

UN plans to send peace force to E Timor

WASHINGTON, Sept 7: The United Nations is planning for a 5,000 to 7,000-strong international force to quell the violence in East Timor, according to US newspaper reports Tuesday, says AFP.

The planning is in the "advanced stages," but such a decision would require the approval of the Indonesian government and the UN Security Council. The Washington Post said Tuesday quoting US and UN officials.

The force could total 5,000 to 7,000 troops with a mandate to crack down on anti-independence militia groups, the officials said.

The military-backed militia have gone on a rampage after East Timor's landslide August 30 vote for independence, killing hundreds of Timorese and forcing thousands more to flee their homes.

A consensus for an international force, however belated, is

virtually inevitable," a Western envoy was quoted as saying by The New York Times.

The official, however, warned that there was "a long way between that consensus and it happening."

Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Canada and a handful of other countries have made commitments to participate in a multi-national force for East Timor, said the officials quoted in the Post.

Australia would likely lead the force, both dailies said.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard said Monday he was ready to send 2,000 troops into East Timor within 48 hours of a United Nations go-ahead for an international peacekeeping force.

The UN Security Council agreed Sunday to send a five-member mission to Jakarta to press the Indonesian authorities to rein in those behind the killings.

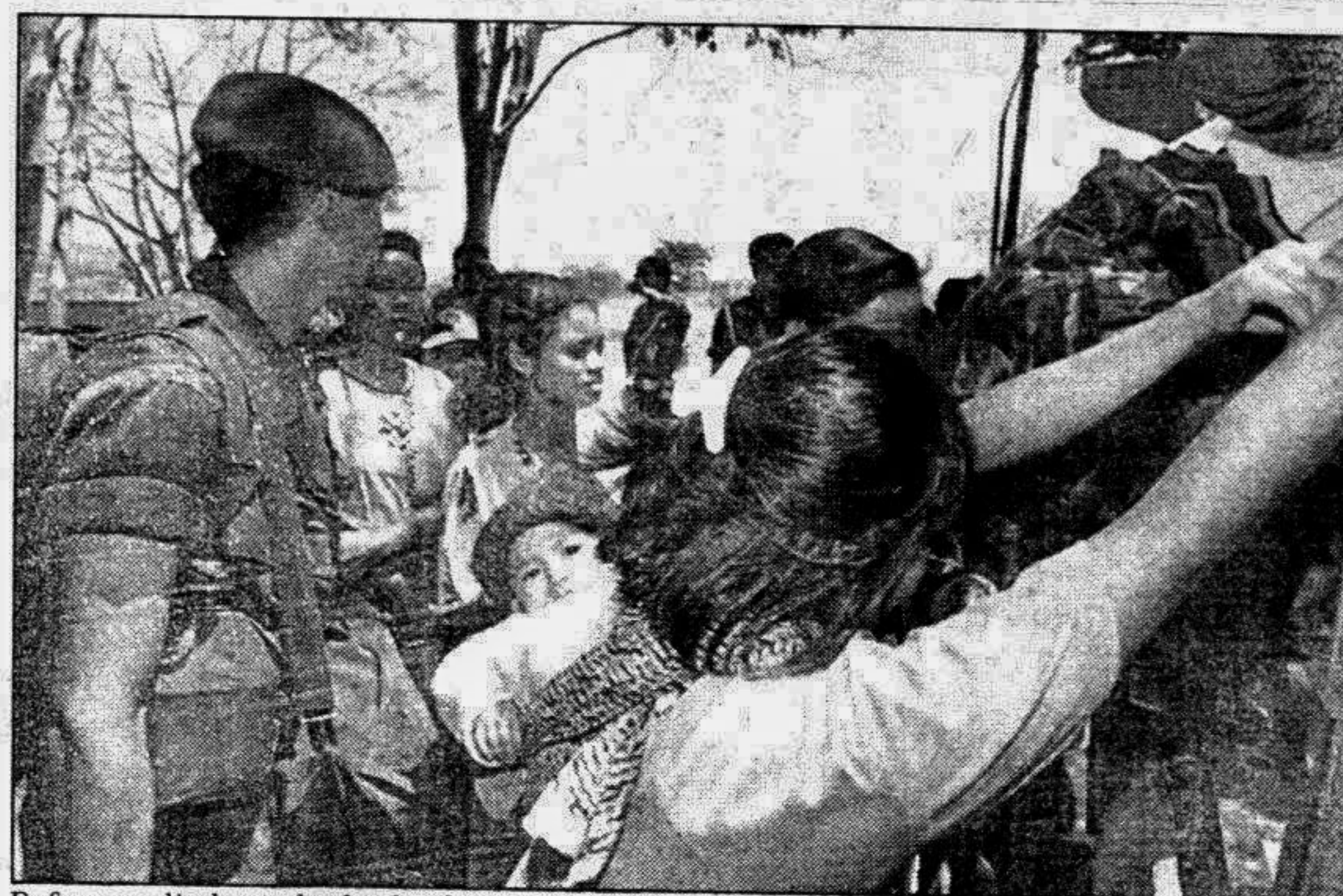
The New York Times said the UN mission left New York late Monday.

