

International

Australian PM calls for urgent talks with Jakarta

CANBERRA, Australia, Oct 11: Australia was seeking urgent high level discussions with Indonesia after its troops were fired on by members of the Indonesian army. Prime Minister John Howard said today, reports AFP.

Troops attached to the Australian-led multinational security force (Interfet) in East Timor were on patrol Sunday near the border between East and West Timor when they were fired on by pro-Indonesian militias accompanied by members of the Indonesian military and returned fire in self defence.

An Indonesian commander later admitted his troops had attacked Australian troops, believing they had crossed the border into West Timor.

Howard told parliament Monday the Australian government regarded the incident in the most serious terms and said he was seeking to have discussions with Jakarta as soon as possible.

"Interfet personnel believe the incident took place in East Timor," Howard said. "It shows that some elements in TNI (the Indonesian military) may be disregarding the terms of the UN Security Council resolution 1264 and continuing to support militia groups."

Australia would also make its concerns known to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Australian prime minister said.

Typhoon Dan death toll rises to 34

BEIJING, Oct 11: Typhoon Dan which struck the south-eastern Chinese province of Fujian over the weekend has left a total of 34 people dead and hundreds injured, local officials said Monday, reports AFP.

The 14th typhoon to hit the region this year caused the deaths of 16 people in the city of Quanzhou, 10 in Zhangzhou and eight in Xiamen, officials at local civil affairs bureau told AFP.

More than 1,400 people were injured in the storm, with dozens seriously hurt, they said.

Most of the deaths were in collapsed buildings as winds reached up to 144 kilometres (90 miles) an hour.

The typhoon was the strongest to hit Xiamen since 1959.

Economic losses were still being assessed but local officials said they could be the highest caused by a typhoon in recent years.

In Quanzhou, local officials estimated losses to be more than 1.2 billion yuan (144 million dollars) as of Monday, while the China Daily said losses in Zhangzhou stood at two billion yuan (240 million dollars).

Heavy rains and wind brought road, railway and air traffic in the region to a standstill on Saturday as more than 23,000 houses were flooded. 1,500 homes collapsed and 35,000 acres of farmland flooded.

Six students killed in US road accident

COLLEGE STATION, Texas, Oct 11: Six college students on their way to a fraternity party were killed yesterday when the driver of a pickup truck apparently fell asleep at the wheel and ran them over, police said, reports Reuters.

The students were walking along a highway near the campus of Texas A&M University when the accident occurred.

Blood tests showed the driver, 18-year-old Texas A&M student Brandon Kallmeyer, had not been drinking before the accident, said Maj. Mike Patterson of the College Station police department.

"He volunteered and went to the hospital and got a blood test. We don't think there's alcohol involved in it. I think he just fell asleep at the wheel," Patterson told reporters.

Schroeder loses sixth state polls this year

BERLIN, Oct 11: German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder suffered his sixth straight state election loss this year in Berlin Sunday as his Social Democrats (SPD) plunged to their lowest post-war score in the capital, according to provisional results, reports AFP.

But SPD leaders said their centre-left party had stabilised from its nation-wide electoral free-fall as the result was not much worse than the previous Berlin parliament ballot in 1995 and better than had been predicted.

The conservative Christian Democrats (CDU), which rule in Berlin in a coalition with the Social Democrats, won the vote but not an absolute majority, as some polls had forecast. Former East German communists did well in the poll, continuing to show strength in eastern Germany, but were third, behind the SPD.

SPD Secretary General-designate Franz Muentefering said the score was "not satisfactory" but still represented a "stabilisation at a low level" showing the chancellor's party had recovered nationally from the deepest depths.

The Social Democrats have already this year lost state elections in Hesse in February and in September in Saarland, Brandenburg, Thuringia and Saxony, as voters reject Schroeder's austerity policies and condemn bickering in the SPD.

Free East Timorese from 'concentration camps'

Gusamo appeals to Indonesia

MELBOURNE, Australia, Oct 11: East Timor's resistance leader Xanana Gusmao appealed to Indonesia Monday to free the tens of thousands of displaced East Timorese from the "concentration camps" of West Timor, reports AFP.

He also made a personal plea to the Indonesian parliament's newly appointed chairman, Amien Rais, to halt the persecution of thousands of Timorese residents in Indonesia and shut down the Kopassus special forces whom he branded "the real criminals" of East Timor.

"We appeal to the Indonesian government to act in a way which is consistent with the process of democratic reform in Indonesia itself," Gusmao told almost 5,000 supporters at a rally here.

"We invite the Indonesian government to prove the sincerity of its political good will

which can only help to lift the shame brought upon the country by a handful of generals."

Gusmao received a thunderous welcome as he entered the Melbourne Tennis Centre after a day meeting political leaders, union and church representatives and addressing a packed news conference.

Gusmao told reporters earlier the East Timorese had always been ready to accept the risk of armed struggle against Indonesia and were now prepared to accept the high cost of their independence and freedom.

He warned that the same Indonesian military responsible for the deaths of so many East Timorese people were also still killing Achenese people.

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"The Indonesian military have to be taught to accept international values, the values of democracy, the values of justice... because what happened in East Timor was very, very unjustified," Gusmao said.

Gusmao also blamed the Indonesian military for provoking a weekend incident in which Indonesia has said Australian troops killed an Indonesian police officer at the border of East and West Timor.

In his speech to supporters, which was eloquent despite its delivery in halting English, Gusmao thanked Australians for standing "side-by-side" with the East Timorese at a time when East Timor was considered a closed case.

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