

Bali blasts cleric freed



Abu Bakar Bashir in Jakarta on Wednesday. (AFP)

Jakarta, June 14 (Reuters): Radical Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir walked out of a Jakarta jail today after serving time for links to the 2002 Bali bombings, calling on jubilant supporters to join forces for the spread of Islamic law.

Australia's Prime Minister said millions of his citizens would be extremely disappointed because of the release and a US embassy spokesman

said there was cause for concern.

Wearing his trademark white skullcap and red-and-white checked shawl as he emerged from prison, a smiling Bashir said: "Let us strengthen Islamic brotherhood. We strengthen our unity for one aim — that is Islamic shariat (law)".

Indonesia and other nations that "have been in darkness" could be saved by adherence to Islamist precepts, he said. Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim nation.

Seen by the West as the spiritual head of the al Qaida-linked Jemaah Islamiah (JI) regional militant network, Bashir was convicted of being part of a conspiracy behind the Bali bombings that killed 202 people, many of them Australian tourists.

In Australia, Prime Minister John Howard told parliament: "I want (Indonesia's

politicians) to understand from me, on behalf of the government, how extremely disappointed, even distressed, millions of Australians will be at the release".

15 JUN 2002

Java quake toll rises to 4,000, rescue efforts on

Bantul (Indonesia): Rescue workers dug desperately for survivors on Sunday and hospitals struggled to cope with the thousands of injured, a day after an earthquake killed nearly 4,000 people on Indonesia's Java island.

Up to 20,000 had been injured and more than 100,000 have been left homeless, according to UNICEF (the UN Children's Fund) spokesman John Budd, but he said figures were still sketchy. "Nobody really knows for sure simply because a lot of people were actually evacuated out ... in order to be treated and a lot of people who are injured have been turned away," Budd said.

Trucks full of volunteers from Indonesian political parties and Islamic groups, as well as military vehicles carrying soldiers, headed south from the ancient royal city of Yogyakarta to Bantul, hardest hit by the quake, to help in the effort.

"Kopassus (special forces troops) and Indonesian Red Cross volunteers are trying to comb through rubble because thousands of houses are damaged and people may still be trapped beneath them," Ghozali Situmorang, director general of aid management for the national social department, told Yogyakarta radio. Medical supplies and body bags were arriving at the airport of Yogyakarta, about 25 km from the Indian Ocean coast where Saturday's 6.3 magnitude quake was centred just offshore.

A volcanologist said the quake had heightened volcanic activity at nearby Mount Merapi, a volcano experts believe may be about to erupt. Merapi has been rumbling for weeks and sporadically emitting hot lava and



Youths cry during the funeral of their mother, who was killed during Saturday's earthquake, at Bambang Lipuro district in Bantul, near Yogyakarta, on Sunday

highly toxic hot gas.

The official death toll stood at 3,717 by late afternoon on Sunday, said the social affairs ministry's disaster task force. That number was expected to rise as more bodies were uncovered. The toll "could be a lot more", aid director Situmorang said.

In the Bantul area, which accounted for more than 2,000 of the deaths and where most buildings were flattened, makeshift plastic tents dotted the roads. In the afternoon heat Sugiyo picked through the remnants of his brick home. He had been trapped with his family before being

rescued by other village residents. His mother was killed. "I found my motorcycle but it was destroyed, then I found the cupboard but it was broken too," said Sugiyo. But his face lit up as he spotted a pink box containing diapers and baby clothes. "This is for my 2-year-old daughter," he said holding the box tightly in his arms.

Throughout the disaster-struck region, authorities struggled to deliver aid. "The problem now is that we are still short of tents, many people are still living on the streets or open areas," said Suseno, a field officer of the Yogyakarta disaster task force. AGENCIES

29 MAY 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

3,000 killed in Indonesian quake

S B Azmi Yudhoyono

Epicentre near Yogyakarta; temblor may trigger eruption of Mount Merapi



BANTUL (INDONESIA): A powerful earthquake flattened homes and hotels in central Indonesia early on Saturday as people slept, killing more than 3,000 and injuring thousands more in the nation's worst disaster since the 2004 tsunami.

The magnitude-6.2 quake struck at 5.54 a.m. local time near the ancient city of Yogyakarta, 400 km east of the capital, Jakarta. It was centred about 10 km below the surface, the U.S. Geological Survey said.

Activity picked up at nearby Mount Merapi, one of the world's most active volcanoes; one geologist warned the temblor could still spark a large eruption, though another downplayed those concerns.

The strong quake knocked down houses, hotels, a hospital and government buildings, sending hysterical people running into the streets. Many roads and bridges were destroyed, hindering efforts to get taxis and pickup trucks filled with wounded to packed hospitals.

Bantul worst-hit

In the hardest-hit district of Bantul, rescuers tried to pull bodies from the rubble as residents started digging mass graves, rows of corpses awaiting burial beneath the blazing sun.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono ordered the army to help evacuate victims and arrived in the densely



THE AFTERMATH: Residents amid the ruins of their houses after an earthquake struck Yogyakarta in Indonesia on Saturday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

populated Central Java province in the afternoon with a team of Cabinet Ministers to oversee rescue operations.

Sixteen hours after the quake struck, the number of dead stood at 3,068, Social Affairs Ministry official Sopar Jaya said, adding that two-thirds of the fatalities occurred in devastated Bantul.

"The numbers just keep rising," said Arifin Muhadi of the Indonesian Red Cross, adding that more than 3,400 people were injured.

