

S.S. Box
Singapore
HDP-12

An impressive win for PAP

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, NOV. 3. Singapore's ruling People's Action Party (PAP) won as many as 27 of the 29 seats for which voting took place today. The Opposition retained the two seats of Hougang and Potong Pasir. Earlier, the PAP had been swept back to power as Opposition parties failed to put up candidates for more than half the seats on offer. With tonight's near clean sweep, the PAP now has a total of 82 seats in a House of 84. It had got a walk-over in 55 seats.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong's party has secured 75.29 per cent of the total votes cast for the 29 seats — an increase of just over 10 per cent when compared to the 64.98 per cent of the votes obtained by the PAP in the 1997 elections.

Mr. Goh had said before the election that his party aimed to get around 65 per cent of the

votes cast for what he would consider to be a strong mandate. He has done far better than the standard he had set for himself and the PAP. The election took place at a time when the Singapore economy is in downturn and companies are cutting down on jobs. The ruling party, which has been in power since 1959, has promised to help the jobless in all possible ways.

There has also been a debate on "foreign talent" — that foreigners were taking jobs away from the Singaporeans and also getting top wages. One in four residents of Singapore is a foreigner.

For its part, the Government has strongly defended its policy of bringing in foreign talent — saying these persons were necessary for sustaining the economic progress of the country.

In today's elections, the Opposition Worker's

Party took the Hougang seat and the Singapore Democratic Alliance won the Potong Pasir constituency.

Of the 29 seats for which polling took place today, nine were single-member constituencies, while four were five-member group representation constituencies.

Addressing a press conference tonight, Mr. Goh said the people had given the PAP a "resounding endorsement".

A serious-looking Mr. Goh, however, said that the mandate was a heavy responsibility. He said the elections had taken place in "rather unusual circumstances" — with Singapore facing a deep economic recession.

He said the PAP had as many as 25 new MPs entering Parliament some of whom were likely to be made Ministers.

THE HINDU

4 NOV 2002

Philippine rebel's hideouts bombed

ASSOCIATED PRESS

51-5 28/11
ZAMBONGA, Nov. 22. - The Philippine military bombed several suspected hideouts of supporters of a renegade Muslim regional governor today as the death toll in the four-day conflict rose to more than 100, officials said.

Brig Gen Edilberto Adan said airplanes bombed at least four areas in a hunt for supporters of the Governor, Mr Nur Misuari, a former rebel leader, now wanted for possible sedition charges.

Brig. Adan said at least 100 of Mr Misuari's men have been killed since Monday when they attacked a military base on the island of Jolo, a Muslim guerrilla hotbed about 940 km south of Manila. Mortar fire killed at least four soldiers and seven civilians while a military counter-attack and air strikes killed 51 rebels, Brig. Adan said.

The military said Monday's attack was carried out by 500 Misuari loyalists and 100 members of the Abu Sayyaf.

After the firefight, the President, Mrs Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, ordered Mr Misuari's arrest with an eye to pressing charges of sedition or rebellion.

The government accused Mr Misuari of ordering the attack in an effort to disrupt the 26 November elections in the southern autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao to replace him.

Mr Misuari said the elections violate a 1996 peace deal signed between the government and Mr Misuari's Moro National Liberation Front as he was not consulted about the election process.

Arroyo's call: Mrs Gloria Arroyo has called for stepping up the campaign against international terrorism by cutting off the sources of their financing, adds AFP.

THE STATESMAN

23 NOV 2001

SS
Philippines

Moro rebels take dozens of hostages in Philippines

49-15
28/11

ZAMBOANGA (PHILIPPINES), NOV. 25. Seeking to escape a withering air assault, heavily armed Muslim rebels fled one of their key bases in the southern Philippines on Tuesday, dragging along dozens of hostages roped together as human shields.

The military said hours of intense fighting had left 25 guerillas and one soldier dead and an unknown number of others wounded, including civilians. The rebels belong to a faction of a separatist Muslim militia that fought the Government until a peace deal was struck five years ago.

Fighting broke out again last week, with the Government claiming the local Governor — a former rebel leader — was upset over losing power. Some of the terrified captives, snatched from their homes in the middle of the night before explosions and tracer fire lit up the skies, sobbed and shouted for troops not to shoot.

The soldiers backed down a paved road, separated from the hostages and rebels by a slowly moving armoured personnel carrier with its guns trained on the group just a few yards away. They reached a hilly park, where they reportedly occupied a house.

The Mayor, Ms. Maria Clara Lobrebat said officials had held talks with the rebels, who were seeking safe passage. A military spokesman, Gen. Edilberto Adan, said they would have to lay down their



A mother cuddles her child as they run to safety following a firefight between Government forces and members of the Moro National Liberation Front loyal to the arrested leader, Nur Misuari, in Zamboanga city in southern Philippines on Tuesday. — AP

arms. The military had ordered them to leave the base — without their weapons — on Monday, but most refused. Gen. Adan said about 80 rebels were holding the

hostages while about the same number remained holed up at the base, where attacks by bombers and helicopter gunships continued as dusk fell. — AP

THE HINDU

28 NOV 2001

Mobs kill rebel as fighting erupts in Philippines

S & Asia
Zamboanga (Philippines), November 29

ANGRY MOBS hacked a Muslim rebel to death on Thursday as fresh fighting broke out between Philippine troops and guerrillas on the outskirts of southern Zamboanga city.

The renewed clashes occurred a day after the military allowed about 250 Muslim guerrillas safe passage out of Zamboanga in exchange for the release of 110 civilians they had taken hostage.

The new fighting involved about 30 rebel stragglers left behind in the retreat of the main body of guerrillas from the mainly Christian city of 750,000 people on Wednesday, southern military commander Lieutenant-General Roy Cimatu told reporters.

