

Chechnya vows to wage war against Russia

GROZNY, Russia, Aug 11: The defiant president of Chechnya vowed on Thursday to wage a 'Jihad' against Russia if Moscow tries to invade the breakaway region in southern Russia's Caucasus Mountains, reports AP.

The ITAR-Tass news agency, quoting officials in Chechnya's capital, Grozny, said

Russia to withdraw troops from Moldova in 3 yrs

MOSCOW, Aug 11: Russia and Moldova agreed Wednesday on a withdrawal within three years of the 8,000 Russian soldiers stationed in the former Soviet republic, Interfax news agency reported. reports AFP.

The agreement was signed by officials from the two states in the Moldovan capital Chisinau.

President Dzhokhar Dudayev planned to announce overall mobilisation in the tiny, mainly Muslim region of 1.2 million people.

Dudayev, a former Soviet air force general, declared Chechnya's independence from Russia immediately after being elected president in the fall of 1991. He has accused Moscow of backing his enemies and planning to invade.

Russian authorities have denied planning an invasion, but have suspended all flights to and from Chechnya, and put troops in neighbouring regions on combat alert. Russian troops sent to the region in late 1991 were forced to retreat after encountering stiff resistance.

Opposition to Dudayev has grown in recent weeks amid rising lawlessness and a worsening economy, and Russia has said it will protect its citizens in Chechnya.



Islamabad administration workers unload big portraits of Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto for decoration in front of the Parliament house on Wednesday. Preparations are in swing to celebrate the 48th Independence Day of Pakistan on August 14. — AFP photo

International

Gunmen kill 5 in Karachi

KARACHI, Aug 11: Gunmen shot and killed four Shi'ite Muslim activists and a police officer, renewing sectarian violence that has plagued Pakistan's largest city, authorities said Thursday, reports AP.

The police officer was killed in the crossfire, said police spokesman Akram Abro.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the deaths. Both police and Shi'ites are accusing militant Sunni Muslims.

The extremist Sunnis were responsible for the killing of our activists," said Hasan Turabi, spokesman for the militant group called the Movement for the Enforcement of Shi'ite Law.

Police said masked marksmen on motorcycles gunned down Jaffer Hussain, a 30-year-old Shi'ite activist and his father, as they returned home late on Wednesday from their shop in Karachi's southern neighbourhood.

Lankan opposition leader fears military rule

COLOMBO, Aug 11: A top Sri Lankan opposition leader Thursday expressed the fear that the ruling party would not transfer power if it loses the August 16 general elections, reports AP.

There is a serious threat that martial law will be declared and leading opposition leaders will be placed under house arrest," Chandrika Kumaratunga of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party told reporters.

Mrs. Kumaratunga, who is tipped to be the prime minister if the opposition People's Alliance that her party belongs to wins, said she planned to go into hiding after the polls.

Mrs. Kumaratunga has stopped addressing public rallies on Tuesday after death threats that she blamed on allies of the ruling party.

The purchases are part of Tokyo's ongoing effort to improve its watch over air and sea lanes around and approaching the Pacific nation, the Pentagon said in brief notices to Congress.

Japan to buy US weaponry

WASHINGTON, Aug 11: Japan is preparing to buy US \$800 million in US military weaponry, including two airborne warning radar systems made by Boeing Co, the Defense Department said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The purchases are part of Tokyo's ongoing effort to improve its watch over air and sea lanes around and approaching the Pacific nation, the Pentagon said in brief notices to Congress.

Off the Record

Pet rat gnaws child to death

FULLERTON, Calif: A homeless couple whose infant son was gnawed to death by the family's pet rat were each sentenced Wednesday to six years in prison after being found guilty of child neglect, reports Reuter.

Prosecutor James Tantzi said during the parents' trial the rat, named "Homer," had bitten the four-month-old boy more than 100 times as he lay in the trash-strewn car where he lived with his mother, father and four-year-old sister.

