

Jakarta to disarm militias as E Timor vote set for delay

DILI, East Timor, Oct 12: Indonesia said Tuesday it was likely to delay a vote on East Timor's independence as the military ordered the disarming of militias in the volatile border area after a clash with multinational forces, reports AFP.

A member of an Indonesian ad-hoc committee discussing the East Timor issue said the vote would be delayed as Jakarta urged Portugal, the former colonial power, to drop a clause in its constitution claiming the half-island as its territory.

The committee said when the national assembly revokes the 1978 decree incorporating East Timor into Indonesia, it would in effect constitute handing the territory back to Portugal.

To effect a handover to the United Nations Lisbon would first have to revise its own statutes, committee member, Yahya Zainin, said.

A delay in ratifying the overwhelming August 30 vote for independence by the East Timorese could postpone the arrival of a UN peacekeeping force to replace the Australian-led forces already on the ground to quell the violence which erupted after the ballot.

Meanwhile, Indonesia moved to defuse a row with Australia over Sunday's skirmish in which Jakarta says an Indonesian policeman was killed. Military chief general Wiranto went to Kupang in West Timor and then flew to the border, vowing to disarm the pro-Jakarta militias blamed for the violence.

"I am convinced that this area will be free from activities that tend towards armed conflict," he told Strategic Command troops Kupang.

In Jakarta, the military's top spokesman confirmed the decision.

"We do not want this area to become a stronghold or base for the pro-integrationists," Major General Sudrajat told AFP.

"We will disarm them and if they want to fight, then go back to East Timor. If they want to integrate with Indonesia then be good citizens."

In Dili, the International Force for East Timor (Interfet) said it had offered Indonesia the use of a sophisticated global positioning system (GPS) and detailed maps in a bid to avoid any more border clashes.

Interfet spokesman Colonel Mark Kelly said the Indonesian armed forces had also asked Interfet to take part in a joint investigation into Sunday's incident.

"We have offered them the use of our GPS system, we have offered them the use of our more detailed maps," Kelly said, but added that a response was awaited.

Kelly said Australian forces in Interfet were operating with maps dating from 1992 which used Indonesian data. The Indonesian armed forces patrol which met with Australian officers after the incident on Sunday was using a Dutch map dating from the 1930s.

But he denied reports from Indonesia that Interfet had been acting provocatively.

"They are wrong," he said.

Pakistan plans massive assault on terrorists

ISLAMABAD, Oct 12: Frustrated by relentless sectarian bloodletting, Pakistan prepared Tuesday to launch a full-scale assault on terrorists, recruiting its powerful military to begin the enormous task of disarming a country awash in weapons, said Interior Minister Shujaat Hussain, reports AP.

The interior minister, whose job it will be to oversee the "dewarriorisation" of Pakistan, said "it won't be easy... but that is the only solution." He said he would meet Tuesday with the army chief and chief ministers of Pakistan's four provinces to plot a strategy to collect weapons.

Pakistan's crackdown has been prompted by a weeklong wave of bitter religiously motivated violence that killed more than 30 people. Pakistan wants everyone, including Islamic militant groups, disarmed, Hussein said in an interview with the Associated Press.

Already Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's public denunciation of terrorist training camps in neighboring Afghanistan has generated a barrage of criticism and threats from militant Islamic groups headquartered in Pakistan.

They accuse his government of being a puppet of the United States, which has been a big critic of the Taliban because they allow suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden to roam free.

Hussein said Sharif knows he is in for a tough battle, but "we have no other choice... it is hurting Pakistan."

Pakistan has asked the Taliban to shut down camps used by Pakistanis, mostly Sunni Muslim militants who return to Pakistan to attack the country's Shiite Muslim minority, whom they revile as non-Muslims.

The Taliban publicly deny the existence of these camps.

But privately Hussein said the Taliban's leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, has promised Islamabad he will close the camps. Among those expected to be closed are camps used by such groups as the violent Sipah-e-Sahaba or Guardians of the Friends of the Prophet, blamed for many of the attacks on Shiite Muslims in Pakistan.

Also receiving training in Afghanistan by their own admission are members of Harakat-ul Mujahideen — on Washington's list of terrorist groups.