"I have directed our troops to conduct pursuit and operations are continuing," Cimatu said. There were no immediate reports of casualties in the renewed fighting in a forested area around a hill overlooking Zamboanga, where troops and guerrillas of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) fought pitched battles on Tuesday.

After a tense 36-hour standoff, the rebels released all their captives, many of them women and children, in a deal that allowed them to leave Zamboanga with their weapons. Presidential spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao told reporters in Manila the arrangement was necessary to defuse a potentially explosive situation and save the lives of hostages.

Tiglao said that under the deal, the MNLF fighters were required to later surrender their weapons to local officials running the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which administers five largely Muslim provinces in the country's south. The guerrillas are die-hard supporters of MNLF chief and former ARMM governor Nur Misuari, who is now detained in neighbouring Malaysia and has been charged in the Philippines with rebellion. Kuala Lumpur officials have said



AFP PHOTO
A Philippine soldier looks at mortar and bazooka shells left behind by followers of Nur Misuari on Thursday.

they are ready to deport Misuari despite Manila's wish that he be prosecuted under Malaysian immigration laws. Misuari led a 24-year MNLF revolt for an Islamic state in the south of the mainly Catholic Philippines until he signed a peace deal with the government in 1996, which led to his installation as governor of ARMM.

Reuters

Myanmar junta sacks top men

HD-16
12/16
By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, NOV. 11 In a major shake-up, Myanmar's military junta "retired" five more Ministers today after sacking two top men — the State Peace and Development Council's Secretary Three, Lt. Gen. Win Myint — and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Military Affairs, Lt. Gen. Tin Hla, yesterday.

Lt. Gen. Win Myint was considered to be the fourth-most powerful man in the country's hierarchy.

Their dismissals, reported by State-run newspapers in Yangon yesterday, gave no reason for the move.

The Reuters news agency reported that the two men had long been rumoured to have personal business connections with the private sector.

"It has long been the talk of the town of some possible corruption being involved. I think this would improve the image of the Govern-

ment," a diplomat was quoted by the news agency as saying.

On Sunday, State-run newspapers reported the retirement of two Deputy Prime Ministers — Vice-Admiral Maung Maung Khin (72) and Lt. Gen. Tin Tun (70).

Also, the newspapers said that Culture Minister, Mr. Win Sen, Cooperative Minister, Mr. Aung San and Immigration Minister, Mr. Saw Tun, all former military officers, had retired with effect from November 9 when they reached the official retirement age of 60.

Interestingly, the SPDC has not yet appointed any replacement for the Secretary Two, Lt. Gen. Tin Oo, who perished in a helicopter crash in February this year.

There has been considerable speculation that the Army Chief and SPDC Vice-Chairman, Gen. Maung Aye, and the Secretary One, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, don't see eye-to-eye and have been engaged in a power struggle.

Conversion slur on Myanmar junta

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Nov. 11: The Myanmar junta is forcing Nagas living in that country to embrace Buddhism, according to the Amsterdam-based Naga International Support Centre.

In a statement issued from its headquarters, the NISC accused Myanmar of using its armed forces as "religious" agents. It quoted Naga "victims" of military excesses as saying that they had been threatened with eviction if they did not become Buddhists.

NISC leader Frans Welman said the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was orchestrating the conversion programme. "Celebration of Christian religious festivals and church activities have been banned in Lahe town," he said.

The rights activist claimed Christians who had willingly embraced Buddhism were being paid monthly stipends ranging between 800 kyats and 1500 kyats.

"Free education and medical treatment are the other perks. Except for dilapidated school buildings, there are no facilities for education in the Naga-inhabited areas," he said.

The leader of the Amsterdam-based organisation said the Indian armed forces, too, were targeting Nagas living in Myanmar. "They are hand-in-glove with the junta. Nearly 3,000 Konyak Nagas have been displaced since May."

The alleged "displacement" of Nagas came to light when representatives of the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights and the Naga Students' Federation recently visited Chen Mohu in Nagaland's Mon district to deliver relief materials. The NISC quoted the two organisations as saying that 2,671 Konyak Nagas had fled Myanmar over the past seven months to escape the military offensive. It said Myanmar military personnel had planted landmines in the vicinity of at least three of these villages.

Trouble for Megawati Govt.

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, NOV. 12. The murder of Theys Eluay (64), top leader of the "Free Papua" movement on the week-end, has dealt a heavy blow to the Megawati Sukarnoputri Government in Indonesia.

According to reports from Jayapura, provincial capital of Irian Jaya (also called West Papua), Eluay's body was found inside his car at Koya, 50 km from Jayapura.

Eluay, president of the Papuan Presidium Council, had dinner with a military commander from Kopassus, the Indonesian name for the military's special forces. He was on his way back home when he was kidnapped.

Eluay's wife received a telephone call from his driver who said that the separatist leader had been kidnapped. There is no information about the whereabouts of the driver. *S. S. K. S. K.*

In the meantime, the New York-based Human Rights Watch has termed Eluay's murder as a "well-planned assassination". The group said in a statement, "We are calling on President Megawati to immediately establish a competent and impartial commission of inquiry into Eluay's murder, preferably with international participation."

For his part, the Speaker of Indonesia's lower House of Parliament, Mr. Akbar Tandjung, has said that the murder of Eluay was "political". (Mr. Akbar is currently under investigation in a corruption case by the Megawati Government).

On Sunday, there was some scattered violence on the outskirts of Jayapura, but the situation is believed to be quiet today. Reports said Eluay's funeral in his home town of Sentani is being planned for Dec. 1.

Eluay was facing charges of treason and had been in jail for a considerable length of time.

Irian Jaya, incorporated into Indonesia in 1963, is the country's richest province in terms of mineral resources but the income levels of the Papuan people are the lowest. West Papua, as it is called by the locals, has the world's largest gold and copper mine — Freeport Indonesia.

