

### India to build 2,000 bunkers for Kashmiri people: Report

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Indian authorities plan to build some 2,000 shell-proof bunkers in Kashmir for civilians exposed to artillery attacks by Pakistan frontier troops, a newspaper said today, reports AFP.

The Tribune said family-size reinforced bunkers would be constructed in the border Kashmir district of Kargil, the site of a major military flare-up that ended in July this year.

Some 80,000 Kargil inhabitants were forced to flee during the 10-week fighting between Indian forces and Pakistan-backed Muslim guerrillas in the region.

The newspaper said the 2,000 bunkers would be ready by the end of the current year and added the total cost of the shelters would be around 930,000 dollars.

The authorities would also build 100 "community bunkers" in Kargil town and some 1,000 additional underground shelters in frontier villages of Indian Kashmir during 2000, a home ministry official told Tribune.

Despite the end to the May-July conflict, which left more than 1,000 dead on both sides, cross-border shelling by Indian and Pakistani troops in Kashmir is routine.

The divided Himalayan territory is claimed by both the countries and has been the subject of two of the three wars between India and Pakistan since 1947.

### Japan plans talks on setting up diplomatic ties with DPRK

TOKYO, Dec 11: Japan is considering holding preliminary talks on setting up diplomatic ties with communist North Korea as early as Dec. 20, a newspaper reported Saturday, reports AP.

The talks would be held in Beijing and involve senior bureaucrats from both sides, the mass-circulation Asahi Shimbun reported.

They would prepare the resumption of full-fledged normalization discussions, which broke down in 1992 over allegations that North Korean agents kidnapped Japanese citizens.

Also Saturday, Kyodo News service reported that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Toshiba Corp. and Hitachi will sign an agreement by the end of the month to help build two nuclear power reactors in North Korea.

The offer by the three major Japanese companies are part of a 1994 agreement to provide nuclear power plants to North Korea in exchange for a promise that it would stop its nuclear weapons program.

The deal will be the biggest for Japanese companies in North Korea, Kyodo said.

The offers of Mitsubishi Heavy, Toshiba and Hitachi were closed Saturday and officials could not be immediately reached for comment.

### Militants kill four tribals in Tripura

AGARTALA, India, Dec 11: Four tribals were killed and six wounded by suspected Bengali militants in India's northeastern state of Tripura, police said today, reports Reuters.

The victims described as poor migrant cultivators, were attacked on Friday night at Krishna Tilla, about 190 km (105 miles) north east of Agartala, the state capital.

The assailants first lobbed crude bombs and then started chopping the tribals. Four were killed on the spot and six sustained serious injuries in the attack, north Tripura District Superintendent of Police, Nepal Das, told Reuters. "We suspect Bengali militants are responsible for the crime."

Police officials said it may have been a retaliatory attack after 18 Bengalis were massacred by suspected tribal separatists last month.

### China puts 38 on trial in high-seas piracy case

BEIJING, Dec 11: China has put 38 people on trial in its biggest ever case of high-seas piracy, involving the fatal bludgeoning of 23 Chinese seamen whose bodies were dumped overboard, state media said Saturday, reports AP.

Prosecutors alleged that the gang posed as anti-smuggling police to hijack three ships in 1998, including the "Chang Sheng," a freighter carrying coal cinders, state-run newspapers reported.

The pirates handcuffed, tied-up and gagged the ship's 23 crew, then bludgeoned them to death, the reports said.

The gang, led by an Indonesian identified in the reports as Suoni Wei, tied heavy weights to the victims' bodies before dumping them into the sea, the state-run Beijing Morning Post said.

Gang members were charged with crimes including murder, robbery and the possession of weapons, drugs, and explosives, the reports said. They said it was China's biggest case of high-seas robbery and murder in 50 years of Communist party rule.

The trial opened Friday morning in the Shanwei City Intermediate People's Court in the southern coastal province of Guangdong, and was expected to last six days, the reports said.

# Russia opens up corridors to evacuate Grozny

MOSCOW, Dec 11: Moscow today said it was opening several corridors to evacuate the rebel Chechen capital Grozny, effectively putting back its expiring ultimatum to inhabitants to leave or be annihilated, reports AFP.

Russia's Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu left early Saturday to personally supervise the evacuation on the orders of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, Russian media reported.

Russian NTV television said he would supervise the evacuation through a corridor opened Saturday morning south of the capital at Alkhan-Yurt and in the direction of Chernorechye, via the Rostov-Baku road.

General Valery Manilov, number two in the Russian army command, told NTV that

"several corridors" would be opened to evacuate various points of the capital "where there are concentrations of people wanting to leave the city."

"We can guarantee the safety and a proper reception for all people wanting to leave Grozny," the general said, reiterating that as well as civilians, defecting rebel fighters would also be welcome if they had not committed major crimes.

