

## International

# Hizbul threatens escalation of violence in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Sept 17 : The Hizbul Mujahideen threatened today to induct freshly trained rebels, bolster its armoury and escalate its bloody campaign against Indian rule in Kashmir, reports AFP.

The separatist group, which walked out of a truce in August, also renewed its offer for talks with India but maintained that Pakistan must be included in any negotiations on the disputed territory.

The outfit at present has plans to intensify actions against security forces in Kashmir and other parts of the country," Hizbul commander Assad Yazdani told

the Press Trust of India (PTI).

He also said his group would "increase the number of skilled militants, acquire more sophisticated weapons and at the same time garner public support."

Yazdani, a senior Hizbul strategist, said a universally accepted ceasefire in Kashmir could be reached provided India agreed to include Pakistan in the talks.

Let India respond positively first," Yazdani said. "The future ceasefire will be an absolute one and every outfit operating in the (Kashmir) valley will abide by it."

Yazdani participated in talks after the botched ceasefire offered by Hizbul on July 24.

Hizbul's Pakistan-based chief Syed Salahudin revoked the ceasefire on August 8 citing Indian intransigence over demands that Pakistan be involved in the talks.

Yazdani said fresh talks could start immediately if India agreed to the pre-conditions.

"Yes, we are ready even for bilateral talks with India provided final settlement of the Kashmir imbroglio is through tripartite agreement," he said.

Yazdani added "Pakistan, being a party to the issue, ... cannot be sidelined."

Yazdani said Hizbul would "take into confidence all militant

groups" before offering a fresh ceasefire in Kashmir.

The guerrilla commander also said foreign Islamic guerrillas fighting Indian forces in Kashmir would also accept a Hizbul-sponsored ceasefire provided New Delhi softened its stand.

The Muslim separatist campaign in the Indian part of Kashmir has claimed some 34,000 lives.

India, which controls the southern two-thirds of Kashmir, accuses Pakistan of arming and training Kashmiri separatists, a charge Islamabad denies.

Milosevic trailing behind his rival in poll

BELGRADE, Sept 17 : The stakes were high for Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic as polls showed him trailing behind his opposition rival Vojislav Kostunica just a week before the Yugoslav presidential race on September 24, reports AFP.

For weeks, Kostunica, the 56-year-old candidate of the umbrella coalition Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) which groups 18 parties, has headed various opinion polls with a lead of between five and 18 percent over Milosevic, who is seeking his second term, but this time through a direct vote.

The vote is as important for Milosevic, isolated by the West after being indicted last year for alleged war crimes committed in Kosovo, as for his political opponents in Serbia, who for a decade have failed to defeat the Yugoslav strongman.

An apparent bid to step up the campaign, Milosevic, known for his rare public appearances, twice this week visited showpiece sites for his government-sponsored reconstruction campaign.

A defeat for Milosevic would not only mean a loss of power but could also make his future highly uncertain, with the prospect of a possible trial before the UN-sponsored International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, local analysts say.

Pro-Moscow  
dy police chief  
shot dead in  
Chechnya

MOSCOW, Sept 17 : A Chechen deputy police chief serving with pro-Moscow forces in the breakaway republic was shot dead overnight, ITAR-TASS reported today, says AFP.

Lieutenant Colonel Shamil Azayev, deputy police commander in the southeastern Veden district, died in a hail of bullets fired by unidentified gunmen who drove up to his door, the agency cited Chechnya's military commander, General Ivan Babichev, as saying.

ITAR-TASS did not say where the attack took place, but the main population centre in the mountainous area, Veden, was once the stronghold of feared Chechen field commander Shamil Basayev.

Nepal bans  
torchlight  
procession

KATHMANDU, Sept 17 : Nepal has banned torchlight processions throughout the kingdom, state-run radio announced today, reports AFP.

"The ban has been imposed to protect life and property of the general public," it said quoting a home ministry order.

But it was believed the ban was aimed at leftist parties, which usually stage the nighttime processions 12 hours ahead of strike calls to garner support.

The order comes four days ahead of a national strike called by nine left-wing parties supported by the underground Maoists rebels for Thursday.

The fighting has left 1,388 people dead, and more than 2,000 people injured.

