

Global warming could spawn more hurricanes

GENEVA, Sept 15: Global warming could spawn more super-hurricanes like the one heading for southeastern United States, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) warned Wednesday, reports AFP.

Hurricane Floyd, which on Tuesday ripped through the Bahamas, could be succeeded by others unless governments do more to combat global warming, the WWF said in a statement.

Adam Markham, director of the WWF Climate Change campaign, said analysis of its latest scientific data suggested that the Atlantic could find itself "ripped apart by a barrage of super-hurricanes during La Nina years."

La Nina is a cyclical weather phenomenon that produces unusually higher ocean temperatures in the tropical Atlantic.

"Stoking up sleeping giants like super-hurricanes endangers the safety and prosperity of coastal communities in entire regions. It could also mean enormous destruction of wildlife and nature on land and in the sea," he said.

Markham called on the US administration of President Bill Clinton to "help minimise the risk by taking an international lead with prompt and cost-effective measures to reduce global warming emission in the US."

Between 1995 and 1998 there were 33 hurricanes, the name for powerful storms in the Atlantic and Caribbean, known as typhoons in the Pacific.

UN admits 3 more members

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 15: The United Nations admitted three new members Tuesday, adding the South Pacific island nations of Nauru, Kiribati and the Kingdom of Tonga to its ranks at the start of the 1999-2000 session of the General Assembly, reports AP.

The General Assembly also inaugurated its new president, Namibian Foreign Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab, who used his first speech to highlight the colonial struggle of Africa and call for an apology from its "invaders and slave-traders."

"The horrors of slavery and destruction wrought upon Africa and its people cannot be forgotten," Gurirab told the assembly, which now comprises 188 members. "Now is the time for reconciliation and healing."

The message had particular resonance in the General Assembly hall, as many recalled Gurirab's efforts a decade ago at the United Nations to bring about independence for Namibia after 75 years of South African rule.

Gurirab was the UN observer and foreign secretary of the South-West Africa People's Organisation, which fought South Africa for independence and won Namibia's first elections in 1989.

"It is perhaps a fortuitous but fitting coincidence of history that, at the century's end, both the secretary-general of the United Nations and the president of the General Assembly are sons of Africa," he said. "The two of us represent those heroic struggles and the final triumph of the human spirit."

Pinochet regrets brutality

SANTIAGO, Sept 15: Former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, apparently aiming to heal the deep emotional rifts left here in the wake of his brutal 17-year regime, said he regretted the repression that marked his rule, reports AFP.

"To that effect, I sincerely declare that there is no hate or rancour in my soul," Pinochet said in a letter delivered to Chile's Senate leader and made public Tuesday.

"Moreover, the pain of those who suffered was not alien to me neither in the past nor now," wrote the ageing general who is under house arrest in a wealthy estate London.

Pinochet was arrested in London last October at the request of Spain, which wants to put him on trial for human rights abuses during his 1973-1990 dictatorship.

Extradition proceedings start on September 27 to determine if he should be delivered to Spain on charges of torture and conspiracy to torture.

Pinochet, now 83, has said he is innocent.

"I regret all the belligerent situations and acts of violence," he wrote, calling for a change of attitude here to bring about reconciliation.

"One can see in the country encouraging signs of a search to heal the wounds of the past which have not been able to close," Pinochet wrote.

"I fervently hope that all Chileans will join in the effort to find the truth about our history and to find the country's real identity, which can only come from deep and sublime virtues of the spirit," Pinochet said in his letter.

But round table talks joining members of Chile's military and human rights representatives to discuss the fate of those who disappeared during Pinochet's rule have so far failed to produce any results.

And a 10,000-strong march last Saturday to the tomb of former president Salvador Allende, killed in the coup that placed Pinochet in power in 1973, made clear that the people remain deeply divided over Pinochet's legacy to the country.

Pinochet also faced 42 criminal cases in Chilean courts, including two new ones filed Tuesday, related to the disappearances of 1,198 prisoners during his rule.

Missile transfer to Pakistan: China may face US sanctions

WASHINGTON, Sept 15: The United States has new evidence that China may have transferred medium-range missiles to Pakistan. The discovery raises the possibility of tough sanctions against China and adds potential complication to a relationship that seemed headed for recovery after a difficult period, reports AP.

State Department spokesman James Foley called the possible transfer of M-11 missiles, with a range of about 250 miles (402 kilometres), a matter of "grave national security importance" to the United States.

A national intelligence estimate concluded that the transfer took place, but Foley

said Tuesday that policy and legal determinations have yet to be made.

