Wahid talks tough against coup

JAKARTA, Jan 17: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid today warned against any attempts by the military to topple his government, saying such actions would not be tolerated, reports AFP.

Asked if he was concerned about the possibility of a military coup. Wahid said he did not think one would be mounted. but the government "will take harsh action against an attempt if there is one."

"Other countries can have estimates of their own ... but we know our own situation, so l don't think there will be a coup and that's one thing," he told journalists at the Bina Graha presidential office.

We appreciate the fact that other countries are concerned and I know that other governments feel that as well." Wahid

Washington on Friday issued a stern warning to the In-

donesian military not to challenge Wahid's authority amid speculation some generals angered by efforts to prosecute them for human rights abuses might be planning a coup against the three-month old democratically-elected gov-

"We are seeing news reports about a (possible) military coup in Indonesia. We would view this with the most, the greatest possible concern." US Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke said.

"I hope that these rumours are false. Any Indonesian army officers or any military officer thinking of military adventurism have forgotten that we are now in the 21st century."

Wahid last week replaced military spokesman Major General Sudrajat, who recently said the president was not the supreme commander of the milAsked to comment on Hol-

brooke's warning to the Indonesian military, Wahid, a moderate Muslim scholar, said Indonesia "respects the United

"My reaction to what Holbrooke said is that he gives warning to the military in Indonesia not to do anything against the government and we appreciate that." Wahid said.

"So with what Holbrooke said, we respect (it) and we will consider carefully but that doesn't mean that we are lackeys of the United States," he

Separately, Indonesia's national assembly speaker Amien Rais dismissed the military coup rumours as "paranoia."

"No matter how bad the TNI (military) leadership is, no one dares (to mount a coup)," said Rais, one of the country's most

powerful politicians, quoted by Republika daily.

"A coup is just a delusion, it will not materialise." he said. but warned of the possibility of a popular revolt if a military coup should take place.

The Indonesian military's chief of staff for territorial affairs, Lieutenant General Agus Wijoyo, told the Detikcom online news service that "there are no indicators that we would launch a coup."

A Japanese news report said Sunday that Wahid planned to sack cabinet minister General Wiranto -- a powerful former armed forces chief -- from his Cabinet where he serves as coordinating minister of politics and security. Wiranto is reportedly at odds with the president.

Kyodo news reported that Wahid had told a senior official of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party over the weekend of a plan to get rid of Wiranto.



Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (C) is flanked by Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Finance and Industry, Kwick Kian Gie (L) and Finance Minister Bambamg Sudibyo, as he bursts into laughter at a journalist's question during a press conference at the presidential palace in Jakarta yesterday. Wahid said he plans to continue replacing senior government and military officials in an effort to wipe out corruption. - AFP photo

Tribal protest in India snaps links with '7-Sisters'

GUWAHATI, India, Jan 17 A general strike by a radical group of tribal students today cut off rail and road links between seven remote far-eastern states and the rest of India, officials said here, reports AFP.

The 24-hour protest in Assam, the biggest state in northeastern India, began at 5:00 a.m. (5:30 am BST).

The All Bodo Students Union outfit had announced today's strike to protest against New Delhi's "indifference" to its demand for a separate state for Bodo tribals carved out of As-

Eight separatist guerrilla groups in India's troubled northeast on Saturday announced a strike on the country's Republic Day on January 26 following which federal troops were put on high alert throughout the region.



Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf (L) shakes hands with Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji prior to a meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. Musharraf is in Beijing for a two-day visit for discussions with Chinese leaders, his first international visit outside the Arab world since seizing power in October.

- AFP photo

Musharraf in China to discuss security issues

BEIJING, Jan 17: Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf arrived here today for a two-day visit to China expected to focus on regional security issues, reports AFP.

Musharraf, who ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif in an October 12 coup, issued a statement shortly after his arrival describing China as Pakistan's "most reliable and trusted friend."

