

Chicago okays world's tallest skyscraper

WASHINGTON, Sept 30: Chicago has approved the construction of the world's tallest skyscraper - a thin, cylindrical 112-story building, topping Malaysia's Petronas Towers by 20.4 meters, the Chicago Tribune said Thursday, reports AFP.

The 500 million dollar building, a mix of office and residential floors, will stand 472.4 meters (1,550 feet) excluding its 137-meter (450-foot) antennas.

Construction would begin in April and take 40 months to complete, the newspaper said.

Chicago's City Council gave unanimous approval Wednesday to the project headed by the Chicago-based European American Realty Ltd.

Company president Scott Toberman told The Washington Post that the tower's four groupings of upper floors would be separated by notches to relieve wind pressure on the structure, and that its antennas would be Chicago's premier broadcasting tower.

"I think it is an unusual design. I think it is very creative," said Mayor Richard Daley, adding however that the developer still had to present his source of financing.

Gunmen kill Shiite Muslim leader in Pakistan

LAHORE, Sept 30: Gunmen shot and killed a Shiite Muslim leader Thursday in eastern Punjab province, the second religiously motivated killing to target Shiite Muslims this week, said police, reports AP.

They said Ijaz Rasool Nagri, a lawyer and leader of the Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan or the Movement for Shiite Law in Pakistan, was shot by gunmen in his hometown of Gujranwala, some 60 kilometers (36 miles) north of Lahore.

Nagri was in his vehicle with his daughter when the gunmen roared passed on a motorcycle killing him instantly, police said. It wasn't immediately known if his daughter was injured. The gunman escaped.

No one has taken responsibility for the killing, but Nagri's organisation is blaming rival Sunni Muslim extremists.

On Tuesday, Pakistan's tribal Northwest Frontier Province Khurshed Anwar, another prominent leader of Tehrik-e-Jafria was killed, along with his daughter and a bodyguard.

Church torched in S India

NEW DELHI, Sept 30: A church housed in a thatched hut in southern India was set ablaze by arsonists Thursday, but officials said a land dispute was most probably behind the incident, reports AFP.

Unidentified "miscreants" set fire to the church at a village near Nagercoil town in the state of Tamil Nadu, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

No one was injured and local firemen swiftly put out the fire.

PTI quoted police sources as saying that a long-standing dispute between two groups of villagers over the plot of land on which the church was located may have led to the arson.

Church activists have alleged a spate of attacks on the Christian community in India since Hindu nationalists came to power at the head of a coalition government in March 1998.

India to launch 'Astrosat'

NAVI, Mumbai, Sept 30: India is planning to launch a satellite 'Astrosat' dedicated to astronomy in the new millennium, according to Dr K Kasturirangan, Chairman of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), reports PTI.

The satellite will be exclusively used for the science of astronomy and will be technically highly challenging, he said while delivering the CV Raman lecture of the Department of Atomic Energy here yesterday.

It is in the conceptual stage and the Indian astronomers are studying the project. It would take five to six years to realise Kasturirangan said while addressing the engineering students community.

Speaking on space science in India-emerging possibilities, he gave details on entire spectrum of the science and technology involved in space science.

Aum cult member sentenced to death

TOKYO, Sept 30: A Japanese court Thursday sentenced Aum Supreme Truth doomsday cult disciple Masato Yokoyama to death by hanging for unleashing Sarin gas in Tokyo's subway, reports AFP.

Afghan front lines quiet as fighting eases

KABUL, Sept 30: Front lines across Afghanistan's northern provinces were quiet Thursday as the ruling Taliban and the opposition United Front temporarily ceased hostilities, an opposition spokesman said, reports AFP.

The United Front spokesman Mohammad Habeli said all guns had fallen silent on the sixth day of the Taliban's northern offensive in Kunduz and Takhar provinces allowing both sides to regroup.

"There have been no moves by the Taliban or by us and there have been no aerial bombardments," Habeli told AFP.

