Indian zone of Kashmir. Several of the foreign mercenaries are training Kashmiri youths in the (Kashmir) valley itself.

Kashmir's ownership is disputed by India and Pakistan. Islamabad controls the northern third of the province, and New Delhi the southern two-thirds where the separatist campaign has left thousands dead.

The Times said the foreigners in Kashmir were formed in a group known as Harqat-ul-Jehad Islami (HUJI), and its motto was: "Kashmir is Allah's territory and we have to fight to establish in it Allah's rule."

US renews proposal for Indo-Pak security talks

WASHINGTON, July 23: The United States, worried about advancing nuclear capability and regional tension, has renewed a proposal for security talks between India and Pakistan but India continues to reject the idea, a senior administration official said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

"The idea is that there may be virtue in having the Pakistanis and the Indians sit down with the Russians, Chinese and Americans to see if together, through some mechanism of confidence and security-building measures and assurances, we can't meet the security concerns of not only Pakistan but India," Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gallucci said.

He said he last discussed the initiative — which was tried with no success by the preceding Bush administration — with the two sides two weeks ago.

"The Indians have not agreed to such talks. The Pakistanis have," he told an overseas writers luncheon, adding: "We still think this would be a good idea."

"The situation in South Asia from our perspective is of very serious concern and has gotten more dangerous with the passing of time," he said.

"We have countries — in India and Pakistan — that have very sophisticated nuclear programmes, certainly at least the capability to produce nuclear weapons... that are interested in ballistic missile delivery capability... that have at history of conflict between them," he said.

Although the matter is being discussed, Gallucci did not suggest that the Clinton administration had decided to make an aggressive push for the Indian-Pakistan talks at this time.

As reflected by Gallucci's

remarks, many US officials are concerned about rising tensions on the Asian sub-continent. But there has been varied opinions about whether the administration should take on an India-Pakistan initiative as a major goal.

"If we have enough diplomatic energy left from Yugoslavia and the Middle East, I personally think it would be worth the investment in the first part of this administration to find a way to get this relationship (India-Pakistan) turned back in a positive direction," one senior US official told Reuters.

"It's very tricky... there are a lot of sensitivities. It's not a place where unilateral US diplomacy would be as useful as it is in the Arab-Israeli context. You really need to have several players involved," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"I think that unless we (Washington) try to put together an initiative involving others it's probably not going to happen," he said. He added the administration was unlikely to invest much time in the effort now because other issues are consuming the attention of senior officials and "there's overload in the circuit".

Also, US ties with both countries have had problems of late. The Clinton administration has sought to fix a rocket deal between Russia and India and has warned Pakistan it may be placed on Washington's list of countries sponsoring terrorism for supporting separatist groups in Kashmir.

Gallucci said Pakistan's security concerns revolve around its relationship with neighbouring India while India is concerned about China as well as Pakistan.



PARIS: Two little cute gold beaded angels underline the bust of this sleeveless white cocktail dress by Russian designer Valentin Yudashkin during the presentation of his 1993/94 Fall/Winter haute couture collection, in Paris Thursday. — AFP photo

Sleeveless T-shirts banned on campus

SINGAPORE: Straitlaced Singapore has banned students at the National University of Singapore (NUS) from wearing slippers, shorts, sleeveless T-shirts and T-shirts with indecent messages, an NUS official said on Friday, reports Reuter.

The new dress code, announced earlier this year and enforced since Thursday, covers the entire campus but excludes hostels, sports and recreation centres," she said.

Students will be allowed to wear knee-length bermudas for a trial period of one semester.

Anyone flouting the dress code could be fined up to a maximum of Singapore 300 dollar (185 US dollar), suspended or expelled from the NUS and hostels.

Move to curb sexual violence on TV

LONDON: Worried by growing aggression in society, British television has announced moves to curb the impact of TV violence on viewers, reports AP.

The British Broadcasting Corp on Thursday announced revised guidelines telling programme makers among other things that they must show what it called sharper awareness over the portrayal of sexual violence and violence against women.

