

Wahid may declare emergency

AP, Jakarta

President Abdurrahman Wahid dramatically raised the stakes in Indonesia's political crisis yesterday, warning hostile legislators he would impose martial law and dissolve parliament if it initiates impeachment proceedings against him later this week.

However, an army spokesman said the military would not act against the legislature if ordered by the increasingly isolated head of state.

"The president will declare a state of emergency if parliament sticks to its plan to convene a special session of the People's Consultative Assembly and if the life of the nation is threatened," said presidential spokesman Adhi Massardi.

Wahid's message, which came after a flurry of meetings at Jakarta's state palace, was the strongest warning to date that he is willing to take unilateral action to stay in office.

A spokesman for Wahid said the embattled head of state believed he could count on the military and police to enforce a state of emergency, which he described as a last resort if negotiations for a political



PHOTO: AFP

This combo picture shows Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (L) and Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Indonesia's leadership crisis deepened yesterday as Megawati confirmed that embattled President Wahid had threatened to declare a state of emergency within 24 hours.

solution to the crisis is not reached.

But army spokesman Brig. Gen. Bachtiar said the military would not take sides in the dispute and repeated a call to Wahid not to move against parliament. He said troops would not take action to shut down the legislature and would also

continue to protect the president and his family.

"The army sticks with its suggestion to the president that he not declare martial law and not issue a decree to disband parliament," Bachtiar said.

A majority of lawmakers seem

set on replacing Wahid with popular Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Many dismissed earlier martial law threats by Wahid as mere bluffing by a leader who is fast running out of options and support.

The crisis, which has been dragging on for months, came to a head on Friday when Megawati rejected a surprise offer by Wahid to share power.

Under the failed plan, he would have been allowed to stay on as figurehead leader while she would take control of the government.

On Saturday the leaders of the main factions in parliament announced it would convene on Wednesday and call on the 700-member assembly, Indonesia's highest legislature, to impeach Wahid over charges of corruption and incompetence.

Massardi said Wahid had not set any deadline for the legislature to drop its campaign to oust him.

"The president, himself, does not want to do this," Massardi said, adding that there was still time for all sides to negotiate a peaceful solution.

25 workers killed in roof collapse in India

AFP, New Delhi

At least 25 workers were killed on Saturday in the southeast Indian state of Andhra Pradesh when the roof of a building they were working on collapsed, reports said.

Rescue teams were working to recover as many as 50 workers feared trapped in the rubble of the building at Karepalli village in Khammam district, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported.

Five bodies had been recovered and 10 injured workers were receiving medical treatment, PTI said, citing official sources.

The exact death toll would only be known after the rubble has been cleared, police said.

The roof of the building collapsed at 7.45 pm when most of the workers were engaged in construction work on the third floor, PTI reported.

2613 Sierra Leonean rebels surrender

XINHUA, Lagos

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) has disclosed that some 2,613 rebels and pro-government militiamen in Sierra Leone had handed in their weapons since the disarmament process began on May 18, according to reports reaching here on Saturday from Freetown.

In the northern areas of Kambia and Port Loko, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had 1,037 disarmed fighters, 162 of them children. The pro-government Civil Defence Forces (CDF) militia had 1,576 disarmed fighters, among them 61 children, a senior official of UNAMSIL was quoted as saying.

Similar operations will be conducted at the district level in other parts of the country two days after the deadline for disarmament expires on May 28, the official added.

Viagra also works for women: Study

REUTERS, London

Viagra, the anti-impotence drug that has improved the sex lives of men, also works for women, Italian sexologists reported yesterday.

Scientists at the University of Catania in Italy who tested the tiny blue pills, known generically as sildenafil, found they helped women get aroused too.

"Our results demonstrate that sildenafil may directly improve female arousal disorder and thus other sexual qualitative functions such as enjoyment and orgasm, Professor Salvatore Caruso said in a report in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

The researchers said the pills, made by American Pharmaceuticals giant Pfizer, may also play an indirect role in sexual enjoyment.

In the first study on the use of Viagra on women with sexual arousal disorder, Caruso and his colleagues tested the pills on 51 women between the ages of 22-38.

The women were randomly selected to receive Viagra in 25 mg or 50 mg doses or a placebo over three four-week periods with a week interruption between each. Each month the women rated their arousal, orgasms, enjoyment and sexual fantasies on a five-point scale.

The Italian scientists said arousal scores of the women taking Viagra rose from 1.5 to 4.2 on both drug doses. But the placebo group only achieved a 2.6 grade.

Philippine gunmen raid tourist resort, kidnap 20

REUTERS, Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Gunmen believed to be Muslim rebels seized 20 people including two American missionaries in a dawn raid on a tourist resort in the southern Philippines on Sunday, officials said.