While Pakistan refuses to comment on US allegations that bin Laden is running a global terrorist network out of Afghanistan, Islamabad's charges of allowing training camps for their nationals is a major blow to the Taliban.

Pakistan is one of only three countries to recognise the Taliban and is considered their closest ally in an international community that has grown increasingly hostile toward them and their hard-line religious movement.

A Taliban commander, interviewed by The Associated Press, said there are thousands of Pakistanis getting training in Afghanistan, many of them to fight in the disputed Kashmir region against India.

The commander, who asked not to be identified for his own safety, said there is a large training camp in Afghanistan's northeastern Kunar province, which is used by Kashmir-bound militants. They belong to a variety of groups, all headquartered in Pakistan, including Harakat-ul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, he said.

They are receiving training in tanks, guns, cannons, artillery, anti-aircraft weapons, and explosives, he said.

As well as the many of the Kashmir-bound militants come from religious schools of Pakistan, believed to number in the thousands throughout the country.

But Hussein said Pakistan won't close these schools, mostly because the government worries that the students would be incited by their leaders to revolt against the government.

"They brainwash them in these schools," said Hussein, but the Pakistan government doesn't believe there is large-scale military training going on at these schools. For that it seems they go to Afghanistan.

Hussein said that the task of combating terrorism in Pakistan is a complicated one, fraught with dangers for the government.



Top Indian nuclear scientist APJ Abdul Kalam checks out ordnance at an Indian defence stall on the opening day of the Defexpo '99 defence exhibition yesterday in New Delhi. India is starting to scout global markets for military partners, pushing the country as a cost-effective export base for defence-oriented joint ventures. — AFP photo

Myanmar slams extension of EU sanctions

BANGKOK, Oct 12: Myanmar today criticised the European Union's decision to extend sanctions against the military-ruled country over its poor human rights and democracy record, reports AFP.

A statement from the junta said it was "unfortunate" that the EU believed that "slowing Myanmar's economic development through sanctions and boycotts will hasten the transition to democracy."

On Monday EU foreign minister agreed to extend sanctions for another six months and expressed concern at continuing human rights violations and the repression of Myanmar's democratic opposition.

But the junta said it was "working hard to serve the best interests of the nation to achieve a thriving economy and a stable, multiparty democratic system."

"Unfortunately there are still some nations that believe that a country can transform itself into a functioning democracy overnight," it said.

"It is regretful that more realistic and meaningful ways to achieve common goals are neglected," the statement added.

BRIEFLY

Lankan troops kill 4 Tigers: Sri Lankan troops shot dead 4 women fighters of the separatist Tiger movement in the north of the country, the defence ministry said Tuesday, AFP reports from Colombo.

Government soldiers confronted the fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at Oddusudan in the Wannu region on Monday, the ministry said. It said four women fighters were killed while two others escaped with injuries. The ministry did not say if soldiers suffered any casualties during the confrontation.

Anti-Milosevic march: More than 5,000 people marched in Belgrade's city centre Monday demanding Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's ouster. It was the 21st consecutive day of such protests, AFP reports from Belgrade.

Only a few policemen were at the scene, directing marchers to a main square where rallies are officially allowed. The march, organised by the opposition coalition Alliance for Change, was dedicated to Slavko Cuvurjiva, owner and editor-in-chief of an independent daily, Dnevni Telegraph, who was murdered by unidentified gunmen on April 11.

Sydney hit by power outage: Power was cut to parts of Australia's largest city Tuesday, temporarily shutting down office towers, switching off traffic lights and trapping people in elevators across downtown Sydney, AP reports from Sydney.

Power company Energy Australia Ltd said an explosion caused by fire at a substation in St. Peters, a suburb south of the central business district, severed a cable supplying power to downtown and several city areas.

UN staff shot dead in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Oct 12: An international staff member of the UN mission in Kosovo was shot dead in the centre of the capital Pristina yesterday, the United Nations said, reports Reuters.

He was the first international staff member of the UN mission to be killed since it moved into Kosovo in mid-June to step up an interim administration.

