

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

Gunmen kill 5 in Karachi

KARACHI, Aug 11: Gunmen shot and killed four Shiite 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 Shites 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 Shite Law.

Police said masked marksmen on motorcycles gunned down Jaffar Hussain, a 30-year-old Shiite 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.

Under the Sri Lanka constitution, the winning party can form a government only after the president invites them to do so. The party has to prove its majority in parliament later.

The ruling United National Party has controlled the 225-member parliament for 17 years.

But many political analysts and newspaper columnists are predicting an opposition victory because its candidates swept the March provincial council polls in southern Sri Lanka.

Japan to buy US weaponry

WASHINGTON, Aug 11: Japan is preparing to buy 803 million dollar in US military weaponry, including two airborne warning radar systems made by Boeing Co, the Defence Department said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

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.

BRIEFLY

Six Serbs jailed in Croatia: A military court in the Croatian port of Split has jailed six captured Serb soldiers for six to 15 years, the Croatian news agency Hina reported on Wednesday, Reuters reports from Zagreb.

It said the six were arrested in civilian clothes near the coastal town of Zadar on July 4 and were convicted of terrorist activity aimed at undermining Croatia's sovereignty.

Catholic guard killed in Belfast: A Catholic security guard was shot dead by suspected Protestant extremists on Wednesday in Northern Ireland's third killing in a week, police said, Reuters reports from Belfast.

The gunman opened fire at the middle-aged victim as he sat in his hut next to a supermarket in a mainly Protestant area of the city, a spokesman for the Royal Ulster Constabulary said.

US fire leaves 5 dead: A fire in a dilapidated, two-story home in New Orleans killed four children and one adult. One fireman was injured trying to rescue one of the children, Fire Superintendent Warren McDaniel said, AP reports from New Orleans.

The home in the uptown section of New Orleans was engulfed in flames by the time firefighters arrived around 8:45pm on Wednesday, McDaniel said.

66th Ariane lifts off: The 66th Ariane rocket fired into space on Wednesday carrying two telecommunication satellites for Brazil and Turkey, AFP reports from Kourou.

The European Space Agency rocket lifted off at 8:05 pm, (2305 GMT) from the Guyana space station with the Brasilsat-B1 and Turksat-1B aboard.

Mines maim 1 lakh in Angola: Up to 100,000 people have been maimed by land mines in Angola, the United Nations Children Fund envoy in Angola, Vincent Orenilly said yesterday, Xinhua reports from Luanda.

Speaking at a symposium on social issues in Angola, Orenilly said Angola is among the countries which are most affected by land mines.

1800 die in S China floods: The floods which have swept through southern China since May have claimed at least 1,800 lives according to latest estimates, China Daily reported, AFP says from Beijing.

The torrential rain fell hardest on Guizhou, Guangxi and Zhejiang Provinces, affecting 85 million people, the paper said.

Volcano erupts near Goma camps: The volcano towering over Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire erupted Wednesday, spewing ash and dust but there was no immediate gush of lava, AP reports from Goma.

The last minor eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano occurred about three months ago and did not release lava.

The volcano erupts periodically, but the last killer eruption took place in 1977. Close to 1,000 people died in the disaster.

Fires kill 1019 in China: Fires in China killed 1,019 people and caused economic damage estimated at 540 million yuan (62.8 million dollars) in the first half of this year, the China Daily said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The Public Security Ministry registered 21,090 fires from January to June, a drop of 7.3 per cent compared with the same period last year.

Niger seeks foreign aid: Niger appealed for international aid Wednesday to cope with damage from torrential rains over the past few weeks that have killed 27 people and left 20,000 homeless, AP reports from Niamey.

Communications Minister Hassoumi Massoudou said that the unusually heavy storms have destroyed more than 2,000 homes. Niger urgently needs medical and material assistance, he said.

Jordanian Prince visits Israel: Prince Talal Hussein, nephew of King Hussein, visited Israel in secret for talks on whether Jordan might ship goods through the Jewish state, an Israeli mayor said yesterday, Reuters reports from Jerusalem.

Zvi Zilker, mayor of Israel's Mediterranean port city of Ashdod, quoted Prince Talal as saying Jordan wanted to transport 30,000 containers next year and 60,000 in 1996 through Ashdod rather than its own Red Sea port of Aqaba.

Kurds kill 12 in Turkey: Turkey's separatist Kurds killed 12 civilians including two children in a minibus they raked with automatic weapons fire, security officials said.