Musharraf said he looked forward to holding in-depth discussions with Chinese leaders on the security situation and on steps Pakistan has taken to bring peace and stability to the region.

"It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to visit the People's Republic of China -- a country which Pakistan holds dear as its most reliable and trusted friend," Musharraf said in the statement.

"My visit to China is a reaffirmation of our close and fraternal ties.

Musharraf extended greetings and best wishes on behalf of the Pakistani people to the people of China for a prosperous new year and new century.

He said the two countries would strive to further strengthen their relations in the new "China has stood by Pak-

istan in difficult times. Our relations have remained strong and steadfast, notwithstanding the cataclysmic changes in the political and security environment at the international, regional or domestic level," Musharraf said. "I am confident that my visit

would further fortify our ties, strengthen our mutually beneficial relations and enhance mutual cooperation in international fora.

First artificial eye for blind man

man can read large letters and navigate around big objects by using a tiny camera wired directly to his brain, the first artificial eye to provide useful vision, a researcher, reports AP.

The 62-year-old man doesn't see an image. He perceives up to 100 speaks of light that appear and disappear. like stars that come and go behind passing clouds, as his field of vision

But as he showed a reporter last week, that's enough to let him find a mannequin in a room, walk to a black stocking cap hanging on a white wall. and then return to the mannequin to plop the cap on its head. He also can recognise a 2inch-tall letter from five feet away, said researcher William

"He can do remarkably well" with the limited visual signal. said Dobelle, who is developing the artificial vision system. The man, who asked to be aid, and it's a far cry from the

been blind since the age of 36. He volunteered for the study and got the brain implant in 1978; scientists have been working since then to improve the software.

Dobelle is chairman of the Dobelle Institute, a medical device company in New York. He describes the device and its performance in this month's issue of the ASAIO Journal, a publication of the American Society of Artificial Internal Organs.

Richard Normann, who studies artificial vision at the University of Utah, said he's encouraged by how much Jerry can do. He said Dobelle's report suggests that, someday, even limited signals to the brain will let blind people do relatively complicated visual tasks.

It's the first demonstration of useful artificial vision, he said, but he stressed the device is a very limited navigational people enjoy.

Still, an implant that helps blind people navigate would be a major step forward, said Dr Bill Heetderks, who directs a National Institutes of Health program to develop electronic implants that work with the

"when Dr Dobelle provides additional details on his methodology that establishes this result, we may be there." Heetderks said after reading Dobelle's report.

While Dobelle's device uses a brain implant, some other scientists are studying implants in the retina, the light-sensing tissue at the back of the eve. The retina strategy made news recently when blind musician Stevie Wonder expressed inter-

To use the device, Jerry wears sunglasses with a tiny pinhole camera mounted on one lens and an ultrasonic

NEW YORK, Jan 17: A blind identified only as Jerry, has visual experience that normal range finder on the other. Both devices communicate with a small computer carried on his hip, which highlights the edges between light and dark areas in the camera image. It then tells an adjacent computer to send appropriate signals to an array of small electrodes on the surface of Jerry's brain, through wires entering his skull behind his right ear.

> The electrodes stimulate certain brain cells, making Jerry perceive the specks of light. The shifting patterns as Jerry scans across a scene tells him where light areas meet dark ones, letting him find the black cap on the white wall, for example.

> The device provides a sort of tunnel vision, reading an area about the size of a card 2 inches wide and 8 inches (20 cms) tall, held at arm's length. Jerry uses the device only

two or three days a week at Dobelle's lab, as researchers tinker

Blasts rock

customs bldg

in Moscow

BRIFFIY

Volcano erupts in Guatemala Authorities here put three villages on red alert and began evacuations after the Pacaya volcano. 25 km south of here

began to erupt late Sunday, AFP reports from Guatemala City. Government officials said hundreds of people were being evacuated from areas at risk from the eruption. President Alfonso Portillo, who took office Friday, coordinated the evacuations. officials said. Air-traffic authorities said the capital's Aurora international airport, which lies just to the south of the capital, was temporarily closed, after radar detected ash and volcanic sand floating at an altitude of some 10,000 meters (31,000 feet), which could affect flights.