Diplomats now expect the United Nations to give Indonesian President B.J. Habibie three or four days to demonstrate whether he can bring an end to the violence before making any decision on a peacekeeping force, the paper said.

Militias demand fresh vote

A commander of the pro-Indonesian militias in East Timor said Tuesday his men were ready to "burn everything" if the territory's independence vote is not held again.

"We have to work together, but if that can't be done and the international community does not review the (vote) process, we are ready to destroy everything. We'll burn everything," Herminio da Silva da Costa told AFP.



Refugees climb at the back of a police truck while an Indonesian soldier (L) looks on after evacuating from East Timor by Indonesian military plane Tuesday at the airport of the West Timorese capital. Thousands of refugees have been fleeing the strife-torn territory of East Timor following pro-Indonesian militia attacks in the aftermath of the results of a self-determination referendum.

— AFP photo

Gaddafi opens 4-day OAU summit

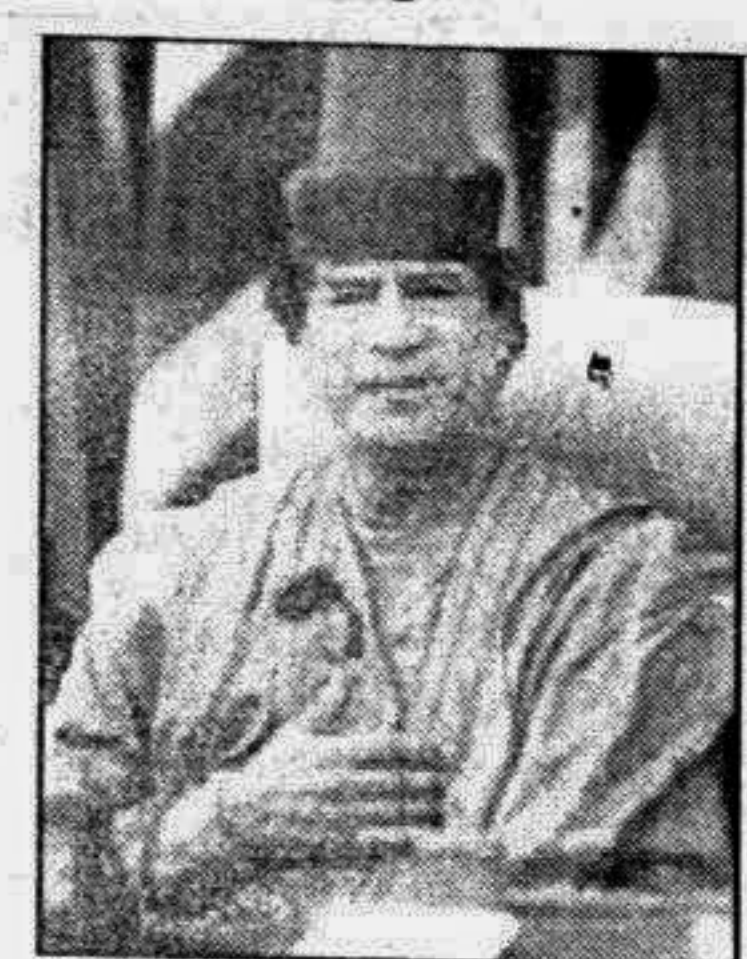
TRIPOLI, Libya, Sept 7: Col. Moammar Gadhafi kicked off an African Summit on Monday with a call for the establishment of an African union modeled after the United States, the former Soviet Union or the European Union, reports AP.

