

## INDIAN GANGSTER 'CHHOTA RAJAN' CAUGHT IN BALI

**JAKARTA:** An alleged Indian crime boss wanted in his home country for up to 20 murders has been arrested in Indonesia after two decades on the run, police said yesterday. Acting on a tip-off from Australian police, Indonesian authorities detained Rajendra Sadashiv Nikalje on Sunday as he arrived in the popular resort island of Bali from Sydney, Bali police spokesman Heri Wiyanto said. The 55-year-old Nikalje, known in India as Chhota Rajan, had been evading police in several countries for years, with Interpol flagging him as a wanted man back in 1995.

"We received information from police in Canberra yesterday (Sunday) about the red notice for a murderer," Wiyanto told AFP. "We arrested the man at the airport yesterday. What we know is that this man was suspected to have carried out 15 to 20 murders in India." Nikalje was the alleged former right-hand man of Mumbai crime kingpin Dawood Ibrahim, who is suspected of being behind the 1993 bomb blasts in the city that killed more than 250 people.

### 'People were so scared'

Nikalje later became Ibrahim's rival, accused of running one of several underworld outfits that had a grip on India's financial and entertainment capital in the 1980s and 1990s until a police crackdown. "It (the



**BALI:** Motorcyclists pass by Denpasar's police station where Rajendra Sadashiv Nikalje is detained. — AP arrest) is very, very important because after Dawood's gang, his was the second most notorious and cruel gang," former Mumbai police chief PS Pasricha told an Indian TV station. "People were so scared that they

stopped even holding their marriages in Mumbai or purchasing expensive cars because the moment they did, they would get calls from gangsters for extortion." Among other crimes, police accused Nikalje in 2011

of ordering the murder of a prominent Mumbai crime reporter, who was gunned down in a drive-by shooting the same year. Wiyanto said Bali police were coordinating with Interpol and Indian authorities, adding it was likely Nikalje would be deported to India.

A spokesperson for Australian Federal Police said Interpol in Canberra had alerted Indonesian authorities "who apprehended Nikalje at the request of Indian authorities".

The federal police confirmed last month that Nikalje was living in Australia under another identity and had been in discussions with Indian authorities, the spokesperson said, but would not provide further details. Nikalje in 2001 was wounded by gunmen who burst into a Bangkok apartment and killed his associate in what appeared to be a shooting ordered by Ibrahim. Because he was facing a bid to extradite him to India, he made a dramatic escape from the Bangkok hospital where he was being treated. India's top Central Bureau of Investigation welcomed the arrest yesterday, saying it had been working with Australia authorities to hunt down Nikalje. Interpol's website says Nikalje was born in Mumbai, and was wanted for multiple charges including murder and possession and use of illegal firearms. — AFP

## MYANMAR TRAINS CONTROVERSIAL 40,000 STRONG 'ELECTION POLICE'

**YANGON:** In a makeshift classroom in downtown Yangon, rows of uniformed men listened to lessons on election security yesterday as they prepared to join Myanmar's controversial 40,000-strong special polling day police force. The former junta-ruled nation will hold a highly-anticipated vote on November 8 in what many hope could be the freest election in decades.

Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition is expected to make major gains. But there are concerns unrest could flare in the conflict-prone nation where religious tensions are simmering while the use of civilian deputies has sparked unease given the country's long history of military rulers using armed thugs to suppress opposition.

"They need more police and I wanted to help as much as I could," said Aung Swe Oo, a deputy head of the local fire service in Botadung Township who was undergoing training yesterday. "We learned basic military subjects, the laws and principles of the election and police rules. But the priority is how to act during the polls and how to be ready," the 45-year-old told AFP, without elaborating what scenarios they might prepare for.

Some 41 recruits were undergoing lessons at the local police station yesterday-one for each polling station in the township. They have been kitted out with

police uniforms, but with "special election police" red epaulettes on their shoulders. Last month's announcement that a special force would be created followed a joint statement from countries including the United States and Japan expressing alarm that rising religious tensions could spark conflict around the elections.

A new openness has blossomed in Myanmar since the military stepped back from outright power in 2011. But reforms under a quasi-civilian government have appeared to backtrack in recent months. The country has also been shaken by sporadic outbursts of often deadly religious unrest since 2012, with minority Muslims facing increasing political exclusion as the influence of nationalist Buddhist monks grows.

