

# Filipinos launch nationwide protests to pressure Estrada to resign

## Impeachment trial begins next month

MANILA, Nov 14: Filipinos launched nationwide protests and work stoppages today to pressure Philippine President Joseph Estrada to resign, a day after he was impeached by Congress for alleged corruption, reports AFP.

Protesters included militant leftist organisations, trade unionists, transport workers and employees of big conglomerates, organisers said.

Public transportation was virtually paralysed in some key cities while at least 20 factories ceased operations to back the protest.

Employer and "big business" groups have expressed support for the "historic protest," said Vicky Garchitorena, a spokeswoman for the Congress of the Filipino People (KOMPIL), a civic group involved in the protest actions.

Thumping tables and shouting "Estrada resign," some dealers on the Philippine stock exchange walked out of the trading floor to support the "national day of protests" against the president, who following his impeachment Monday will face a Senate trial that could lead to his ouster.

Vice-President Gloria Arroyo and the influential leader of the Christian church Jaime Cardinal Sin, who are leading the clamour for Estrada's resignation, have backed the protests and work strikes.

Protests on Tuesday began in some provinces in the morning, although most actions in the capital Manila were to start later in the day.

About 30,000 workers affiliated with the militant May One Movement were to lead a protest in one Manila district, while about 100,000 other members and their families were to be deployed nationwide to join other mass actions.

Another group began mobilising hundreds of people in central Manila and was expected to join the May One Movement-led gathering for a march to the presidential palace later in the afternoon.

Union workers made the rounds of busy streets and markets early Tuesday to distribute anti-Estrada leaflets and posters, reports said.

Estrada's national security adviser Alexander Aguirre said the president has ordered police to respect the people's right to assembly but added security had been tightened.

The House of Representatives on Monday impeached Estrada for alleged corruption stemming from an accusation by a former friend that the leader took millions in gambling bribes and tobacco excise tax kickbacks.

**Impeachment trial**

President Joseph Estrada's impeachment trial will begin in December, the newly-elected president of the Senate said today as he pledged a speedy and impartial hearing.

Aquilino Pimentel, who is seen as an independent-minded Estrada ally, said the Senate committee on rules had been asked to finish by Monday the drafting of rules for the country's first impeachment trial of a sitting president.

Officials said they would use US impeachment rules as a general guideline.

"I think realistically, we can start hearings in December. If this is done every day, Mondays to Saturdays, then we will finish everything by end December," Pimentel told radio station DZMM.



Thousands of anti-Estrada demonstrators march on a street in Manila yesterday in support of the impeachment of President Joseph Estrada by Congress. Estrada became the first Philippine leader to have been impeached by Congress on charges of corruption. He is to face trial in December at the Senate, whose members are to sit as jurors. —AFP photo

### Five militants killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, Nov 14: Indian security forces shot dead five Muslim militants today in two separate incidents in the restive northern state of Kashmir, reports AFP.

The two encounters took place early Tuesday in Bhatnagar district, around 100 kilometres east of the Kashmiri winter capital Jammu.

A total of five militants were killed, all of whom were identified as members of the Hizbul Mujahideen militant outfit, said defence spokesman Major Sanjay Khanna.

"A large amount of arms and ammunition were seized from the dead militants," he added.

Hizbul Mujahideen announced a unilateral ceasefire earlier this year, but soon called it off, citing Indian intransigence over allowing Pakistan to participate in a peace dialogue over Kashmir.

The Muslim insurgency against Indian rule in Kashmir has claimed more than 34,000 lives since its launch in 1989.



A protester stands behind a fence near the Pavilion in Chicago where Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak was addressing the United Jewish Communities conference on Monday. The three-day conference, which ends Tuesday, has attracted more than 5,000 Jewish leaders from around the world. —AFP photo

### Angolan rebels reject amnesty offer

LISBON, Nov 14: Angolan rebel group UNITA, which has been fighting a long-running civil war, spurned on Monday a new government offer of an amnesty for those who surrendered, reports Reuters.

According to a statement sent to Portuguese news agency Lusa, the rebels rejected "totally and irrevocably" the offer made by President Jose Eduardo dos Santos at the weekend during ceremonies marking Angola's 25 years of independence from Portugal.

The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, which has resorted to guerrilla tactics after losing its central highland strongholds early last year, reaffirmed that it was willing to talk peace, but only on its own terms.

