

Pak Army to supervise prisons in Sindh

KARACHI, Aug 24: Army officers will be put in charge of prisons in Pakistan's politically troubled southern Sindh province after incidents of jail breaks, officials said Tuesday, reports AFP.

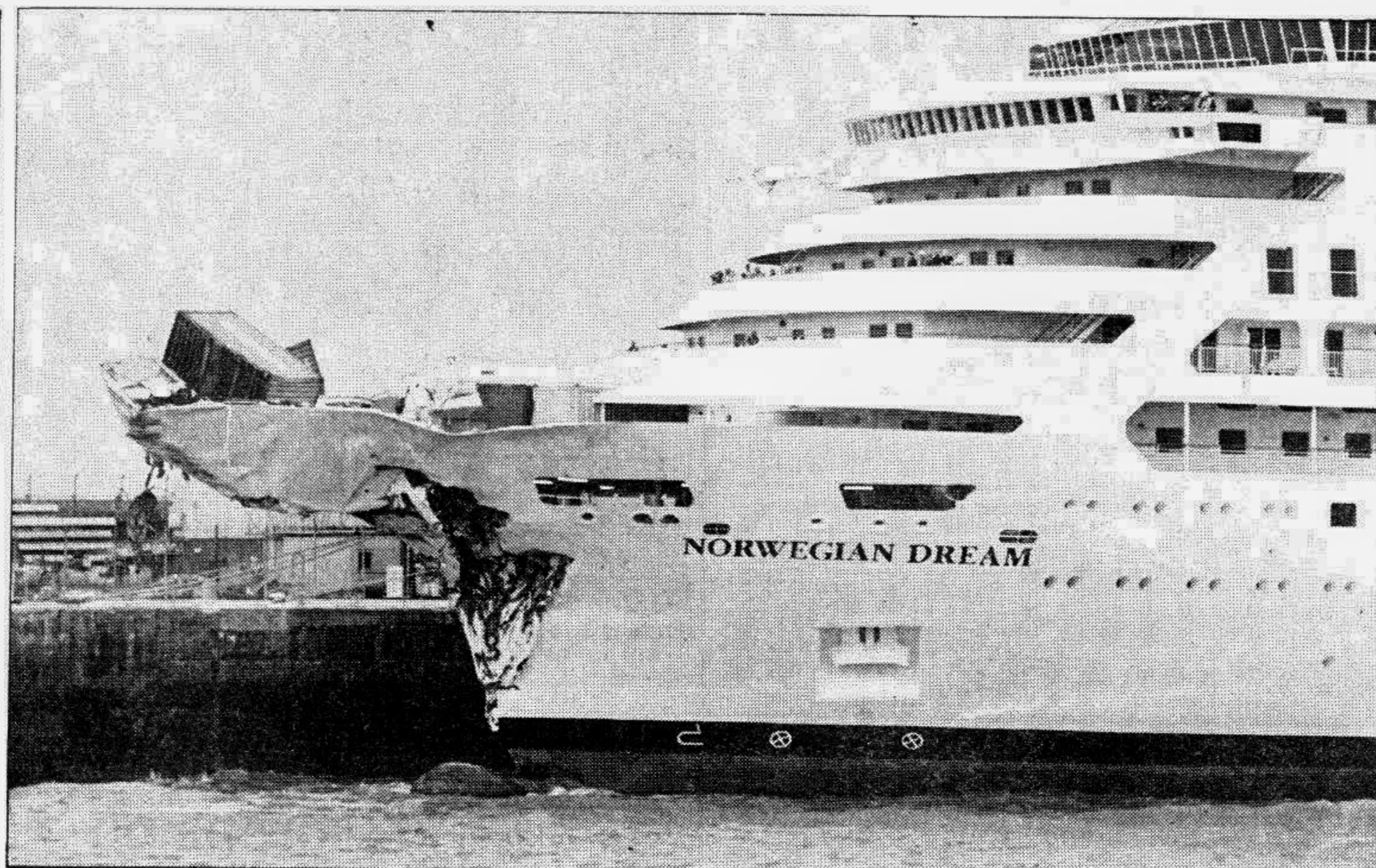
The move is also aimed at curbing corruption and other malpractices in 16 prisons in the region, which has been wracked with violence for years, they said.