An intelligence judgment is not a sufficient basis for applying technology-transfer sanctions, Foley said.

"It depends to a large extent on the nature of the evidence underlying that judgment, and before the law can be triggered, all the various elements of the missile sanctions law must be satisfied," he said.

He added: "If we believe that the case can be made within the law on such a violation, we will impose sanctions."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi said he was aware of the report and considered it an old allegation.

One US official said sanctions against China could add up to "big bucks." Pakistan also

would be subject to sanctions, but it would not be materially affected because the country already is under penalty because of violations covered by separate legislation.

The sanctions are part of the US effort to deter the transfer of missiles and missile technology. The law under which the sanctions would be applied uses standards outlined in the Missile Technology Control Regime, an international anti-proliferation effort.

The penalties would deny high-technology equipment to the Chinese organisation involved in the transfer. They also would extend to activities of the Chinese government relating to development of MTCR

This issue has lasted for a long time, and I think it already has been put to an end," Sun said. "I think the relevant report is playing the same old tune, and it can only further undermine Chinese-US bilateral relations, which already have been damaged."

The report was quietly declassified last Thursday, two days before President Bill Clinton and Chinese President Jiang Zemin met in New Zealand amid predictions by both sides that the two governments would overcome prickly disputes that soured relations in recent months.

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missiles or MTCR components or affecting production of electronic and space systems or equipment and military aircraft.

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Chinese-American relations have been suffered in recent months since the accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May as well as allegations that China stole secrets from US nuclear weapons laboratories.

Human rights also has been

a sore point in relations — as was apparent in an angry response Tuesday of Chinese Ambassador Li Zhaoxing to critical remarks by a senior State Department official at a forum on US-Chinese relations sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Susan Shirk said a Chinese crackdown on unregistered religious activity had harmed the country's internal and international relations.

She also included many positive comments about ties between Washington and Beijing. When she ended her remarks, Li declined to join others in the large gathering who applauded Shirk's presentation.

The driver was detained for questioning but it was unclear whether he was linked to two deadly bombings that demolished Moscow apartment buildings Monday and September 9, killing over 200 people.

Mayor Yury Luzhkov meanwhile told police and local interior ministry troops to check all attics and basements in the city once again and special controls were placed on sugar supplies from Russia's southern regions.

Police and interior ministry troops were deployed on Moscow's main thoroughfares Wednesday, searching cars and verifying documents as the security clampdown went into full gear.

International

UN okays multinational force for E Timor

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 15: The United Nations on Wednesday approved sending a multinational peacekeeping force to East Timor while US President Bill Clinton warned that Indonesia was responsible for stopping the violence in the region before the peacekeepers arrived, reports AFP.

The 15 members of the UN Security Council voted unanimously early Wednesday for a resolution authorising deployment of the multinational force.

The resolution did not specify the size or composition of the force, but a British spokesman had earlier said it would contain between 5,000 and 7,000 soldiers.

The force -- which will not be a UN operation and which could take weeks to organise -- should be "replaced as soon as possible by a United Nations peacekeeping operation" in the transition to independence, the resolution

stated.

The resolution also condemned the violence that erupted after the East Timorese voted by a four-to-one majority for independence in a referendum organised by the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) on August 30 and demanded that "those responsible for such acts be brought to justice".

British ambassador Jeremy Greenstock, who drafted the UN resolution, said that it "gives the multinational force a framework that enables them to take all measures necessary to restore peace and security in East Timor, to help UNAMET and to enable the humanitarian organisations to get to the people who really matter, who are the refugees and the people starving up in the hills."

In East Timor, tens of thousands of residents continue hiding in the hills outside the capital, Dili, some reportedly surviving on roots and leaves. The

refugees were driven out of the cities by violence following the August 30 vote.

Meanwhile Clinton, travelling in New Zealand after a major Asia-Pacific economic conference in Auckland, said that Jakarta "has a responsibility" to provide security in the interim period before the peacekeepers arrived.

"The people are still vulnerable to attack. Many have fled their homes. Many are short of food," he said during a stop in the city of Christchurch.

"We continue to receive reports of violence and intimidation which Indonesia has a responsibility to prevent," Clinton said.