Around 40,000 people, rebels and civilians, including women, elderly people and children, are believed still trapped in the capital of the breakaway republic.

According to the public ORT television channel, by Saturday fewer than 200 people had taken advantage of the only

"safe corridor" until then, established by Russian federal forces at Piervosmayskaya, a western suburb of Grozny.

The Russian military has charged the Chechen rebels with holding civilians in Grozny against their will and using them as human shields, a charge the Chechen authorities have denied.

On Monday the Russian army dropped leaflets over Grozny telling residents to flee by Saturday or be considered "terrorists" and face a massive aerial and artillery onslaught.

This prompted international outrage. But on Friday Russia indicated that it was prepared to ease its ultimatum, saying civilians would still be allowed to leave after the expiry of the deadline.

Meanwhile General Manilov

said a column of Chechen fighters, including several warlords, had been wiped out near Shatoi, in southern Chechnya, on Thursday.

"A column of rebel chiefs were bombed and completely destroyed," he said, adding that federal forces were trying to establish exactly which rebel leaders had been killed in the attack.

Chechen field commander Shamil Basayev and an Islamist warlord of Arab origin known as Khattab head Moscow's wanted list.

Russia revealed Friday that it was in secret peace talks with Chechen leaders but said Grozny had not accepted Russian conditions for a political solution to the three-month war.



Former Indonesian government prisoners cheer shortly after their return to East Timor, upon arrival at Komoro Airport in Dili yesterday. Xanana Gusmao (C) walks with an unidentified International Red Cross (IRC) member, as he attended their return, which was organised by the IRC. — AFP photo

## Syria-Israel peace talks begin in Washington Wednesday

WASHINGTON, Dec 11: Peace talks between Israel and Syria, the first for almost four years and the most high-powered ever, will resume in Washington on Wednesday and probably last two days, the US mediator said on Friday, reports Reuters.

Dennis Ross, special coordinator for Middle East peace talks, said the two sides agreed to come together again because they thought the talks could meet their needs and because they had had enough of merely talking about talks.

US President Bill Clinton announced the resumption on Wednesday and officials have been working since then on the dates, venues and other arrangements.

The United States says the two countries agree to resume the talks where they left off in early 1996, apparently without resolving a long disagreement over what Israel had offered in the previous talks.

Asked to explain the formula, Ross said "They are approaching this from the point of basing everything on what they have discussed and

talked about before, and they're resuming in light of that."

"Both sides have a level of confidence about the possibility of their needs being met, and that's one of the reasons that they have come to the conclusion that it's important to get back to the table," he told a briefing.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who helped clinch the deal on a Middle East trip this week, told CNN on Wednesday that Washington gave no assurances to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad to persuade Syria to join the talks.

The negotiations will be between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara.

"The talks will begin without conditions, beyond the fact that they will resume from where they left off," she told CNN.

The United States has been trying to bring Israel and Syria back together again since Barak took office in July, but Syria insisted Israel state that in the old talks it gave a firm commitment to full withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Withdrawal from the Golan

Heights, captured by Israel in the Middle East war of 1967, is at the core of the negotiations, alongside security arrangements for Israel, a normalisation of relations between the two countries and a timetable for synchronizing those three elements.

Ross said Albright and Clinton would be involved in the talks but the United States wants Israel and Syria to do as much as possible bilaterally.

Albright has cancelled plans to go to Panama next Tuesday for a ceremony to hand the Panama Canal over to the Panamanians and to Brussels on Wednesday for a two-day meeting of NATO foreign ministers, US officials said.

Other officials said most of the talks would take place in Blair House, where the US government often puts up visiting dignitaries. The negotiators will also have some meeting with Clinton in the White House across the road, they said.

Ross said that, after four months of argument about how to resume direct talks, Israel and Syria seemed to have concluded that the discussion was going nowhere.

## Morocco building collapse death toll 50

RABAT, Dec 11: The death toll in the collapse of a five-storey building in Fez, central Morocco, has reached 50, local officials said Friday, reports AFP.

Another 40 people were injured in the disaster, which happened in the small hours of Wednesday morning. Officials said the figures were close to being definitive.

The building, in the working-class Hassani district, dated from the 1980s and housed 87 people. Extensions had been added illegally to the main structure.

Officials served residents with an evacuation order after cracks appeared recently in the building's facade, but the inhabitants disregarded it, said the official MAP agency.

On Thursday, rescue workers pulled out a two-month old baby and later the baby's 35-year-old mother alive from the ruins. They also saved a nine-year-old girl.

A block of flats collapsed in the same district in January 1998, killing 17 people.

Many buildings in the Hassani district do not meet minimum standards of safety and hygiene.