A government official said several jail breaks had occurred in the province and "hardened criminals" had escaped.

The prison law has been amended to allow army supervision of each prison by an officer of the rank of major assisted by a dozen soldiers, he said.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in October sacked an elected provincial government and imposed direct federal control on Sindh, of which the country's biggest city and port, Karachi, is the provincial capital.

Terrorism and violence has claimed 4,000 lives in Karachi over the past four years and dozens of accused, including political activists, have been sentenced to death, by special anti-terrorism courts.



Fallen cargo containers lie on the bows of the cruise ship Norwegian Dream moored in Dover Harbour Tuesday, after a collision during the night in the English Channel with the Panamanian-flagged container vessel Ever Decent. Three people on board the cruise liner were injured and the container ship is still in the Channel with a serious fire on board.

Ships collide in English Channel

DOVER, England, Aug 24: Britain has declared an exclusion zone around a burning Taiwanese container ship in the Channel amid fears of pollution after a collision with a US cruise liner early Tuesday, emergency services said, reports AFP.

The cruise liner Norwegian Dream and the Panamanian-flagged container ship Ever Decent collided some 27 km off the coast of Margate, southeast England, injuring three people on the cruise liner.

After the collision occurred around 0015 GMT, a fire broke out on board the 294-metre (970-foot) vessel, the British coastguard said, retracting earlier information that the blaze had begun before the two ships collided.

By late morning, the 17 crew of the container ship were still struggling to put the fire out with the assistance of rescue personnel, a Coastguard spokesman said.

Kent Fire Brigade deputy chief officer Pete Coombs said there were some "hazardous" materials on board, but the flames had been kept away

from these. He added that it could take at least 24 hours to control the blaze on the Ever Decent.

Fifteen containers were burning, four of which contain paint, the coastguard spokesman said, adding however that the "fire is not spreading." The 52,000-tonne vessel was transporting hundreds of such containers, he said.

In Taipei, the owner Evergreen Marine Corp., was unable to say what the vessel was carrying as the Ever Decent had already made some stops in Europe to discharge cargo.

The authorities have declared an air exclusion zone around the stricken boat and have asked ships to avoid the area, while experts evaluate the pollution risk.

The ship was stationary in the water but listing after the accident in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

Specialist firefighting teams, tug boats and naval rescue boats were at the scene, where weather conditions were good, said the coastguard spokesman. Dutch salvage company Smit Internationale dispatched a

four-member team by helicopter to the burning container ship.

Smit Internationale spokeswoman Ellen Lastdrager told AFP in The Hague that the ship was carrying a "mixed cargo", but refused to reveal further details.

She added that salvage workers would be equipped and protected to cover the eventuality of there being dangerous substances on board.

A German warship was also standing by to lend assistance if needed.

Earlier, a Royal Air Force Nimrod aircraft was monitoring the situation.

The ship's crew were wearing breathing apparatus against the thick smoke, said a spokesman for Margate's sea rescue services. No evacuation seemed necessary for the moment, he added.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian Dream, carrying 2,400 passengers, made its way under its own steam and arrived safely at the southeast English port of Dover -- some 40 miles (55 kilometers) from the collision site -- at 6:00 a.m. (0500 GMT).

BRIEFLY

Kim Dae-jung to visit Australia:

South Korean President Kim Dae-jung is to visit Australia next month on a trip to tighten trade ties, Prime Minister John Howard announced Tuesday, AP reports from Canberra.

"I look forward to President Kim's visit as an opportunity for Australia and the Republic of Korea to strengthen our links and for discussions between us on how we can best cooperate in promoting the prosperity and stability of our region," Howard said.

12 die in road mishap in Vietnam:

Twelve people were killed when a minivan crashed head-on with a truck in the south-central province of Ninh Thuan, a provincial police officer said Tuesday, AP reports from Hanoi.

Nine died instantly in the accident at midnight Sunday and two others a few hours later, the officer said. Another died Tuesday morning while being transferred to Ho Chi Minh city. Police are investigating the cause of the accident. The van was carrying 13 people.