A third American and 17 Filipinos were also seized in the raid on Dos Palmas resort off Palawan island.

Hours after the attack, a motorboat thought to be carrying the gunmen and their hostages was spotted by military aircraft near the maritime border with Malaysia, said national security adviser Roilo Golez.

"We are conducting pursuit operations... We have deployed navy vessels in the area," Golez said. "They are travelling slowly apparently because of the many people on board."

Manila had told Kuala Lumpur that the gunmen might try to slip into Malaysian territory "and the Malaysian navy is stepping up its border patrol," a military spokesman said.

Two of the kidnapped foreigners

were an American couple who had been working with minority groups in the Philippines for 15 years and were on holiday at the resort, their group, New Tribes Mission, said in a statement.

The military described the raiders as "terrorists" while a police officer said they were believed to be Muslim separatist Abu Sayyaf rebels.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo issued a statement condemning the raid as a "dastardly criminal act by ruthless bandits." Military officers at first said two of the kidnapped tourists were American and the third was from Spain but police and presidential spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao later said all three were American.

Thirteen domestic tourists, including an eight-year-old boy, and four resort guards and staff were also abducted.

Abu Sayyaf rebels sparked worldwide outrage last year when they snatched more than 40 foreigners and Filipinos from two tourist resorts in Malaysia and from Jolo island in the southern Philippines.

Many of those victims were

released after big ransoms were paid. Some were rescued by soldiers and others escaped. One Filipino resort worker kidnapped is still held.

The masked gunmen, armed with a machinegun and assault rifles, raided the resort on Arrecifi island, near the Palawan provincial capital Puerto Princesa, at about 5 a.m., police said.

Holding resort guards at gunpoint, some of the raiders broke into cottages where tourists were sleeping and grabbed them.

"It all happened very quickly. Everyone was stunned and no one could talk... It was all over in 15 to 20 minutes," said resort security officer Rudy Gordon.

Dos Palmas officials said there were about 100 tourists on the resort when the gunmen, riding in a speedboat, slipped into the dock and held two guards at gunpoint.

Golez told a radio station the motorboat believed carrying the kidnappers and hostages was spotted near Bugsuk on the southern tip of Palawan, near the border with Malaysia.

Riot leaves 20 hurt in Britain

REUTERS, London

More than 20 people were hurt and 17 arrested during a race riot that turned into an ugly stand-off with hundreds of police in northwest England overnight, British police said on Sunday.

Police fought running battles with up to 500 stone and petrol bomb-throwing youths in the streets of Oldham, near Manchester after Saturday night clashes between rival white and Asian groups escalated into a riot in which cars were set on fire, pubs firebombed and gunshots reported.

"They threw quite a lot of petrol bombs," Manchester police Superintendent Eric Hewitt told reporters as dawn broke over the rubble-strewn streets and the crowd dispersed. "I am very angry. We could have had someone killed."

He said police were at a loss to

explain the sudden eruption of violence, although he accepted that racial tensions had been building for some time.

"We have seen tensions building here for many months, but not on the scale we saw last night. No one can provide an explanation for this at the moment. We will be looking to rebuild confidence in the community."

Hewitt praised his officers for their bravery and said many more arrests were expected in coming days.

He rejected suggestions that tensions in the town had turned some places into no-go areas for his officers, but said police would maintain a high presence throughout the bank holiday weekend.

Twenty police officers and several civilians suffered minor injuries and a number of police cars were very badly damaged.

"There are fires burning in the streets, there is rubble all over the road and the air's full of smoke," a police spokeswoman told Reuters earlier after hundreds of riot police from around Greater Manchester were drafted in to quell the fighting.

A Reuters photographer was attacked and his equipment smashed during the height of the rioting, which came just 10 days before a general election that has featured rising crime as a prominent theme.

An eyewitness at the scene described the stand-off between the rioters and the police at the edge of the Glodwick estate, which is home to the town's main Asian community and has been a hotbed of racial tension recently.

Delhi doesn't rule out a war with Pakistan

UNI, New Delhi

The Indian Government does not rule out a conventional war with Pakistan even though prospects for reconciliation between the two nuclear neighbours have brightened following Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's invitation to military ruler General Pervez Musharraf for talks to defuse tension.

In such an eventuality, the battlefield will be the integrated Command, Control, Communications, Computer, Intelligence and Information (C-4, I-2) assets, target acquisition, highly lethal precision weapon systems and a non-linear battlefield with real-time surveillance

According to an official report, the future battlefield is likely to be more digitised and transparent and would experience an exponential increase in the deployment of electronic devices signalling the growing primacy of the electromagnetic spectrum.