60 illegal immigrants stranded:

About 60 Iraqis. Pakistanis. Turks and Afghan nationals are on Ambon Island in central stranded on the eastern Indonesian island of Sumba after their boat broke down on its way to Australia, a report said Monday,

The Jakarta Post daily said the group, only 37 of whom have passports, had been southward bound on a small motor boat when it developed engine trouble. They were being housed in a hotel in West Sumba until they could be transported either to Java or West Timor.

Iranian FM heads to Turkey: Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi left Tehran Monday morning for Turkey where he is to make an official two-day

visit, the official IRNA agency reported, AFP says from Tehran. Kharazi is due to discuss several sensitive subjects in his talks with Turkish leaders. He is also due to express Iranian leaders' concerns over Israel-Turkey cooperation, the foreign ministry said.

Fresh sectarian violence flares in Spice Islands

JAKARTA, Jan 17: Clashes between Muslims and Christians claimed the lives of another three people in eastern Indonesia's Maluku Islands, the military said today, despite a warning from Jakarta of tough action to halt the violence, reports AFP.

Master Sergeant Des Sopacua, of the Maluku military command information office said three people were killed on Sunday in clashes be-Maluku.

"Four members of the security forces were also injured when they tried to intervene in the fighting," Sopacua told AFP from Ambon, the main city in the Malukus on the island of the same name.

But he said security forces had regained control in the

The violence took place the morning after Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid warned the government's patience was running thin and it

intended to take strong action

to halt the year-long sectarian violence in the Malukus, formerly known as the Spice Is-

> Angry mob set church on fire

Meanwhile, a mob of Muslims today set fire to a Roman Catholic church in Mataram on Lombok island, just east of Bali, officials there said.

"The mob, mostly youths, burned the Maria Immaculata church in downtown Mataram this morning," said an official of the local administration's information office who identified himself only as Hayat.

Hayat said the mob was angered by press reports of the slaughter of Muslims in Halamahera island in the past week. by their Christian rivals there.

'What can I say, they (the attackers) were angry at the killings of Muslims in Halmahera and in the Maluku," Hayat

He added that to his knowledge, there were no casualties, nor had there been any arrests.

Pakistan calls for Kashmir talks

Indo-Pak ties at lowest ebb

"cricker matches and a path-NEW DELHI, Jan 17 : Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf said in remarks published today that only talks on disputed Kashmir failed. could improve ties with India currently at their "lowest" level, core issue was not being adreports AFP.

Musharraf also denied New Delhi's allegations that his country was involved in the recent hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane and said the hijack-

ers were not in Pakistan. "I totally agree that relations disputed Kashmir frontier. between India and Pakistan are at their lowest." Musharraf said in an interview with The Hindu. the first to an Indian newspaper since he took power in a coup in October last year.

The root cause is Kashmir, he said, adding that earlier efforts to improve ties through

breaking bus journey to Pakistan by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had "It has failed because the

dressed. I feel there is one dispute only ... the Kashmir dispute. Others are minor aberra-

tions. Musharraf said the South Asian region was fraught with tension, especially along the

"Every day there is firing and killing on both sides of the border. Lots of people are dying. they are getting killed."

India accuses Pakistan, which administers the northern part of Kashmir, of fomenting a Muslim separatist drive in the Indian zone of the state. The

secessionist campaign has claimed more than 25,000 lives since 1989. Islamabad denies the charge but extends moral and diplomatic support to the

Musharraf denied he had reneged on a peace agreement inked by Vajpayee and the-then Pak'stan prime minister Nav : Sharif in February last

The general said the accord only referred to Kashmir in

"Previously there was an apology to Kashmir. I will not make it apologetic. I want to face facts and I want the Indians

to face the facts." Musharraf said another stumbling block was Indian non-recognition of his regime.