The Independent Television Commission, meanwhile, on Thursday told commercial TV companies to cut the amount of violence they screen and said they will be monitored to ensure they comply.

"What we are seeing is a public revulsion against violence in society which is feeding through to a desire for greater sensitivity by TV programme makers and the makers of films videos," said David Glencross, the chief executive of the commission, when he announced the ITC guidelines.



Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif waves to thousands of supporters at the Lahore airport on Thursday. Sharif flew into his home city after resigning July 18 and vowed to defeat his opponents in the October polls. — AFP photo

Indonesia denies establishing ties with Israel

SINGAPORE, July 23: Indonesia Friday denied reports it was establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, reports AP.

"That is not at all true," said Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. "We have no intentions of establishing relations with them."

Alatas was commenting on news reports from Israel saying the Indonesian ambassador in Singapore had gone to Israel to hold negotiations on relations.

Alatas said recently he had gone to a conference in Vienna and sat at the same table with an Israeli minister.

He said the chance even had been portrayed wrongly as a meeting between Indonesian and Israeli government representatives, "when I only exchanged one sentence with him," Alatas said.

Alatas is here to attend the Annual ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting.

Opponents seek delay in polls : Sharif

LAHORE, July 23: Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, basking in the warm reception he received in his home city of Lahore after arriving overnight, accused opponents of seeking a delay in elections set for October 6, reports AP.

"We will not allow them to flee," Sharif vowed as thousands thronged the airport for a noisy reception. He charged that some of his opponents were trying to wriggle out after he accepted their challenge for Autumn polls.

But the 44-year-old former businessman, forced to step

down earlier this week along with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan in an army-brokered solution to a power struggle between the two men, also said he opposed a series of electoral reforms proposed by his arch rival Benazir Bhutto.

Bhutto, 40, has called for the reforms to ensure free and impartial elections.

Bhutto has demanded election to the national assembly and the provincial legislatures on the same day. The caretaker government has fixed October 6 for the national assembly elections and October 9 for the

provincial polls.

Acting President Wasim Sajjad has also rejected the possibility of postponing elections after some leaders suggested a delay until next Spring.

Sharif said major changes were being proposed as an excuse to delay the polls.

Earlier police baton-charged and lobbed tear gas canisters at militants of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) who had tried to remove barricades erected by the local administration outside the airport, party officials said.