"I've been impatiently waiting for this day," Gadhafi told African foreign ministers at the opening session of the four-day extraordinary gathering. "We have no future without unity."

Gadhafi called for the extraordinary summit in July at the OAU's annual meeting which was held in Algeria to discuss a long-overdue restructuring of the organization's charter.

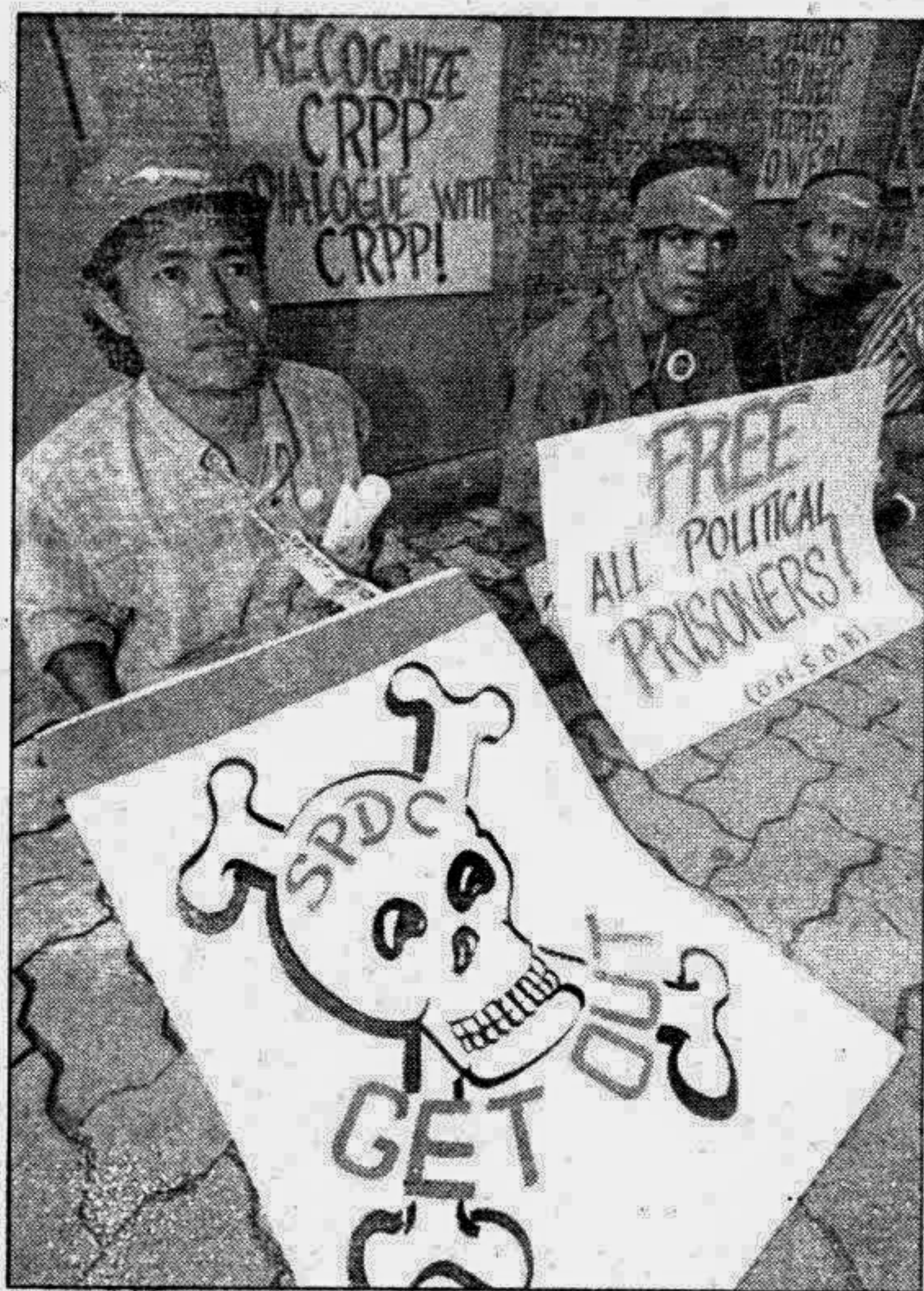
Several heads of state have already arrived in Libya to participate in the last two days of the summit starting Wednesday and a military parade on Tuesday celebrating the 30th anniversary of the coup that brought Gadhafi to power.

