

Indonesia agrees to let E Timor refugees go home

JAKARTA, Oct 3: Indonesia has agreed to let hundreds of thousands of East Timorese refugees in West Timor return home, a UNHCR official said Sunday, reports AFP.

"The government has agreed to begin repatriation," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Fernando del Mundo said by telephone from the East Timorese capital of Dili.

"Today we met with police and TNI (Indonesian army) officials in Kupang (West Timor) and we told them we plan to begin the movement in the next few days."

The first to leave by airlift to Dili, Del Mundo said, would be around 100 of the "most vulnerable."

In Dili, the returnees would be met and taken care of by UNHCR staff, he added. All that was awaited was the go-ahead from the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET).

The UNHCR and non-governmental organisations say many of the refugees are living in fear of the militia, who control many of the camps. Reports of pro-independence advocates disappearing from the camps and killings are rife.

In Kupang's Tupa Pukan camp on Wednesday night in the same camp a man was picked up after speaking to a Western reporter. He has not been seen since. In Atambua, where more than 100,000 refugees are housed, sources with a non-



East Timorese pro-Indonesia "MAHIDI" militias ride on the back of a truck holding their weapons on the way to Meliana from Atambua, West Timor, yesterday. Some 6,500 Pro-Indonesia militias prepared for resistance to protect their land against Pro-independent armed movement (Falintil) and International Forces in East Timor (INTERFET).

governmental organisation who preferred to remain anonymous said "kidnappings are going on almost every night."

But despite the breakthrough, reports from East Timor quoted one refugee who had slipped back across the border as saying the Indonesian military were blocking the frontier. "The TNI (Indonesian

armed forces) are stopping vehicles going back and are threatening to kill the people in them," Domingos dos Santos said in the town of Balibo.

Following the announcement in Kupang, reports surfaced of Indonesian government officials giving red cards to camp refugees who wanted to return home, and blue cards to those who wanted to stay.

Those receiving red cards were said to have their rations cut.

Meanwhile leaders of pro-Jakarta militia met on Sunday in West Timor, vowing to continue their struggle to reclaim East Timor for Indonesia, a report said, says AFP.

"We remain committed to keeping the red and white flag in East Timor. We are ready to die for integration," chief militia commander Joao Tavares was quoted by the state Antara news agency as saying.

Tavares is the commander of the Integration Fighters' Force (PFI), under which all pro-Jakarta militias are grouped.

Among those present at the "consolidation" meeting in the village of Mota Ian was Eurico Gutierrez, leader of the notorious Aitarak militia group and deputy commander of PFI.

The Aitarak went on a bloody rampage in the East Timorese capital Dili after people in the former Portuguese colony voted overwhelmingly for independence on August 30.

The violence triggered world outrage and the arrival of foreign peacekeeping troops.

Hundreds of the militia poured into the Indonesian West Timor, along with more than 200,000 refugees, after the independent vote, while those who remained in the East are being rounded up and disarmed by Interfet.

China visibly relaxed, delighted over golden jubilee celebrations

BEIJING, Oct 3: China's elderly communist leaders are reveling in the smooth-running of the celebrations of their 50-year grip on power, breathing a sigh of relief as intense security crackdown paid dividends, reports AFP.

Beijing visibly relaxed and returned to normal on Sunday, with the security barriers and knots of police that mushroomed on street corners disappearing.

A ring of steel was clamped on the city for months in the run-up to Friday's elaborate military and civilian parade through Tiananmen Square.

Disidents were rounded up, criminals executed and undesirable such as prostitutes and beggars hurried out of the city, as a nervous Communist Party acted tough to ensure nothing would spoil their big day.

At Beijing's main train station rural jobseekers began flooding back into the city on Sunday.

"They can all come back now. The National Day celebrations are over. I expect the hookers will also be back within a couple of days," said one middle-aged Beijing resident.

Wang Xuyong, a 41-year-old woman looking for work near the station, ducked and dived to avoid being banished from Beijing last week and was now desperately looking for work so she could send money back to her husband and two children in the countryside.



The celebrations at Tiananmen Square in Beijing last Friday as China celebrated its 50th anniversary of communist rule with a grand patriotic extravaganza of around 500,000 hand-picked soldiers, students and "model citizens".

She said she did not watch the anniversary parade on television.

"It's only meaningful to the rich. To poor people, what's so meaningful about National Day if you don't have enough to eat," Wang said.

The 128-acre Tiananmen Square and its surroundings were hermetically sealed for Friday's grandiose Communist

septic.

Snipers were positioned on roofs and only 500,000 carefully-screened party loyalists, media and military were allowed within several kilometres of President Jiang Zemin as he addressed the nation from Tiananmen Gate where Mao Zedong founded communist China on October 1, 1949.

Jiang and fellow politburo

members looked solemn and anxious throughout the occasion, rarely smiling and showing the strain of spending hours on their feet in the sun. They loosened up as they donned casual clothes for a stage-managed walk in Beijing's many parks on Saturday, and the presidential walkabout brought a new army of nervous security agents onto the streets.

