

International

Alarm grows as military take over in Pakistan

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: International alarm rose Friday as Pakistan's military ignored worldwide appeals to restore democratic rule and imposed effective martial law after deposing the civilian government in a bloodless coup earlier in the week, AFP said.

Concern was most keenly felt in neighbouring India where, although the government was unwilling to immediately react to the state of emergency declaration, experts and former leaders were quick to warn of trouble.

Former prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral warned General Pervez Musharraf's takeover could only raise tension on the subcontinent where India and Pakistan, the world's newest nuclear powers, have been bitter rivals for five decades since independence and partition.

Most recently they waged a border conflict in Kashmir in May to July. The divided Himalayan state has been the

root of two of their three wars. The history of Gen. Musharraf's military career and his observations on Kashmir show India should expect confrontation from him, Gujral, prime minister in 1997-98, told The Asian Age newspaper.

Brahman Chellaney, a security expert with the private Centre for Policy Studies, concurred: "What has happened in Pakistan has serious negative implications for India," he said.

Analysts said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's two-day-old government would be cautious as it would have to deal with the junta.

New Delhi had a muted reaction to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's ouster on Tuesday, merely expressing "grave concern." But Vajpayee convened an urgent cabinet meeting and Indian troops on the border were put on high alert.

In Washington, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said the decision to impose a state of emergency was a "step in the

wrong direction."

"We were hoping he would take steps to re-establish democracy procedures and re-institute elections," he said.

The White House was more cautious. "We are watching the situation very closely. We are still trying to ascertain what ultimately the results will be," White House spokesman Jim Fallin told AFP.

He added US ambassador to Pakistan, William Milan, would meet the country's new leaders Friday.

Former colonial ruler Britain also expressed alarm.

"It is a seriously and deeply worrying step," a Foreign Office spokesman said. British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President Bill Clinton are among those who have called for a return to democracy.

Also in London a leader of former premier Benazir Bhutto's opposition Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) called for elections and said a state of emergency would not be welcomed.

"People were not happy when the civilian government declared a state of emergency (after nuclear tests last year) and people will not be happy about it now," Nisar Khuhro, a close Benazir aide told AFP.

And inside Pakistan, the country's main fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami party expressed alarm for the first time since Tuesday.

"It is shocking," Jamaat's secretary general, Syed Munawwar Hassan, told AFP. "Nobody can support the suspension of fundamental rights or martial law."

In Tokyo, Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi said: "Such a move goes against democracy and we are extremely concerned."

Vice Foreign Minister Yutaka Kawashima summoned Pakistani Ambassador Touqir Hussain to express concern that military rule "will not lead to instability in Southwest Asia and undermine nuclear non-proliferation."

Russia launches new kilo class submarine for Indian navy

MOSCOW, Oct 15: The Russian Admiralty Shipyards in St Petersburg yesterday launched a new kilo class submarine for Indian Navy, sources in arms exporting agency Rosvozrozhod told PTI.

The new submarine part of the 877 EKM Project, is the second of two vessels which Russia had contracted to build under a 1997 deal between India and Russia arms export corporation Rosvozrozhod.

The new submarine, which has enhanced noise suppression systems that make it difficult to detect, would be equipped with latest electronic systems and deadly weapons including anti-submarine "91RE1" missiles with "Smart" warheads.

Only recently the Kremlin cleared the export of these Smart Missiles to friendly countries and the Indian Navy would be the first foreign navy to receive them.

It would also have deadly Igla anti-aircraft missiles.

China denounces EU human rights report

BEIJING, Oct 15: China Friday denounced the European Union's human rights report, accusing Brussels of deliberately distorting facts and interfering in China's internal affairs, reports AFP.

The Chinese government is opposed to the practice of any country and blocs of countries who distort facts and use human rights as an excuse to interfere in China's internal affairs, foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue was quoted by the China Daily as saying.

The Chinese side believes that the allegations of the EU in the annual report on the human rights situation in China is entirely baseless.

Zhang said "unremitting efforts" by the Chinese government at improving its human rights situation had scored "enormous achievements" and "attracted the attention of the world."

The first human rights report by the EU, released on Monday, underlined concerns over "administrative detention and re-education through forced labor which are still largely utilized in an arbitrary manner" in China.