Gambia's foreign minister, Mohamed Sedat Jobe, said



Africans would like to reconstruct the OAU charter "to make it a much more functional charter that would reflect the strengths of the continent."

"The fact that we are not solidly united makes us very vulnerable to exploitation on the continent," added Jobe. "I do hope that we leave here a stronger OAU."



Exiled Myanmar activists hold anti-junta posters during their sit-in protest outside the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok Tuesday. The protest is to support a call by Myanmar's overseas opposition for disobedience against the junta in Yangon on 9/9/99 or "four nines". The protesters vow to continue their peaceful protest until Thursday.

Myanmar dissidents try to sow seeds of revolution

BANGKOK, Sept 7: Myanmar dissidents hope to outflank intense government security Thursday to rekindle the embers of revolt against the country's military rulers, reports AFP.

Students and activists plan a campaign of civil disorder, leaflet campaigns and general strikes.

Plans for September 9 or Four Nines Day (9/9/99), are a tribute to hundreds of protesters killed when troops turned their guns on a student uprising on August 8, 1988 (8/8/88).

But given the vice-like grip of military intelligence on every level of Myanmar society, many analysts and diplomats believe a popular revolt is impossible.

Even some exiled activists privately admit the plans may simply underscore the army's omnipotence.

Security has been tightened in recent days with extra officers on duty in the capital Yangon and troops reportedly transported to the provinces.

Dissidents say hundreds of activists have been detained, a claim denied by the junta.

"It looks like it will be very difficult for anything to happen," one dissident source told

AFP. "The authorities have the situation under control and it looks like only something they do could create a spark."

"I think there are some people that will dare to try something but a lot of people have been arrested, especially activists from 1988," he said.

Nepal proposes SAARC summit in November

KATHMANDU, Sept 7: Nepal has proposed the 11th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meeting be held between November 26 and 28 in Kathmandu, the Foreign Ministry said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Nepalese Minister for Foreign Affairs Ram Sharan Mahat said: "I have handed over the invitations of Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai to the heads of government of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the head of states of Sri Lanka and the Maldives to attend the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in the last week of November."

Mahat was speaking after returning from visits to the Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Pakistan detains 2 Iraqis linked to Bin Laden

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Sept 7: Two Iraqis believed to be linked to Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden have been arrested here while trying to cross the border into Afghanistan, official sources said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The two, identified as Mohammad Talib al-Alami and Anwar Shaikhani Mohammad al-Haloo, were taken into custody Monday at the Torkham border crossing, the sources said.

They were being interrogated by intelligence officials, the sources said.

Bin Laden is wanted by the United States for allegedly masterminding the August 7, 1998 twin bombings of American embassies in East Africa that killed more than 200 people.