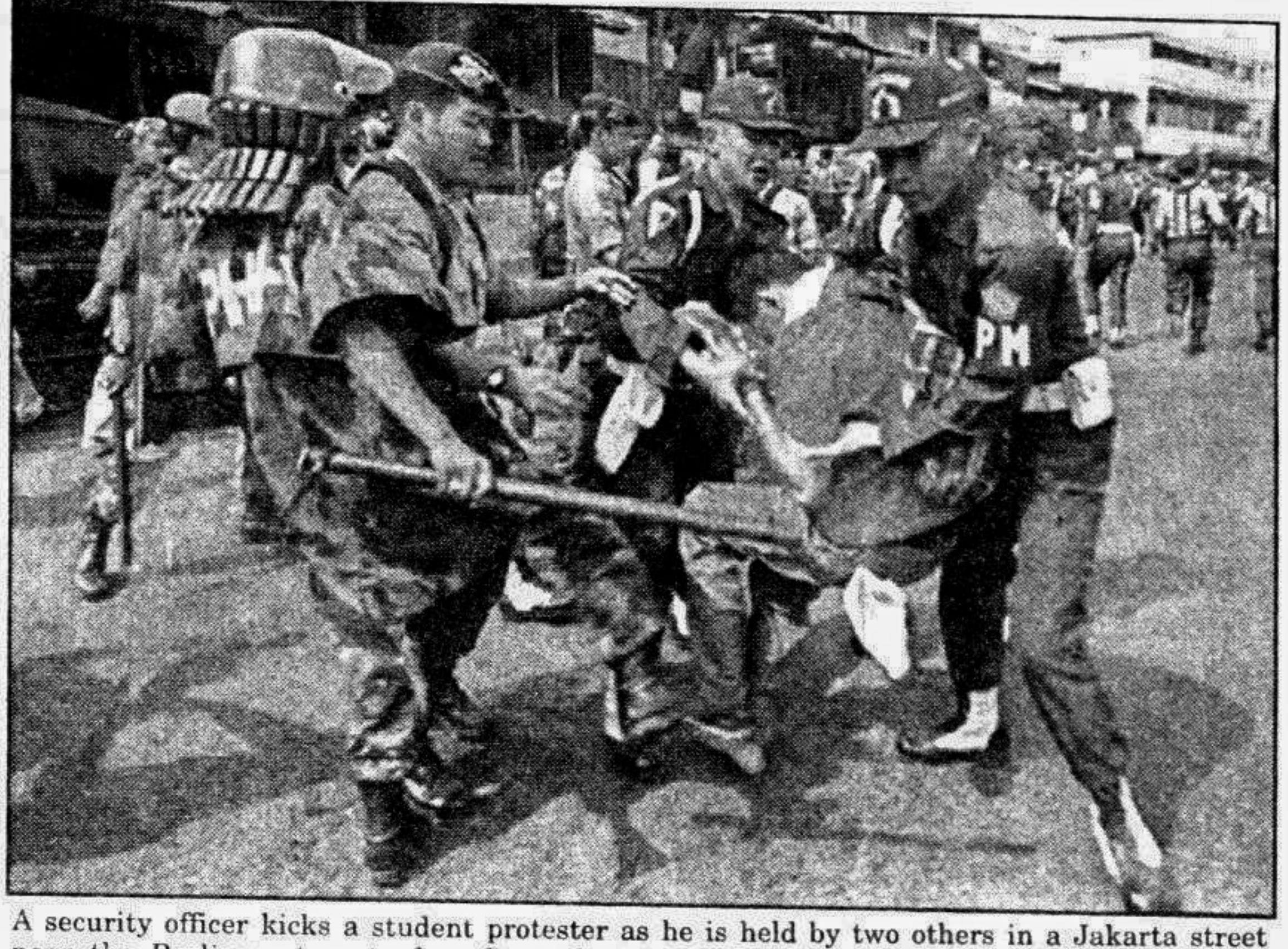
The prime minister said the rules of engagement for the force had not yet been determined, but he said the Security Council resolution was "quite wide" and should allow peacekeepers to avoid situations like those encountered in Bosnia where their hands were tied in certain situations.

In Canberra, Australian Prime Minister John Howard said his country was ready to lead a quick military deployment to East Timor.

"It is vitally important that the multinational force be deployed quickly," Howard said. "Australia is working with other contributors to ensure the earliest possible arrival of the force."

In response to worries voiced by Indonesia, Howard said there would be "a very significant element of ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) participation in the multinational force."

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A security officer kicks a student protester as he is held by two others in a Jakarta street near the Parliament yesterday. Several protesters were arrested as they attempted to reach the Parliament building to protest against the security bill.

— AFP photo



Disney World visitors leave the park after an announcement that it would close early Tuesday as Hurricane Floyd approaches the east coast of the US. This is the first time in the park's 28-year history that it has been closed. Park officials said they would reopen it on Wednesday.