# Pak army govt encouraging violence against minorities, alleges AI

ISLAMABAD, Nov 14: Pakistan's army government is encouraging violence against religious minorities with its silence, Amnesty International said Tuesday, reports AP.

The accusation follows two attacks in as many weeks against members of Pakistan's minority Ahmedi sect of Islam, a group that is reviled as heretics by mainstream Muslims here.

Last week five people were killed when a mob of Sunni Muslim activists stormed an Ahmedi mosque in eastern Punjab province. An earlier attack on an Ahmedi mosque, also in eastern Punjab province, killed six people.

The official silence around the religiously motivated murders... and the lack of police investigation have directly contributed to a climate in which extremists feel encouraged to harass, attack and kill members of the country's religious minorities," the London-based Amnesty International said in a statement received Tuesday.

The attack last week in Takt Hazara was the culmination of weeks of harassment and intimidation, said the human rights organization. Ahmedi graves had been desecrated. Ahmedi worshippers threatened. The mob hacked Ahmedi worshippers with axes.

"They broke down the door, armed with sharp weapons, axes and daggers. They killed five people. Then they burned down the mosque. We weren't even allowed to bury our dead there. We had to take them elsewhere," said Raja Ghalib Ahmed, general secretary of Jamaat-e-Ahmedi or Group of Ahmedis.

Attempts by Ahmedis to get help from the local police were met with

silence and urgings that they remain calm.

Ahmedis who number more than 3.5 million in Pakistan differ from mainstream Muslims in their belief that a messiah came about 100 years ago named Ahmed.

Mainstream Muslims say Ahmedis worship a prophet after Mohammed, contrary to one of the pillars of the Islamic faith which says there are no prophets after Mohammed.

In the early 1970s, Ahmedis were declared non-Muslims in Pakistan, a declaration that was written into the Pakistani constitution.

Ahmedis have been forbidden by law from calling their faithful to prayer from loudspeakers the way mainstream Muslims do. They also cannot inscribe or quote verses of the Muslim holy book.

Hundreds of Ahmedis have been charged under the country's controversial blasphemy law that imposes the death penalty for insulting Islam or its prophet Mohammed.

"How many more people have to die for their religion before the government of Pakistan takes action and clearly and publicly states that such violence will not be tolerated?" Amnesty International asked.

But the Punjab provincial government says that the attacks are being investigated and that the military regime was committed to protecting minorities in Pakistan.

"We will ensure that the life and property of minorities are safe and protected," said Khalid Ranja, the Punjab minister for religious minorities. "We know that this is being done by our enemies to damage our credibility at the international level."

# Putin for N-cuts by Russia, US

MOSCOW, Nov 14: In a bold new arms control gambit, Russia's President Vladimir Putin said Monday that Russia and the United States could make drastic cuts in their nuclear arsenals far beyond existing proposals, reports AP.

Putin, who is pushing to downsize a huge and inefficient military that Russia can no longer afford, said the former Cold War opponents need not stop at the 1,500-warhead limit Russia has been advocating up until now. He did not propose any specific numbers.

"It's not the limit, we are ready to consider lower levels in the future," he said in a statement issued by the Kremlin. "We don't see reasons which would hamper further deep cuts in strategic offensive weapons. There should be no pause in nuclear disarmament."

Putin said the 1,500 level could be achieved by 2008, but

only if the United States does not go ahead with a national missile defense system that Russia says would undermine nuclear deterrence.

After years of delay, Russia's parliament in April ratified the START II arms reduction treaty, which would roughly halve arsenals to about 3,500 warheads each. As soon as the treaty goes into effect, the sides have tentatively agreed to go ahead with a START III treaty that envisages further cuts, to 2,000 to 2,500 warheads.

Analysts say the United States has roughly 7,500 nuclear weapons, while Russia has between 6,000 and 7,000. START II has not taken effect because the Russian parliament added conditions not yet ratified by the US Senate.

The cash-strapped Russian government is under intense pressure to cut military spending, which makes up one third of

the federal budget even though Russia spends only about \$1.5 billion on defense compared with annual US defense spending of around \$290 billion, service lives.

"It's very important for Russia to persuade the United States to also cut its arsenals, to avoid a unilateral disarmament," said Dmitry Trenin, an analyst for the Carnegie Endowment.