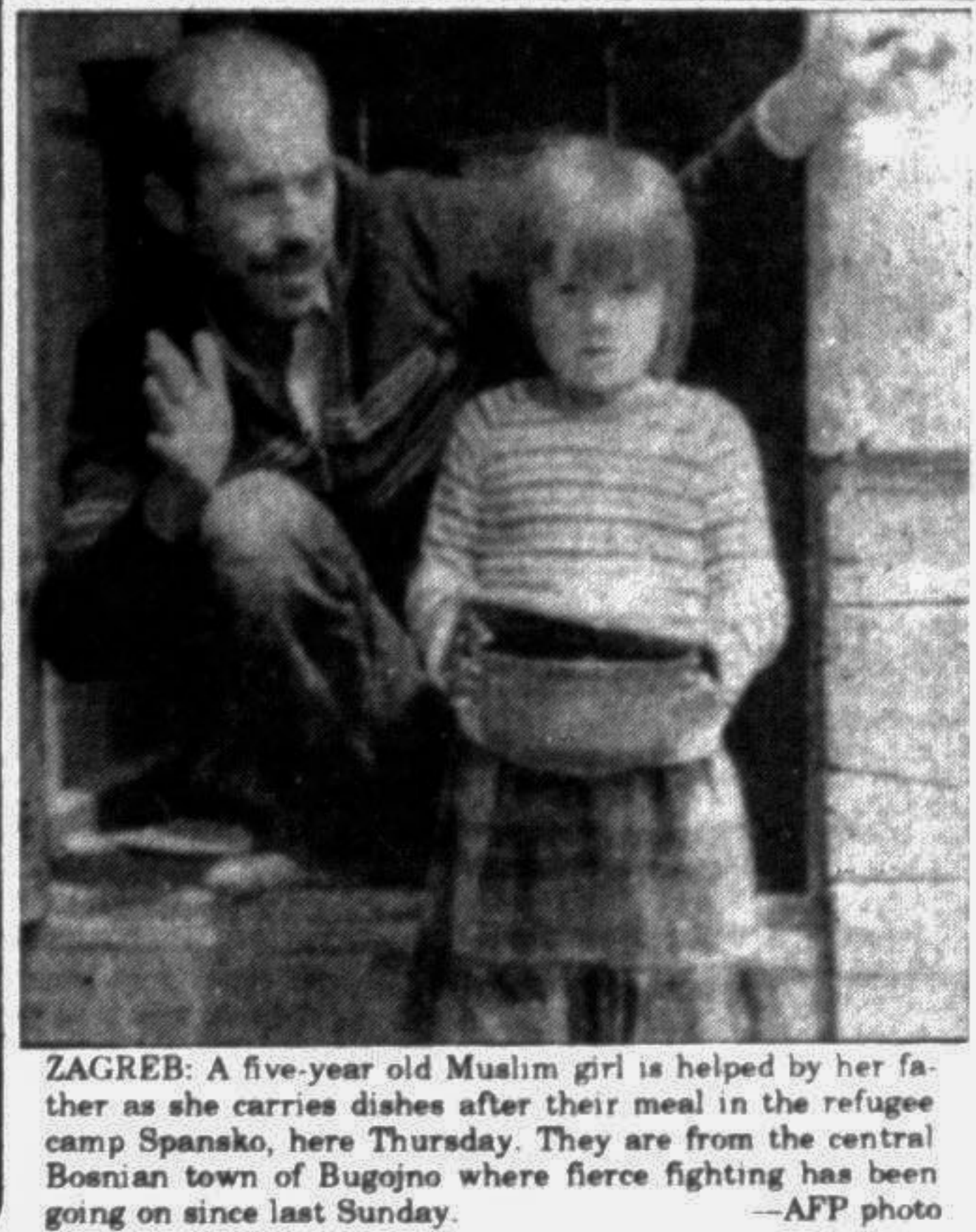
They said at least eight peo-

ple were injured in repeated incidents of police baton-charge and stone throwing by some activists.

The crowd, arriving in hundreds of vehicles including buses, cars and taxis, had paced a two-kilometre (1.2-mile) stretch of road leading to the airport, chanting welcome slogans.

The visit was Sharif's first since he stepped down on Sunday.

Sharif told reporters that the PML central executive would meet in Islamabad on July 25 to finalise its election strategy.



ZAGREB: A five-year old Muslim girl is helped by her father as she carries dishes after their meal in the refugee camp Spanko, here Thursday. They are from the central Bosnian town of Bugojno where fierce fighting has been going on since last Sunday. — AFP photo

Artillery duels on in Sarajevo

SARAJEVO, July 23: Artillery duels continued in Sarajevo today after massive bombardments that led to the postponement of peace talks in Geneva, reports AP.

UN protection force (UNPROFOR) spokesman Barry Frewer blamed Thursday's fighting on "a concerted Serb attack on Sarajevo."

The talks in Geneva on dividing up this former Yugoslav republic among Serbs, Croats and Muslims were due to have resumed Friday, but were put off till Sunday after President Alija Izetbegovic refused to leave Sarajevo until Serb attacks subsided.

UN observers counted 3,777 shells fired into Sarajevo by the Bosnian Serb gunners on Thursday, commander Frewer reported. Most of those were on the outskirts, but 680 shells were counted exploding downtown, he said. The observers, who are thinly scattered, estimate that they generally count about one-third of all shells

fired.

Frewer did not have a count of return fire by troops of the mainly Muslim Bosnian army, but their shells screamed overhead from dawn Thursday until the fighting subsided mid-afternoon.