MOSCOW, Jan 17: Two explosions early today rocked the customs department building in Moscow. Interfax news agency quoted police as saying, reports

Half an hour after the blasts occurred at 7.30 a.m. (10:30 am BST), the police were unable to say whether there had been any

Almost all the windows in the downtown customs building were blown out, Interfax said.

Right-hand man to Carlos the Jackal sentenced to life

BERLIN, Jan 17: Johannes Weinrich, considered the righthand man of international terrorist "Carlos the Jackal", was sentenced today to life in prison after a murder trial for the bombing of the French cultural centre in west Berlin, reports

Weinrich, 52, was charged with murder, attempted murder and possession of explosives for the 1983 attack.

Japan remembers

Kobe quake

victims

TOKYO, Jan 17 : Heads

bowed. Japanese relatives hold-

ing lanterns gathered in silence

on a hill top above Kobe at 5.46

a.m. today to remember the

6,432 victims of the killer

earthquake that struck exactly

Newspapers turned over

five years before, reports AFP.

large swathes of their front

pages to the event and the state-

backed Japan Broadcasting

Corp. scheduled more than

seven hours of television pro-

gramming on the disaster

sary, many of the bereaved wept

in front of black stone plaques

bearing the victims' names in

the western Japanese city.

mostly rebuilt after being dev-

lit 6.432 candles to write out the

date of the disaster. At Kobe's

port. 200 people floated

lanterns onto the waters to re-

· At a park in Kobe, mourners

astated by the tremor.

On the eve of the anniver-

memorial.

Pak religious parties rally against signing of CTBT

ISLAMABAD, Jan 17: Pakistan's right wing religious parties warned the military-led government not to sign the global test ban treaty and one cleric issued a fatwa or edict threatening an uprising if the treaty is signed, newspapers re-

AFP reports from Jakarta.

ported Monday, says AP. Pakistan, which exploded nuclear devises in 1998 in response to its neighbour India, is being asked by the international community to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar last week said that his government wants to achieve a consensus among Pakistanis before signing the treaty. But statements indicate the government favours signing

But Pakistan has made it

Maulana al-Sheikh Rahat Gul. the patron of a religious school issued a religious edict calling on Pakistan's Muslims "to stand up and rise against the rulers" if they sign the test ban treaty, the English-language newspaper The News reported.

campaign by religious groups in Pakistan to stop the military government from signing on to the Comprehensive Test Ban

"Signing the test ban treaty clear that even if it signs the would amount to surrendering treaty it will not give up the to the forces conspiring against by New Delhi's handling of the

clear programme.

The edict is part of a large

The small, but powerful Jamaat-e-Islami, held a rally on Sunday in the eastern city of Lahore to condemn the global test ban treaty.

tests if India carries out more

quoted Jamaat-e-Islami leader, Qasi Hussein Ahmed as saying. The religious parties in Pakistan have been staunch supporters of the country's nu-

"Nuclear technology is the only defence Pakistan can have against India," Ahmed said.

Since last month's hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane relations between India and Pakistan have deteriorated with both countries waging a bitter war of words. India accuses Pakistan of orchestrating the hijacking, which resulted in the release of three Kashmiri militants, Pakistan vehemently denies the accusation and says India is launching its propaganda campaign to appease a domestic audience disgruntled right to conduct future nuclear Pakistan," the newspaper hijacking.

Former Lankan Tamil leader returns to India

COLOMBO, Jan 17: A former Tamil rebel leader who returned from nine years in exile last year has gone back to India after being expelled by his party for supporting the government. the party said Monday, reports

Vartharaja Perumal, who once had declared the northera Tamil majority areas independent from Sri Lanka, returned home last year after a nine-year self-imposed exile.

But Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front expelled him from the party last week after he pledged support to the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga while trying to resume leadership of his party.

The EPRLF had opposed Kumaratunga's December 21 rcelection. "He was undisciplined and

did not want to toe the party

line," said party leader Guresh Premachandran. He said Peru-

mal had left Sri Lanka.