Stupidity of Japan's nuclear disaster stuns experts

Plant operator admits illegal manual in nuclear accident

TOKYO, Oct 3: The operator of the uranium plant where Japan's worst nuclear accident occurred last week admitted Sunday it had used illegal standards for uranium processing for four years, reports AFP.

"Knowing that the standards did not meet legal requirements, the firm had operated for some four years," said Hideki Motoki, a spokesman for JCO Co., which runs the troubled uranium-processing facility in Tokaimura.

The company changed its procedure manual without government approval, using necessary facilities.

"But it is not certain whether the violation caused the accident," Motoki told AFP. "We need more time to reach a conclusion as the workers involved in the accident remain in hospital."

Police are investigating

JCO and its employees on suspicion of professional negligence, news reports said.

Meanwhile experts in Japan have been left stunned by the child-like stupidity that led to the world's worst nuclear accident since the 1996 Chernobyl disaster.

The professional standards "we are talking about here are those of elementary school children," said Nobuo Oda, an emeritus professor of radiation physics at Tokyo Institute of Technology.

JCO "must have been run by amateurs," said the Tokyo Institute of Technology expert. The accident demonstrated "gross amateurism and low morale among plant workers," the professor said.

"The company lacks both fundamental knowledge of nuclear matters and safety measures and it is mind-boggling to

think how both the JCO and the government allowed this to happen," Oda said.

The accident exposed at least 49 people to radiation and forced more than 320,000 people to shelter in their homes for more than 24 hours. The three workers are in hospital with radiation sickness, two of them gravely ill.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said the Tokaimura accident was provisionally placed at four on the seven-point scale, making it the worst since Chernobyl, which scored seven points.

"This accident is not about technical failure, but about a sheer lack of safety culture and poor morale at the plant," said Keiji Naito, an emeritus professor of nuclear engineering at Nagoya University.

Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi agreed.

Two killed as gunmen clash with Pak police

MULTAN, Pakistan, Oct 3: A clash between police and alleged terrorists in a central Pakistani town early Sunday left two people dead, police said.

Officials said police were escorting a criminal from Vehari, 100 kilometres west of Multan to their interrogation centre when two motorcyclists attacked their van.

Police "retaliated" killing one assailant, an official told AFP adding that his accomplice managed to escape.

The prisoner, under trial in several criminal cases, also died in the shootout, officials said.

Sunday's gunbattle came amid a wave of bloody sectarian violence in Pakistan in which 24 people have died since Friday, mostly members of the minority Shiite community.

The Shiite political party Tehrik-i-Jafria, Pakistan, has blamed a Sunni Muslim extremist group, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), for the killings. The SSP denied the charge.

Embassy gunmen leave trail of mystery Myanmar closes frontier with Thailand

BANGKOK, Oct 3: Myanmar closed its border with Thailand and reinforced its frontier troops following the release of five armed rebels, who had held diplomats and others hostage at the Myanmar embassy here, reports agencies.

Thai border forces were also put on alert as a precautionary measure after the young Myanmar militants were flown away by helicopter and set free on Saturday.

In a statement that could lead to a rift between Thailand and Myanmar, Thai interior minister Sanan Kachornprasart described the hostage-takers as "students fighting for democracy." But Myanmar military government branded the five young rebels as criminals and terrorists and is likely to view Thailand's tolerant attitude as provocative.

Meanwhile, the entire episode has left behind a trail of mystery paradoxes. Who the gunmen actually were, and if

their action signals a resort to violence by Myanmar students in their quest for democracy after years of political stalemate, remain uncertain.

The five armed men calling themselves the "Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors" held almost 40 people hostage, including diplomats and foreigners, for more than 24 hours after storming the Myanmar embassy here Friday.

They demanded the Myanmar junta free all political prisoners and open talks with the National League for Democracy (NLD).

Meanwhile, the NLD in Yangon, and exiled student groups and activist NGOs here, sympathised with their objectives but quickly denounced any involvement and the use of armed force.

"We categorically condemn the seizure of the embassy and the taking of hostages," the NLD said. It said the embassy crisis was the result of "many acts of

injustice and cruelty repeatedly perpetrated by the military regime".

The gunmen however do not appear to represent a new generation of activists within pro-democracy ranks. According to reports quoting police and NGOs here the leader of the group, identified as San Naing, alias "Johnny," had a long record of terrorist activities.

Under another name he hijacked a domestic Myanmar airliner in 1989 and diverted it to Thailand. He was sentenced to six years in jail here, but released under a royal pardon after serving only three. Having been refused asylum in Australia, he later spent more time in prison on explosives charges.

Human rights groups and dissidents released a statement warning Myanmar's ASEAN partners that the hostage crisis should be considered a "wake up call."

