

Indonesia plans quick pullout if E Timor rejects autonomy

Australian military placed on alert

DILI, East Timor, Aug 26: Indonesian troops will pull out of East Timor within six months if East Timor rejects autonomy in a landmark referendum next week, an Indonesian spokesman said Thursday.

The announcement came as thousands of people took part in the final rally backing Indonesian sovereignty in the former Portuguese colony which will vote on its future next Monday.

If the people of East Timor reject autonomy under Indonesian rule, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and armed forces chief General Wiranto want a gradual withdrawal to prevent security vacuum, said Indonesian government task force spokesman Dino Djajal.

Alatas and Wiranto have said three to six months ... we don't want to leave a vacuum here, there has to be some con-

tinuity," Djajal said.

There are between 12,000 and 15,000 Indonesian military and 8,000 police in East Timor, according to foreign military observers.

Djajal said he was unable to give a firm date for ratification of the vote by Indonesia's People's Consultative Assembly (MPR).

But the assembly is to convene on October 1 and he said it could be passed by mid-October.

There are mounting fears of violence as pro-Indonesian leaders have warned of guerrilla warfare if the referendum is only narrowly one by separatists.

The United Nations has said it will strengthen its civilian police force in East Timor after the vote, and the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) sources say there could be a change in their advisory role.

Meanwhile, the Australian Defence Force was Thursday

placed on alert to evacuate Australians as fears intensify of a violent reaction to Monday's historic autonomy ballot in East Timor.

More than 200 Australians are in the territory to witness the vote and with violence flaring Thursday, Defence Minister John Moore said the government was taking no chance.

Another report says, three men, including two independence supporters, were shot dead Thursday in clashes on the fringes of a pro-Indonesian campaign rally in East Timor, witnesses said.

A member of the pro-Indonesian Aitarak militia gunned down an independence supporter in Dili's downtown Kuluhun area while a policeman shot dead another pro-independence man suspected of inciting violence, the witnesses said.

In contrast to the previous day's festive atmosphere, some residents said the militia had hijacked many vehicles for the rally.

Meanwhile, the Australian Defence Force was Thursday



Commander of the pro-Indonesian "Aitarak" militia Eurico Guterres leads pro-autonomy supporters through the streets of Dili Thursday. The pro-integration marchers took to the streets on their last day of campaigning, while the pro-independence supporters will conclude today the official campaigning for the August 30 UN-sponsored ballot on the future of East Timor.

— AFP photo

7 militants, one soldier killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, Aug 26: Government forces pursued armed Islamic militants into jungles close to the cease-fire line with Pakistan in disputed Kashmir, killing at least seven of them and losing one soldier, police said Thursday, reports AFP.

Government forces have intensified patrolling in the state with voting in India's general elections scheduled for next month. A dozen rebel groups, fighting for secession from India since 1989, have asked people to boycott the elections.

India accuses Pakistan of training and arming the guerrillas, a charge Pakistan denies. India and Pakistan have fought two wars over control of Kashmir since they won independence from Britain in 1947.

Acting on a tip from a local villager on Wednesday, the soldiers attacked a jungle hideout of the guerrillas, who returned fire. The gunbattle lasted several hours and left four rebels and one soldier dead, a police officer said on condition of anonymity. Another four soldiers were injured in the fighting in Sajwan, a village in Poonch district, 125 kilometers (80 miles) north of Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu-Kashmir state.

Congress biggest enemy: NCP

NEW DELHI, Aug 26: The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) yesterday declared that Congress leadership was its biggest enemy and predicted a split in Congress after the elections with the breakaway faction joining NCP, reports PTI.

The biggest enemy is the Congress leadership, but that does not mean we are joining BJP, senior party leader P A Sangma told reporters here.

Rejecting the charge that NCP and BJP were speaking the same language, he said, there is no question of the NCP following the BJP.

He said such a criticism was being made because of the two parties were taking up similar issues — Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin and a fixed term for Lok Sabha.

Sangma said Congress would not reach the three-digit mark in the polls following a dismal performance and would split after the polls. The splinter group would join NCP, he claimed.

Sonia says

Coalition govts not in country's interest

MAKRANA (Rajasthan), Aug 26: Congress president Sonia Gandhi today said short lived governments could not do any good to anybody because such governments were formed by coming together of different parties for the sole aim of grabbing power, reports PTI.