The future conflicts would be dominated by a wide variety of platforms and delivery systems with increased ranges and accuracy as well as terminally-guided and preci-

sion-guided munitions.

According to the report of the high-profile Group of Ministers on National Security, while India needs to ensure a credible nuclear deterrence to prevent the possibility of a nuclear misadventure by its potential adversaries, it has to simultaneously maintain adequate and duly-modernised conventional forces which are properly managed, led and equipped to take advantage of the Revolution in Military Affairs and which can take care of any possible conventional conflicts.

The report says that Pakistan would continue to pose a threat to India's security in future also. Its traditional hostility and single-minded aim of destabilising India were not focussed just on Kashmir "but on a search of parity."

"This arises out of the two-nation theory coupled with a desire to exact revenge for the 1971 humiliation over the separation of Bangladesh. This has been accentuated by the Kargil War of 1999."

Pakistan posed a threat not only to India but to the stability of the region as well through its nexus with the Taliban and Jehadi elements as well as its involvement in religious extremism, international terrorism

and the narcotics trade. Pakistan's military regime may act "irrationally" particularly in view of its propensity to function through terrorist outfits, as a result of its political and economic instability.

In the belief that nuclear weapons could compensate for conventional military inferiority, Pakistani leaders had not concealed their desire to use nuclear weapons against India.

"General Musharraf's proclaimed desire to talk to India rings hollow against the backdrop of continuing Pakistani support for militants and its unremitting obsession with Kashmir. Pakistan is following the policy of bleeding India through a thousand cuts."

Expressing concern over Pakistan's weapons acquisition from the West and China and its close collaboration with China and North Korea on nuclear and missile matters, the report says that Pakistan would continue to seek further enhancement in the quality of its weapons to attempt to offset its conventional quantitative military inferiority vis-a-vis India.

Jerusalem car bombs a blow to US diplomatic bid

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Palestinian militants set off two car bombs in Jerusalem hours apart yesterday, injuring up to four people and underscoring the uphill struggle of a U.S. mission to end eight months of Israeli-Palestinian violence.

The bombs blew up 200 yards apart. One exploded at around midnight in a pub district packed with young Israelis and the other at 9 a.m. off a main shopping street ahead of the Jewish Shavuot (Tabernacles) festival.

Palestinian militant groups claimed responsibility for the two blasts in faxes to Reuters in Beirut. Police said two to four people were hurt by glass shards in the second blast, claimed by the Islamic Jihad group.

"I was selling bagels when all of a sudden I heard two strong explosions and four small ones. People started running," said Noah Goldberg, who was working at a coffee shop when the morning blast occurred.

Officials ascribed the lack of serious casualties to luck. Both blasts occurred near the main city police station.

"It was early, the streets were empty, as it was only nine o'clock in the morning," police spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby said after the second explosion.

Parts of the bomb, made from mortar shells, were hurled over buildings by the force of the blast to land hundreds of yards away.

At least 448 Palestinians, 87 Israelis and 13 Israeli Arabs have been killed in the Palestinian revolt against Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza, lands captured in war 33 years ago. The uprising erupted last September after peace talks stalled.

The bombs dealt a severe blow to a bid by the United States, the traditional broker in Middle East peacemaking, to coax Israelis and Palestinians to halt eight months of bloodshed and return to the peace talks table.

William Burns, the new U.S. envoy for the Middle East, met Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in the West Bank city of Ramallah before noon and

was due to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon later in Jerusalem.

Israeli and Palestinian officials said they did not expect an immediate breakthrough from the latest round of U.S.-led diplomacy. Statements by both sides on the eve of the meetings offered little hope they were closer to ending hostilities.

Arafat asked Muslim foreign ministers meeting in the Gulf state of Qatar to isolate Israel, which he accused of carrying out "monstrous massacres" during the Palestinian uprising.

"There is no way but to take a firm stand that puts aggression and the aggressors in shackles," he said.

In the West Bank, two Palestinians, aged 20, were wounded -- one seriously -- by Jewish settlers who opened fire near Tekoa settlement on Friday. Dr. Kamel Jabril, director of a Palestinian health clinic, said.

A witness said he saw a settler fire at the two people on a road. Israeli police said they were checking the report.

In the southern Gaza Strip, Israeli troops briefly entered a Palestinian-ruled area with bulldozers and a tank to destroy trees and shrubbery where land mines had been planted, military officials said.

A spokesman for Sharon, Raanan Gissin, said Israel's five-day-old call for a cease-fire remained intact but he said Arafat and the Palestinian Authority were to blame for the rise in car bombings.

"At this stage the cease-fire is still in effect but of course our patience is running short with the continuation, the escalation in car bomb attacks which are all attributed to the Palestinian Authority," Gissin told Reuters.