The special police will be unarmed and wield fewer powers than official police, according to officials. They will be paid around \$140, the same monthly salary regular officers receive. Use of civilians by Myanmar authorities as part of crackdowns has a long and controversial history in a nation where the military brutally suppressed dissent during its nearly 50 year rule. Most recently men believed to be deputized civilians in plain clothes with red armbands were seen beating protesters alongside police at a student protest in March. — AFP



**KALIMANTAN:** In this picture taken on October 25, 2015 children play in their neighborhood by the Kahayan riverbanks, the worst-hit by haze Palangkaraya city. — AFP

## DESPERATION IN EPICENTER OF SOUTHEAST ASIA'S HAZE CRISIS

### 'I CAN'T EVEN BREATHE FRESH AIR'

**PALANGKARAYA:** When the smoke from forest fires turned a thick, acrid yellow, casting an apocalyptic glow over Palangkaraya, Kartika Sari decided to grab her child and flee the Indonesian city at the epicenter of the haze crisis smothering Southeast Asia. The 32-year-old pharmacist and her three-year-old daughter have for weeks been inhaling toxic air in Palangkaraya, a city of 240,000 that has been engulfed in poisonous darkness by smoke from peat land set alight to clear land for palm oil plantations.

"The smoke was no longer white, it was yellow," she told AFP from an evacuation centre in Banjarmasin, a six-hour drive from Palangkaraya. "Usually we just endured it, even though we had headaches and felt nauseous. But it has got so bad lately, that I can't take it anymore. I can't even breathe fresh air." Now she waits in limbo in a basic shelter with nine other evacuees, mostly children, including a one-year-old boy suffering from a severe cough and diarrhea. Authorities say the fires from slash-and-burn farming in Borneo and neighboring Sumatra have killed 10 people so far, some of whom died while fighting the blazes and others from the pollution. Respiratory illnesses in Palangkaraya have soared as the choking smog has worsened in recent weeks.

While many have relocated to safety elsewhere with friends and relatives, others have no

choice but to stay behind despite the risks posed by the noxious haze. 39-year-old Rahmah, a street vendor in Palangkaraya, said she needed to keep doing her job to pay her children's school fees, despite the toll on her health from working outdoors.

"I have to stay whether I like it or not. My livelihood is here so how can I leave?" Rahmah, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told AFP on the porch of her riverfront wooden house in Palangkaraya. "You get light headed after a while, but I just try my best to cure myself with simple medication."

Her neighbor Nurjanah, who shares a small house with seven other family members, including her five-month-old granddaughter, echoed the sense of desperation felt in the blighted city, where visibility is sometimes as low as a few dozen meters. "Leave? Where to?" Nurjanah said, when asked why she doesn't evacuate. "The smoke gets everywhere, so what's the point of evacuating when there's no escape?"

### "Can't go on like this"

At a nearby health clinic, hundreds of people queue for hours for a chance to use one of the 10 oxygen tanks available to get a breath of fresh air. Even there the haze finds its way in, swarming around 23-year-old English teacher Ayu Dwitasari, who has suffered from bronchitis for days and is having trouble breathing. "It's got

especially bad today, that is why I came here," Dwitasari said.

Mass evacuations-especially of children and those suffering chronic respiratory illnesses-were not out of the question, said Indonesian military spokesman Tatang Sulaiman. Three warships carrying medical teams, tents, cooking stoves and protective masks were on their way to the worst-affected regions in Kalimantan-Indonesia's half of Borneo-and Sumatra, he said, to help build temporary shelters away from the haze-plagued cities.

"Our warships are ready to evacuate residents, whether to these temporary shelters, or even to take them on board. We are prepared for that," he told AFP. But for those fighting the fires, a lack of equipment and tinder-dry conditions are hampering their best efforts to curb the thousands of blazes smoldering on carbon-rich peat lands.

In Kuala Kapuas, not far from Palangkaraya, 33-year-old volunteer Rahmat Muhammad Noor and around 20 others toil around the clock fighting the fires, struggling with limited water and poor equipment. Wearing thin rubber boots and a cotton face mask, Noor tried desperately to stamp out a fire with a wooden stick after the machine pumping water through the hose broke down. "Please tell the government we need more help," he told AFP. "We need masks. We can't go on like this." — AFP



**YANGON:** Specially recruited police officers for the election attend a training session. — AFP

## TWO KOREAS WRAP UP EMOTIONAL REUNIONS

**SEOUL:** North and South Korean families divided since the Korean War said a tearful final farewell yesterday, wrapping up a rare reunion that was clouded at the last by a maritime border spat. After three emotionally fraught days of seeking to redress more than 60 years of separation, the reunion ended on the most traumatic note of all-a goodbye that for most of the elderly participants marked the last time they will ever see each other.

Around 1,000 relatives from both sides took part in the week-long event-a tiny fraction of the tens of thousands wait-listed for a reunion slot. Divided into two rounds, it was only the second gathering in five years for those torn apart by the 1950-53 Korean conflict. The two Koreas had agreed to the reunion as part of a deal brokered in August to ease tensions that had pushed them to the brink of armed conflict.