The leftist parties complain of various government shortcomings and allegedly unequal treat-

ments with India.

Solomon Islands  
militants seize  
aircraft

GIZO, Solomon Islands, Sept 17 : Solomon Islands militants have hijacked a light aircraft and kidnapped its pilot, authorities said today, reports AFP.

A faction of the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) led by Harold Keke, seized the aircraft at Babanakira on Guadalcanal's isolated Weather Coast on Saturday and demanded two million Solomon dollars (200,000 US\$).

## Peru's president to leave office, calls fresh polls

LIMA, Sept 17 : In a dramatic and unexpected move, Peru's President Alberto Fujimori announced a new round of general elections late Saturday, and said that he would not stand as a candidate in the upcoming vote, reports AFP.

The surprise announcement, nationally broadcast on radio and television, effectively marked the Peruvian leader's resignation from office, although it was not clear exactly when elections would be held or how soon he would withdraw from political life.

Fujimori said that the vote would be held "in the near future."

He told television viewers that he had reached the decision to hold immediate elections, "after a period of deep reflection," adding that "the person who is now speaking will not be a candidate."

The bombshell comes barely four months after Fujimori was reelected for a third consecutive five-year term, with nearly 52 percent of the vote.

The announcement of his early departure was especially surprising because Fujimori has held a tenacious grip on the presidency over the past decade, using a vast array of political stratagems over the years -- from suspending the constitution to dissolving Congress -- to maintain his hold on power.

The political upheaval appeared to be fallout from a corruption scandal which has rocked Peru over the past few days, after the head of the National Intelligence Service (SIN) was shown in a 58-minute video apparently handing a bribe to a former member of the Peruvian opposition.

In the video, SIN chief Vladimiro Montesinos was seen handing over 15,000 dollars in cash to Alberto Kouri, a former member of Peru's police who recently switched to Fujimori's Peru 2000 party.

A voice on the video, apparently that of Montesinos, is clearly heard asking Kouri, "How



Alberto Fujimori

During the elections in April, Fujimori's party managed to win just 53 of a possible 120 congressional seats. But that number rose to nearly 70 by the time he took office on July 28, as members of the opposition Peru Possible party suspiciously defected en masse.

The video was allegedly filmed on May 5, mid-way between the two rounds of the election.

Public outrage and political pressure on Fujimori mounted steadily over the weekend after the scandal came to light, with ex-president candidate Alejandro Toledo called on the president to resign and for a one-year transitional government to be installed.

The video was allegedly filmed on May 5, mid-way between the two rounds of the election.

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## Hostage rescue operation may take a week

All hostages are alive

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, Sept 17 : A military operation to rescue 22 hostages, including six foreigners, in the southern Philippine island of Jolo could take up to a week, the ground commander told President Joseph Estrada today, reports AFP.

Army Brigadier General Narciso Abaya, speaking from Jolo, told Estrada in a teleconference at a military base here that the operation, which began early Saturday, could take "three days to one week."

"We are banking on you, Abaya," Estrada said during the conversation, which took place during a photo opportunity attended by photographers and a television crew.

Estrada ordered Abaya specifically to secure the freedom of two French journalists among the hostages without putting their lives at risk.

French television journalists Jean-Jacques Le Garrec and Roland Madura were abducted while covering the hostage crisis in July.

The other captives are American tourist Jeffrey Schilling, three Malaysians and 16 Filipinos.

During his three-hour visit, Estrada was briefed by the top military brass at the southern military command in southern Zamboanga city, from where the island's main population centres.

Another report says, twenty-two hostages held by Muslim extremist guerrillas are alive two days into a military rescue operation in the southern Philippine island of Jolo, armed forces chief of staff General Angelo Reyes said Sunday.

Meanwhile, six Muslim extremist kidnappers have been killed and 12 people wounded in a massive Philippine military operation to rescue 22 hostages including six foreigners, officials said today.

Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado said six Abu Sayyaf gunmen were killed and 20 others

captured, including four wounded guerrillas.

Four government troops were also wounded, he said.

The mayor of Jolo, Rashdi Abubakar, said four civilians were wounded in the fighting, which he said was outside the island's main population centres.

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