

# 'Violence may have killed tens of thousands in East Timor'

Militias defiant as peace force approaches

LONDON, Sept 19 : The violence in East Timor may have claimed tens of thousands of lives, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said in a BBC-TV interview on Sunday, reports AFP.

Downer said he had no precise figures on casualties, blamed on Indonesian troops and anti-independence militiamen, but "it could be as high as tens of thousands rather than hundreds."

Last week, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation estimated that 7,000 people had been killed in East Timor, while between 300,000 and 400,000 had been displaced and more than 200,000 were at risk of starvation.

Downer described the devastation of property in East Timor as "very substantial," saying he had been informed that "something like two-thirds" of the buildings in the capital city, Dili, had been burned out.

The 7,000-strong multinational force preparing to take over from the Indonesians in East Timor -- commanded by

Australia -- would probably have to remain in place for two to three months, he said.

It would give way to a "more familiar kind of United Nations peacekeeping operation which will not be quite so overwhelmingly Australian," he added.

"But that will then in turn be in place for quite some time because the UN will administer East Timor for a period which could be around two years before East Timor becomes a fully-independent country," Downer said.

In Jakarta, East Timor's feared militias were defiant Sunday as peacekeepers approached their shores, vowing to resist and insisting the territory be split between their supporters and those who favour independence.

Eurico Guterres, commander of the pro-Jakarta Aitarak militia which has waged a campaign of terror in East Timor, warned his men would not be pushed out of their homeland by the international troops poised to land there Monday.

The leader of the UN forces

from Australia is very wrong if he said he will repel the members of the PPI the moment he lands in East Timor," he said, speaking for the main militia group Pro-Integration Forces (PPI) of which he is deputy commander.

"He cannot force me to live in place for quite some time because the UN will administer East Timor for a period which could be around two years before East Timor becomes a fully-independent country," Downer said.

"It is hard to say whether or not the same militias who have visited this awful violence on East Timor will feel like trying their hand against a modern military force," he said.

Militia leaders have vowed to "fight to the last drop of blood" to retain control of the territory but Guterres did not say Sunday whether they still intended to resist the international peacekeepers by force.

After a brief visit to Dili to discuss preparations for the peace force's deployment, Cosgrove said he was concerned about the threats of violence.

"This is a cause for concern and I really hope that they will

understand that our mission here is only to bring assistance to all East Timorese in need of assistance," he told reporters.

But he said he had not yet had an opportunity to assess the risk for himself.

Shortly before he departed from the northern Australian city of Darwin with his advance delegation, Cosgrove said he anticipated "some disquiet" at the peacekeepers' arrival.

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However, a pro-Indonesia activist speaking from Atambua, across the border in West Timor, promised there would be attacks on the troops, which include a strong contingent from Indonesia's southeast Asian neighbours.



Commander of the United Nations peacekeeping force for East Timor Major General Peter Cosgrove (2nd L) boards an Australian Air Force plane from Darwin to East Timor yesterday. Cosgrove leads a UN delegation to Dili to prepare the way for peacekeeping troops expected to arrive today in the troubled territory.

— AFP photo

A polling station in India to cater just 3 voters

GUWAHATI, India, Sept 19 : A polling centre in a remote hamlet in the far-eastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh caters to just three voters -- who don't seem too keen to vote, reports AFP.

According to officials, it is located at 8,500 feet (2,575 meters) above sea level at Chaku village, some 120 km from the town of Bomdila.

Polling officials had to trek to the polling station because part of the mountain road leading to it had been damaged by landslides.

The only three voters live in two huts at Chaku.

"We shall have to make all formalities to conduct polls at Chaku despite the fact that there are just three voters," said Arun Daroka, the area's chief election officer.

In the 1998 elections, none of the three voted.

**Gunmen kill Sunni Muslim cleric in Hyderabad**

KARACHI, Sept 19 : Unidentified gunmen shot and killed a Sunni Muslim cleric outside a mosque in the southern city of Hyderabad early Sunday, police said, reports AFP.