The fact that it went ahead as scheduled had encouraged those who hoped the deal might usher in a period of détente, but the inherent volatility of North-South ties was underlined on Saturday by an incident on their disputed maritime border. It was a minor spat, with a South Korean naval vessel firing warning shots at a North Korean patrol boat that had strayed across the border and promptly returned.

### North Korean warning

But Pyongyang insisted it was a dangerous and deliberate provocation by the South that could "totally derail" the August agreement. The accord had also envisaged the resumption of official talks between the rival Koreas, but there has been no sign to date of such a dialogue getting under way. The latest reunion, meanwhile, ended with no commitment as to when the next one might be held.

Given that there are more than 65,000 South Koreans currently on the waiting list for a reunion spot, those selected represent a very fortunate minority. But yesterday's scenes of relatives clinging to each other and weeping at their final breakfast meeting underlined the emotional cost that gatherings exact. The "three-day" tag attached to each reunion round is misleading. In reality, that boils down to just six, two-hour sessions-only one of which allows the separated relatives to meet in private.

Among those reunited over the last three days was Lee Bok-Soon, 88, and the son she had not seen since he was abducted by the North in 1972 while on a fishing boat in the Yellow Sea. "I am alive and have lived a good life," her son, 64-year-old Jung Gun-Mook told Lee during one of their meetings monitored by an ever-present North Korean official.

North Korea has rejected repeated requests from the South to make the reunions longer and more frequent. South Korean participants say the events are wrenchingly short and over-politicized, with their North Korean kin obliged to parrot official propaganda during their monitored conversations.

The reunion program began in earnest after a historic North-South summit in 2000, and was initially an annual event, before strained cross-border relations interrupted their frequency. Pyongyang has long manipulated the reunion issue as a tool for extracting concessions from Seoul, and sees its agreement to hold the meetings as an act of diplomatic largesse that merits reward. Observers say the North has little to gain from the reunions, and is focused solely on restricting the amount of time its citizens spend in the company of their clearly more affluent South Korean kin. — AFP

## JAPAN CALLED TO BAN CHILD MANGA PORN

**TOKYO:** A UN special envoy yesterday called on Japan to ban cartoon images featuring "extreme" sexualized images of children, after Tokyo last year fell into line with other G7 nations by criminalizing possession of child pornography. Graphic images of pedophilia in manga comic books remain legal under the new law, which came into effect this summer, while books and videos of real children in sexually provocative poses are still widely available-and legal. Campaigners had long urged Japan to toughen its stance on child pornography, complaining it was a major source of the material globally.

"When it comes to particular, extreme child pornographic content, manga should be banned," Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, the UN's special reporter on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, told reporters as she wrapped up a week-long Japan tour. But she acknowledged the challenge in "finding the right balance" between artistic freedoms and the need to protect children. "I accept that the freedom of expression argument should outweigh, should prevail when it comes to adult pornography," she added.

Despite calls for manga imagery to be includ-

ed in the new rules, there was strong resistance from manga artists, free-speech advocates and publishers, who said it would impinge on freedom of expression and allow authorities to make arbitrary decisions about art. De Boer-Buquicchio criticized the law for being riddled with "numerous loopholes" and lashed out at so-called "child erotica", saying kids were being exploited. The still-legal offerings feature photos and other materials depicting half-naked children in skimpy outfits, such as tiny bikinis.

DVDs or photo books of child erotica are readily available online and at stores in Tokyo including in the city's well-known Akihabara district. "All these are obviously lucrative businesses. What is worrying is that there is a trend which seems to be socially accepted and tolerated," the UN envoy said. Billboards featuring women with voluptuous figures and distinctly child-like faces are also widely seen in urban centres.

### 'Sexual crimes'

Japanese police say they have been cracking down with an 11 percent on-year increase in cases-a total of 1,828 — in 2014. Child prostitution has declined in Japan, but materials featuring

the abuse of children have proliferated online, the envoy said, as she pointed to poverty, a lack of gender equality, social tolerance and few prosecutions.

While Japan is a relatively wealthy country, about 16.3 percent of children aged 17 or under were living in poverty-meaning a family income half that of the national median-according to 2012 data. The UN envoy said impunity for offenders is "relatively high" in Japan. "If these issues can be addressed, I believe Japan can make substantial progress, if not completely eradicate, sexual exploitation of children," De Boer-Buquicchio said.

Some Japanese non-profit organizations last week issued a formal call to the government to tighten up the new law. "Materials of children under 18 that were clearly created for the purpose of fulfilling sexual excitement should be regulated as child pornography," said Shihoko Fujiwara, head of non-profit organization Lighthouse. While Lighthouse called on firms to stop distributing DVDs depicting half-naked children several years ago, such images are still widely available, she added. "We should teach children about sexual crimes at schools," she said. — AFP