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Indonesian army on high alert

Habhajan Singh in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Wed: Indonesia has again found itself in the grip of heightened tensions, this time over debates in Parliament to impeach the President.

The security forces have been put on the high alert with a "shoot to kill" order against demonstrators around the Parliament.

At at 7.00pm local time, the Indonesian legislature appeared to be moving into high gear by allowing the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) to proceed with the special session to impeach Abdurrahman Wahid.

Half an hour earlier, seven of the 10 factions in the 500-seat House of Representatives (DPR) had voiced support for the motion to be carried.

Two factions opposed the motion while as expected the security forces abstained.

President Abdurrahman Wahid, who came into office in October 1999, remained defiant, calling the action as "a rape of the political process".

"He has no plans to resign," said his spokesman after the embattled President left the convention centre where the Group of 15 (G-15) Summit is held.

And the President, who leads the National Awakening Party (PKB), still has one card to play, that is an "emergency decree", which would declare a state of civil emergency and suspend the DPR.

"He is still undecided whether to issue the decree," the spokeman said.

The DPR and the President are considered equals under Indonesian law.

Only the MPR, the highest legislative body in Indonesia, can remove the President after considering the DPR's recommendations.

As for the G-15 Summit of developing nations from Asia, Africa and Latin America, it was pretty much business as usual.

Among the five world leaders here to attend the meeting are Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe.

Its venue is a mere 1km from the Parliament, with most of the delegates and journalists staying at Hilton Hotel adjacent to the convention centre.

In the past few days, thousands of Gus Dur's supporters had decended upon the city of 12 million people.

And there has been reported violence in East Java, Gus Dur's power base, overshadowing the G-15 summit's opening ceremony today.

Despite the tight security, thousands of marching Abdurrahman supporters were seen streaming past the summit centre on their way to the DPR complex.

The DPR had begun meeting at 9.00am, at about the same time Gus Dur was delivering his G-15 Summit address.

The President's rivals have attacked him over his recent statements, especially for claiming that six of the country's provinces would declare independence if impeachment proceedings were instituted, thus threatening "national disintegration" and mass unrest.

They said such statements were "irresponsible" and "unbecoming" for the President and that it was his responsibility to maintain the integrity and unity of the country.

The push to impeach the President is led by the 153-seat Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI-P), headed by Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Also in favour of the move is Golkar, the second biggest faction in the DPR with 120 seats.

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