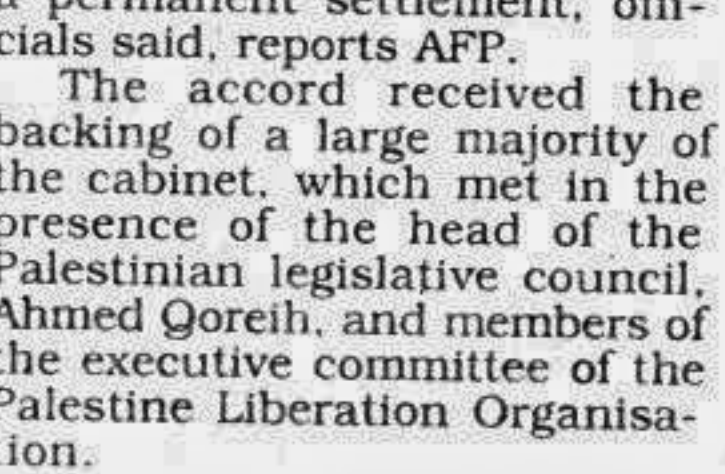
Afghanistan's ruling Taliban has rejected the US allegations and said Washington had failed to provide any evidence of bin Laden's guilt.

Reports have said bin Laden lives at a secret hideout inside Afghanistan, protected by guards including Arabs.

Palestinian cabinet okays accord with Israel

GAZA CITY, Sept 7: The Palestinian cabinet on Monday approved the landmark Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum signed with Israel over the weekend, which opens the way to talks on a permanent settlement, officials said, reports AFP.

The accord received the backing of a large majority of the cabinet, which met in the presence of the head of the Palestinian legislative council, Ahmed Gorieh, and members of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.



Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar is surrounded by garlands at an election campaign rally in south Bombay Monday. Pawar, whose stronghold is central Maharashtra, is determined to humble the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Deputy Chief Minister Gopinath Munde on his home turf.

—AFP photo

PM scorns Sonia's foreign roots

Vajpayee urges voters to punish opposition parties

NEW DELHI, Sept 7: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee urged voters Tuesday to make opposition parties "pay the price" for bringing down his government and forcing the third general election since 1996, reports AFP.

"Vote against irresponsibility and opportunism," Vajpayee said in a nationwide address broadcast on state-run television.

"If destabilisation costs the country heavily, then make the destabilisers pay the price," Vajpayee said, urging the electorate to return his Hindu nationalist-led alliance with a large enough majority to provide a stable government.

"Teach our opponents how to sit in opposition for five years," he added.

Indians began casting their ballots Sunday in staggered general elections that have been split into five voting days, ending October 3.

Turnout was lower than average in the first round and Vajpayee reminded the country's 605 million voters of their "duty" to exercise their franchise.

Vajpayee's coalition government, which came to power in March 1998, collapsed in April this year after losing a confidence motion in parliament.

ment by a single vote.

The main opposition Congress party, led by Sonia Gandhi, was unable to secure the numerical support to form an alternative administration, forcing a general election.

"If our opponents could topple our government with one vote, your one vote will bring it back," Vajpayee said.

All the national and major regional parties have been allotted air time on state-run television and radio to deliver political broadcasts during the campaign.

In his 10-minute speech, Vajpayee stressed the commitment of his multi-party alliance to protecting India's secular traditions, and rejected opposition charges that the Hindu nationalists were bent on encouraging communal divisions.

"Contrary to the propaganda of our adversaries, the past 17 months have been remarkably free from communal tension," Vajpayee said.

"My message to our sisters and brothers belonging to minority communities is: Your welfare and the protection of all your legitimate interests is our responsibility."

The prime minister also spoke of a new, more confident nation arising out of the mili-

tary success in the recent conflict along the disputed Indo-Pakistan border in Kashmir.

India's victory over armed Islamic infiltrators in Kashmir has been cited as one of the major factors behind the strong showing of Vajpayee's alliance in the opinion polls.

The polls have predicted that the alliance, led by Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party will win between 310 and 320 seats in the 545-member parliament.

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee launched a scathing attack Tuesday on the opposition Congress Party and the foreign origins of its leader Sonia Gandhi.

Addressing a crowd of around 1,500 supporters after filing election nomination papers in his northern constituency of Lucknow, Vajpayee urged voters to consider if the Italian-born Gandhi would make a suitable prime minister.

"One has to discuss whether making a foreigner the most powerful person in the government is good or not," Vajpayee said.

"It is a question of principle. There should be a discussion. Many constitutions in many countries bar foreigners from becoming head of state."