Haifz Mohammad Jafrees, 50, a leader of Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadis, was shot dead by two gunmen as he left a mosque in central Sraygha neighborhood of Hyderabad, 120 kilometers (72 miles) north of the port city of Karachi, a police official said on condition of anonymity.

No group has claimed responsibility for the killing.

But police said the Sunni Muslim Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadis has been waging a dispute with another Sunni Muslim group over the control of mosques in Hyderabad.

No arrests have been made so far.

Rival Muslims sects routinely clash in Pakistan over ideological and religious differences.

**Orbiter to begin circling Mars on Thursday**

WASHINGTON, Sept 19 : The human fascination with Mars will enter a new phase Thursday when the US space probe Mars Climate Orbiter begins circling the red planet, peering at it from various angles and sending reports back to Earthling controllers, reports AFP.

"After travelling 670 million km (416 million miles) during the last nine months, Mars Climate Orbiter is now ready for its most dramatic moment, the orbit insertion burn," said Sam Thurman, the probe's flight operations manager at NASA.

The unmanned probe is to observe the seasons and study the distribution of water on Earth's red neighbour.

Three months later, a second product of the rebirth of human attention aimed at Mars -- the Mars Polar Lander -- will actually land on the planet and look for underground water.

The document asked for ex-

## Lanka tightens security Ethnic bloodbath raises int'l worry as 76 villagers perish

COLOMBO, Sept 19 : Sri Lanka's ethnic bloodbath has worsened with the slaughter of 76 civilians in attacks amid mounting international concern for the innocents caught between government troops and Tamil Tigers, reports AFP.

Women fighters of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas butchered 54 ethnic-Sinhalese villagers Saturday in one of the bloodiest massacres in the embattled country in over four years.

The slaughter was seen by many here as a tit-for-tat revenge attack by the LTTE to avenge the deaths of 22 minority Tamil civilians who were blown to pieces by an airforce bombing raid three days earlier.

The attacks are again shifting towards civilians and as fighting between government

forces and the rebels intensify, the civilians will suffer more," an international aid worker here said.

Western diplomats here noted that the number of violent incidents in the past six months had been mounting adding to a daily death. About 10 to 15 people are killed in the conflict each day.

In the past three months, there have been a spate of spectacular suicide attacks carried out by the Tamil Tigers claiming heavy losses among government troops, civilians and Tamil Tigers, reports AFP.

The LTTE's July 29 suicide bombing of a moderate Tamil legislator here drew international condemnation and calls for a speedy resolution to the dragging separatist conflict which has claimed more than 55,000 lives in the past 27 years.

Junior defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte ordered more than 100 para-military homeguards to be deployed in the district of Ampara, 350 km east of here after Saturday's massacre, officials said.

He said the authorities had made arrangements for mass burial at a cemetery in the same village where the attack took place early Saturday.

Armed troops take up positions at a funeral Saturday after Tamil Tiger guerrillas massacred 54 ethnic Sinhalese at the eastern Sri Lankan village of Puncisigiriya. A total of 54 ethnic Sinhalese were massacred in a retaliatory attack for an airforce raid that killed 22 Tamil civilians three days earlier.

— AFP photo

**Bin Laden followers in Turkey for bomb attacks**

ANKARA, Sept 19 : Turkish anti-terrorism police have been put on alert over reports that six followers of Saudi billionaire Osama Bin Laden were in Turkey planning bomb attacks on US and British diplomatic missions, a newspaper said on Sunday.

Citing a police document, the liberal Milliyet daily said that the six men, four Kurds and two Algerians, entered Turkey in June from Iran to plan the attacks.

Two Iranians, meanwhile, were on stand-by in Iran, the report said.

Washington has offered a reward of five million dollars for information leading to bin Laden's arrest.

The document asked for ex-

tra security measures around US and British embassies as a precaution against possible attacks, Milliyet said.

British and US diplomats were not immediately available for comment on the report.

Bin Laden, believed to be in Afghanistan, is accused by the United States of masterminding bloody bomb attacks against its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August of last year which killed more than 220 people.

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