THE HINDU

13 NOV 2001

Revolt rocks region in Philippines

By Amit Baruah

180-124
SINGAPORE, NOV. 19. A fresh revolt in the troubled region of Mindanao in the Philippines poses a challenge to the Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, now on a visit to the United States.

Armed men belonging to the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which had made peace with the Government, attacked the town of Jolo and the Philippine military brigade headquarters in the area. The MNLF is headed by Mr. Nur Misuari, currently Governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), who has had a falling out with the Government and has called for a boycott of fresh elections to the Governor's post on November 26.

While some supporters of Mr. Misuari claimed that they had seized control of the

airport and seaport on Jolo island, Philippine military authorities dismissed the claim. According to available information, MNLF men, many of whom had been integrated into the Philippine military after a 1996 peace agreement, attacked the brigade headquarters using mortars. In a related development, some 100 separatist gunmen are reported to have taken position on a hilltop overlooking the city of Zamboanga triggering a strengthening of security.

"Our forces are prepared for any eventuality....this is all the handiwork of Misuari for his personal vested interests," Col. Danilo Servando of the Philippine army was quoted as saying. Lieutenant-General Roy Cimatu, who heads the southern military command, claimed that Mr. Misuari's group had formed an alliance with the Abu Sayyaf group, a brutal outfit involved in the killing of both foreigners

and Filipinos. Mr. Misuari, who was seen as the chief ally of the Government in the southern region of Mindanao, appears miffed at efforts to sideline him and the Government's decision to hold talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). After Ms. Arroyo took over as President, a new strategy of engaging the MILF began. Earlier, the Joseph Estrada Government had waged a relentless military assault on both the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf. While Ms. Arroyo has continued with the crackdown on the Abu Sayyaf, her Government entered into talks with the MILF in Malaysia. A ceasefire has been agreed to between the military and the MILF and substantive negotiations are said to be under way.

Mr. Misuari clearly is far from pleased with the state of affairs as reflected in his group's decision to launch an assault on the Philippine military.

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Jakarta offers to send peace troops

By Amit Baruah

S. G. Anandaraman

SINGAPORE, NOV. 15. Indonesia is willing to send its troops as part of a United Nations peace-keeping force to Afghanistan, senior Ministers have said in Jakarta. "We will take part in the (probable) U.N. mission if requested.... as long as it is under the umbrella of the U.N., Indonesia will meet a request to send peace-keeping troops because Indonesia is a member of the world body," the Indonesian Home Minister, Mr. Hari Saborno, stated.

In turn, the Defence Minister, Mr. Matori Abdul Djilil, echoed his Cabinet colleague. "We are still waiting for a request from the U.N.," Mr. Matori maintained. "If the U.N. decides to send international peace-keepers to Afghanistan, we will respond to it positively. And we are ready to join," a Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted as saying.

One complicating factor for Indonesia could be that the international force likely to be sent to Afghanistan would not be that of designated U.N. peace-keepers, but a multinational force from different countries sent under the terms of a U.N. Security Council mandate.

The model, in all likelihood, will be the landing of Australian troops in East Timor in 1999. In the event of such a move, the final Indonesian response will still need to be watched.

Interestingly, leaders of Muhammadiyah and the Nadhlatul Ulama, both large organisations claiming the membership of millions of Muslims, have supported the move to have Indonesian peace-keepers go to Afghanistan.

However, Mr. Salahuddin Wahid, top leader of the Nadhlatul Ulama, said the Megawati Government must take into account Indonesia's national security situation before sending troops to Afghanistan. "I don't know whether we have enough security forces to solve security problems at home if we end up sending a peace-keeping force to Afghanistan. If we have enough, it should be okay because we have a lot of experience in doing the same (U.N. peace-keeping activities) in the past," Mr. Salahuddin stated. There is little doubt that Indonesia's decision to send peace-keepers to Afghanistan would be welcome since over 80 per cent of its 210 million people are Muslims.

THE HINDU

16 NOV 2001

Renegade Philippine Governor held

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, NOV. 24. Mr. Nur Misuari, chief of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and former Governor of the autonomous region of Muslim Mindanao, was arrested off the Malaysian island of Sabah this morning.

The official Malaysian news agency, Bernama, said Mr. Misuari and some of his associates were arrested for entering Malaysia illegally. A Malaysian police official was quoted as saying that Mr. Misuari, whose followers recently attacked Philippine military positions, had come into Malaysia through the southern Filipino island of Jolo. "We will inform the Philippine Embassy in Kuala Lumpur as soon as possible as we have to consider that he is wanted by the Philippine Government," the official added.

In a related development, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, said his country was not prepared to grant political asylum to Mr. Misuari. "This is an internal matter of the Philippines and Malaysia should not intervene by providing refuge to rebels from other countries," Dr. Mahathir was quoted as saying by Bernama.

"Autonomy has been accorded but unfortunately when in power, they did not use their power for the development of the southern Philippine region. Instead, we find its leaders like Misuari were seldom in the southern Philippines. They were more often outside the country or in Manila," Dr. Mahathir said.

Malaysia, the Prime Minister

said, had previously helped Mr. Misuari in arriving at a political solution with the Philippine Government, but found that he did not do much for the people of the southern Philippines after becoming Governor. "So therefore, we no longer feel responsible to provide him any assistance," Dr. Mahathir added. The Prime Minister's categorical statement can only mean that Mr. Misuari and his associates will be handed over to the Philippine Government in Manila.

Such a "handing over" will be seen as a major success for the Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, after the attacks launched by Mr. Misuari's MNLF on the Philippine military in which over 50 persons are reported to have been killed. There have also been reports that Mr. Misuari and his followers have made common cause with the Abu Sayyaf, who specialise in kidnappings for ransom. Such reports have, however, still to be confirmed.