The man had just arrived in the Serbian province earlier in the day to begin his assignment, UN spokeswoman Nadia Younes said.

He went to his hotel, had dinner and went out for a walk, Younes said. "He was shot dead in the street."

The victim's name and nationality would not be released until next of kin had been informed, she said. Several sources told Reuters a US driving licence had been found on the man's body.

The world body is charged with running all aspects of civilian life in 10 weeks of NATO bombing drove Yugoslav and Serb forces out of the province, until elections can be held to allow the people of Kosovo to take charge of their own affairs.

North Korea is also estimated to possess at least 19 different kinds of biological weapons, the paper said.

"We have so far underestimated the North's chemical weapons capacities," the White Paper said.

If North Korea launched missiles with biological and chemical warheads, they could reach as far as the southern-most cities of Pusan and Mokpo (in South Korea)," the ministry said in a separate press release.

North Korea stunned the region last year by test-firing a three-stage, solid-fuel missile, part of which flew over Japan before splashing into the Pacific.

US defence analysts believed North Korea was preparing to test an even longer range missile, capable of reaching Hawaii and Alaska before Pyongyang agreed to suspend missile tests, while it is in talks with the United States.

The agreement was made in exchange for Washington's relaxation of long-standing trade sanctions.

In the face of the North's potential use of weapons of mass destruction, the ministry said it has been developing comprehensive countermeasures, including strengthening of chemical warfare military units, jointly with the United States.

The ministry said it is spending 350 billion won (\$292 million) over the next five years to beef up chemical and biological warfare protection equipment and materials.

The White Paper said that despite its famine and economic difficulties, North Korea was estimated to have spent more than 30 per cent of its national budget on defence, although Pyongyang's official announcements point to smaller figures.

North Korea has said its military spending for 1999 would be \$1.36 billion or 14.5 per cent of its budget of \$9.39 billion, according to the Defence Ministry report.

South Korea's total defence spending for this year stood at \$3.7 trillion won, or 17.1 per cent of the nation's budget of \$3.6 trillion won.

North Korea's armed forces now total 1.17 million, compared with the South's 690,000 troops.

Monks clash at Korean temple

SEOUL, Oct 12: At least five Buddhist monks were injured when hundreds of rival clerics, wielding metal pipes and hurling rocks, clashed Tuesday at the headquarters of South Korean Buddhism, witnesses said, reports AFP.

Some 4,000 riot police, wearing body armour and armed with shields and truncheons, sealed off a temple in downtown Seoul where monks from opposing factions of the Chogye order fought a 30-minute pitched battle.

More than 500 grey-robed clerics, some backed by hired security men, wielded makeshift weapons and hurled stones, bottles and furniture at each other before they were separated by riot police troops.

"I didn't expect to see such violence at the temple," a witness said. "The fight exploded very suddenly with iron bars appearing instantly from nearby cloth bags."

Monks occupying the temple compound and their henchmen, wearing surgical masks and baseball caps, turned chemical fire extinguishers on a rival faction trying to wrest control of the order's administration.

It was very quick and amazingly violent like a clash between Hong Kong street gangsters. I saw one monk being beaten by about 30 people with steel pipes. I thought he would be killed," the witness added.

Traffic in the area was halted and shops closed as the area was covered in a snow of white powder from the fire extinguishers and debris hurled by the fighting monks.

Monks occupying the temple barricaded themselves in the compound by blocking the entrances with shipping containers and lacing the walls with barbed wire.

At least five monks with bloodied faces were seen being dragged into the temple compound by members of the rival faction inside. Some were taken to hospital.

Only 26 Muslim MPs enter Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: Only 26 Muslim members have been elected to the 13th Lok Sabha as against 29 in the previous house though, young Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain said the distinction of winning on a BJP ticket from Kishanganj in Bihar, reports PTI.

The 26 MPs include five from Congress, four each from CMP and NC, three each from BSP and SP, and two each from RJD and IUML.

Uttar Pradesh with eight Muslim MPs leads the list of minority representatives, followed by four from Jammu and Kashmir, and three each from West Bengal, Kerala and Bihar.