Hurricane Floyd batters Bahamas

Two million flee US east coast

MIAMI, Sept 15: A massive hurricane furiously lashed the islands would be Eleuthera, the Abacos, and the eastern tip of Grand Bahama, and said he'd be surprised if Floyd took no casualties.

At 11 p.m. (0300 GMT) Floyd was just north of the northern Bahama but the islands were still experiencing hurricane-force winds, according to the US National Hurricane Centre.

As Hurricane Floyd, packing sustained winds of 225 kilometres (140 miles) per hour, crashed down into the Atlantic islands, an eerie silence closed the White House said.

The storm was centred 100 kilometres (170 miles) east-southeast of Cape Canaveral, Florida, and was moving northwest at 21 kilometres (13 miles) per hour.

"We are very concerned" about the damage Floyd would cause in the Bahamas, said Max Mayfield, deputy director of the National Hurricane Centre.

Forecasters expected the

New EC body approved

STRASBOURG, Sept 15: The European Parliament on Wednesday confirmed a new 20-member European Commission, headed by President Romano Prodi, to replace the one swept out in a corruption scandal last March, reports AFP.

Prodi, a former Italian premier, promised a new era of honesty and openness in the commission, which runs the day-to-day business of the European Union.

He invited Europe to "look over my shoulder" as he forged a "union of hearts and minds" within the EU.

"I want to bring Europe out from behind closed doors and into the light of public scrutiny," he said earlier. "I want people to look over my shoulder."

Prodi's commission is to replace the one that was forced to resign en masse last March in a corruption scandal that shook the EU to its foundations, and the thrust of his speech to parliament on Tuesday was reform, healing and confidence-building.

9 killed in Kashmir mine blast

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 15: Nine people, including two Muslim separatists, were killed in northern Kashmir when militants accidentally triggered a landmine they were assembling, police said Wednesday.

President Bill Clinton on Tuesday declared a federal state of emergency in Florida and Georgia, and decided to return to Washington from New Zealand earlier than scheduled to monitor the situation, the White House said.

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"We are very concerned" about the damage Floyd would cause in the Bahamas, said Max Mayfield, deputy director of the National Hurricane Centre.

Forecasters expected the

hurricane to run parallel to the Florida coast and make landfall around the Carolinas by early Thursday morning, if not sooner, Pennington said.

President Clinton on Tuesday declared a federal state of emergency in Florida and Georgia, and decided to return to Washington from New Zealand earlier than scheduled to monitor the situation, the White House said.

The highly destructive hurricane was thrusting maximum sustained winds of nearly 220 kilometres (140 miles) per hour down from earlier higher winds, but still menacing.

Floyd remains an extremely dangerous category four hurricane" with hurricane force winds extending outward up to 205 kilometres (125 miles) from the centre, the NWS warned.

The building was levelled in the blast, which injured four others.

Muslim separatists have called for a complete boycott in Kashmir of India's staggered general elections, which began on September 5 and end on October 3.

Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, has been wracked by separatist violence which has claimed more than 25,000 lives since 1989.

US deploying N-arms in ROK, alleges DPRK

SEOUL, Sept 15: North Korea on Wednesday accused the United States of deploying more than 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons in rival South Korea to be used against the communist state, reports AFP.

Washington has neither confirmed nor denied the existence of nuclear weapons in South Korea.

This has turned South Korea into an area highest in the density of strategic weapons deployment in the world," the KCNA said.

North Korea also charged that "over 130 (US) warplanes of different types" are now deployed in South Korea "for the delivery of nuclear bombs."

The fact is that Muslims offered Namaz in the Babri Masjid right upto the night of 22-23 December, 1999 and were forced to keep out by the unfair Order of the administration, till it was demolished on December six, 1999, Shahabuddin said in a statement here.

He further stated that the Gyanvapi Mosque (adjoining Vishwanath Temple) in Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah Masjid (adjoining Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple in Mathura) were functional even today and Namaz is regularly offered there.

The rapidly changing poll scenario and the current trends suggest that the Congress would do "much better than that, though it would still trail the BJP by a big margin," said the survey.

In the 349 constituencies that would have gone to polls by this weekend, the ruling alliance is likely to win 189 and the Congress block 136 seats, the newspaper said.

The opposition Congress, which earlier was forecast to lose heavily to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's ruling alliance, may increase its share of ballots by a massive 11 per cent in voting Saturday, said the survey in The Times of India daily.