

Suharto won't tolerate unconstitutional means to unseat him

JAKARTA, Mar 1: President Suharto has warned that he will "clobber" those who use unconstitutional means to unseat him, the official news agency Antara reported Saturday, reports AP.

"If the people want Suharto to step down, I'll say thank you. I'll accept the decision for the sake of the people and the Constitution," Antara quoted Suharto as saying Friday during a meeting in Central Java with hundreds of prospective pilgrims to Mecca, Islam's holiest site.

"But if they do it (by means other than through the People's Consultative Council), I will clobber them because they are violating the Constitution," he said.

The People's Consultative Council, the highest policy-making body in the country, meets once every five years to elect a president and vice president and also lay out the broad outlines of state policy.

The remarks Friday marked the second time the 75-year old

president has come out with such a strong warning since an earlier debate in 1989 about his succession.

Suharto, who replaced the late president Sukarno in 1966, has brought the country from the brink of bankruptcy to an economic miracle with an 8.2 per cent annual economic growth rate.

However critics and opposition figures say he rules the country with an iron hand while tolerating little criticism.

Suharto has not publicly stated if he will run again when his sixth five-year term ends in March 1998.

But the ruling Golkar party has begun campaigning to have him retained at the helm for another five years.

Suharto's warning came in the wake of ethnic and religious riots that have plagued the country since last July. About 90 per cent of Indonesia's people are Muslims, making the country the largest Islamic nation in the world.

Five feared killed in frenzy

Rioters storm army barracks, seize arms in Albania

TIRANA, Mar 1: Thousands of rioters stormed an Albanian army barracks in the southern port of Vlore overnight and seized hundreds of weapons, a local inhabitant told AFP by phone early today.

Earlier at least five people were killed and 22 injured in clashes between demonstrators and members of the Secret Police (Shik), according to various sources.

Officers and soldiers in the barracks located on high ground outside the town, had put up no resistance, according to the witness who described the situation in the city as an "uprising."

The Secret Police (Shik) said meanwhile that rioters, it called "terrorists" had attacked its headquarters in Vlore, killing two policemen and injuring six others, according to a statement put out here by the official ATA news agency.

Twenty-seven lorries carrying dozens of people with arms took part in the assault on the Shik headquarters which was set on fire with grenades, ATA

said. The Secret Police retaliated by opening fire on the attackers, the statement said.

Four people, including a 14-year-old boy hit in the chest, were shot dead and 22 others injured in the firing, according to hospital sources quoted by local inhabitants. One of the four victims was a member of the Shik, they said.

At dawn, lorries filled with armed men firing bursts of automatic weapons fire were moving around Vlore, Ladi Zeneli, a local man told AFP from Vlore.

He said a 12.7 calibre machine-gun had been installed outside the university where 41 students have been on a hunger-strike since February 20.

A rumour that the Shik was about to forcibly evacuate the hunger-strikers from the campus was the spark that triggered the rioting, which followed 24 straight days of anti-government protests in Vlore over failed savings schemes.

Last night in Tirana, the government said it had asked courts to rule the student

hunger-strike illegal.

Tribunal president Qazim Gjonaj told AFP that Prime Minister Alexander Meksi's government also wanted the courts to order the hunger-striking students off the campus.

The case is to be heard today afternoon (1300 GMT) in the Albanian capital.

In response to the announcement, about 1,000 people armed with rifles and knives surged onto the streets and headed for the university. They then made for Shik headquarters in the port area.

The crowd swelled to around 10,000 people after rumours spread that the government had proclaimed a state of emergency in Vlore.

The crowd turned on the Shik headquarters with stones, fired shots at the building and then set it on fire, according to witnesses.

In Tirana, Interior Minister Halit Shamata, questioned by AFP denied there was a plan to declare a state of emergency in Vlore.

'Israeli plan to build new quarter in E Jerusalem threat to ME peace'

GAZA CITY, Mar 1: The Palestinian Authority said late Friday that the decision of the Israeli government to build a new Jewish quarter in east Jerusalem was "a threat to the peace process," reports AFP.

The peace process is in danger, in the wake of this decision which is aimed at voiding the (Arab) town of its inhabitants and goes against international law and the peace accords," the Palestinian Authority said in a statement after a meeting here of the Palestinian cabinet.

The statement "flatly" rejected the Israeli decision to build more Jewish homes in the annexed Arab part of Jerusalem and warned that the peace process "cannot continue in the face of continued Israeli settlement."