Such coalitions could benefit only some individuals and the country is always the sufferer, she said at an election rally here.

People join hands or coming to power but internally they are poles apart as there is no meeting point on ideology. This is how the country saw three prime ministers in as many years, she said.

Hitting out at the BJP-headed coalition government at the centre, Gandhi said even the members of BJP were speaking in different languages. Such government could not provide a stable government, she added.

Voters in Bellary unaware of Sonia's foreign origin

BELLARY, Aug 26: While BJP leader Sushma Swaraj is seeking to turn the Lok Sabha contest here into a fight between Deshi and Bideshi many voters in this backward area of Karnataka are not even aware of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, reports PTI.

Swaraj in her public meetings emphasises that Sonia Gandhi is a woman of foreign origin and it is a fight between Swadeshi (Native) and Videshi (person of foreign origin), but many voters this correspondent spoke to are not aware that the Congress President has Italian origin.

For quite a few of them it is the name of the Gandhi family that matters, when asked, one man said Sonia Gandhi is Indira Gandhi.

One Venkata Rao of a village under Siriguppa assembly segment said I have not heard the name of Sonia Gandhi, while 27-year-old Manjunatha said his family always voted for the Congress.

Izetbegovic to press charges against NY Times

SARAJEVO, Aug 26: The Muslim member of Bosnia's collective presidency, Alja Izetbegovic, is to press charges against The New York Times for its article on corruption in Bosnia published last week, media reported here Thursday.

The Sarajevo daily Oslobojenje, quoting Izetbegovic's spokesman Ademir Jervkovic, said the Muslim leader was preparing a suit against the US daily and a journalist.

In the suit President Izetbegovic will say more about the motives behind this story, Jervkovic said.

Jervkovic also said that an international investigation of the allegations in the article.



The Royal Air Maroc Boeing 737-400 stands at El Prat Airport in Barcelona Thursday after the conclusion of a hijacking attempt. The hijacker of the plane, which was forced to land in Barcelona, was a 45-year-old Moroccan who was apparently mentally disturbed. He gave himself up to police after a six-hour drama. All 77 people on board, 68 passengers and 9 Moroccan crew members, were released unharmed.

— AFP photo

Monitors hope

New Indian govt will sign CTBT after polls

VIENNA, Aug 26: Heads of the organisation which oversees the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) said Thursday they hope a new Indian government will sign it "fairly soon" after forthcoming elections, reports AFP.

They also expressed optimism that a conference in Vienna in October will give a "political push" to the landmark nuclear treaty, which must still be ratified by several key countries before it can enter into force.

The top priority when it comes to new signatures ... is really India and Pakistan," said Wolfgang Hoffmann, the executive secretary of the preparatory commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO).

The process of talking with

these two countries is now in abeyance now that everybody is waiting for the outcome of the Indian elections, " scheduled for September/October, he told AFP.

"Only after these elections ... will we be able to talk again to the new Indian government and what we hope is that we will start again at the point where the talks ended ... if we can achieve this then I think we have a fair chance to have an Indian signature fairly soon."

The CTBT was adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 1996, but before it can enter into force it must be ratified by a list of 44 countries judged to have nuclear facilities.

So far only 21 of the countries on that list have ratified.

Hoffmann confirmed that a conference to review progress will be held in Vienna on October 6-8, saying he hoped it would be held a ministerial level.

Under the terms of the treaty, subsequent review conferences could be held annually if key states still do not sign.

"We are optimistic and we hope that we won't need a second conference," said CTBTO chairman Mokhtar Reguei. "It will depend on the states, and what measures they take to accelerate the entry into force of the treaty."

Hoffmann said: "It might be that this first conference will be sufficient to give a political push. But we can't say where we will be a year from now."

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Most of the passengers were North Africans, but there also French, Germans, Swiss, Italians, Dutch and Canadians among the group.

The plane was parked on the tarmac away from the terminal. About 200 police and Civil Guard members cordoned off while negotiations were conducted by radio.

The man claimed he was one of three hijackers holding the plane but authorities quickly realised he was acting alone, a Spanish government source said.

Officials at first reported the plane was carrying 88 people. But after the hijack drama was over, a final count showed only 73 passengers plus eight crew members on board.

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