The figure shows a decline in the number of Muslim representatives in the Lok Sabha where in most constituencies Muslims constitute a sizeable chunk of the electorate.

Tactical voting or the lack of it has, however, not prevented the number of Muslim MPs from going down in each election. In 1980, there were 46 Muslim members in the Lok Sabha, which fell to 29 in 1998 and 26 this year.

Minorities' clamour for the representation in the lower house baffled the best of psephologists.

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World population hits 6 billion

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 12: The world's population reached six billion today, having doubled since 1960 — with more than one billion young people just entering their reproductive years, according to UN demographers, reports AP.

A 29-year-old first-time mother in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, gave birth to a boy at two minutes after midnight Tuesday, making him the designated six billionth baby.

Dr Idris Bukvic, paediatrics chief at Sarajevo's hospitals, said Fatima Nevic gave birth to the 3.55-kilogram (8-pound), healthy boy after a seven-hour labour. Mrs Nevic and her husband, Jasminko, are from the Bosnian town of Visoko.

The United Nations had hoped to keep the baby's identity secret until Tuesday afternoon, when Secretary-General Kofi Annan plans to visit mother and child.

Even with a continuing decline in fertility rates and family size, the sheer numbers of the largest "youthquake" in history guarantee an enormous momentum of population growth through 2050, UN population experts say.

Most of these more than one billion young people, aged 15 to 24, live in less developed nations where governments are struggling to provide education, jobs and social services — and they urgently need reproductive health information and services, the UN Population Fund said Monday.

"Whether they get services will determine the future course of population growth," Dr Nafis Sadik, the fund's executive director, said in an interview.

"The decisions they make on the size of their family will determine the future levels of fertility, and the eventual numbers of the world's population."

And there is another "youthquake" coming, with 1.8 billion youngsters under the age of 15.

Population has doubled since 1960, partly due to some very positive developments, including increased life expectancy and lower infant mortality, Sadik said.

It would have been higher if the United Nations, voluntary organisations and governments had not started promoting family planning and contraceptive use, which has increased from just 10 per cent of women and men in 1969 to 60 per cent today, she said.

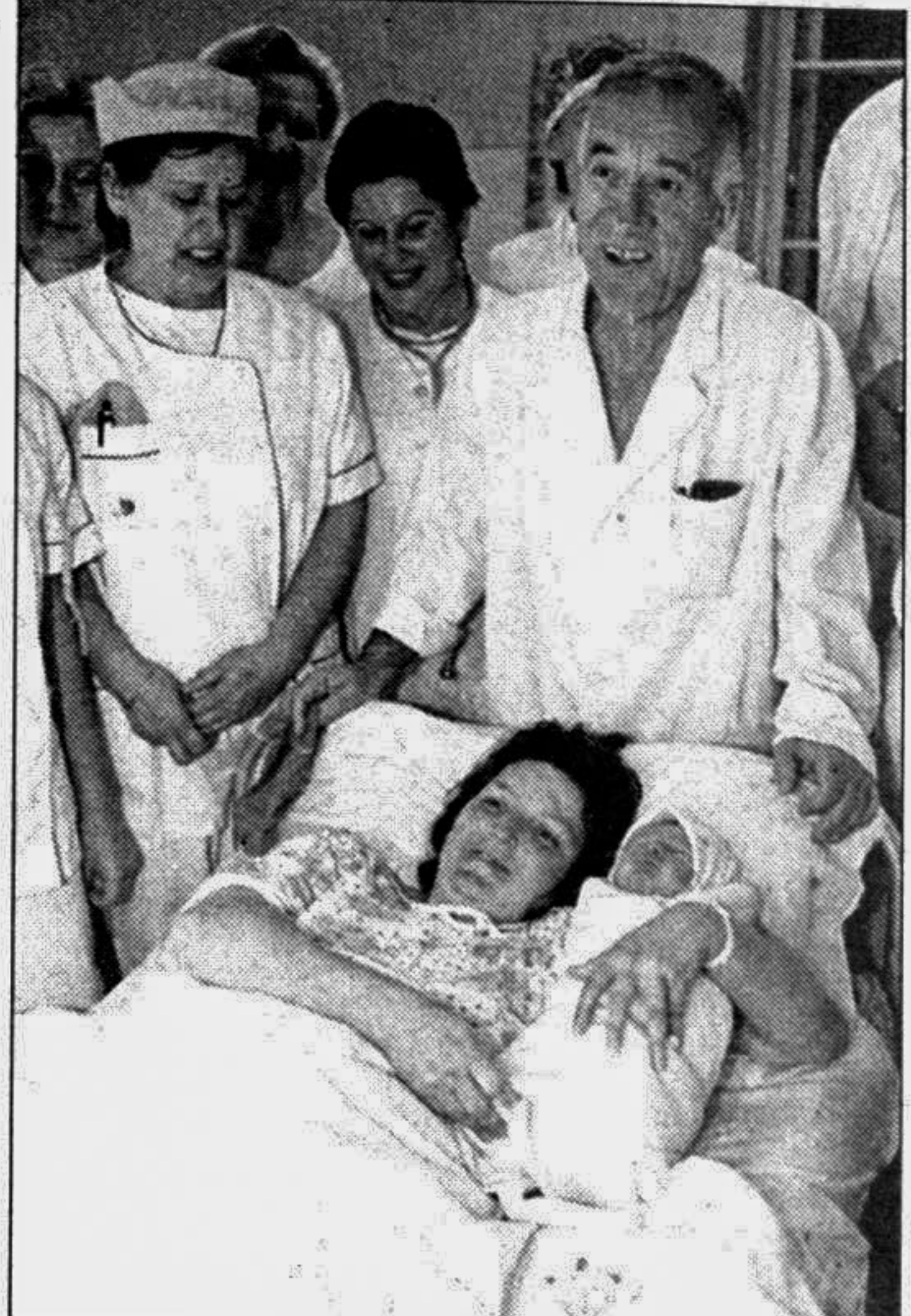
"If we hadn't done anything there would have been quite a different situation today. The population may have been 7 billion or 8 billion," Sadik said.