How Ms. Arroyo deals with Mr. Misuari will also indicate whether she favours a political or law and order approach towards the MNLF. Currently, Manila is engaged in talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) for a political resolution of the problems in Mindanao. Mr. Misuari's problems arose after it became clear that the Philippine Government was backing the leader of a splinter MNLF faction to become Governor of the autonomous region of Muslim Mindanao in his place in the November 26 elections.

THE HINDU

25 NOV 2001

U.S. set to play new role in S-E Asia

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, NOV. 22. The United States is getting set to play a new role in South-East Asia. Washington has signalled that it is prepared to help countries in the region in the battle against terrorism — a model for that purpose has been readied in the Philippines — and can be extended to other countries.

The Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, said a polite no to the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, to stationing American troops in the Philippines to take on militants in the troubled southern part of her country.

But, during a just-concluded visit to Washington, Ms. Arroyo secured nearly \$100 millions in enhanced military assistance from Washington to battle militants in her own country.

A joint Philippine-U.S. statement said: "The two leaders affirmed that they would continue to work on a vigorous, integrated plan to strengthen the Philippine security forces' capacity to combat terror and protect Philippine sovereignty."

Interestingly, Mr. Bush made a similar offer to the 10-nation Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) of which Philippines is a member.

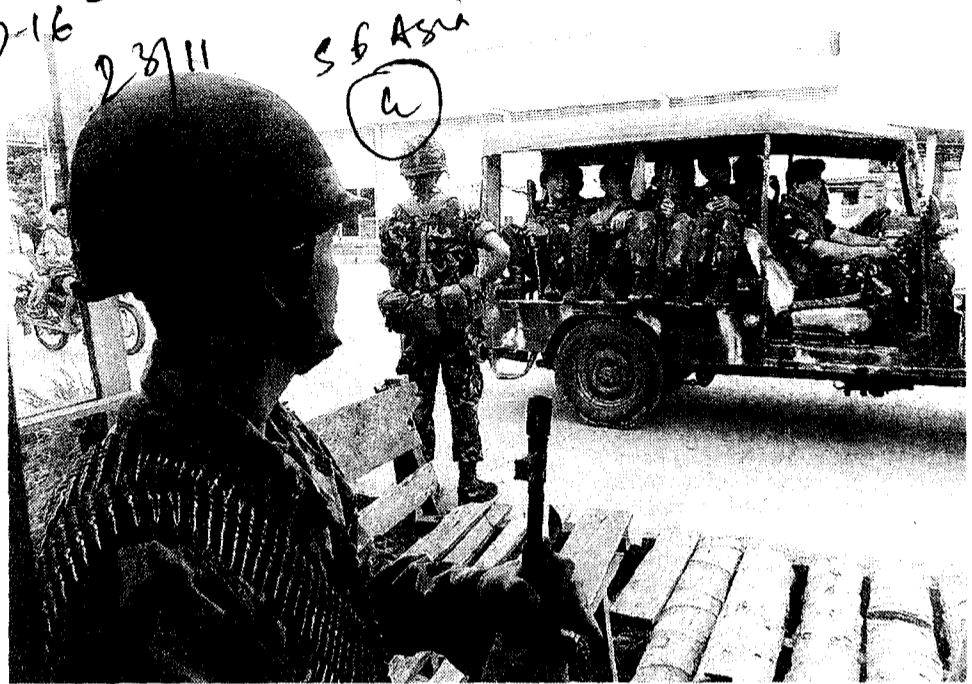
"Emphasising U.S. support for a strong, united ASEAN, President Bush further offered all appropriate assistance to help ASEAN improve its capacity to combat transnational threats, including terrorism and the illegal narcotics trade," the joint statement said.

"He (Mr. Bush) specifically noted with appreciation Philippine offers of logistical and other support to the (anti-terrorist) coalition, as well as President Arroyo's efforts to force a regional ASEAN approach to combatting terror," the statement added.

For Ms. Arroyo, the "revolt" by Mr. Nur Misuari, leader of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), who was Governor of the autonomous region of Mindanao, adds to her problems. There are reports that the Abu Sayyaf and the MNLF have developed some links.

Speaking in Kuala Lumpur today, Admiral Dennis Blair, chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, said Washington stood ready to cooperate with those countries that were "both willing and able" to eliminate the terrorist infrastructure in South-East Asia.

Clearly, Admiral Blair, who has been touring



Philippine Marines guard a checkpoint at the entrance of the sprawling satellite office of the former leader of the Moro National Liberation Front and renegade Governor, Mr. Nur Misuari, on the outskirts of Zamboanga city in southern Philippines on Thursday. — AFP

the region, is making the same point as Mr. Bush — that the U.S. stands ready to help South-East Asian nations in the battle against terror.

In a related development, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defence, Mr. Paul Wolfowitz, has said that the Al-Qaeda outfit of Osama bin Laden had ordered "foreign elements" to carry out terrorist actions in Indonesia.

In an interview to the *Tempo* magazine, Mr. Wolfowitz said: "We want to work with your (Indonesian) Government to track those (Al-Qaeda) people down. Frankly, I think they are more dangerous to Indonesia than they are to the US...."

Asked what kind of cooperation this would entail between the U.S. and Indonesia, the American official stated: "I think, well, as we are doing with a number of Governments around the world, I think it starts with intelligence sharing and intelligence is a big part of this.

"We know things about this network from

the outside and we imagine that your Government either knows or has the ability to find out the network from the inside. I think we should sit down and take those two pictures together. You can have a much clearer idea what the problem is and what the appropriate courses of action are to take the people out and bring them to justice," he said.

Mr. Wolfowitz also stressed that moderate elements in Indonesia should speak out against extremists in the country. "There aren't enough Indonesians who are saying clearly and publicly that this terrorism (of Sept. 11) is a terrible problem that has to be dealt with".