"Some resolute efforts aimed at reforming the system of administrative detention, including the early intervention of a judge in the detention period, must be urgently made as the absence of arbitrary measures is one of the pillars of the rule of law," it said.

Clinton nominates Gen Ralston as NATO chief

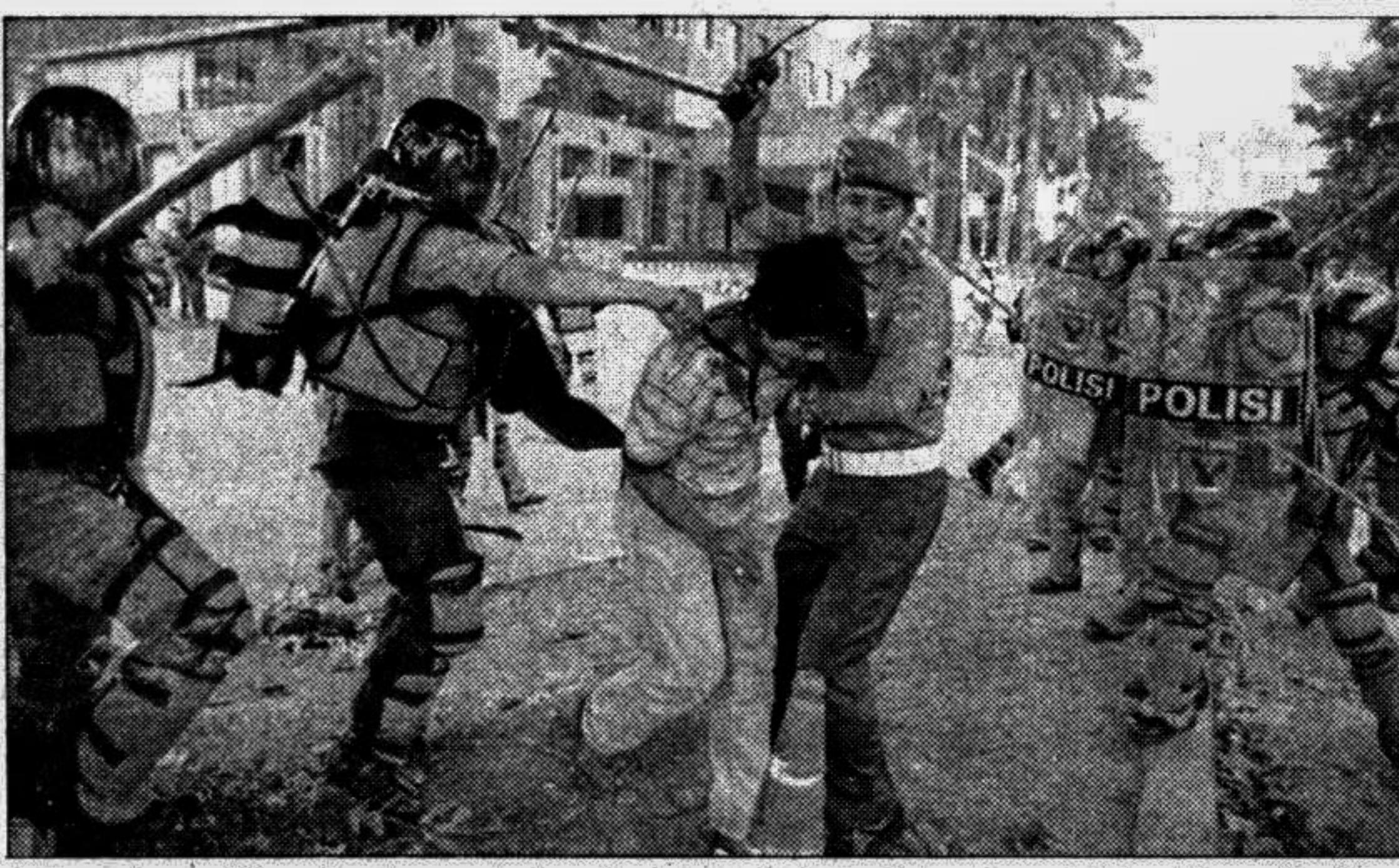
WASHINGTON, Oct 15: President Bill Clinton officially nominated General Joseph Ralston, the current vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as supreme allied commander of NATO, replacing General Wesley Clark, reports AFP.