He gave a provisional toll for Thursday of seven killed and 49 wounded.

Today, the UN observers counted about 30 shells up to 9:30 AM (0730 GMT), he said.

The firing continued all the morning, but at a much lower level than on Thursday.

The Security Council again demanded Thursday an end to the fighting in Bosnia before territorial integrity and political independence.

In a statement read in a formal session by this month's council president, Sir David Hannay of Britain, the council singled out and condemned the Serb offensive of mount Igman, which it said was aimed at further isolating Sarajevo.

ROK for inter-Korean talks to ease tensions

SEOUL, July 23: South Korea eased its tough policy toward rival North Korea Friday and said it would seek a resumption of inter-Korean dialogue to ease bilateral tensions, reports AP.

The change was prompted by a recent North Korean move to hold talks on inspections of its suspected nuclear sites. South Korea, threatened by the Communist North's nuclear build up programme, had frozen all inter-Korean exchanges.

"Our government has decided to seek a resumption of dialogue with North Korea at an early date," Vice Unification Minister Song Young-dae said, briefing reporters on a cabinet meeting Friday on inter-Korean relations.

But, Song said, South Korea would not stop treating nuclear issues as its top concern.

The two Koreas, which still remain technically at war with no peace treaty signed after the bloody 1950-53 war concluded a historic peace accord in December 1991, but its imple-

mentation has been stalled, mainly because of disputes over how to carry out nuclear inspections.

More recently, North Korea proposed an exchange of presidential envoys to discuss a summit. International pressure was intensifying after its decision in March to withdraw from an international nuclear safeguards pact.

The North agreed to suspend its decision in talks with the United States, but South Korea refused to open inter-Korean talks on non-nuclear issues.

Song did not say whether Seoul would accept the proposed exchange of presidential envoys, but he indicated nuclear issues could be discussed separately at a commission launched last year to implement the nuclear treaty.

The commission held a series of talks but failed to produce any progress. South Korea accused the North of using inter-Korean talks to buy time for its nuclear arms development.

BRIEFLY

Fire kills 15 in China: At least 15 people have been killed in a fire which engulfed a shopping centre in China's eastern coastal province of Fujian, a report said Friday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

More than 10 people were also injured in the fire which razed a shopping centre in Hulan county early Wednesday, the Beijing-backed Hong Kong China news service was quoted as saying.

Thatcher honoured: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher received an honorary doctorate in chemistry from a leading Russian university on Thursday, reports Reuter from Moscow.

The award ceremony at Mendeleev University, a leading institute for chemical research, was also attended by former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife Raisa.

Highlights were broadcast on commonwealth television's main evening news programme, while Thatcher's speech after the ceremony was reported in full in the Russian daily Ivestiya.

7 DPRK soldiers flee to China: About 7 North Korean soldiers suffering from hunger and harsh treatment from the military, fled to China last month to escape their communist regime, a report said Friday, AP reports from Seoul.

It is the largest reported escape from the closed and regimented northern regime since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

In a dispatch from Beijing, South Korea's national Yonhap news agency quoted a source said to be well informed on North Korean affairs as saying the defections occurred on June 15.

Four Kashmiris shot dead: Four suspected Muslim rebels and an Indian soldier were among six people killed overnight in the strife torn northern state of Kashmir, the Press Trust of India reported Thursday, AFP says from New Delhi.

The news agency said four separatists allegedly trained by a Pakistani intelligence agency were shot dead in separate incidents on Wednesday while trying to cross over to India from Pakistan held Kashmir.

Officials in the state's winter capital, Jammu, said a soldier died and eight other troops were injured when their vehicle hit a land mine planted on a southern highway by separatists on Thursday.

Taylor won't attend Benin summit: Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor said on Thursday he will not attend this week's West African summit in Benin because Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida had ordered his assassination, Reuter reports from Cotonou.