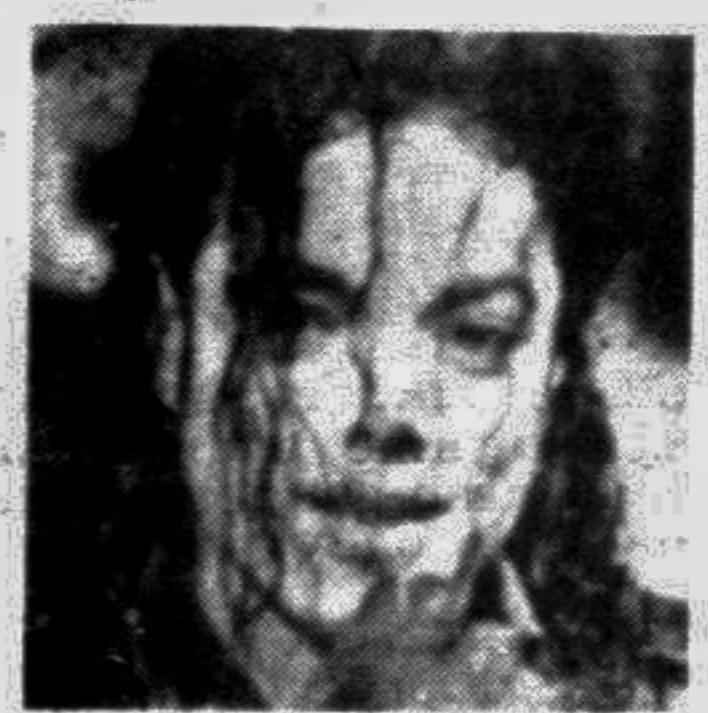
The boy bled to death, Tantzi said.

Orange County Superior Court Judge Kazuharu Makino said he was sentencing the child's parents, Steven and Kathleen Giguere, to the maximum term because they had sacrificed their children's welfare for drugs.

"These two children were solely dependent on their mother and father for their welfare. These people were given public money for the welfare of their children. Instead, that money went for drugs. They used that money for their own self interest so much that they couldn't pay rent, they couldn't buy food, they had to live in their car," Makino said.

Jackson declines to testify in child molestation case

LOS ANGELES: Michael Jackson declined to respond to court questioning about child molestation allegations levelled by five former bodyguards, according to recently released court documents, reports AP.



Jackson, who recently married Elvis Presley's daughter Lisa Marie, is being sued by five former bodyguards who contend they were fired in 1993 because of their first-hand knowledge of his alleged activities with young boys.

They sued Jackson in November, saying they were fired so they would appear to be "disgruntled employees" in any future investigation.

Jackson has steadfastly denied the molestation accusation. In documents made available this week, Jackson denied the five were ever regular employees, claiming they were hired only infrequently to provide security for his parents and property.

In the documents, which were filed July 18 in response to the bodyguards' lawsuit, Jackson declined to respond to questions about the allegations of child abuse. Jackson involved the US Constitution's Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

The bodyguards contend Jackson frequently sneaked adolescent boys into his bedroom at his parents' home while living there, and that he ordered one guard to retrieve and destroy a photograph of a naked boy from Jackson's private bathroom.

Roman city discovered under Aqaba sands

RALEIGH: The lost city of Aila, one of the great port cities of the Roman Empire, was discovered this summer beneath the sands of the Jordanian city of Aqaba, a team of US researchers announced Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The team from North Carolina State University warned that the site, near the Israeli border, could disappear again — this time under hotels and parking lots as the new peace agreement between Jordan and Israel leads to economic expansion in the region.

"There is a great sense of urgency to this work," said Thomas Parker, a history professor and leader of the team of archaeologists, historians and students that rediscovered the 2,000-year-old city this summer.

"I knew that with the growth of modern Aqaba, this would probably be our last chance to find the ancient city of Aila, if it ever was to be found," Parker told a news conference where artifacts and photographs from the dig were on display.

Their only clues to Aila's location were ancient records and some aerial photographs that hinted at the outlines of long-buried walls.

But within weeks they had uncovered remnants from the city that existed from the first century BC to the 7th century AD. The items included portions of the wall that surrounded the city, thousands of pieces of pottery, coins and a camel's pelvic bone on which someone had written a letter.

The letter is currently being translated.

Aila was an economic centre for the Roman Empire until 630 AD when Prophet Mohammed conquered the city.

Within decades the Muslims had built a city several miles away and Aila was abandoned.

Man held for in-flight sexual assault on girl

NEW YORK: A 15-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by a man who sat next to her on a flight from Rome to New York, authorities said, reports AP.

The girl told police that Arthur Coreno, 45, of Brook Park, Ohio, attacked her in the last row of TWA Flight 853, according to Tom Middlemiss, a spokesman for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

Police arrested Coreno when the plane landed Wednesday.

The man allegedly covered her with a blanket and undid her pants after she fell asleep, police were quoted as saying in Thursday's New York Newsday newspaper.

The girl awoke during the attack, but was too frightened to stop him. She waited until the man was himself asleep, then jumped over him and ran to her father, police told Newsday.

The father and six other relatives then ran to the back of the plane and started beating and kicking the suspect until flight attendants intervened. Another passenger watched over Coreno for the rest of the flight.

The girl was later examined at a hospital, Middlemiss said.