Sharon was due to meet senior cabinet ministers later on Sunday to discuss the latest attacks, Israel Radio reported.

Palestinians have dismissed Sharon's call as a public relations gimmick. They insist Israel's policy of Jewish settlement in occupied lands and use of military force to quell a Palestinian uprising are to blame for the unceasing unrest.



PHOTO: AFP

A group of ethnic Albanian refugees, women and children, leave their village of Matejce in tractors yesterday. Many Albanians are leaving their villages due to heavy fighting between the Macedonian army and Albanian extremists in the Kumanovo area.

Iranian parliament passes bill defining political crime

AFP, Tehran

Iran's reform-majority parliament scored a major victory yesterday by pushing through a first-ever law defining political crime and strengthening the rights of political prisoners.

The long-awaited bill was passed over strong objection from the conservative minority which called for debate on the bill to be postponed.

Deputies still must work out all the details of the measure in further debate, while final approval hinges on the conservative-led Guardians Council which has previously blocked key legislation of the reformist parliament.

The landmark legislation is the

first of its kind since the founding of Iran's Islamic republic in 1979.

Its passage in outline form signals a key win for reformists just two weeks ahead of the presidential election, and comes while dozens of pro-reform supporters of President Mohammad Khatami remain in prison.

Among a raft of provisions, the bill gives political prisoners the right to a re-trial after its final passage and stipulates all trials are to be held in public, while also giving defendants the right to have a lawyer present.

It also accords political prisoners the same rights as common criminals, although they would be held in separate prison areas, and prohibits keeping them in solitary confinement for more than 15 days.

The bill also calls for political crimes to be tried in civil courts, while most people faced with charges of acting against national security are now tried by revolutionary courts, which are independent of the judiciary.

"By political crime we mean any act which undermines the regime of the Islamic republic or violates the fundamental rights of citizens and public freedoms," the bill's first article says.

The legislation also defines as political crimes any "insult" against a foreign head of state visiting Iran or the formation of any group which endangers internal state security.

High-speed train sets world record

REUTERS, Paris

A French high-speed train set a world record on Saturday when it travelled the length of France at an average speed of 306 km (190 miles) per hour.

The TGV train left the northern town of Calais at 4:30 pm to arrive three hours three minutes later in the southern resort of Marseilles, 1,067 km (660 miles) away, a spokesman for French railway group SNCF said.

"The objective was not to set a record but to test our train," said SNCF spokesman Pierre-Bernard Fauvergue.

"But it is the first time in the world a high-speed train covered such a long distance without stopping and maintained a speed of over 300 km per hour.

The train was being tested ahead of the planned opening of a new route on June 7 to link north and south France.

SNCF hope to provide a high-speed train network linking Marseilles with London and Amsterdam by 2003 or 2004.

Presidential polls Khatami banned from holding rally

REUTERS, Tehran

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami has been banned from holding a re-election campaign rally, the official IRNA news agency reported on Saturday.

The agency, quoting a source in Khatami's campaign headquarters, said the judiciary had ordered police to stop the event, which was due to take place on Monday in Tehran's Shiroodi stadium.

The judiciary said its ruling was due to a ban on the use of government property for campaigning by the 10 candidates running for the June 8 presidential election.

Presidential aide Mohammad Ali Abtahi had earlier said Monday's gathering would be the only mass rally to be held by Khatami to speak to his supporters.

The president and his rivals have been given an equal amount of time to speak on state radio and television.

Judicial officials have said the tough campaign rules are there to ensure a fair election.

A judge on Friday ordered the removal of all campaign banners belonging to conservative candidate Abdollah Jashi.

5 killed as Thai navy helicopter crashes

AFP, Bangkok

A Thai navy helicopter crashed during a search and rescue mission off the coast of southern Thailand, killing at least five navy personnel, a senior naval officer said Sunday.

Navy spokesman Vice Admiral Narong Thepvisan told AFP that a helicopter carrying seven soldiers was sent late Saturday to rescue an injured fisherman aboard a trawler in the Gulf of Thailand.

The Bell 212 helicopter crew was part of the Thai navy's 2nd wing detachment and included navy divers, rescue technicians and navy medical staff who were deployed to fetch a fisherman with a badly lacerated leg.

They failed to find the vessel and had turned back towards base in the northern Thai province of Narathiwat when the chopper plunged into the sea about 15 miles off the coast.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters march carrying signs and banners in Hong Kong yesterday to the territory's government offices to commemorate the 12th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Organisers estimated some 4,000 people joined in the demonstration, which came ahead of a candlelight vigil held annually on June 4 at Victoria Park on Hong Kong island to remember the victims killed and injured in the crackdown in Beijing in 1989.