Over 30 drown in Nigerian river:

More than 30 people drowned in the Argungu River in Nigeria's northwest Kebbi state at the weekend when the boat in which they were travelling capsized following a strong tidal wave, state-run Nigerian National Television reported yesterday, AFP reports from Lagos.

Local divers and fishermen have so far managed to recover only one body out of the 35 passengers on the boat Saturday when it overturned, the report said.

Quake victims, soaked by rain, scramble for survival

IZMIT, Turkey, Aug 24: Driving rains in Turkey's earthquake-shattered northwest Tuesday left hundreds of thousands of homeless survivors soaked and scrambling for survival and seriously hampered rescue and relief work, reports AFP.

The weather bureau offered no respite, forecasting continuing rain over the next three days, but with temperatures hovering around a comfortable 25 Celsius (77 Fahrenheit). Public anger at what is widely perceived as a dysfunctional state apparatus continued to mount as the media showed images of people seeking shelter from the rain in body bags and trying to protect their babies in makeshift tents made of blankets and bed-sheets.

Newspapers slammed the Red Crescent material used in the much vaunted tent cities set up outside stricken urban centers as outdated and unhygienic.

The tents near Yalova, set up without foundations, were flooded, the semi-official Anadolu news agency reported, and survivors were forced to spend the night standing or trying to sleep leaning against tent posts.

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furiously survivors -- according to the NTV news channel.

The death toll continued to mount -- it stood at 14,360 dead as of 0100 GMT -- and there was almost no likelihood of finding any more survivors one week after the earthquake.

Local officials who told foreign rescue workers to leave because they could no longer help were widely criticized, and one US rescue worker said in a television interview that there was still some hope.

"I once saved someone after 10 days," said the American, who was not identified, "and a friend of mine pulled someone out alive after 14 days."

The unprecedented criticism of state and government continued, with the liberal daily Milliyet headlining, "The mentality that destroyed us."

Fire breaks out on UNI plane as it lands in Taiwan

TAIPEI, Aug 24: Fire broke out on a UNI airline plane as it landed in the eastern Taiwan city of Hualien Tuesday, injuring 28 passengers, officials said, reports AFP.

"Fire broke out in the luggage cabin above the 10-12 row of seats when the plane taxied at Hualien airport," UNI Airlines spokeswoman Mandy Yu said. She denied reports the jetliner crash-landed.

An airport official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP there was an explosion beneath a seat. But UNI said the cause of the fire was still not clear.

"There was a bang from within the luggage cabin before the fire," UNI Air Vice Chairman Ssu Chung-ching told reporters.

"Unfortunately the incident happened after it landed," Ssu said he was not sure whether the fire erupted from the plane or passenger luggage.

China planning punitive action against Taiwan

HONG KONG, Aug 24: China may launch punitive attacks on Taiwan in the next few weeks if Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui fails to withdraw claims to "state-to-state" relations, a Hong Kong newspaper said Tuesday, reports AFP.

China was prepared to begin punitive military action such as a blockade of the Taiwan Strait, the independent Chinese-language newspaper Sing Tao reported, citing unidentified sources in Beijing.

It said that missiles may be used in the Taiwan Strait. The newspaper also quoted a former US state department official as saying he had received signs that action would take place soon as Beijing did not think Lee would back down.

China has kept up a propaganda barrage to press Lee to back down from his statement that ties with the mainland should be on a "state-to-state" basis.

Hong Kong newspapers, particularly those close to Beijing, have been full of reports of Chinese troops on upgraded alert. Few have been officially confirmed however.

China has repeatedly said it would use force to stop Taiwan splitting with the mainland, which has considered the nationalist island a renegade province since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949.

The PLA lobbed ballistic missiles into the shipping lanes off Taiwan in mid-1996 during the island's first direct presidential elections.

Russia takes control of 4 towns in Dagestan

MAKHACHKALA, Russia, Aug 24: Russia on Tuesday reported seizing four key Dagestan towns occupied by Islamic insurgents as a self-imposed Moscow deadline for dislodging the rebels drew near, reports AFP.