The Palestinian Authority appealed to the co-sponsors of the peace process: The United States and Russia and to the whole international community, particularly US President Bill Clinton to "restrain" the Israeli government and "take appropriate measures to safeguard the peace process."

Zairean FM rules out ceasefire with rebels

TRIPOLI, Mar 1: The foreign minister of Zaire on Thursday ruled out any ceasefire with the rebels of Laurent-Désiré Kabila as long as "foreign troops" remained in eastern Zaire, reports AP.

Gerard Kamanda Wa Kamanda who is attending an organisation of African Unity ministerial meeting in the Libyan capital, declined to discuss contacts taking place in South Africa between Zairean officials and Kabila.

The Uganda and Rwanda had sent troops to assist the rebels and without "a withdrawal of foreign forces" there could be no ceasefire.

The minister, interviewed by radio France Internationale, South African radio and AFP, said "talking about a ceasefire would serve no purpose."

Kamanda Wa Kamanda accused Kabila of being "at the head of a war waged by Uganda and Rwanda in eastern Zaire."

PPP nominates Zardari for senate polls

KARACHI, Mar 1: Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari is among the candidates nominated by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) for upcoming Senate elections, party officials said Friday, reports AFP.

Bhutto, who chaired the PPP Parliamentary Party meeting, endorsed his candidature for a seat from southern Pakistan's Sindh province.

Election for 46 Senate seats will be held throughout Pakistan on March 12. Deputies in four provincial assemblies will elect 10 senators each while two senators from capital Islamabad and four from federally administered tribal areas will be elected by the National Assembly.

Zardari is in jail in connection with the murder of his wife's estranged brother Murtaza Bhutto in a police shootout here in September.

He will be produced in a trial court on Saturday when he will file his nomination papers for the Senate seat.

UNSC postpones action against Sudan

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 1: The UN Security Council said Friday it was postponing action on proposed aviation sanctions against Sudan for failing to hand over suspects in an attempted assassination on Egypt's president, reports AP.

The council met Friday afternoon to hear a report by the head of UN humanitarian operations, Yasushi Akashi, on the potential impact of sanctions on Sudan's fragile economy.

Last year, the council demanded that Sudan surrender three Egyptians believed involved in the 1995 assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia claims Sudan's state-run airline shipped weapons into its territory and held a plane at Addis Ababa's airport so that one of the suspects could escape.

Sudan denied any role in the attempt and claimed they could not find evidence the suspects were on its soil.



South African President Nelson Mandela (R) is joined by his companion Gracela Machel (L) for arrival honours at Malacanang Palace Saturday. Mandela who is on an official three-day visit in Manila as part of his Asian tour was accompanied for the first time by the 51-year-old widow of Mozambique President Samora Machel. Mandela divorced his wife Winnie Mandela last year. — AFP/UNB photo

Chinese PM pledges more reforms

BEIJING, Mar 1: In a speech laced with references to economic reform patriarch Deng Xiaoping, Chinese Premier Li Peng pledged cautious steps Saturday to revive bankrupt state-run industries, reports AP.

Li, delivering his government's work report to China's legislature, vowed to pour more money into agriculture, divert more funds to the less developed interior and to make sure the increasingly restive poor and unemployed are cared for.

"We are facing great pressure from population and employment issues," Li told the Congress in his 90-minute speech.

The annual session of the National People's Congress is one of the signal events in a highly political year. Political manoeuvring in the run-up to a Communist Party Congress this fall, always heated, is expected to intensify following Deng's death February 19.

Although he relinquished all public posts in 1990, Deng continued to influence policy, protect his proteges from disaffected factions and mediate their disputes.

Qiao Shi, the legislature's head and a rival of Li's opened the session by praising Deng as a great communist and economic moderniser. The 2,901 delegates — the dark suits most were offset by the traditional costumes of ethnic minority members — then stood for a moment of silence in the cavernous Great Hall of the People.

Li called on Deng's legacy to urge people to "achieve new successes in reform" and rally around party general secretary Jiang Zemin, first among equals in the post-Deng collective leadership.

Li looked self-assured, smiling and waving to party notables as he entered the hall. He noted with satisfaction the soft-landing China's often infla-

tionary economy achieved last year. Economic growth of 9.7 per cent, retail price increases of 6.1 per cent and foreign investment of over 40 billion dollars.