The attack took place late on Wednesday, Reuters reports from Diyarbakir, Turkey.

Guerillas of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) opened fire when a minibus travelling from the eastern city of Van to Bahcesaray town refused to stop at a roadblock.

Quake hits central Romania: A moderate earthquake hit central Romania Wednesday afternoon, cracking walls and breaking windows, the state Rompres news agency said. No casualties were reported, AP reports from Bucharest.

The earthquake occurred in the Gherla area, about 250 kilometres (160 miles) northwest of the capital, Rompres said.

9 feared drowned near Surat: At least nine personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), were feared drowned when the bus in which they were travelling rolled down from the Magdalla bridge into the Tapi river near Surat (rural) district early yesterday morning, PTI reports from Ahmedabad.

Russian dam burst toll now 15: Fifteen people died and another 55 were reported missing after a dam burst in the Russian republic of Bashkortostan, the Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations said Wednesday giving a final toll for the accident Sunday, reports AFP from Moscow.

A ministry spokesman refused to speculate on chances of still finding survivors from the four villages submerged after the Tifran dam in the east of the central Russian republic collapsed.

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.

In a petition presented to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees here, 900 Afghan elders begged for an end to the fighting that has killed more than 15,000 people in the past two years.

"We wish the voice of the Afghan people, who have sought refuge in Pakistan and elsewhere, to be heard because of the continuing hostilities and destruction in our country," said the petition.

There are still 1.5 million Afghan refugees living in

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.

Since throwing the communists from power in April 1992, Muslim insurgents have turned their guns on 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-Tunisian Foreign Minister Mahmood Mestiri to Afghanistan as a mediator.

But so far the leaders don't appear interested in peace. Van Leeuwen said the UNHCR is hoping a collective plea from 1 million Afghan refugees might convince the warring factions it is time to lay down their arms.

"The voices of 1 million of their own people is difficult to ignore," he said.

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 fell 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.

Floods kill 53 in Uttar Pradesh

NEW DELHI, Aug 11: Floods rampaging the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh have killed at least 53 people and caused widespread destruction, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today, reports AFP.

The latest victims were a villager and his son who died when their house collapsed in heavy rains on Wednesday in Ghazipur District, some 600 kilometres (375 miles) north-west of Calcutta, the news agency said.

Meanwhile AFP adds: India's parliament extended direct federal rule over Kashmir for six more months Wednesday after Home Minister Shankar Rao Chavan 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 Chavan scotched speculation that New Delhi was planning to stage early state assembly elections, saying it would be "premature to rush into the electoral process."

UNESCO awards 3 literacy prizes

PARIS, Aug 11: The UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation on Wednesday awarded its international literacy prizes for 1994 to groups in Malawi, India and Tunisia, reports AP.

Malawi's National Centre for Literacy and Adult Education, which has taught 646,500 people to read, 85 per cent of them women, won the 15,000 dls International Reading Prize.

The award was set up in 1979 by the International Reading Association of the United States.

The Loreto Day School in Sealdah, India, part of the Roman Catholic Loreto Order's network of girls' schools, won the Noma Prize for its innovative reading programmes, such as child-to-child teaching in rural areas that has deeply cut into dropout rates.

The 15,000 dollars Noma Prize was established in 1980 by the late Japanese publisher, Soichi Noma.

The National Union of Tunisian Women won the King Sejong Literary Prize for helping improve women's status by cutting female dropout rates and creating reading programmes for the poor.

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, reports AP.

The summit at the Erez Crossing was their first meeting in Gaza since the Palestinian leader moved there last month to run the self-rule government. The two leaders last met July 6 in Paris after receiving a UN peace prize.

Rabin and Arafat discussed snags in their May 4 agreement, which granted the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) authority over the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

"We don't have a magic wand, but we hope that with determination... we will be able to overcome all our obstacles," Arafat told reporters after the 90-minute meeting.

Issues on the agenda included the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails, expanding self-rule elsewhere in the West Bank, implementing the safe passage agreement across Israel between Gaza and Jericho as well as the overall size of Jericho.

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

there about the city.

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 would-be state.

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 \$1.6 billion 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.



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

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 Reuters.

Prosecutor James Tanizaki 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, Tanizaki said. Orange County Superior Court Judge Kazuharu Makino said she 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 reportedly married Elvis Presley's daughter Lisa Marie, is being sued by five former bodyguards who contend they were fired in 1993 because of their firsthand 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 invoked 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 Reuters.

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.