The U.S. official, who has worked as a diplomat in Jakarta, added: "Indonesia stands for a country with a Muslim majority that practises religious tolerance and practises democracy and treats women properly, and that believes Islam is a religion of peace. Indonesia ought to be a model to the rest of the world of what Islam can be."

THE HINDU

23 NOV 2001

Megawati calls for pause in bombing

SB Asen
Indonesia
HD-17

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, NOV. 1. The Indonesian President, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri, has called for a "pause" in American military strikes on Afghan targets, warning that these could weaken the world's anti-terrorism efforts.

Addressing the annual session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), Ms. Megawati said today that American military action must be halted during the upcoming month of Ramzan as well as Christmas.

In her clearest call yet, Ms. Megawati said in Jakarta: "We call for the need for a humanitarian pause to provide an opportunity to handle humanitarian aspects, and to find a way to find a solution via political and diplomatic means."

"Prolonged military action is not only counter-productive, but can weaken the global coalition's joint effort to combat terrorism," the President said.

"In relation to this, we call for the ongoing military strikes, directed at finding terrorist suspects and which have taken so many innocent lives, not to continue during the holy month of



An Indonesian Muslim militant protester shouts "God is great" during a demonstration at Parliament in Jakarta, on Thursday demanding the President, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri's government to reconstruct Indonesia and follow the Koran. — AFP

Ramzan and Christmas Day," she told the MPR or Upper House of Parliament.

Ms. Megawati, who has

switched from a position of support to criticism vis-a-vis the U.S. operation, described the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington as "the worst atrocity...in the history of civilisation".

The annual MPR session is likely to approve direct elections to the post of President and Vice-President for the polls due in 2004. Most political factions have agreed to this in principle — but the modalities for the elections are still to be worked out.

At present, it is the MPR which elects both the President and the Vice-President.

Referring to the state of the Indonesian economy, the President said the country's ability to repay its huge foreign debt of \$140 billion was already reaching a "dangerous limit".

"I humbly and frankly admit that I cannot report much good news...there is progress here and there but overall things have not improved much. After the September 11 tragedy, which may trigger a world recession, reform efforts will be even more difficult," Ms. Megawati said in her assessment of the economic situation.

THE HINDU

2 NOV 2001

Inner circle threat to Megawati

S by Asia, Indonesia



While the calm Indonesian President is happy to delegate powers to her top aides, palace officials and trusted ministers are proving to be a disappointment. She has to make her presence felt, writes **KORNELIUS PURBA**

5-2
1/11

he replaced aides at whim.

While Mr Wahid was largely in confrontation mode with the legislature, Ms Megawati avoids potential conflict. Her choice of MA Rachman as attorney-general because he was a career state prosecutor indicates how she avoids friction with state bodies.

Ms Megawati made clear her priorities: Economic revival, restoration of political chaos, law enforcement and maintaining endangered territorial integrity. She picked as her strongest aides Mr Dorodjatun, coordinating minister for political and security affairs General (retd) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and state secretary/Cabinet secretary Bambang Kesowo to be in charge of administrative affairs. She delegated powers and let them to take major decisions. Over the past few months, however, the aides' performance has been disappointing.

The appointment of Mr Dorodjatun, former Indonesian envoy to the USA, initially won praise from the market. Now many doubt his capability. During Cabinet meetings, he reportedly upsets the ministers with his lengthy sermons about economic strategy. His idea about a possible debt-writeoff received strong opposition from major lenders, including a direct remark from Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

Gen Susilo drew criticism for the way he handled violent demonstrations, including the "sweepings" against foreigners by some radical groups protesting against the US-led attacks on Afghanistan. He continued to issue warnings without taking firm

action. It was only after Ms Megawati threatened to take over his role by directly approaching the demonstrators and to dismiss the police top brass that the police took action. The demonstrators, including the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), clashed with police but public order was restored.

Mr Bambang professed that the President did not want to get involved in details, including her speech-writing process, and that she took final decisions after consulting top aides. Mr Bambang practically acts like her chief of staff. She supports his idea to return power to the State Secretariat, once described as "a state within a state".

In this scenario, Mr Bambang would be in charge not only of the presidential office but also the office of Vice President Hamzah Haz. This is not taking place without any resistance, including from the powerful military. Sources close to Ms Megawati says the military protests against Mr Bambang's plan to abolish the military secretary's post and downgrade it to deputy state secretary. Having grown up in the palace as the daughter of first President Sukarno, Ms Megawati was familiar with her father's inner circle of officials and the intrigue among those competing to get close to Sukarno.

People have hoped she would not repeat the mistakes of her predecessors, including her father, who allowed themselves to be misused by their trusted aides and others around them.

The mostly quiet President seems so far inaccessible to those with vested interests, such as

officials and business people. However, corrupt practices by palace officials, especially those who were under Suharto's regime, remain a threat to Ms Megawati's leadership.

Protocol officials are famous for their sophisticated way of arranging meetings with the President, if necessary by holding a ceremony where their "clients" would get an opportunity to talk to the President. For instance, the seminar on drugs, featuring the police top brass, opened on Monday at the palace, but had been scheduled for November.

So, it is possible that old practices will re-occur. Businesspeople or officials have been known to bribe palace officials to obtain presidential decisions on business-related policies prior to public announcement, or influence people around the President to issue certain presidential decrees or government decisions to benefit a business or other interest.

One notorious example was going to the palace individually, referring to the efforts of those who would meet the President secretly without their superiors' knowledge. To better lead her household and avoid past mistakes, Megawati must take command of the Cabinet meetings and other major political decisions, and not just delegate her aides to act on her behalf.

She is more than capable of leading the country. But she may lose control on her government and the Cabinet if she does not become more involved in day-to-day government affairs.

- The Jakarta Post/Asia News Network.