Relatives, locals and central government officials pray for the victims of the 1995 Kobe earthquake during a memorial ceremony in Kobe, western Japan yesterday. The ceremony

marked the fifth anniversary of the quake which left 6,432 people dead.

Socialist Ricardo Lagos celebrates in Santiago after accepting victory in the second round of presidential elections Sunday. Lagos will govern for six years beginning in March 2000. - AFP photo

Lagos elected Chilean president

SANTIAGO, Jan 17: Ricardo Lagos was elected Chile's first socialist president since Salvador Allende, narrowly defeating a conservative rival in a runoff election that focused more on the country's economic future than on its violent past. reports AP.

Conservative candidate Joaquin Lavin, who once worked in the government qu former dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet, conceded defeat after the voting Sunday and went to Lagos' campaign headquarters at a hotel in Santiago to congratulate him. Hundreds of Lagos' supporters cheered wildly as the two appeared on a balcony and hugged each other with their wives at their sides.

A moderate socialist, Lagos has distanced himself from the radical brand of Marxism espoused by Allende.

Russia pounds Chechen positions Council of Europe calls for truce

NAZRAN, Russia, Jan 17: Russia blasted rebel Chechen positions today in the besieged capital. Grozny, as it stepped up its drive towards the city centre. brushing aside the Council of

Chechen fighters repulsed a bid overnight by Russian forces to storm the main Grozny hospital after a bitter fire-fight, a Chechen presidential spokesman told AFP by telephone from Chechnya.

Europe's pleas for a ceasefire.

"The assault was launched by Russian elite troops backed by artillery and armoured vehicles in the Oktyabrskoye district in the east of the Chechen capital," said Said-Selim Abdulmuslimov.

sualties sustained by either side in the clashes. Capture of the hospital building would give the Rus-

sians an important strategic

He gave no details of the ca-

boost in the capital as it would allow them to fire down the main thoroughfare in Grozny, Victory Avenue (formerly Lenin Avenue).

Fierce battles also erupted Monday in the northwestern Staropromyslovsky district, Abdulmuslimov said. Russia launched a concerted bid Sunday to storm central

districts of the besieged capital, unleashing a hail of artillery fire and rockets in support of troops spearheading a "decisive new phase in the war. Moscow sent in troops to seize Grozny on December 25,

but has made little headway in the face of entrenched resistance from the estimated 2,000 rebel defenders. In Moscow, a Council of Europe delegation was to meet Russian Prime Minister

Vladimir Putin to raise con-

cerns over the Chechen war.

Delegation chief Lord Russell-Johnston of Britain Sunday called for an immediate end to hostilities in the republic. warning the conflict could lead to Russia's suspension from the 41-nation human rights and democracy body.

He was to outline the Council's concerns in talks with Putin and a host of key officlals, including Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, and Deputy Prime Minister Sergel Shoigu. who as emergencies minister has been handling the refugee exodus from Chechnya to neighbouring Ingushetia.

On Tuesday, the delegation will fly to the troubled North Caucasus for talks with local leaders, including Ingushetia's President Ruslan Aushev, a sharp critic of Moscow's policles in the region.

Five Israelis hurt in bomb attack

member those who died.

HADERA, Israel, Jan 17; Five Israelis were wounded today in a bomb attack in this northern town that officials said could be the work of "terrorists" trying to derail the Middle East peace process, reports AFP.

The bomb, hidden in a litter

bin, exploded near a branch of Bank Hapoalim next to the town's central market place around 11:15 a.m. (3:15 pm BST), police said.

All the injured, including one who was seriously hurt, received first aid at the scene before being taken to hospital.

Police immediately cordoned off the area and launched a search to make sure there were no other bombs hidden nearby. Security was stepped up in the centre of town and police blocked off traffic.

Police said initial inquiries suggested the attack had nationalist motives, which generally indicates a Palestinian act.