## Heavy fighting kills 230 Tamil Tigers

COLOMBO, Dec 11: Sri Lankan troops killed more than 230 Tamil Tiger rebels in beating off an attack on a key military camp in the country's north early today, the defence ministry said, reports Reuters.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels struck at government forward defence lines on the eastern side of the Elephant Pass camp, using artillery and mortars, a ministry statement said.

With air force and navy support, troops drove back rebels attempts to breach the camp's defences and also stopped guerrillas in boats from landing near the military base, the statement said.

A second landing attempt by the Tigers was also repulsed by the navy and air force, it said.

The air force later struck at rebel concentrations near the military camp and the navy pursued retreating guerrillas, the ministry said.

As per reports received so far, over 230 terrorists had been killed and a large number wounded," the statement said.

The ministry said 41 security forces personnel were wounded, 11 seriously.

The Elephant Pass military

complex lies on the causeway that links the mainland with the northern Jaffna peninsula.

War activity has shown signs of intensifying in recent weeks ahead of Sri Lanka's presidential election on December 21.

Today's strikes follow attacks last month in which the Tigers recaptured vast regions of territory in the northern Wanni region where the military had seized in several operations over the past few years.

The international aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) warned that the separatist war was causing growing civilian deaths and hardship to people living in the war zone.

The LTTE has been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east since 1983 in a war that has claimed more than 55,000 lives.

MSF said in a statement seen by Reuters today that continued heavy fighting in Sri Lanka's north and east would worsen the already precarious situation for civilians there.

It urged both parties to agree to establishment of humanitarian corridors and safe areas to improve aid access.

## Crash averted at Sri Lanka airport

COLOMBO, Dec 11: A Thai Airways passenger aircraft aborted its landing at Sri Lanka's international airport today after a Russian-built Antonov-74 plane on the ground entered its landing path, officials here said, reports AFP.

The air traffic controllers who spotted that the Antonov aircraft crossing the safety limit at the holding point of the taxiway alerted the Thai Airbus A-300 carrying 237 passengers to overshoot the runway, officials said.

Airport officials said that the situation was not considered a near-miss and said they had been in complete control of the situation.

However, a passenger onboard the Thai flight TG-307 from Bangkok to Colombo said that their pilot announced that another aircraft had illegally entered the runway and he was aborting the landing to avoid a collision.

"We were almost ready to touchdown with fasten seat belt signs on and then suddenly we felt the pilot engaging full power and making a sharp climb," a passenger told AFP.

## BRIEFLY

**US envoy Holbrooke in Kinshasa:** US Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke arrived in Kinshasa Saturday for the culmination of his trip aimed at shoring up an increasingly shaky ceasefire accord in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), AFP reports from Kinshasa.

Holbrooke -- who is travelling with Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice -- was expected to meet DRC President Laurent Kabila during his visit, which will last just a few hours. The US envoy arrived from the Ugandan capital Kampala where he met Friday with the three rebel groups operating in the DRC as well as their backer, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni.

**45 still trapped in landslide:** Search crews on Saturday unearthed six more bodies from a landslide in the Indonesian province of West Sumatra, raising the death toll to 19, with 45 others still trapped and feared dead, an official said, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Karting of the social service agency in the West Sumatra capital of Padang, said the retrieval of the remains were reported by officials who had arrived from the scene of Thursday's landslide. "A total of 19 people have been recovered since the beginning until 1:00 p.m. (12:00 BST) today," she told AFP by telephone. "The information that we received came from officials who went to the field."

## Four wounded as police open fire in Aceh

JAKARTA, Dec 11: At least four people were seriously wounded when police fired on residents in the restive Indonesian province of Aceh, according to a rebel source and a report Saturday, says AFP.

An official with the rebel Free Aceh Movement (GAM) said four men were badly injured in the incident Thursday in Matanggeulumpang Dua, in the northern Acehness sub-district of Bireuen.

"They opened fire and wounded four men. The troops also destroyed stores in the city, terrorised the public and people are now terrified," the source, who requested anonymity, told AFP by telephone from Aceh's Pidie district.

Police in the main northern Acehness town of Lhokseumawe refused to confirm the incident Saturday, but the Banda Aceh-based Serambi daily newspaper also ran a

similar report.

It said troops from the elite Brimob police battalion surrounded Matanggeulumpang Dua on Thursday night and that the situation there "has become very tense."

Serambi quoted police as claiming that their headquarters had come under fire from unidentified assailants armed with Russian-made assault rifles.

The incensed troops, Serambi said, also strafed and destroyed a department store, several cars and assaulted residents who were near the scene.

Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid ordered the withdrawal of special forces and strategic reserves command troops from Aceh on his election in late October in an attempt to appease separatists.