THE STATESMAN

NOV 2002

US trains guns on SE Asia

Matthew Engel
Washington, October 11

THE SECOND front in Washington's war on terrorism may soon be opened up in South-east Asia which, the US believes, shelters groups that have links to the al-Qaida network.

Officials at the State department and the Pentagon are known to be especially alarmed about the situation in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country. Suggestions that covert operations would soon — or may already — be under way there as well as in the Philippines and possibly also Malaysia, were given some credence by sources close to the administration yesterday. There has been a strong opposition in all three States to the US attacks on Afghanistan.

There has been fighting this week between Philippine troops and Muslim separatist fighters from the Abu Sayyaf group which the US claims is linked to al-Qaida. Philippines says 21 rebels have been killed.

Tony Blair last night said the "first phase" of the war was against Afghanistan but refused to

rule out military action against other countries. Asked whether Britain would back strikes against Iraq, he told BBC2's *Newsnight*: "What I am not going to be prepared to do is to say that if there is evidence that emerges in respect of other terrorist operations elsewhere in the world we are not going to take action."

US Secretary of State Colin Powell yesterday denied plans to move into the Far East but also said the US campaign was directed "against terrorism wherever it may exist in the world".

President Bush said yesterday that the eradication of global terrorism was "our calling".

However, there were signs of uneasiness from the allies at the White House's apparent return to the boundless bellicosity of the early days of the crisis. Nato insisted yesterday that it would need more evidence before, it could support attacks anywhere other than Afghanistan. The secretary general, Lord Robertson, said Nato's endorsement for anti-terrorist action was based on "dealing with those connected with and responsible for the attacks of September 11".

In the Far East, a full-scale assault seems out of the question but the new US stance makes it highly credible that special forces could be drafted in to help Governments stamp out rebellions with potentially dangerous international links.

Indonesia is a source of alarm for diplomatic and military strategists. It has been increasingly unstable politically and Gen Powell devoted much time during the build-up to Sunday's bombings to courting President Megawati Sukarnoputri to ensure her backing. "There's a huge concern that Indonesia could be the world's biggest powderkeg," a diplomat in Washington said.

Two Indonesian fundamentalist groups are suspected of having links with al-Qaida. One is the Islamic Defenders Front, whose leader, Muhammad Rizieq, described the US on Monday as a "terrorist nation... who must be driven from the face of the earth". It has also threatened foreigners and is known to raid bars and nightclubs frequented by expatriates.

The other group, Laskar Jihad, has been threatening to

wage a holy war on the Molucca Islands which have experienced bloody religious riots in the past few years, and is suspected to have had reinforcements from the Taliban.

There have even been rumours in Washington that Osama bin Laden might be holed up in Indonesia. The diplomat described this as "implausible but not impossible. It's a big country and law enforcement and infrastructure is very primitive in large parts," he said. "There is no proper authority in some places."

Despite Megawati's backing for the US position, her own vice-president, Hamzah Haz, has said the attacks merely "atoned" for past sins against other countries.

The New York Times yesterday quoted an administration official who put greater emphasis on the threat from the predominantly Catholic Philippines, describing it as "a major operational hub". There is a less direct threat in Malaysia but investigators have claimed that some of the September 11 hijackers had been seen there.

The Guardian

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 OCT 2001

Bad news for S.E. Asia on economic front

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JULY 11. It is all about downturns and slowdowns. The news emanating from South-East Asia on the economic front is not good.

My 10-17
Yesterday, the Singapore Government downscaled its GDP growth forecast for 2001 at 0.5 to 1.5 per cent from 3.5 to 5.5 per cent — the second downward revision. Last year, the Singapore Government grew by a robust 9.9 per cent but the authorities here have been warning of an imminent slowdown which is now upon Singapore. "Advanced estimates show that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the second quarter grew by 0.8 per cent in real terms over the same period last year. On an annualised quarter-by-quarter basis, real GDP declined by 10.1 per cent," an official statement said.

"Goods-producing industries are estimated to have contracted by 6.6 per cent. The manufacturing sector declined in the second quarter, due largely to the drop in global demand for electronics, while the construction sector recorded flat growth," it said. Explaining the rationale for revising the GDP growth downwards, the statement referred to the sharp slowdown in major economies. "U.S. growth in the first quarter was only 1.2 per cent, as companies run down inventories in the midst of a sharp drop in demand. Second quarter performance is expected to be worse. While there are tentative signs of a recovery, the outlook of the U.S. economy remains uncertain.

"More significantly, Singapore's economy is more closely linked to the U.S. technology sector than the general economy. Due to the huge excess capacity built up over the boom years, this sector is weaker and will take longer to recover," the statement added. Mr. David Cohen, director of economic forecasting at Standard & Poors, was quoted by *The Straits Times* as saying that the current downturn "is worse than 1998" and predicted that the Singapore economy would contract by 0.5 per cent this year.

However, the problem is not just with Singapore. Indonesia and the Philippines have also revised their 2001 GDP forecasts downwards. In the case of Indonesia, it is down to 3.25 to 3.75 per cent from 5 per cent, while for the Philippines it now stands at 3.3 to 3.8 per cent. It is not just South-East Asia, but North-East Asia as well. Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea, too, have also revised their expected GDP growth rates for 2001 downwards.

THE STRAITS TIMES

2001-07-11

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Malaysia, Burma may expand military ties

Kuala Lumpur, May 12: Malaysia and Burma may expand military ties to include joint exercises in the future, Malaysian newspapers said on Saturday.

Defence forces chief, Mr Zahidi Zainuddin, was quoted as saying he favoured closer links with its northern near-neighbour and fellow member of the 10-country Association of South East Asian Nations.

"I fully endorse measures towards strengthening military

ties between Malaysia and Burma," he said after Friday talks with Burma Air Force chief, Mr Kyaw Than.

Mr Zahidi said Burma military officers had attended assault courses run by the Malaysian Army and enrolled in the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College.