Security officials vowed to completely crush the insurgents' rebellion by Wednesday. Conflicting field reports suggested that the Chechnya-based group still held on to at least two villages in the south of the Russian republic.

An interior ministry official here said Russian bombers and artillery fire had "completely crushed" gunmen holed up in the tiny mountain village of Tando -- the scene of the fiercest fighting in the region since the 1994-96 Chechen war.

An AFP correspondent near the Chechen border town said the village was barely visible through thick smoke from the fighting and the bombardments were incessant on Monday. Moscow said rebels, who had proclaimed the republic's independence from Russia, also had

abandoned the neighboring villages of Rakhata, Ashino and Ziberkhali.

Russian troops reported discovering mass graves of killed gunmen in the seized villages as well as large ammunition and artillery supplies abandoned by the fleeing insurgents.

The offensive comes on the 18th day of a deadly guerrilla war on Russia's impoverished and volatile southern flank which has also seriously tested the two-week government of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

The new premier, who also served as a former KGB agent, had vowed to quash the Islamic rebellion by Tuesday without allowing it to spread to neighboring regions where Moslems compose a large portion of the population.

Since crossing from Chechnya, the insurgents have found little support for their cause among the local population, but officials in Moscow fear those sentiments could change should the war drag on for several months.

'East Timor to risk war if it rejects autonomy'

DILI, East Timor, Aug 24: Indonesian supporters could become guerrillas if East Timor rejects autonomy in its landmark self-determination referendum, an anti-separatist leader warned Tuesday.

"Win or not win, we must be with Indonesia," Tito Batista, head of the United Front for East Timor Autonomy, told AFP.

Speaking on the sidelines of a large rally in Dili, Batista indicated his group would continue to fight for autonomy even if next Monday's ballot went against them.

"We will be the new guerrillas in the mountain." The front is a coalition which includes the pro-Indonesia Forum for Unity, Democracy and Justice (FPDK) and militias.

Since Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony in 1975, separatist guerrillas have been fighting Jakarta's forces.

Most diplomats and observers have blamed pro-Indonesia militias for much of

the violence and killings in East Timor since March. They have also accused the Indonesian authorities and military of arming or supporting the militias.

Some 4,000 pro-autonomy supporters on 50 trucks and buses held a street parade after gathering in front of the governor's office here.

Led by hundreds of motorcyclists wearing the red and white colors of the Indonesian flag, they hurled leaflets bearing the portrait of Indonesian presidential hopeful Megawati

Sukarnoputri. Megawati and her Indonesian Democracy Party-Struggle (PDIP) wants East Timor to remain part of Indonesia but she has said it would respect next Monday's vote.

"Remember our struggle is already over," read the leaflets that were snatched up by small children.

But there were no visible signs of the crowd response that greeted a pro-independence street rally Monday, when people thronged the city's sidewalks cheering.

Monday's rally was quickly called off by the pro-independence Council for East Timorese Resistance, which called on the rallyers to disband because it was not their allotted campaign day.

Present at the rally at the governor's office was Akbar Tanjung, head of Indonesia's ruling Golkar party, who did not address the crowd. He said he was there "to monitor the implementation of the popular consultation."

N Korea threatens to abandon N-deal

TOKYO, Aug 24: North Korea threatened Tuesday to abandon an agreement freezing its nuclear program, accusing the United States of failing to live up to the bargain, reports AFP.

Washington was delaying construction of a light water reactor (LWR) as stipulated in the 1994 deal, said the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper, according to Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency.

"Since the US considers the implementation of the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)-US agreed framework as drinking poison, there is no need for the DPRK to be bound to it," said the dispatch, monitored here.

It said North Korea had suffered a "huge loss" by freezing its nuclear activities. "We have no intention to suffer any more. The relevant institutions in the DPRK, including the military, are calling for urgent measures against the indefinite delay of the LWR construction," it said.

In the 1994 agreement, the United States and its allies agreed to supply Pyongyang with two light water nuclear reactors in exchange for an end to North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons programme.

Little progress has been made since, however. "The United States' persistent dilly-dallying with the construction compels the DPRK to do according to its own decision," said the Pyongyang dispatch.