However, he said the provincial capital of Takhar, Taloqan, remained a prime target for the militia who launched their second wave of their summer offensive on Saturday.

The city is a strategic base for the opposition and controls the supply routes to bases held by the United Front in the south. Taloqan has been bombed regularly by the militia's fleet of ageing MiG jet fighters.

After five years of civil war with the United Front, the militia has gained control over most of Afghanistan and imposed its own ultra-orthodox Islamic laws. It has vowed to win control of the northeast from the opposition.

India needs to explore ways to recover Pak-held Kashmir: PM

NEW DELHI, Sept 30: India needs to explore ways of recovering the northern third of Kashmir currently under Pakistani control, according to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, reports AFP.

"We now need to think how to take back Pakistan-occupied Kashmir," Vajpayee was quoted by the Press Trust of India as telling a campaign rally late Wednesday.

"But we want to solve this problem by mutual dialogue," Vajpayee stressed.

The Himalayan state of Kashmir is claimed by India and Pakistan. India holds the southern two-thirds of the picturesque state, and Pakistan the northern third.

The territorial dispute has been the cause of two of the three wars between the South Asian rivals since independence and the partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

India also accuses Pakistan of backing Muslim guerrillas waging a bloody separatist campaign in Indian-controlled Kashmir which has claimed more than 25,000 lives since 1989.

Indian troops launched a two-month offensive in May this year to push back Islamic guerrillas who had crossed into Indian Kashmir from the Pakistani side of the disputed border.

The conflict has been a key issue during the month-long

Indian elections, which end this weekend.

Vajpayee, who is spearheading the campaign to retain power for his Hindu nationalist-led alliance, has repeatedly attacked Pakistan in his election speeches.

Indian troops shoot dead 7 militants in Kashmir

Another report says: Indian army troops have shot dead seven Muslim separatists in the troubled northern state of Kashmir, police said Thursday.

The clash took place overnight Wednesday during an army search and cordon operation in the forests of Kupwara district bordering Pakistan.

Indian troops came under heavy fire and in the ensuing gunbattle which lasted more than 10 hours, seven militants were shot dead, a police official said.

The military began a comprehensive sweep of the Kupwara area two weeks ago, searching for militants who had crossed into Indian-controlled Kashmir from Pakistan.

The army says between 150 and 200 separatist guerrillas are active in Kupwara, although unofficial estimates put the number as high as 2,000.

India accuses Pakistan of providing military and logistical support to the 10-year Muslim insurgency in Kashmir - a charge Islamabad denies.

Sharif extends army chief's tenure as chairman of JCSC

ISLAMABAD, Sept 30: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has extended army chief General Pervez Musharraf's tenure as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) for two years, quashing reports the two had fallen out, reports AFP.

Musharraf will continue to hold the post of army chief as well as chairman of the JCSC until October 2001, officials said Thursday.

"The step will once and for all set at rest the uncalculated rumours and speculations about change of command in the army," a spokesman for the prime minister said following the order issued late Wednesday.

He said certain vested interests were fanning the speculation in pursuance of their political agenda. He did not name the interests.

Musharraf, who was appointed Chief of the Army Staff on April 8, 1999 for three years, was also assigned the largely ceremonial post of JCSC chairman for a period of one year after the former chief General Jehangir Karamat stepped down.

An official notification said President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar approved the continuation of the appointment of General Musharraf as Chairman JCSC in addition to his present assignment as army chief upto 6th October 2001.

Analysts said he unusual announcement came amid a flurry of rumours that Musharraf was being asked to go.

The speculation followed a

tough US warning last week it would oppose any "unconstitutional move" to overthrow the government amid a campaign by religious and political parties against Sharif's domestic and foreign policies.

Washington issued the statement after talks between Sharif's brother Shahbaz Sharif and US officials last week.

Sharif's key aides later met with Musharraf who also dismissed the reports as misinformation, saying "there is no misunderstanding between the government and the army."

He also refuted reports he was being asked to quit amid an alleged rift with the government over the handling of the recent Kashmir conflict with India.