But he added that sustaining the growth is uncertain: Agriculture remains weak, population grows despite a one-child policy, unemployment is rising and corruption and crime are rampant.

State-run enterprises have long been the most troublesome problem of China's 19-year reform drive, and Li called reforming the sector the economic priority of 1997.

"A certain number of state-owned enterprises are experiencing difficulties in production and operation and losses are on the rise," Li said. "Additional enterprises have completely or partially suspended production, causing an increase in unemployment."

Mandela begins Asia tour, arrives in Manila

MANILA, Mar 1: South African President Nelson Mandela arrived Saturday for a three-day visit to the Philippines on the first stop of his first Asian tour aimed at strengthening economic ties with the region, reports AP.

Mandela was welcomed at the Malacanang presidential palace by President Fidel Ramos, who described him as "one of the towering figures of the century" for leading South Africa out of apartheid.

Ramos said his discussions with Mandela covered bilateral, regional and multilateral issues affecting the Philippines and South Africa and both leaders agreed to seek measures to strengthen friendly ties between their two countries.

'Indo-Pak relations a history of hostility'

ISLAMABAD, Mar 1: Fifty years after independence, India and Pakistan are that hoping their cold war will soon go the way of the Berlin Wall. But seemingly irreconcilable differences remain, reports AP.

The two countries share much culture and history — language, food, dress, dance and music are almost indistinguishable — but also the memory of three wars and countless religious clashes.

Both countries are also developing nuclear weapons, making their enmity of international concern.

Shortly after he was sworn in last week, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif wrote a letter to his Indian counterpart, HD Deve Gowda, offering to meet in an attempt to resolve a longstanding dispute over the northern state of Kashmir.

which both countries claim.

But an Indian government official, who spoke in New Delhi on condition of anonymity, said that while Sharif's overture was welcome, India isn't sure he has enough power to set policy.

Even if they meet, Sharif and Gowda won't be able to quickly undo the knot of antagonism that has tightened over decades.

Travelers can't fly directly between the two nations' capitals. Citizens are routinely denied visas for cross-border visits. The national cricket teams usually meet in third countries for fear that the mix of politics and a sport that is almost a religion in both countries could erupt into riots.

The only images we get of each other are second-hand images," said Tariq Rahman, a Pakistani linguist who is an expert on Pakistani and Indian languages but has never been granted permission to visit India.

India and Pakistan were part of what was British India. At independence, Pakistan was created for Muslims who feared they would face discrimination in overwhelmingly Hindu India. Pakistan achieved independence from Britain on August 14, 1947; India a day later.

In the years before partition — which some on both sides suspect was part of a British strategy to divide and thereby weaken the region — debate over whether Hindus and Muslims could live together fanned violence.

Religious clashes still flare occasionally in officially secular India. Many Muslims stayed after partition; India's Muslim minority is almost as large as the entire Pak population.

BRIEFLY

1 sentenced to death in Rwanda:

A court in Rwanda has sentenced a woman to death for participating in the country's 1994 genocide, state-run radio said yesterday. Reuter reports from Kigali.

It said Virginia Mukankusi was convicted by the court in Gitarama, 50 km (33 miles) south of the capital Kigali, of genocide and crimes against humanity. She said she would appeal against the verdict.

Special Rwandan courts began sitting in December to huge those accused to responsibility in the mass killing of at least 800,000 minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The court have passed at least 12 death sentences.

Malaria claims 201 in Zimbabwe:

Malaria has claimed 201 lives in Zimbabwe since January with a total 106,721 cases reported countrywide, Xinhua says from Harare.

These figures are higher than the same period last year when 122 died of malaria with a total of about 91,000 cases. An update on the malaria situation released by the ministry of health and child welfare Friday said, 'Malaria incidences are expected to get worse as the rainfall subsides. The ministry has therefore put all provinces on alert in case of further epidemics.'

SA, Zimbabwe sign defence accord:

Zimbabwe and South Africa have signed a defence cooperation agreement which focuses on training, military medical exchange programmes and the development of sport and cultural ties, Xinhua reports from Harare.

A statement released Friday by the South African High Commission in Harare said that the agreement was signed by Zimbabwean Defence Minister Moven Mahachi and his South African counterpart Jew Modies in Pretoria on February 21 paving way for the establishment of a defence liaison committee to promote smooth implementation of the programme. The statement said, 'The agreement was signed in a spirit of good neighbourliness and in the interests of regional peace and security.'