Accusing Nigeria of disinformation, Taylor angrily denied he had rejected a new agreement to end Liberia's civil war, which is due to be signed in Cotonou on Saturday.

Marcos' body to be flown home Sept 5

MANILA, July 23: The body of former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, lying in a Hawaii crypt for almost four years, will be flown to his northern hometown on September 5, a family associate said today, reports Reuter.

Congressman Luis Stignons said he and other political leaders from the north had been asked by former First Lady Imelda Marcos to fetch her husband's remains from Hawaii.

The late president's body has been kept in an air conditioned crypt in Hawaii since his death in September 1989, three years after he was toppled from power.

ASEAN foreign ministers okay regional security forum

SINGAPORE, July 23: Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations endorsed on Friday a security forum of nations involved in the Pacific basin, reports AP.

"Regional security has always been on the agenda of our meeting, by ourselves and with others, but we have focused on it more intensely, and more openly," said Philippines Foreign Secretary Roberto R. Romulo.

Besides the Philippines, ASEAN includes Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and Singapore.

The forum will include ASEAN's major trading partners, the United States, Japan, the European Community,

Australia, Canada, South Korea and New Zealand. Their representatives are due for an expanded meeting starting Monday.

Other countries with interests in the region need to participate in security talks, Romulo said.

The Philippines favours, for example, the participation — the sooner the better — of Vietnam, Laos, Papua New Guinea, China and Russia. He told the opening session of the annual ASEAN gathering.

Vietnam, Laos and Papua New Guinea have observer status. China and Russia are on hand as special guests.

"ASEAN is not and will not become a military pact" said Singapore Prime Minister Goh

Chok Tong. "But consultations among defense and military officials will help build an environment of confidence. Goh said such an arrangement was inconceivable a few years ago during the Cold War.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, speaking to reporters in Washington before leaving for Singapore, said "these regional security dialogues will supplement, but they won't supplant our forward military deployment and the bilateral ties that have been developed in this region."

ASEAN planners said the forum would deal with a full range of security matters, from arms transfers and military exercises, to the movement of refugees and illegal refugees

across international borders.

"When all the major regional players begin to participate in the regional dialogue on political and security matters, a Pacific Asia Pacific process for peace would have begun to take shape," said Malaysian Foreign Minister Ahmad Badawi.

During the Cold War, the 26-year-old ASEAN excluded regional security issues from its annual agenda to avoid getting entangled in military rivalries among big global powers. This policy began to shift in 1991 when the once staunchly anti-communist ASEAN invited officials from Moscow and Beijing to attend a foreign ministers meeting in Maldives.

Goh expressed the hope that Cambodia and Burma will

gain observer status "when conditions permit." Then, all 10 southeast Asian countries will be integrated into a single community.

Prince Norodom Sivuth, foreign minister of Cambodia, was in Singapore as a special guest of ASEAN.

Other items on the agenda include refugees, human rights, the ASEAN Free Trade Area and President Bill Clinton's call for a summit meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

APEC comprises the six ASEAN states and the United States, Japan, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Mahathir Mohamad caused tension in ASEAN by announcing that he would boycott the proposed November meeting in Seattle on the grounds that it would institutionalize APEC as a formal trade bloc.

Mahathir, who is deeply suspicious of western ways in general and the United States in particular, is promoting his own East Asian Economic Caucus. It excludes the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, but has made little progress, mostly because Japan has declined to join.

The ministers also hope to revitalize AFTA, the ASEAN Free Trade Area that has drifted aimlessly since being launched in January as a showcase for economic cooperation.

US to send army trainers to Haiti

WASHINGTON, July 23: As President Clinton met with deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on Thursday, officials disclosed plans to send about 50 US military trainers to help pave the way for Aristide's planned return, reports AP.

An undetermined number of military construction personnel also will be sent to Haiti, officials said, to help Haitians initiate a variety of civic action projects, such as digging wells.

Earlier this month, international mediators worked out an agreement to return Aristide to Haiti on Oct 30 two years and one month after he was deposed in a military coup.