Malaysia has been a strong backer of engagement with military-ruled Burma. Its approach contrasts with Western countries' condemnation of Ran-

goon's record on forced labour and suppression of political opponents.

Mr Zahidi said Mr Than had also met his Malaysian counterpart Saruji Che Rose during his visit. He said their discussions covered developments on the Burma-Thailand border following clashes between the armies of the two countries.

Burma said on Friday that it had protested to Thailand over what it called an airstrike, which wounded six people.

But Bangkok promptly denied the accusation, saying Rangoon appeared to have mistaken a routine air exercise on Thursday for an air raid.

Relations between Burma and Thailand, both ASEAN members, have been tense since February when their troops clashed along the border. ASEAN groups the countries of Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Burma, Cambodia and Laos. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

1143 MAY 2001

3 MAY 2001

Burma fighting spills over to Thai fringes, tribes flee

Bangkok, April 24: About 100 more hill tribes people living along the border with Burma fled to low lying camps on Tuesday to avoid being caught in fighting between Burma troops and ethnic rebels, officials said.

They said the sound of gunfire from across the border resumed on Tuesday near a Burma Army outpost that was overrun by the rebel Shan State Army on Sunday, and heavy exchange of fire lasted about

one hour. Sporadic gunfire continued to be heard in Thailand, they said.

"There was heavy fighting this morning which sent about 100 more people fleeing to the camp in panic," said Arthit Chittangkul, chief of civil defence of Fang district in Chiang Mai province.

It is about 800 kilometres north of Bangkok.

The new arrivals raised to more than 600 the number of hill tribes

people who have fled their homes at the border, said Mr Arthit, contacted by telephone from Bangkok.

An Army official said the resumption of fighting has forced the Thai Army to send reinforcements to the area to prevent the violence from spilling over.

Artillery has been set up to retaliate in case the Burma combatants fire this way, said the official, speaking on customary condition of anonymity.

Judging from the sound of exchange there appear to have been heavy casualties, but no details are available, said another Army officer.

In a statement to news agencies, the Shan State Army said about 250 rebels took part in the fighting on Tuesday. It did not mention any casualties.

The Shan State Army is fighting for independence for the Shan state bordering Thailand.

Thailand has been concerned about its border communities since fighting between Burma and the Shan State Army spilled into the neighbouring Chiang Rai province in January.

Later, Thai and Burma troops also exchanged fire, further hampering relations between the two countries. Several border crossings between the two countries remain closed because of the tensions between the two countries. (AP)

THE ASIAN AGE

THE ASIAN AGE

25 APR 2001

'Transition to democracy not easy in S.E. Asia'

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, FEB. 17. The Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, has said the process of democratic transition in South-east Asia could face "regression" in the future.

Mr. Abdullah, who has met senior Singapore leaders in a bid to resolve bilateral issues, said at a lecture that developments in countries like the Philippines could have an impact on the rest of the region. "I believe that these pressures (for democratisation) will be sustained, even increased in the years ahead," Mr. Abdullah, who is the chosen successor of the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, said he hoped and prayed that the Indonesian leadership would be able to "manage the situation" there. He said it might be necessary for Malaysia

and Singapore to extend a helping hand to Indonesia in the future like getting involved in expanding trade and development.

Asked about the dangers of "Islamisation", Mr. Abdullah said Islam was very much compatible with democracy. Lashing out at extremist forces, he said he was worried about Islam being propagated by Muslims not worthy of Islam. Projecting a moderate image, Mr. Abdullah stated that "Islam preaches peace and we are a peaceful people". Steering clear of naming individual countries in his lecture entitled, "Democratic Transitions in South-east Asia", Mr. Abdullah said: "The tendency to get carried away with democracy by fiesta and exuberant outpourings of emotion belies the hard work that needs to be done in building credible institutions of governance and nation-building."

"I know of no magic formula that can apply equally to all countries to promote smooth transitions and prevent regressions or reversal. What works for one country can be disastrous for another. Nor are we always in control of the forces and the events. What I would caution against is a hubristic and triumphant rush towards democracy." Mr. Abdullah argued that democracy "must not descend a country into chaos and instability. We must not be preoccupied with measuring how liberal or free democracies are..."

"There is a tendency for people to be overwhelmed by the waves of democracy and lose sight of the ultimate goals of peace and prosperity. Democracy is not a street party. It is a serious issue that needs to be addressed rationally and carefully. Let me stress again that democratisation requires the

hard work of promoting good governance and observing the sensitivities of nation-building," he said.

Mr. Abdullah said the "challenge of democracy" was a reality in South-east Asia. "As we look around we see political transitions. Some have been tumultuous and some have yet to deliver the good that democracy promises. But these changes are, nonetheless, very real. It is a reality which leaders of my generation will have to grapple with, and it is a reality that awaits the generation of future leaders."

Referring to the Malaysian experience, Mr. Abdullah said candidly that at the time of independence Malaysia did not even have an "imagined community" made of Malays, Chinese and Indians.

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THE HINDU

18 FEB 2001

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Vietnam stresses
claim on
Spratlys isles

HANOI, April 16. — Vietnam emphasised its claim to the disputed Spratly Islands today ahead of Chinese Vice-President, Mr Hu Jintao's visit to Hanoi.

The official Communist party newspaper Nhan Dan said Vietnamese soldiers based on the South China Sea islands had started celebrating the ninth Congress of the ruling party which starts this week and which Mr Hu is due to attend.

The paper said the campaign — "To Reach the Peak of Victory" — started on 5 April and would run until the end of the month.

"All units and affiliated units have strictly maintained regimes on being on duty, operational watch, monitoring watch and guarding," it said. "The training and the spirit of combat readiness of forces have been improved." — Reuters

THE STATESMAN

17 APR 2001

Indonesia, Singapore sign maritime accord

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, FEB. 24. In a bid to tackle the growing incidents of piracy in the Southeast Asian region, Indonesia and Singapore have reached a bilateral accord through which Indonesian seafarers could get jobs on Singapore-registered ships.