Fire claims 5 in China:

Five people were killed and four others injured when a fire broke out on board a Greek cargo vessel undergoing repairs in Shanghai, a newspaper reported yesterday, AFP says from Shanghai.

The Liberation Daily reported that the fire, which took two hours to put out, was the most serious in Shanghai so far this year and was caused by careless use of welding tools. The Shanghai fire bureau dispatched 28 fire engines and more than 300 fire fighters to put on the blaze on the 'agan' which was being repaired in Shanghai Lifeng Shipyards. The report did not say when the fire occurred.

Mongolia's presidential polls in May:

Mongolia's presidential elections will be held on May 18, with nominations closing on March 26, Xinhua reported Saturday in a dispatch from Ulan Bator's parliament, AFP says from Beijing.

President Punsalmaagiyn Ochirbat, who supported the rise of the nation's democratic parties after the collapse of the Soviet Union, will end his term on June 30. Parliamentary elections in Mongolia last year ousted the communist Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party after 70 years of rule and replaced it with a democratic coalition.

Road mishap kills 8 in Philippines:

At least eight people were killed late Friday when two buses collided in the southern Philippines, the latest in a series of deadly road accidents in the country since January, AP reports from Iligan.

The accident, involving two buses belonging to the same bus company, Mindanao Rural Transit, occurred in Misamis Oriental province, 780 kilometres (487 miles) south of Manila. The conductor of one of the buses, Glenn Nano, said his driver had slowed down when he saw the other bus speeding from the opposite lane. Nano said the other bus appeared to be out of control on the road made slick by rain.

Tourist drowns in S Korea:

A South Korean tourist was swept off rocks while fishing at Ninety Mile Beach and drowned, police said Saturday, AP reports from Whangarei.

Police on Saturday identified the dead man as Hak-Eun Choi, 33. Details of his occupation and home town were not available. Police Senior Sgt. Dave Turner said Choi had been fishing at the bluff, on the west coast near Te Kao, on Friday afternoon when he had been washed off the rocks into the sea.

Ship fire kills 1 in S'pore:

Fire engulfed a tourist cruise ship returning to Singapore from Malaysia, and at least one person was believed killed, police said Saturday, AP reports from Singapore.

A police spokesman said nine others suffered minor injuries in the fire that broke out in the engine room of the ship, 'Gemini', on Friday night. All the casualties were among crew members, said the spokesman, who could not be identified under briefing rules. He said a "few hundred" passengers were on board the ship, which had just returned from a pleasure cruise from Port Klang in Malaysia.

SA, Philippines to sign accords:

African President Nelson Mandela arrived in Manila yesterday for an official three-day visit to the Philippines during which he will sign bilateral agreement strengthening ties between the two countries, AFP reports from Manila.

Mandela, the first South African head of state to visit the Philippines, was met by Vice President Joseph Estrada and Foreign Affairs Minister Domingo Siazon.



An Iraqi woman sells flour Friday in a Baghdad market. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said Thursday during a visit to Paris that food supplies to Iraq under the 'oil for food' scheme would begin "from March 1". Annan made the announcement after Iraq complained last week to the United Nations that it had not yet received any supplies under the scheme concluded in December. — AFP/UNB photo

Myanmar junta accuses West of influencing Karen rebels

YANGON, Mar 1: Myanmar's top generals accused the West and traitors at home of influencing the ethnic Karen guerrilla organisation to prolong its rebellion against Yangon's rule, official media reported today, says Reuter.

State-run newspapers said Gen Maung Aye Vice Chairman of Myanmar's ruling military body, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) made the comments in a speech yesterday.

He said the armed Karen National Union (KNU) — some of whose members have indicated they want peace talks with Yangon — had fallen under the influence of western nations and "axe-handlers" or traitors, within Myanmar.

"As those of the West bloc who could not bear to see peace

and development in our country persuaded them with arms and dollars they rebuffed the peace," Maung Aye was quoted as saying.

"The axe-handlers within the country also opposed peace, or chestrating with the neo-colonialists," he added.

Lieutenant General Tin Oo, Secretary Two of SLORC, made similar comments in a separate speech, saying the KNU has ignored government peace overtures at the instigation of Western elements.