Trenin said that Russia was likely to agree to some form of US missile defense by agreeing to the changes in the 1972 Anti-Ballistic missile treaty which restricts such systems. That's because Russia fears it doesn't have the money to respond if the United States unilaterally backs out of the ABM treaty.

"Russia will have to choose between some kind of agreement with the United States and the absence of one, which would put Russia in a most desperate political and economic situation," Trenin said.

### BSF captures 'spy hawk'

NEW DELHI, Nov 14: Indian border guards have captured a falcon which they believe was being used by Pakistani intelligence agencies as a "spy hawk," reports AFP.

The bird was caught by Border Security Force (BSF) personnel on Sunday near Jaisalmer, a frontier town in the northern desert state of Rajasthan.

"The falcon was fitted with a transmitter, which we have sent away for examination," said B.D. Sharma, BSF deputy inspector general in Jaisalmer.

"We have caught two such birds in the past, and believe they are being used by the Pakistanis as spy hawks," Sharma told AFP by telephone Tuesday.

"Of course, it's always possible that it is just a hunting bird and that the transmitter is a location device should it get lost," he added.

### 11 Arab first ladies to meet in Cairo

CAIRO, Nov 14: Eleven Arab first ladies will gather in Cairo this weekend for a first regional "women's summit," the Arab League said Monday, reports AFP.

Suzanne Mubarak, the wife of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, will play host to the event, which will begin Saturday and aims to discuss the status of women in the Arab world, an official source at the league said.

The summit, which will be attended by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's wife Soha, will also include a gala in support of Palestinian women, expected to draw some 400 figures from around the Arab world.

Scheduled to travel to Egypt for the summit will be Queen Rania of Jordan, Lebanese President Emile Lahoud's wife Andree, Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi's wife Safiya and Sudanese President Omar el-Beshir's wife Fatima.

Also participating will be Princess Lala Mariani, the sister of Morocco's King Mohamed VI, Bahraini Emir Hamad bin Issa al-Khalifa's wife Sheikhha Sabika al-Khalifa, Djiboutian President Ismael Omar Guelleh's wife Khadra Heid and Anbar Gazali, the wife of Comoran Colonel Azali Assoumani.

To be represented at the summit at a lower level will be Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Oman and Qatar are the only countries that have indicated they will not attend, the Arab League source said without explaining their reasons.

Saudi Arabia and Mauritania have not yet responded to invitations.

# Missing Indian chopper crashes near Pak border

NEW DELHI, Nov 14: A missing Indian military helicopter with 12 people on board was sighted Monday, a day after it crashed while flying along the country's border with Pakistan, reports AFP.

Indian Air Force officials said today they had not ruled out Pakistani involvement in the downing of the military helicopter.

"We are not ruling out anything," an air force spokesman told AFP, when asked if there was any evidence that Pakistan may have shot the plane down on Sunday.

The chopper went down some 90 kilometres south of the Gujarat district of Nalia while on a routine mission near the Pakistan border. Five of those on board survived.

The spokesman said the heli-

copter crew had reported seeing some boats in the area.

"BSF (Border Security Force) officials in the sector said that there were no Indian boats there at the time," he added.

Indian Air Force Chief A.Y. Tipnis had said Monday that Pakistani involvement was a possibility.

"It is premature to say so at this moment. That's one of the things we will investigate," Tipnis, who visited the site of the crash and spoke to the co-pilot of the Russian-made Mi-8 helicopter, ruled out engine failure as a cause for the crash.

The Air Force chief said the helicopter was circling the area to take a closer look at the boats they had sighted and the co-pilot had reported nothing wrong with the chopper up to that point.

# UNSC approves peacekeeping reforms

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 14: The Security Council approved broad peacekeeping reforms on Monday but its five major powers rejected a proposal they commit themselves to providing troops for every mission, reports Reuters.

A resolution, adopted unanimously, pledged members to devise peacekeeping mandates that were clear, credible and achievable, dispatch troops within 30 days after a mission is authorized and make other general improvements.

Bangladesh, however, chastised the council's five permanent members for letting others do their fighting by contributing too few troops to peacekeeping operations they authorized.

Its UN ambassador, Anwarul Chowdhury, proposed that the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia each be required to supply five per cent of peacekeeping personnel in missions they authorized in the council.

None of the five mentioned his proposal in Monday's public debate but rejected it firmly in private consultations. British ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock later said that "all member states should consider what they can contribute, not just some, not just those with a large capacity."