India a phoney nuclear power

NEW DELHI, Sept 30: India is nothing more than a "phoney" nuclear power, despite the government's assertions to the contrary, former navy chief Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat was quoted as saying Thursday, reports AFP.

Bhagwat, who was sacked last December by the coalition government led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP party, said the country had been misled following the May 1998 nuclear tests.

"The BJP claims we are a nuclear nation, but let me tell you at best we are a phoney nuclear power," Bhagwat was quoted as saying by the Asian Age newspaper.

Bhagwat was dismissed following a spat with the government over the appointment of his deputy, which developed into a major dispute over decision-making powers in military affairs.

Since his dismissal, Bhagwat has waged a personal campaign against the government, especially Defence Minister George Fernandes.

India published a draft "nuclear doctrine" in August, which envisaged a nuclear weaponisation programme that would produce a land, air and sea-based nuclear deterrent.

While India has successfully tested a new generation range of ballistic missiles, some defence analysts say it is still a long way from developing a reliable system for delivering nuclear warheads.



Village children watch a man paint the party symbol of the Communist Party of India -Marxist (CPIM) on the mud walls of a hut Wednesday in Kalgian village, West Bengal, as a part of CPIM's pre-election campaign.

50th anniversary celebration Jiang to be enthroned as 3rd generation leader

BEIJING, Sept 30: President Jiang Zemin will aim to cement his place in history as China's third red emperor when he follows Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping by addressing the nation from Tiananmen Gate, reports AFP.

In his capacity as chairman of the Central Military Commission, China's supreme military commander, Jiang will copy paramount leader Deng Xiaoping and Great Helmsman Mao Zedong in front of a worldwide television audience in what has come to resemble a coronation rite.

Following a flag raising ceremony on the refurbished Tiananmen Square, Jiang will descend the Tiananmen Gate rostrum and mount into a limousine to review the troops of the People's Liberation Army, organisers said.

Jiang is then expected to remount the rostrum and address the nation to detail China's achievements over the last 50 years.

In 1949, Mao proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China from the same rostrum.

Mao also used the rostrum

during the Cultural Revolution when he addressed and reviewed contingents of Red Guards in front of huge rallies of zealous Chinese youth.

On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the People's Republic, Deng stood up in a Red Flag sedan and reviewed the troops and addressed the nation from the rostrum, showing the world he had ascended the throne as the "core" of China's second generation of communist leaders.

At that time, Deng was fresh from masterminding China's reform program, and officially only held the offices of vice premier and chairman of the party's Central Military Commission.

On Friday, hundreds of thousands of invited guests, soldiers and participants are expected to witness and parade around Tiananmen Square following Jiang's speech, and the PLA's newest and latest weapons will be on display both in the parade and in an air force flyover.

During his speech, Jiang is expected to pay homage to both his predecessors.



People's Armed Police march across Beijing's Tiananmen Square in front of part of a huge billboard celebrating the 50th anniversary of the People's Republic of China Thursday.

US warns Indonesia to disarm militias or face 'severe damage'

JAKARTA, Sept 30: The United States on Thursday told Indonesia's powerful military to disarm militias responsible for violence in East Timor and warned the country would suffer "severe damage" if it did not, reports AFP.

US Defence Secretary William Cohen issued the warning in a statement after talks with General Wiranto, Indonesia's defence minister and the chief of the country's armed forces.

Cohen said elements of the military had "aided and abetted" the militias in their orgy of violence since East Timor voted for independence on August 30.

"I told General Wiranto that the military is at a critical turning point," Cohen said.

"If it supports the government's policy and it contributes to a peaceful solution in East Timor, investigates and punishes those guilty of improper behaviour, disarms the militia in West Timor and prevents them from destabilising East Timor, they will be acting in a manner consistent with In-

donesia's national interest and international obligations.

"If on the other hand they permit or participate, openly or behind the scenes, in further aiding and abetting violence in East Timor, they will do severe damage to the country they are sworn to defend."

"I urged General Wiranto to make the right choice," Cohen said.