"There would have been many more unwanted children. Infant mortality would have been higher, and the average family size, which has reduced from 6 to 3 children in 30 years, would have been much higher," she said.

Still, 350 million women don't have access to reproductive health and family planning services today. And in a world where educated women have fewer children, 960 million people are illiterate, two-thirds of them women, according to UN figures.

At the current pace, humanity is adding about 78 million more people every year. That's equal to another Great Britain plus New York City, the combined population of France, Greece and Sweden, or a city the size of San Francisco every three days.

Nobody knows where the 6 billionth citizen of planet Earth will be born — and celebrations and ceremonies are being held in many countries — but it's almost certain to be in a developing nation.



Bosnian Fatima Mevic, 29, with her newborn son, officially the six billionth human being born on planet Earth, is surrounded by doctors at the maternity ward of Sarajevo hospital. The baby, weighing 3.55 kilograms (7.81 pounds), was born at 0:01 hours yesterday. — AFP photo

DPRK possesses 5000 tonnes of chemical weapons: ROK

SEOUL, Oct 12: North Korea now has around 5,000 tonnes of chemical weapons, or up to five times the previous estimate of its chemical warfare capabilities, South Korea's Ministry of Defence said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

In its 1999 White Paper, the ministry said a 1997 US-South Korea study raised its estimate of North Korea's chemical weapons stockpile to between 2,500 and 5,000 tonnes from the previous year's 1,000 tonnes.

North Korea is also estimated to possess at least 19 different kinds of biological weapons, the paper said.

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Hamas leader warns Israel of attack

JERUSALEM, Oct 12: The spiritual leader of militant Islamic group Hamas warned in a newspaper interview a massive anti-Israeli attack could take place "at any time," reports AP.

"A massive attack on a bus could take place as soon as tomorrow morning. There is no ceasefire between us at the moment. Therefore there could be an attack at any time," Sheikh Ahmed Yassin said in an interview with the Hebrew newspaper Maariv which is to be published in full on Friday.

His comments follow fears expressed by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Monday that Muslim fundamentalist groups opposed to the Middle East peace process were planning attacks against civilians.