Chowdhury spoke after the Security Council adopted the resolution on peacekeeping operations, now costing about \$3 billion a year for more than 38,000 troops in 15 places. The five powers have dispatched some 2,300 soldiers, military observers and civilian police combined.

This symbolic contribution would, besides enhancing operational capacity, demonstrate the united strength of the whole of the international community behind each of the UN peacekeeping operations," Chowdhury said.

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# Tea might be good for heart: Study

NEW ORLEANS, Nov 14: A nice cup of the might just be good for the heart, a study sponsored by the tea industry suggests, reports AP.

Although it is too soon to elevate tea to the status of health food, researchers at Boston University found that it may help the arteries work better when people have heart disease.

Several studies have found that regular tea drinkers seem to have a lower risk of heart attacks. However, it is still unclear whether this is actually the case or how tea might help the heart.

In a new study, doctors had people drink tea regularly while carefully measuring the effects on their bodies. The work was financed by the North America Tea Trade Health Research Association and presented Monday at a meeting in New Orleans of the American Heart Association.

"Drinking tea reverses an important underlying abnormality of blood vessel function that is related

to heart disease and stroke," said Dr. Joseph A. Vita.

People with heart disease often have a defect in which the lining of their blood vessels fails to relax quickly in times of stress to allow more blood flow. The researchers studied 50 men and women who had this defect.

All were asked to drink four eight-ounce cups of tea a day for a month. Ten drank four cups of water a day for another month.

They found that the response of their blood vessels to the stress of a blood pressure cuff became normal during the month of tea drinking. However, there was no change when they drank water.

But Vita cautioned that it is too soon to urge tea drinking as a treatment for heart disease.

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### Nine opposition commanders defect to Taliban

KABUL, Nov 14: Nine rival commanders have switched over to the ruling Taliban militia from a besieged enclave in the northern province of Samangan, an official report said today, reports AFP.

The Taliban's Shariat Weekly said 215 armed men left the Darae Souf valley with their commanders along with heavy and light arms.

"Realising the peaceful policy of the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) these commanders recently discontinued resistance and came over in Darae Souf of Samangan province," the weekly said.

Prominent among the defectors are Rais Juma, Hajj Mohammad Siddiq, Khan and Mulla Juma, the paper said, adding that local Taliban authorities had assured them they could live in peace.

Senior opposition official Sayed Hussain Anwari said he could not confirm the report.

Darae Souf is one of several links between the central highlands and the northern province of Balkh.

Fighters loyal to senior opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood have used the valley to attack Samangan's main provincial town of Aibak.

But they have been under siege for some time, bringing enormous hardship to locals in the area.

Reports of drought-related deaths have come from Darae Souf this summer, prompting a United Nations food drop. Some 12 million Afghans, more than half the population, have been affected by the drought.

The Taliban drove former defence minister Masood and president Burhanuddin Rabbani from Kabul in 1996 and have now imposed their puritanical version of Islamic law on about 90 per cent of the country.

# World's wettest area faces drinking water shortage

MAWSYNNAM, India, Nov 14: A picturesque mountain hamlet in India's north-eastern state of Meghalaya may hold the world record for rainfall but water is currently the scarcest and dearest commodity, residents say, reports AFP.

The little village of Mawsynram, a tourist haven, located 56 kilometres from the state capital Shillong, entered the record books after beating Mount Waialeale in Hawaii, when it experienced a mean annual rainfall of nearly 12,000 millimetres (480 inches).

But today, the village, perched atop a plateau 1,401 metres above sea level, is facing one of its worst drinking water shortages.

"People find it hard to believe that residents of Mawsynram have to buy drinking water in the winters," D.P. Langthli, state geology and mining minister who represents Mawsynram constituency in the state assembly, told AFP.

"A jerry-rigged water costs anything between five (one cent) to ten rupees."

Local villagers from Meghalaya's dominant Khasi race have to go to distant places and streams downhill to fetch drinking water during winter.

"During the winter months, we have to trek for at least an hour, to the nearest natural springs to wash clothes, utensils and to bathe", housewife Roshan Lyngdoh said.

The south-west monsoon and thunderstorms soak the village from June to September. But during the winters, the natural springs and streams dry up and crops suffer. Water tapped from streams and

supplied through pipelines to the village is inadequate.