The unusually blunt message from Cohen reflected concern among US officials that militias now based in West Timor could attack the Australian-led security force in East Timor.

On Wednesday, the US announced it was sending a helicopter carrier with 900 combat-ready marines to the region as extra back-up for the force.

The US has suspended military cooperation with Indonesia and is reviewing its economic assistance and other ties over the Timor violence.

"In our discussion I made it clear that the US will not consider restoring normal military-to-military contacts until the TNI (Indonesian armed forces) reforms its ways," Cohen

said.

"The military must show restraint and respect for human rights throughout Indonesia."

"It must be clear that the military operates under civilian control."

Cohen's visit to Jakarta came on the eve of the convening of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), Indonesia's supreme legislative body, for the first time since elections in June.

Resistance fighters enter Dili, offer to work with Interfet

Falintil resistance fighters entered Dili on Thursday, some for the first time in 24 years, handing over a cache of captured weapons and offering to work with UN-authorized peacekeepers.

Cornejo Gama, deputy commander of Falintil in the Dili region, led a 24-man squad into the city to talk to the international peacekeeping force.

Before the talks they handed over the cache on the outskirts of the East Timor capital, and

offered to hand over all the weapons they had captured from Indonesian forces.

But they said they would keep their own in the interests of security.

Peacekeepers press UN for detectives to probe atrocities

International peacekeepers here are pressing the UN to send civilian police to investigate reported atrocities in East Timor, officials said Thursday as evidence of wanton killing mounted.

The bodies of nine people, including two nuns and a journalist, believed massacred in a weekend attack by anti-independence militia, have been found, a spokesman for the peacekeeping force said.

Colonel Mark Kelly said the bodies were found at Lautem, some 25 km from the town of Com, and 175 km from Dili.

Official confirmation of the massacre at Com followed the discovery on Wednesday of nine charred bodies

China pledges to crush separatism, warns hostile foreign forces

BEIJING, Sept 30: Chinese President Jiang Zemin vowed to crush non-patriotic religious and separatist activities in China's ethnic minority regions and accused the West of stirring up trouble over these issues, state press reported Thursday, reports AFP.

To safeguard the unification of the motherland and fight against ethnic splittism is a long-term political task," Jiang said in a "major" speech carried by the leading People's Daily.

"It is an old trick of Western anti-China hostile forces to use ethnic and religious issues to Westernize and split up China," he said.

Given at a conference on ethnic minorities in the Great Hall of the People on Wednesday, the speech also expressed concern over the increasing use of foreign intervention to solve global ethnic strife.

"Looking around the globe, we will find that many regional conflicts and wars are related to the poor handling of ethnic issues and to foreign intervention

in ethnic disputes," he said.

"Problems occur in all places where ethnic issues are not correctly handled," he said.

He urged both Han nationality (Chinese) and ethnic leaders to make efforts to quickly handle race issues in order that they do not develop into larger problems.

Speaking on the eve of China's 50th anniversary of communist rule, Jiang also pledged freedom of religion to all ethnic minorities under the rubric of the Communist Party-controlled "patriotic churches."

"We firmly oppose separatism in the guise of religious activities... no religion should have the power to override the constitution and laws," he said.

"We must adopt a clear-cut stance to oppose ethnic separatism. We must try our best to unite and depend on people of all nationalities... to isolate and strike the small group of ethnic separatists," he said.

Persistent ethnic strife in Tibet and Xinjiang has long dogged China's central leaders.

Unrest in Tibet has stubbornly resisted efforts by the government to stamp it out since the Dalai Lama fled into exile in 1959 and Muslim unrest has been growing in western Xinjiang following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

China has further bristled at Western efforts to intervene in ethnic and religious disputes in Yugoslavia, viewing such actions as dangerous precedents to potential intervention in Taiwan, Tibet or Xinjiang.

Taiwan to continue military buildup

TAIPEI, Sept 30: As China prepares to unveil its latest military hardware in a show of strength to mark five decades of communist rule, Taiwan is continuing to build up its defences to deter any mainland attack, reports AFP.