Israeli radio also reported Tuesday that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat promised to cooperate in the fight against terror during a secret meeting with the head of Israel's domestic intelligence agency.

It gave no further details about the encounter between Arafat and Shin Bet chief Ami Ayalon, who held a similar meeting to discuss possible terror attacks earlier this month.

Yassin, the elderly founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, said his organisation intends to carry out attacks in the near future.

"It serves the Hamas strategy, one which favours the path of struggle to free its lands. I will fight against my enemy with his weapons," Yassin said.

"If he kills Palestinian citizens, I will kill Israeli citizens," he said.

"Hamas has the right to hijack Israeli soldiers. Israel allows itself to hijack people for its needs... but thinks that Hamas has no right to do so," he said.

Hamas is violently opposed to the peace process and has been responsible for most Palestinian attacks against Israeli targets since the signing of the 1993 Oslo peace accords.

Presidential election Golkar may withdraw support from Habibie

JAKARTA, Oct 12: Officials of the ruling Golkar party have hinted they could withdraw support from incumbent President B.J. Habibie at the last minute, despite officially endorsing him to lead the country into the next millennium, reports AFP.

The nomination of the beleaguered president has met some opposition within Golkar but a review of his candidacy was not included in the agenda at an ongoing two-day party congress, Golkar deputy chairman Marzuki Darusman said.

"Of course, there was opposition (by certain groups) to Habibie's nomination, but we are not officially discussing the issue," Darusman told reporters on the sidelines of the congress which opened late Monday.

He said Golkar still hopes Habibie can beat the other two presidential contenders, opposition hopeful Megawati Sukarnoputri and Moslem leader Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid.

"It is not impossible (for Habibie to win), but it is not going to be easy either," he said.

Speaking after the congress opening, party chairman Akbar Tanjung repeated that it has no plans to bow to calls to review Habibie's candidacy.

"The possibility exists, but an evaluation of Habibie's candidacy is not on the agenda," Tanjung told journalists.

Darusman, who has in the past caused fury within the party for his calls to drop Habibie, said however the congress may give Tanjung a mandate to make quick decisions for the party.

If the new national assembly rejects an accountability speech to be given by Habibie on Thursday, then the Golkar executive board has already decided on a course of action, he said, quoted by the Antara news agency.

Habibie, as the outgoing president, has to account to the new People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) for his policies during his 17 months in power. If his speech is rejected it will scuttle his presidential bid.

Chechen rebels plan to target N-sites: Moscow

MOSCOW, Oct 12: Chechen guerrillas are preparing strikes against Russian nuclear installations and are engaging in hit-and-run attacks on federal forces in Chechnya, defence officials said Tuesday.

Chechen warlord Salman Raduyev is "preparing a series of terrorist acts in Russia, mainly nuclear sites," a defence ministry spokesman told AFP.

Raduyev "has set up small commando groups of up to 15 people, of mainly Slav origin, a ruse which would make it easier for Grozny's forces to infiltrate Russia," the official said.

He did not elaborate on the basis for the claim.

Raduyev hit the international headlines in January 1996, when he led a spectacular raid on the Dagestani town of Kizlyar in which 2,000 hostages were taken.

The Chechens managed to give the Russians the slip after they and 160 hostages were attacked near the village of Perovskoye, handing Russia another humiliation during its disastrous 1994-96 attempt to crush Chechnya's independence drive.

Another Chechen field commander who shot to fame during that conflict, Shamil Basayev, "has been tasked with preparing groups of female terrorists who will strike in southern Russia," the Russian defence official added.

On Monday, the commander of Russia's 58th army said Basayev had been cornered in the western Chechen village of Gorogorsky, a claim Grozny denied. Basayev was appointed last month as commander of Chechnya's eastern front.

Russian defence officials say that the Chechens have adopted a hit-and-run strategy to oppose advancing federal forces, who say they control three northern districts of Chechnya, more than a third of the renegade republic.

Organised in groups of up to six men, the guerrillas attack Russian positions before retreating, drawing federal troops into ambushes along myriad paths, the defence ministry said.

The Chechen presidency said Monday that some 700 people had been killed by Russian artillery and air strikes since September 5.