Pakistan rings alarm over India's nuclear doctrine

ISLAMABAD, Sept 7: Pakistan on Tuesday sounded alarm bells over India's draft nuclear doctrine unveiled last month, urging the international community to "arrest" New Delhi's ambition for regional "military hegemony," reports AFP.

"The dangers are writ large for the world to see... Turning a blind eye will have grave implications," Foreign Secretary Shamsad Ahmad told a gathering including diplomats of major powers at the Institute of Strategic Studies.

He warned that the doctrine would deal a "deadly blow" to all international efforts at halting fissile material production, besides undermining major nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation objectives.

It would "provoke" Pakistan and compel others to "respond to the projected Indian military buildup — a triad of up to 400 operationally deployed ground, air and sea-based nuclear weapons."

The foreign secretary made it clear that Islamabad would not try to match India's "bomb or missile for missile" but would maintain a "credible nuclear deterrence."

Pakistan will not "like lem-

nings, follow India's militaristic example."

Pakistan believes that the international community needs to respond in a coherent and determined way to this 'doctrine' in order to arrest India's dangerous plans for nuclear and conventional arms escalation," he said.

China, Pakistan and the United States have all voiced concern over India's draft "nuclear doctrine," which envisages the development of a land, sea and air-based nuclear deterrent.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has insisted the doctrine is a draft for public discussion and not a final document.

Ahmad proposed a 10-point strategic restraint regime in South Asia and sought world support for it.

The plan calls for formalising unilateral moratoriums on nuclear tests declared by Pakistan and India after their tit-for-tat detonations last year into a "binding" bilateral arrangement.

It calls on the international community to ask India to assure its neighbours and the world that it will not opera-

tionally deploy its existing nuclear weapons and will not build "hundreds" of projected warheads.

Fighting spreads along Afghan battle lines

KABUL, Sept 7: Fighting along the frontline in the Afghan civil war continued Tuesday amid claims by the northern opposition that it had inflicted heavy casualties on the ruling Taliban militia, reports AFP.

An opposition spokesman said the fighting was heaviest along the Old Road about 50 km north of Kabul and at Nejrab, 60 km north east of the capital.

"At least 40 Taliban soldiers and Commander Mulla Khan Shukheer were killed in the fighting," he said.

Independent sources confirmed the fighting and the Taliban had maintained a bombing campaign against northern provinces with its ageing fleet of MIGs. However, they could not confirm the casualties.

A Taliban spokesman was unavailable for comment.



Indian troops frisk a passerby for arms and ammunition on a street in Srinagar in Indian-held Kashmir Tuesday. Security has been beefed up in Kashmir in view of the ongoing general elections. The first phase of voting, held on Sunday, saw a very low turnout as certain militant groups in the state had called for a boycott of the polls. Polling in the state comes to an end September 18.

— AFPphoto

BRIEFLY

Storm Wendy kills 133 in China: Tropical storm Wendy has killed 133 people and left 59 missing in southeastern province of Zhejiang, the China Daily reported yesterday. Reuters reports from Beijing.

Windy brought Zhejiang's "most serious storm in a century," the newspaper quoted provincial government spokesman Chen Jiming as saying. The newspaper said the storm injured 2,600 people and 528,000 people had been forced to leave their homes. Economic losses were around 2.3 billion yuan (\$277.9 million).

Japanese hostages are alive: Four Japanese hostages held by Islamic extremists in Kyrgyzstan said in a message transmitted by a mediator, that they were alive and well and waiting to be freed, AFP reports from Bishkek.

The Japanese geologists were among several hostages including a Kyrgyz general and soldier who were seized by the rebels on August 21. "Allah is great, we are alive and awaiting to be freed quickly," the four, being held in the country's southwest, said in the message.

Habibie summons top brass: Indonesian President BJ Habibie yesterday convened a special meeting of top military and police officials, sources at the Presidential Palace said, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Attending the meeting which began at 10:40 am (0340 GMT) were Armed Forces Chief General Wiranto, National Police Commander General Rusmanhadi and scores of other generals, they said. The meeting came after Indonesia earlier yesterday imposed martial law in the troubled territory of East Timor, attacked by violence following its overwhelming pro-independence vote on August 30.