Afghan refugees urge warring leaders to halt fighting

ISLAMABAD, Aug 11: Afghan elders claiming to represent 1 million refugees appealed to their warring leaders on Thursday to end the bloodletting that is destroying their homeland, reports AP.

Since throwing the communists from power in April 1992, Muslim insurgents have turned their guns on each other in a vicious power struggle between forces loyal to the president and his rival prime minister.

The countless thousands killed and injured in the continuing fighting ... the murders of non-governmental organisation staff, of four UN colleagues in February 1993 and of BBC journalist two weeks ago, all underline the urgent need for peace in Afghanistan coupled with economic rehabilitation

Pakistan and about half as many remaining in Iran. During the 1979-92 anti-communist insurgency in Afghanistan, an estimated 5.5 million Afghans fled to Pakistan and Iran.

Large sections of the capital Kabul have been destroyed since US-backed Muslim rebels established their Islamic government in the heart of the city. What remains of Kabul has been divided among the feuding warlords.

Dozens of people are wounded each day in rocket duels between the forces of the main combatants — Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his arch-rival President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Again on Thursday, Kabul shook with the reverberations from rocket fire. One person was killed and 41 others were wounded when a rocket bar-

rage hit a busy bazaar, said hospital officials in the capital.

A presidential spokesman blamed Hekmatyar and his ally, ex-communist general Rashid Dostum, for the attack.

Dozens of attempts have been made to try to find a peaceful end to the fighting. The United Nations has sent the ex-Turkmen Foreign Minister Mahmood Mestiri to Afghanistan as a mediator.

But so far the leaders don't appear interested in peace.

Van Leeuwen, UNHCR representative in Pakistan, told a news conference Thursday.

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Meanwhile AFP adds: India's parliament extended direct federal rule over Kashmir for six more months Wednesday after Home Minister Shankar Rao Chavhan ruled out an early election in the strife-torn Himalayan state.

A government request to prolong New Delhi's control over the state administration until February was passed by acclamation in the bicameral parliament.

Kashmir has been without an elected state administration since a Muslim moderate administration resigned in January 1990 at the height of a Muslim secessionist upsurge in the state.

Direct federal rule, called president's rule, requires a parliamentary mandate every six months.

The latest extension was granted after Chavhan scotched a proposal that New Delhi was planning to stage early state assembly elections, saying it would be "premature to rush into the electoral process."

Federal rule extended in Kashmir

Troops kill 3 militants

SRINAGAR, Aug 11: Army troops gunned down three militants in an encounter and captured nine others from different parts of Kashmir valley along with arms and ammunition since last evening, reports PTI.

A Defence Ministry spokesman told PTI here today that army troops raided village Talwari in frontier district of Kupwara following information that a large number of militants were hiding in the village. As the troops entered the village, hiding militants opened fire on the troops.

The troops returned fire and in the ensuing gunfight three militants were killed.

Three AK assault rifles, nine magazines, 68 rounds of ammunition and a hand grenade were seized from the killed militants, the spokesman said.

He said four militants were taken into custody by the troops from Badgam town in central Kashmir.

A Pakistan-trained militant of outlawed Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front was killed in the dragnet of the troops at

village Mangal in Anantnag district, while two suspected militants were arrested from Kanabal area of the district, the spokesman said.

He said two militants were detained during house-to-house searches at Ganipora in Baramulla district along with two AK assault rifles, their three magazines and 25 rounds of ammunition.

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Arafat, Rabin admit differences

EREZ CROSSING POINT, Gaza Strip, Aug 11: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat acknowledged their differences at a summit Wednesday but pledged to implement the pact they signed three months ago.

Rabin said that committees would meet next week at Erez to discuss elections among other issues the two leaders might meet in two weeks if required.

Police on both sides mounted a major security operation for the summit, with the roads leading to the crossing point — a previous scene of violent clashes — sealed before the 3 pm (1200 GMT) meeting.

Rabin lashed out at Palestinian Foreign Minister Farouk Kaddoumi for saying in Tunis that violence against Israel should continue until all Palestinian lands are liberated.

Rabin called his statement a serious violation of the self-rule accord between the two sides.

Another tough issue to be resolved is Palestinian finances. Without at least \$600 million in aid promised for this year, the self-rule government could go bankrupt.

The Palestinian authority has not been able to organize the tax collection that was also supposed to help fund their government.

The future status of Jerusalem is one of the toughest issues between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel claims the entire city as its capital, while the Palestinians want to make east Jerusalem the capital of their state.

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Rabin said that the subject of Jerusalem had not been discussed, but said that there had been remarks here and



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (L) and Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin listen to reporters' questions following their meeting at the Erez Crossing Point between Israel and the Gaza Strip on Wednesday.

— AFP photo