"A big reservoir is on the verge of completion and efforts are on to tap water from streams and springs to mitigate the woes of the people," a government administrator in Mawsynram said.

Like Mawsynram, the residents of Cherrapunji, an adjoining village, face similar problems.

Cherrapunji holds a number of world records like highest rainfall for 12 months, 11 months, six months, one month and 15 days.

Both Mawsynram and Cherrapunji are showing signs of desertification as incessant rain washes away the thin layer of soil, leaving very little topsoil in both villages.

"With no soil surface to soak the rainwater, most of the rainfall gets quickly discharged resulting in negligible base flows in the streams during the winters. This leads to no stored underground water to draw from," a local soil scientist said.

"Due to lack of topsoil, there is no vegetation in the area."

Experts say wanton destruction of the forest cover could be responsible for the yearly drought. The once-thick pine forest is lost and official figures suggest there could be less than ten per cent of the forest cover left.

"By denuding the forest cover, the villagers invite nature's wrath and the only way to strike a balance is by carrying on afforestation drives in the area," minister Langthli said.

# Aceh separatists threaten mass strike

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia, Nov 14: Separatists in the Indonesian province of Aceh threatened today to launch a campaign of civil disobedience to win independence, reports AFP.

A declaration in favour of the oil-rich, strongly Muslim province breaking away from Jakarta was approved by a meeting of leaders from across the province and received a rapturous welcome at a pro-independence rally attended by an estimated 500,000 people.

The rally came a day after rebel leaders in the province said they were pulling out of scheduled peace talks with the government in protest at escalating violence by security forces.

The mass gathering, the third of its kind here since Friday, was informed of the leaders' declaration by activist Muhammad Nazar.

"The Indonesian government is asked to return the sovereignty of Aceh to the Acehnese nation," he said to applause and yells of "freedom" from the crowd.

The declaration spelled out four other demands:

- The withdrawal of all Indonesian security forces from the

province:

- The acceptance by Jakarta of responsibility for military atrocities in the province
- Intervention and mediation by the UN and other foreign countries
- The revoking of the Netherlands' declaration of war against the kingdom of Aceh of March 26, 1873. (Separatists argue this declaration of war is proof of Aceh's sovereignty).
- If the five demands are not implemented by November 26, it is called on the Aceh nation to launch a peaceful mass strike starting from November 27 until December 3," the leaders' declaration said.

The crowd on the campus, who had arrived aboard open trucks, buses, motorcycles, cars, pedicabs and on foot since around 9:00 am (0800 BST) dispersed peacefully following Nazar's speech.

Police and security personnel were noticeably absent from the streets of the provincial capital, and traffic to and from the rally site was directed by students in university jackets and SIRA members.

The rallies, which started Friday, mark the first anniversary of a similar gathering in Banda Aceh on November 8 last year which was attended by up to a million people.

There were no immediate reports of incidents or violence in Banda Aceh.

But police and residents reported at least one death elsewhere, bringing to 39 the number who have died since last Wednesday when people started heading to Banda Aceh for the protests.

A member of the Mila sub-district military post was shot by an unknown gunman in the Lameue area in Pidie district and later died of his wounds Monday, a local journalist said.

In Ulee Gie, also in Pidie district, gunshots were heard late on Monday evening but there was no report of casualty, the journalist added.

The Aceh Merdeka separatist movement (GAM) which will celebrate its 24th anniversary on December 4, has been fighting for an independent, Islamic state since 1976.

### Iran foils plane hijack attempt

TEHRAN, Nov 14: Security guards foiled an attempt to hijack an Iranian passenger plane in southern Iran today, arresting the three would-be hijackers, the official news agency IRNA reported, reports Reuters.

It said the plane, on a flight from the southwestern city of Ahvaz operated by the company Ariatour, landed safely in Bandar Abbas on the Gulf, its scheduled destination.

The three, who allegedly attempted to hijack the plane through unspecified threats, were turned over to legal authorities, the agency said. It gave no details on how many people were aboard the aircraft.

### Five killed in Brazil prison

RIO DE JANEIRO, Nov 14: Five prisoners have been hanged in revenge killings by fellow inmates at a jail in southeast Brazilian state Espirito Santo, a prison spokesman said Monday, reports AFP.

"They were killed in lynchings to settle accounts following the death of another inmate, also by hanging, the spokesman said. Prison investigators have already identified the men responsible for the lynchings, the official said.