"All armed groups except the KNU are already within the peaceful political system," he said. "The KNU has turned its back due to the instigation of neo-colonialists and internal traitorous elements who are pining for the West."

Tin Oo then repeated his

usual call for the people of Myanmar to crush the 'destructive' KNU.

The KNU was formed in 1948 to fight for an ethnic Karen homeland in eastern Myanmar. It has rejected several peace overtures from Yangon and is the last major ethnic rebel movement that has not signed a ceasefire agreement with SLORC.

But the KNU has suffered a series of military setbacks in recent years that have prompted many senior members to declare the movement's end is near. The latest wave of fighting forced thousands of Karen to flee into Thailand last month.

The US State Department and human rights groups claim that Thailand was forcibly repatriating the refugees.



Lebanese Najib Abi Aad, 24 (L) smiles to spectators after he was elected Mr Lebanon late on Thursday in Beirut. Dalida Shammai, 23 (R) was also elected Miss Lebanon at the same night. It is the first time in Lebanon as well as the Arab world that a beauty competition for men takes place. Ten males competed for the title. — AFP/UNB photo

Coke bottling co rejects proposals to end strike in Lanka

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Mar 1: Pure Beverages, the company bottling Coca-Cola in Sri Lanka has rejected proposals by the labour commissioner to end a strike at its two plants, a union official was quoted by a daily Saturday as saying, reports AP.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga this week requested the commissioner to submit proposals to end the strike. "But the management of Pure Beverages have turned down the proposals,"

US govt moves to speed human tissue therapies to market

WASHINGTON, Mar 1: Making medicine from human cells or tissue is an exploding field, and the US government says it has figured out how to ensure the products aren't tainted with infections while speeding them to market, report AP.

"This system is a road map for the regulation not only of therapies that exist today, but therapies that will be invented in the future," Dr. David Kessler said Friday, his last day as commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration.

The FDA's approach to tissue-based therapies has been scattered, ignoring some and cracking down on others. Sperm banks and clinics that create test-tube babies, for

example, are under no FDA oversight to make sure the cells are free of deadly infections. But clinics that freeze and store newborns' umbilical cord blood for transfusions later in life feared the agency was poised to shut them down.

And tissue engineering is advancing so quickly that a product to actually regrow patients' knee cartilage started selling before the government had any idea how to measure its usefulness.

Under the plan announced Friday, therapies made of human cells or tissues would have to follow certain safety rules according to their risk of infection and, when necessary, prove to the government that they

work. The rules mean "it should be easier and faster to develop future products," said Lisa Raines of Genzyme Corp., whose Carticel cartilage regenerator will follow easier regulations than the company had anticipated.

The plan "enables broader access to critical transplantation therapies while fully protecting public health," said Cynthia Fisher, president of the Viacord umbilical cord blood bank in Boston.

The regulations do not affect blood, bone marrow and donated organs, which are controlled by long-established regulatory policies. Human tissues can carry diseases, and how they are han-

dled makes the difference between a therapy that works or one wasted when the cells die or are contaminated.

Under the new rules, the FDA won't come up with separate policies for new therapies, but will treat them all according to risk.

Most tissues — except those removed and transplanted back into the same patient in the same surgery, like a skin graft — must be tested for infections and follow "good handling practices."

That includes sperm banks. Tissue companies will register with the FDA so that when medical concerns arise — such as the need to screen neurological tissue for the human equiv-

alent of mad cow disease — the companies can quickly be notified.

Tissues that are manipulated, like pancreas cells boosted to produce more insulin for diabetics or tissues transplanted into unrelated patients, require more intensive testing and scrutiny. The most scrutiny goes to tissue used differently from the way the body would naturally, such as in gene therapy.

The rules mean less scrutiny for some industries, such as those that deal with umbilical cord blood, which is rich in stem cells that are the building blocks of blood. Banks now freeze newborns' blood, pledging it could help the child or a

relative decades later, and the FDA had proposed stiff regulations forcing them to prove how well the still-experimental treatment works. Banks said the cost would shut them down.

Now most banks merely will perform basic infection testing and "good handling practices." They can promise parents that cord blood may help rebuild the bloodstream after chemotherapy destroys it, because that is how the body uses stem cells. Only if they go beyond natural biology, claiming, for example, that the cells fight a disease, will the FDA demand proof.

Kessler, who pushed through the new rules, is leaving the government to become dean of medicine at Yale University.