The accord, signed by the Communication Ministers of the two countries, will reportedly benefit some 10,000 Indonesian sailors and short-handed Singaporean ship-owners.

The agreement comes days after the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported an "alarming rise in piracy and armed robbery" in Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Malacca Straits, India, Ecuador and the Red Sea.

In its annual report, the IMB — a division of the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) — said there had been 469 attacks on ships either at sea, at anchor or in port in 2000. This was four-and-a-half-times than in 1999, it said.

"Indonesia recorded the highest number of attacks, accounting for almost one quarter of the world total with 119 incidents. Eighty-six ships were boarded, two ships were hijacked and attempted attacks were made on another 31 ships. It was also the location where great violence was experienced, with many of the pirates armed with knives. The IMB says there are no signs that the number of attacks will drop unless Indonesia takes serious steps to address the problem."

Worldwide, 72 sea-farers were killed and 99 injured in 2000, up

from three killed and 24 injured in the previous year. Ships were boarded in 307 instances while eight ships were hijacked.

"Among other world hotspots, the Malacca Straits witnessed a dramatic increase in attacks, up to 75 from two in 1999, despite the efforts of Royal Malaysian Police to step up patrols in the area to tackle the problem..." the IMB maintained.

A substantial increase was reported in India — a total of 35 incidents in 2000, up from 14 in 1999.

In its latest warning, the IMB said an increasing number of piracy incidents had been reported from the Malacca Straits. "Ships calling at Davao in the Philippines have reported men firing rocket-propelled grenades at ships from Banca (small canoe with outriggers). During the last four weeks, four ships have been subjected to such attacks," the Bureau said.

"Attacks have been reported at Chittagong, Mongla and Chennai while at anchor. Ships at ports in Bangladesh have been subjected to theft of zinc anodes welded to ships' sides and the stern," it maintained.

"Ships calling at Indonesian ports of Belawan, Dumai, Jakarta, Merak, Samarinda and Tanjong Priok have reported numerous attacks while at berth and at anchor," it said.

On February 13, pirates are said to have boarded a tanker in Kakinada anchorage, India. "The duty officer spotted them and raised the alarm. Pirates escaped with the ship's stores," the IMB's weekly report said.

THE HINDU

25 FEB 2001

Burma soldiers clash with Thailand rebels

Bangkok, Feb. 21: Fresh clashes broke out between Burma soldiers and rebel ethnic guerrillas on Wednesday near the Thai border where Thai and Burma troops were involved in bloody confrontations earlier this month.

A source in the rebel Shan State Army said the guerrillas had attacked a Burma military outpost at dawn and killed 10 soldiers. There was no comment from the Burma authorities.

The clashes were across the border from the Thai frontier town of Mae Sai. The town was hit by shells and bullets earlier this month during fighting between SSA rebels and Burma soldiers and their allies in the United Wa State Army.

Thai soldiers returned fire, and the clashes provoked a war of words between the two countries. The SSA has fought Burma government forces for several decades to try to secure an autonomous Shan state.

Burma has accused Bangkok of giving moral and military support to the Shan rebels. "Shan rebels are the major drug producers and smugglers in the region," said authorities. (Reuters)

Little hope of finding any crash survivors

BY AUNG HLA TUN

Rangoon, Feb. 21: Burma officials said on Wednesday hope was fading of finding alive any of the 11 people still missing after a helicopter crash that killed the fourth most senior member of the country's military government.

Lieutenant General Tin Oo, Secretary Two of the ruling State Peace and Development Council and chief of staff of the Army, was killed on Monday when the helicopter plunged into the Salwin River in Kayin state, southeast of the capital Rangoon.

Officials said that of 29 people aboard the helicopter, 13 had been rescued, and five bodies had so far been found. There was little hope that any of the remaining 11 missing passengers would be found alive.

Officials said Brigadier General Lun Maung, minister at the Prime Minister's office, was also believed to have been killed in the crash.

But they said earlier reports that Col. Thein Nyunt, minister for the development of border areas, had been killed were not correct. Diplomats in Rangoon say the death of 67-year-old Tin Oo will weaken a hawkish faction led by General Maung Aye, vice chairman of the SPDC. Tin Oo was considered an ally of Maung Aye. Diplomats say there is a split in Burma between allies of Maung Aye, who are against any weakening in the military's iron grip on power, and a faction led by SPDC Secretary One Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt which favours making modest reforms in the hope of improving Burma's economy. Maung Aye and Khin Nyunt are the second and third most senior members of the SPDC. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

22 FEB 2001

Thailand, Myanmar open talks over border clashes

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MAE SAI (Thailand), Feb. 12. — Myanmar and Thailand observed a ceasefire and opened negotiations today over deadly border clashes that erupted when fighting between Yangoon's troops and ethnic rebels spilled over the border.

Thai army chief, General Surayud Chulanond, said clashes around this border township, which was pounded with shellfire during the conflict, halted late yesterday after the two national armies agreed to stand down.

"The best way is for the two sides to hold talks and reach an agreement," he said as a border committee meeting convened with officials from both sides in attendance.

Mae Sai was virtually abandoned yesterday after clashes broke out between Myanmar forces and Thai troops, who retaliated when artillery



A Buddhist monk looks on from the bridge bordering Thailand and Myanmar after the border crossing was reopened. At Mae Sai town on Monday. — AP/PTI

aimed at the Shan State Army strayed into Thai territory.

Two Thais died in the cross-fire and a dozen civilians and nine soldiers were hurt.

Foreign ministry sources said the government would summon Myanmar's ambassador to Thailand "to tell him what had happened".

THE STATESMAN

13 FEB 2001