A glittering array of weaponry, 95 per cent of it new according to a pro-Beijing newspaper in Hong Kong, will be on display when the People's Republic of China celebrates its 50th birthday on October 1.

Israeli planes attack S Lebanon

Israeli warplanes rocketed suspected guerrilla positions in South Lebanon yesterday, a security source said. Reuters reports from Nabatiyeh, Lebanon.

Two planes fired three rockets at areas near Zawtar village in the central sector north of Israel's South Lebanon occupation zone, the source said. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

3 hurt in Japan N-plant accident

An accident at a Japanese nuclear power plant yesterday injured three workers who were exposed to radiation, NHK national television said, Reuters reports from Tokyo.

Radiation levels of seven to 10 times normal were detected at a monitoring station just downwind from the uranium processing plant in Tokaimura, 160 km (100 miles) north of Tokyo, NHK said. But radiation levels returned to normal shortly after the accident, which occurred around 10:35 am (0135 GMT), it said.



Nicola Willoughby from Lincoln holds onto her crown as she is crowned Miss United Kingdom at the final in London Wednesday.

'Russian troops entered Chechnya many times'

SAINT PETERSBURG, Russia, Sept 30: Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Thursday that Russian troops had repeatedly crossed into Chechnya over the past two weeks and would continue to do so in the future, reports AFP.

Responding to unconfirmed media reports that Russian troops had occupied mountains in Chechnya, Putin said: "Today I was asked - did we go in or not."

"I can tell you that our troops have entered (Chechnya) many times over the past two weeks. They occupied important mountain points and freed them."

"In the Chechen capital Grozny, meanwhile, a top defence official vowed that his troops were prepared to take the war to Russia should Moscow order an all out invasion of the self-declare Islamic state."

"The military will pick out its positions in a way and in a place that is advantageous only from the military point of view."

"We have no border with Chechnya, and the armed forces need no permission from the Federation Council (upper house of parliament) to invade, as is the case with other military operations," Putin added.

Priest called in to give Pinochet last rites

LONDON, Sept 30: A Roman Catholic priest was called in to give Chile's former dictator Augusto Pinochet the last rites when he collapsed at the weekend, two days before the start of formal extradition proceedings against him, the Daily Telegraph reported Thursday, reports AFP.

The conservative daily said the 83-year-old general's doctor had wanted him to transfer from the luxury mansion southwest of London where he is under house arrest to hospital, but Pinochet refused, saying if he was going to die he wanted to be surrounded by his family.

Students back on Jakarta streets to protest violence

JAKARTA, Sept 30: Hundreds of Indonesian students returned to the streets here Thursday in a second day of peaceful protests against military violence, reports AFP.

The 300 protesters, from the Indonesian Muslim Student Action, gathered at a busy roundabout in the capital's main thoroughfare, chanting peace slogans and brandishing signs demanding an immediate halt to violence, including by the military.

"There is no place for violence in our beloved country," said one poster carried by veiled Muslim girl students.

A long banner proclaimed "Towards an Indonesia free of violence," while another poster

demanding a halt to human rights violations in Aceh and Ambon, two places that have been wracked by violence this year.

The roundabout lies in front of an upmarket hotel where members of the new People's Consultative Assembly, which will be installed on Friday, are staying.

The protesters also displayed a huge banner that could be read from the hotel listing six points the students said should be accommodated by the assembly.

They included a demand that the military's role in the politics be scrapped and that former president Suharto be brought to court for alleged corruption.

Lanka troops beat back LTTE attack on village

COLOMBO, Sept 30: Government troops beat back a possible attempt by Tamil Tiger guerrillas to stage another massacre of civilians in eastern Sri Lanka the defence ministry here said Thursday, reports AFP.

Soldiers and police exchanged fire with a group of about 20 members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the district of Ampar early Wednesday, defence ministry spokesman Sunil Tennakoon said.

"It is possible that they were planning another attack on a Sinhalese village," Tennakoon said.