Clark's departure was announced by the Pentagon at the end of July. He will leave his post next spring, three months before the end of his term.

Replacing Clark, who directed NATO bombings against Yugoslavia during the conflict in Kosovo, has been seen as a punishment after press reports of tension between the NATO commander, US Defence Secretary William Cohen and the commander of KFOR peacekeepers in Kosovo, British General Michael Jackson.

President Clinton nevertheless paid homage to Clark in the statement naming his successor, saying he did an "extraordinary job as supreme allied commander" who led the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to a "brilliant victory in operation Allied Force" against Yugoslavia.

Ralston's nomination to NATO, the second in three and a half years, must be confirmed by the defence committee of the NATO council.



Indonesian soldiers beat a protester during a clash in Jakarta yesterday. Security forces clashed with more than 1,000 students and local residents near the Indonesian parliament, as assembly members inside the building discussed the fate of President B.J. Habibie. At least three soldiers were injured in the clash.

— AFP photo

Police, students clash in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Oct 15: Security forces clashed with thousands of students and local residents around Indonesia's parliament Friday as assembly members huddled in the building to determine the fate of President B.J. Habibie, reports AFP.

Anti-riot personnel fired warning shots and opened up with tear gas volleys for the second straight day as they chased after rock-throwing protesters in avenues and alleys near the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) which chooses the president on May 1998.

A rejection of Habibie's "accountability" speech by the MPR could effectively scuttle Habibie's bid to get a five-year term.

Habibie is being opposed by Megawati Sukarnoputri, 53, daughter of Indonesia's founding president Sukarno, and Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid, 59, head of the largest Islamic organisation in the predominantly Muslim country of more than 200 million people.

Police said about 70 people had been injured since clashes began Thursday.

The state Antara news agency quoted an official as saying that during the

overnight clashes Thursday around parliament and a nearby Catholic university, at least eight people were arrested and 49 injured, including 11 security personnel, four onlookers, and 34 demonstrators.

University students who spearheaded Thursday's protests were joined Friday by uniformed high-schoolers and local residents when they gathered in front of the private Atma Jaya University not far from the parliament building.

Trouble began when rocks rained upon anti-riot troops and police deployed near a flyover to block any march by protesters.

The security forces first reacted by hurling back rocks, but as the stoning intensified from various directions, they fired teargas and warning shots.

Skirmishes continued all day and into the night as legislators continued to huddle in parliament.

Russia storms Chechen stronghold

NEAR GORAGORSKY, Russia, Oct 15: Federal troops stormed the former Chechen stronghold of Goragorsky on Friday and set their sights on a village only 15 kilometres (10 miles) west of separatist capital Grozny, reports AFP.

Russian soldiers near Goragorsky told AFP they had orders to march to the village of Dolinsky once Goragorsky (60 kilometres east of Grozny) had been fully checked for any suspected rebels.

The operation, which will involve an estimated 3,000 Russian soldiers, is expected to last about two days.

"This operation requires lots of grenades because gunmen may be hiding in basements. It is better for everyone to walk out onto the streets once we move in," an officer named Gennady said.

"We are moving to Dolinsky next," he added. "Clearly most of the Chechens have pulled

back. We have not faced any return fire since Wednesday."

Chechen officials in Grozny confirmed to AFP that the rebels had withdrawn from Goragorsky, the scene of intense fighting for most of this week, and were retreating towards the capital.

Artillery struck the western Chechen villages of Banut -- a scene of intense fighting Thursday -- Achkhoy-Martan and Assinovskaya, the defence ministry in Moscow said.

Federal forces have stormed the rebel state for the first time since the brutal 1994-96 war with a self-declared goal of wiping out suspected terrorist bases Moscow holds responsible for organising a wave of terrorist bombings and two incursions in the region.

Generals have made the seizure of Goragorsky one of their top priorities since invading the republic on October 1.

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Fierce battles continued Friday in other parts of Chechnya's western front as Grozny claimed six weeks of Russian attacks had left more than 2,000 Chechen civilians dead.

It reported that 37 Chechen soldiers have been killed and 45 wounded since September 23.

Russia reported conducting 40 sorties over the republic overnight, more than double the figure issued, despite Chechen claims that they had shot down a Russian warplane and killed its pilot.

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