Asia possesses worst record of child labour: ILO

BANGKOK, Sept 7: Asia has the world's worst record on child labour, with 153 million youngsters slogging through hours of often dangerous and degrading work every day, the International Labour Office (ILO) said today, reports AFP.

One, in five Asian children between the ages of five and 14 are in a juvenile workforce swelled by Asia's economic crisis, said ILO envoy Werner Blenk.

"Child labour is mostly a hidden phenomenon," said Blenk, who heads the ILO's international programme on the elimination of child labour.

"The vast majority of child labourers are in Asia."

The Geneva-based ILO estimates 250 million children under the age of 14 years were at work in developing countries worldwide, and of these 61 per cent were in Asia.

Financial turmoil which engulfed Asia in mid-1997 led to increases in the worst forms of child labour, including traf-

ficking in children, prostitution, debt bondage, slavery and the use of children in armed conflict, Blenk said.

The ILO is hosting a three-day Asian regional meeting on child labour beginning Wednesday on the southern Thai island of Phuket, attended by representatives of governments, workers and employers from 13 countries.

The meeting is part of an International Labour Organisation campaign for the ratification of a convention banning the worst forms of child labour adopted in June, aimed at liberating millions of exploited Asian youngsters.

The International Labour Office is the secretariat of the International Labour Organisation, which meets annually.

The convention targets child trafficking, child prostitution, forced recruitment of young- sters into military service, drug selling and work that endangers health.

Representatives from

Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, will be at the Phuket meeting.

"We have about 250 million working children all over the world, half of them, full time, a very considerable portion of them... performing hazardous work," Blenk said.

"It does not mostly happen in what we refer to as the formal part of the economy, but it happens in the informal part, in the small shops."

He said Asia's economic crisis in particular saw informal economic activities boom.

"What we see... from our daily involvement with the grassroots level is that the number of children in the informal sector is growing."

"Employment conditions of the children working in the informal sector are further dropping," Blenk said an estimated 22

per cent of Asia's children were forced to work mostly full time. Behind Asia, Africa has a distant second with 80 million child labourers.

Latin America had some 17 million child labourers, while Oceania had about 500,000.

Blenk said South Asian nations were the worst offenders, but had made major advances in recognising the scale of the problem, as had southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia.

"Very clearly South Asia is where you have huge numbers of working children."

However, he warned the countries of most concern were those which had so far declined to work with the ILO in tackling the issue of child labour.

"Myanmar is a case in point," he added. He said the ILO saw no scope for working with Myanmar's ruling military, which had consistently flouted the most basic humanitarian principles.

Parties training activists in martial arts in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Sept 7: Political parties in India's northeast are organising private militia and training activists in martial arts, as the shadow of insurgency looms large over upcoming elections, reports AFP.

"We have formed people's resistance groups and are imparting physical training on self-defence to thwart militant attacks," Rubul Sharma, who heads the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in Assam State, said Tuesday.

"These groups will be deployed in several constituencies," Sharma said.

Voters in Assam must wait until October 3 to cast their ballots in the fifth and final stage of India's staggered general elections.

Some 10,000 people have been killed in separatist-linked violence in Assam in the past decade, and the main militant outfit in the state -- the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) -- has called for a boycott of the elections.

The main opposition Congress party has called in experts to train party activists in

martial arts, although party officials indicated that they were more worried about electoral malpractice than militant attacks.

"Our aim is to make our cadres conscious about rigging and booth capturing," said Tarun Gogoi, president of Congress party in Assam.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the local chapter of the ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party, which has also organised "combat classes" for its cadres.

Some have voiced deep reservations, saying the "self-defence" groups were actually formed to intimidate voters and supporters of rival parties.

"The is very unfortunate and undemocratic," said Dilip Patgiri, president of a radical students' organisation.

Even the outlawed ULFA has complained.

"These armies of hooligans are meant to capture polling booths and unleash a reign of terror on the struggling people," said a commentary in the front's mouthpiece publication, Swadhinata.