Japan and Malaysia said they would send medical teams, and the United States and the Eu-

ropean Commission also said they would send emergency aid. The U.N. World Food Program and UNICEF offered humanitarian assistance and tents to shelter those left homeless.

Activity near volcano

The quake hit close to the rumbling Mount Merapi, and soon after the temblor a large burst of hot clouds and debris avalanched 3.5 km down its western flank. No one was injured.

Bambang Dwiyanto, the Energy and Mineral Ministry's chief geologist, said the two events did

not appear to be directly related, but warned that the quake could still trigger a larger eruption. "It will influence the activities of Mount Merapi, particularly in the lava dome," he cautioned.

A geological researcher at the Indonesian Science Institute said, however, he did not think the quake was powerful enough to create a large eruption.

"It has increased pressure of lava and raised activities, but I don't think it will have a significant impact," said Dani Hilman.

The quake cut electricity and phone lines in some areas.

It also cracked the runway at the airport in Yogyakarta, home to the famed Borobudur temple, closing it to aircraft until at least Sunday.

Officials said the 7th century Buddhist shrine, one of Indonesia's most popular tourist attractions, was not affected in the quake. Nearby Prambanan, a spectacular Hindu temple to the southeast, suffered some damage but it was not immediately clear how much. — AP

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28 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

Indonesia flexes diplomatic muscles

Jakarta: Indonesia is trying to ease tensions over North Korea's and Iran's nuclear programmes. The Indonesian president is visiting Myanmar to push military leaders to move toward democracy.

And in the furor over cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, the world's most populous Muslim nation wants to bridge the rift between the West and the Islamic world.

After spending years on the diplomatic sidelines as it focused on domestic troubles that followed the 1998 ouster of longtime dictator Suharto, Indonesia is trying to reclaim its role as the dominant nation in Southeast Asia.

"This is one of the largest procedural democracies in the world, with the single largest

moderate Muslim population, but Jakarta has not derived any significant leverage from that," said Jeffrey Winters, an Indonesia specialist and a professor of political economy at Northwestern University in Illinois.

It has "greatly underplayed its hand on the international scene" for the last eight years, he said, but that is starting to change.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono arrived in Myanmar on Wednesday for a two-day visit, the first by a regional leader since the Association of Southeast Asian Nations publicly called on the military-ruled country in December to introduce democracy and release political prisoners.

He is expected to raise the junta's plans for democratic re-

forms with the country's leader, General Than Shwe. That would be a sharp departure from ASEAN's traditional stand of not interfering in the internal affairs of its members. "Yudhoyono should seize the opportunity to display a new, conscientious Indonesian foreign policy," said an op-ed in The Jakarta Post.

The country led by example during the Prophet Mohammed cartoon row, defusing tensions by its insistence on balancing freedom of expression with religious sensitivities, and avoiding violent protests that shook several Muslim countries.

And it is engaging in diplomacy with North Korea and Iran to ease standoffs with the West over their nuclear ambitions. AP



Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono at Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon

Blast rocks Indonesian market

Palu, Indonesia, Dec. 31 (Reuters): A bomb packed with nails exploded in a crowded Christian market selling pork ahead of New Year celebrations in eastern Indonesia today, killing at least seven people and wounding 53, police said.

The early morning blast in Palu, capital of volatile Central Sulawesi province, came after warnings of militant violence during the Christmas and New Year season in Indonesia. But it appeared to be linked to regional tensions, not international Islamic militancy. Indonesia is predominant-

ly Muslim but its east has large pockets of Christians, to whom pork is not forbidden.

Bystanders carried bleeding shoppers from the makeshift market to a road, putting them in passing cars to be taken to hospital. One man screamed as he held up his bloodied arms.

"Suddenly there was a flash of light and a really loud bang. We were all thrown to the ground," one wounded pork seller told El Shindra radio from his hospital bed.

"I saw many buyers who had lost their legs. We just tried to save ourselves by flee-

ing the market."

"It was a homemade bomb. It was full of nails," said police spokesman Major-General Paulus Purwoko in Jakarta.

Central Sulawesi police said seven of the 60 people reported injured had died, and that security was being tightened, especially in places of worship.

The official Antara news agency said another bomb had been found and defused near the market in Palu, 1,650 km northeast of Jakarta.

"This was done by outside perpetrators to create an unstable situation in Palu," Rus-

di Masura, mayor of South Palu regency said.

Intercommunal violence has killed thousands since the downfall of longtime autocrat Suharto in 1998.

Fighting between Muslims and Christians in central Sulawesi from 1998 to 2001 killed 2,000 people, mainly around the Muslim town of Poso. Since then, violence has been sporadic. Last October three teenage Christian girls were beheaded near Poso. Bomb attacks last May in the Christian town of Tentena killed 22 people.

The nation of 220 million people has experienced sever-

al bomb attacks on Western targets as well, mostly blamed on Jemaah Islamiah, a group seen as al Qaida's Southeast Asian arm.

The deadliest killed 202 people, mostly tourists, on the island of Bali in 2002.

But national police spokesman Purwoko said the Palu blast was not typical of those planned by Noordin M. Top, a Malaysian who is the most main identified Jemaah leader still thought to be at large in Indonesia.

Last month police killed Azahari Husin, another alleged Jemaah Islamiah leader.

In his New Year address, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said the country could not drop its guard on the security front.

"The situation last year was coloured by conflict and terrorist acts. Although the main offender of the terrorist movement has been paralysed, the big job is still not finished," he said.

Security expert Ken Conboy, in Jakarta, said the Palu violence was unlikely to spread beyond the district. "The greater terrorist scare has been more focused on Java, and specifically on Jakarta."

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