"Smooth implementation of the DPRK-US agreed framework is good for the DPRK but it has nothing to fear when the framework agreement is broken," it added. "Then, the United States and the DPRK may go their own way."

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The United States, South Korea and Japan say they are concerned about North Korea plans for a possible long-range Taepodong II missile test, fears exacerbated by the nuclear suspensions.

Manmohan Singh to quit if he loses in upcoming polls

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: India's architect of free market reforms, Manmohan Singh, said he would quit as opposition leader of the upper house if he loses next month's elections, a statement said Tuesday, reports AFP.

"I do feel I will have a moral compunction. In that situation, probably it will be wise for me to not to stay as the leader of the Rajya Sabha (upper house)," Singh, who is a candidate for a lower house seat in New Delhi, told the BBC in an interview to be Wednesday.

"If we are in opposition, I think it will be proper for me not to remain as the leader of the Rajya Sabha Congress party," Singh, who as finance minister designed India's liberalisation programme of 1991, told the network according to excerpts released to the media.

Suu Kyi slams new crackdown

YANGON, Aug 24: Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has accused the country's junta of using a new protest campaign as a pretext to tighten its grip over the country, reports AFP.

But she refused to disown dissidents campaigning for a mass uprising on September 9. "I think they are using it as an excuse for cracking down," she said in an interview with AFP late Monday.

"The authorities should not try to find victims for what will arise out of their shortcomings," she said.

More flights delayed

Tempers boil over as chaos grips Hong Kong airport

HONG KONG, Aug 24: Furious passengers Tuesday hurled abuse at airline staff forcing police to intervene as flight disruption built up at Hong Kong airport, reports AFP.

Thousands of passengers milled around the giant Chep Lap Kok terminal building as authorities tried to sort out a backlog of flights delayed and cancelled by Sunday's China Airlines crash and the fallout from Typhoon Sam.

Cathay Pacific, the Hong Kong airline, cancelled 24 flights Tuesday and was only able to operate around 80 percent of its schedule.

Tearful Cathay staff at a help desk were harangued by passengers, some of whom were due to

leave on Sunday and had spent 48 hours camping out in the terminal building.

Police intervened to calm one Taiwanese man who banged his fist repeatedly on the desk in front of Cathay staff.

One young couple from Britain said their Cathay flight to Penang in Malaysia had been delayed nine times since early Monday.

Kirsty Scott told AFP: "We have been here 28 hours and we have been given misleading information from start to finish. I'm in customer relations, and if we ever treated our customers like this we would be out of business overnight," she said.

Her boyfriend Andrew

Knight added: "Finally last night, we were taken to a hotel at 3:00 a.m. We were woken up at 7:00 a.m. only to find that our flight was delayed yet again."

Jim Wiebe, a Canadian oil executive heading to Jakarta, said he would think long and hard before again using the airport, which opened 13 months ago and cost nearly 20 billion US dollars.

"These people couldn't organize a picnic for one. I can't imagine this ever happening in Singapore," said Wiebe.

Wiebe complained he was given a 60 Hong Kong dollar (7.5 US dollar) food voucher. "That will just about buy you a bowl of noodles."

'IRA truce review in disarray'

LONDON, Aug 24: The deputy leader of Northern Ireland's main Protestant party Tuesday criticised Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam's review of the IRA ceasefire as being in "total disarray", reports AFP.

John Taylor, of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), said the Northern Ireland peace process was "unscrambling."

"After yesterday's faux pas and the public disagreement between herself and the Dublin minister, it is quite clear that she is not in charge of the situa-

tion," he told BBC radio. Taylor was commenting on Mowlam's public contradiction Monday of the Irish Republic's foreign minister David Andrews after he said Dublin considered the Irish Republican Army ceasefire "intact".

"We would disagree with that in Northern Ireland," Taylor said.

Protestant Unionist leaders claim the IRA has repeatedly violated its cessation of violence and gangster-style punishment attacks. The IRA has been linked to last month's murder of Charles Bennett, who was shot dead amid accusations,



Students from the opposition Congress Party burn an effigy of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee during a demonstration near his residence Tuesday. The demonstrators accused Vajpayee of having Congress Party phones tapped, ahead of the September polls. — AFP photo