

International

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 officials 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

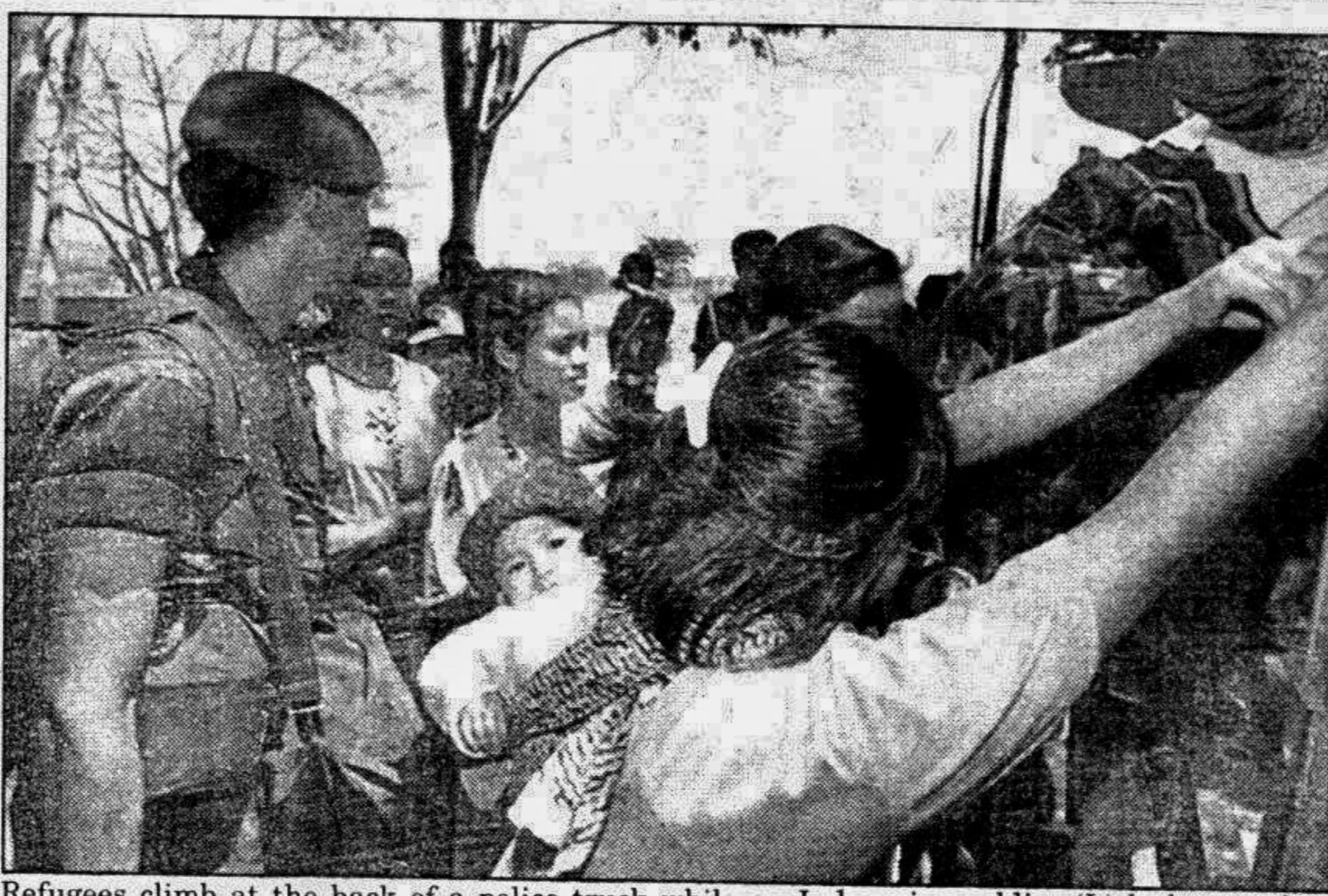
A commander of the pro-Indonesian militias in East Timor said Tuesday his men were ready to "burn everything" if the territory's independence vote is not held again.

"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," Hermínio da Silva da Costa told AFP.

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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

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, a local official said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The two, identified as Mohammad Talib al-Alami and Anwar Shaikh 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 Qoreish, and members of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Plans for September 9 or Four Nines Day (9/9/99), 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 transferred 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.

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.

— AFP photo

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.

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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.

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— AFP photo

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.

Wendy 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, wracked 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 50 million children under the age of 14 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 Organisation 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 rates 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 has no scope for working with Myanmar's ruling military, which had consistently flouted the most basic humanitarian principles.

— AFP photo

Gaddafi opens 4-day OAU summit

TRIPOLI, Libya, Sept 7: Col. Moammar Gaddafi 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," Gaddafi told African foreign ministers at the opening session of the four-day extraordinary gathering. "We have no future without unity."

Gaddafi 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 Gaddafi 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."

Yeltsin roasts military over performance in Dagestan

MOSCOW, Sept 7: President Boris Yeltsin lambasted the military's performance in Dagestan on Tuesday, as government forces continued to struggle to quell the deepening conflict in the southern Russian republic, reports AFP.

Yeltsin told his young prime minister Vladimir Putin that "carelessness by the military" had led to Saturday's bomb attack on an apartment block housing servicemen in the city of Buinaksk, news agencies quoted him as saying.

The daily Vremya said the Russian military operation in Dagestan was confused, saying commanders often did not have details of their own casualties or precise details on the movements of federal troops.

Sonia has every right to become PM: Jyoti Basu

CALCUTTA, Sept 7: Even as West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu yesterday said that Sonia Gandhi had every right to be prime minister, his close confidant and State Home Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya said she was "unfit for the top job", reports PTI.

Lambasting the Congress for projecting her as the party's prime ministerial candidate, Bhattacharya told newspapers here "this only shows the bankruptcy of the Congress".

While Atal Behari Vajpeyi has proved to be a disaster as prime minister, the Congress chief will fare no better. She has no experience of leading either the country or a party like the Congress," he said.

Plans for consolidated their control of the Novolakskoye district on Dagestan's western border