Death toll now 2246 Aftershocks continue to rock Taiwan

TAIPEI, Oct 3: The death toll from Taiwan's devastating earthquake rose to 2,246 Sunday as massive aftershocks rocked the island for the 13th day in a row, reports AFP.

The official toll at 10 a.m. (0800 BST) also listed 8,735 people as injured, 96 as missing or trapped in rubble and seven still stranded in remote areas. Some 100,000 were left homeless.

The Seismology Centre said more than 10,562 aftershocks had been recorded since the fatal quake, measured at 7.6 on the Richter scale by the United States Geological Survey.

The latest major aftershock measuring 4.6 on the Richter scale hit at 03:25 a.m. (0125 BST Sunday).

The epicentre was located 19.2 kilometres south of central Taichung city. The origin was 8.3 kilometres under the earth's surface.

US missile interceptor passes crucial test

VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE, California, Oct 3: A prototype national missile defence system passed a critical test, intercepting and destroying an unarmed missile on a 16,000-mph (25,700-kph) collision course over the Pacific, reports AP.

"It was a successful intercept," said Sheryl Irwin, a spokeswoman for the Department of Defence. "It did everything it was supposed to do, and it did it perfectly."

It was the first test of the "Kill Vehicle" missile's ability to destroy a target by smashing into it.

An unarmed Minuteman missile carrying a dummy warhead and a decoy balloon was launched just after 7 pm Saturday (0800 BST Sunday) from this coastal base on a flight over the Pacific.

About 20 minutes later, the Kill vehicle missile was launched from the Marshall

Islands. The two missiles hurtled toward each other at a combined speed of about 16,000 mph (25,700 kph).

Ten minutes later, 3,000 miles (4,800 kilometres) from California and about 140 miles (225 kilometres) above the ocean, they met.

"It looks like a great, big old bright flash," said Irwin, who watched from a Pentagon room crowded with anxious military observers.

"You saw it explode, and there was a loud roar — a very happy one that went up from the room. It proves that this technology is working and we can move forward with the programme," she said.

The defender was the Raytheon-built Exoatmospheric Kill Vehicle, a 55-inch (140-centimetre)-long, 120-pound (54-kilogram)-device carried aloft on a booster rocket.

Italy detains 78 migrants: A total of 78

illegal immigrants from Albania, Kosovo and Turkey's Kurdish areas were detained when they tried to enter Italy on the southern Puglia coastline, customs officials said Sunday, AFP says from Lecce.

The immigrants, including many women and children, had just crossed the Otranto canal in rubber dinghies when they were captured overnight.

5 hurt in Philippines bomb blast: At least five people were wounded, three seriously, when a homemade bomb exploded outside a packed concert hall in this southern Philippine city, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Zamboanga.

Scores of others were hurt when at least 500 people outside the center panicked and scrambled to safety but none of the 12,000 people inside the hall sustained any injuries, police said. No suspects have been arrested and no group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Tremors jolt northeastern Japan: An earthquake measuring 5.6 on the Richter scale jolted northeastern Japan on Sunday, but there were no reports of damage or casualties, AFP says from Tokyo.

The epicentre of the quake, which struck at 6:09 a.m. (0610 BST), was located 10 kilometres under the seabed off Iwate Prefecture, the meteorological agency said.

Opening of safe passage between WB, Gaza Strip postponed

JERUSALEM, Oct 3: The opening of a safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which was slated for today, has been postponed due to Israeli and Palestinian negotiators' failure to resolve their differences in a meeting Saturday night, reports Xinhua.

The Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met at Neveh Ilan Hotel near Jerusalem for more than two hours, but after midnight the two sides did not iron out their differences over who would issue magnetic security cards and Israel's demand of arresting suspects on the passage.

Orit Messer-Harel, spokeswoman of the Israeli Public Security, announced after the meeting that it was decided to postpone the opening of the route and the "two sides agreed to meet in the coming days to overcome the differences."

She said that the main sticking point was disagreement between the two sides over which side should distribute the cards and where. Another obstacle was a disagreement over whether Israel is entitled to arrest Palestinians suspected of security offenses as they use the passage.

The Palestinian negotiator, led by Minister of Civil Affairs Jamil Tarifi, went to consult with Palestinian National Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat after the meeting broke up.

Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami issued a statement after midnight saying he hoped the two sides would reach an understanding soon on the basis of maintaining two key principles, security and sovereignty.

Yeltsin's daughter denies plan to retain presidency

LONDON, Oct 3: Russian President Boris Yeltsin's daughter has denied her father is planning to use the growing crisis in the republics of Chechnya and Dagestan to keep his grip on power. The Sunday Times newspaper reported, reports AFP.

In comments published in the newspaper, Tatyana Dyachenko, 38, dismissed reports that Yeltsin, 68, may declare a state of emergency as a pretext to cancel next year's presidential election.

Such speculation was "a crude hoax intended to whip up pseudo-popular support" Dyachenko said, according to the newspaper.

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