They were replaced by units from the police Brimob battalion.

## EU links Turkey's membership quest to Ocalan

HELSINKI, Dec 11: The European Union today linked Turkey's chances of joining its ranks to the fate of Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan, who remains on death row, reports AFP.

"You know very well the importance the European countries attach to life," EU high representative for foreign and security policy Javier Solana told a press conference at the EU summit in Helsinki.

"And you know that it would be very difficult to have a member of the European family that did not have the same respect for life," he said in response to a question about Ocalan and Turkey's EU candidate status.

Solana met the press after

dashing to Ankara late Friday after EU leaders confirmed Turkey as a candidate for membership.

Asked if there were "any pre-conditions on the communication of the death penalty" against Ocalan, Solana replied: "The only condition is the Copenhagen criteria" for joining the EU.

Those criteria, spelled out at a 1993 summit, include respect for human rights and protection of minority groups.

Solana said Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit was due in Helsinki around today to discuss the EU candidate status. He had a lunch with the EU heads of government and state.

## Wahid, Megawati to visit riot-torn Ambon today

JAKARTA, Dec 11: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid and his vice president were on Saturday preparing to visit the riot-torn city of Ambon to seek an end to bloody sectarian clashes as a parliamentary probe readied to question generals over the violence, reports AFP.

Wahid and Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri were slated to visit the troubled region on Sunday but the long awaited trip -- seen by many as a possible start to reconciliation -- was not expected to be smooth.

The Jakarta Post daily quoted officials in Ambon as saying that Wahid and Megawati might have to enter the city by sea aboard a navy warship which they would pick up from a port run by state oil and gas firm Pertamina, some 30 km from Ambon. They would then be taken to the governor's office.

Many parts of the road between the city airport and the governor's office are blocked by warring residents.

Ambon military commander Brigadier General Max Tamaela said on Saturday "three alternative entry routes" had been prepared for the presidential entourage due to the "critical situation" there.

"They could enter the city through land with cars, or through the sea by crossing the inner coast of the island, or by air with helicopters," Tamaela told the evening daily Suara Pembaruan.



Falungong practitioners carry a model of the Falungong book by leader Li Hongzhi as they parade through Hong Kong yesterday. —AFP photo

## Falungong members demonstrate in HK

HONG KONG, Dec 11: Hundreds of Falungong followers from around the world paraded through Hong Kong today to demand an end to Beijing's crackdown on the spiritual movement, reports AFP.

Up to 500 sect members, on the first day of a three-day conference here, walked through the city waving banners and wearing bright yellow shirts behind plaques showing their nationalities.

Earlier they presented a letter to Beijing's representatives here calling for dialogue and respect for human rights.

"We want them to resolve the current crisis in China and release the practitioners that have been detained," Co-organiser Belinda Pang said.

"This is not a protest -- that's too strong for us. We do not shout or fight, we just want to send a message."

About 300 practitioners had

earlier gathered outside Xinhua news agency. China's de facto liaison office here, where they performed exercises before setting off on their march.

Dozens of police were watching the crowd but had not intervened.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa warned that authorities had "taken note" of the group's activities and emphasized their illegal status under mainland law.

"There have been reports that the Falungong have led to loss of life and social disorders in the mainland," he said in a statement.

Conference goers and demonstrators "must comply strictly with Hong Kong laws and ... must not act in any manner which are against the interest of China, Hong Kong or 'one country, two systems,'" he said.

## Outrage forces Indian CBI to reopen murder trial

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: India's premier investigative agency, facing a national outcry and court strictures, has launched an appeal over the murder trial acquittal of a powerful police officer's son, officials said here today, reports AFP.

The spokesman of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said the acquitted suspect, Santosh Singh, would be the subject of a high court appeal over the 1996 rape and murder of a 23-year-old law student, Priyadarshini Mattoo.

He said the trial would be reopened after the CBI lodged an appeal against the December 2 acquittal of Singh, which led to protests in parliament and street rallies in India.

"Whatever evidence and material are available in this case are sufficient for conviction," he said amid charges that the CBI had manipulated the probe to save Singh, son of a high-profile policeman.

The suspect's father, J.P.

Singh, the current police chief in the federal territory of Pondicherry, has headed key posts including a crack intelligence and counter-espionage unit of the Delhi police.

The protests erupted after Delhi Sessions Court Judge G.P. Thareja said he was acquitting Singh although he knew the man was the killer.

The judge in an unprecedented stricture against the CBI said the huge influence of the suspect's father in Indian police organisations appeared to have been the binding factor in securing his freedom.

The 455-page stricture said clinching evidence relating to the crime was unavailable to the prosecution or had been tampered.

Indian parliament on Thursday demanded the sacking of CBI chief R. K. Raghavan as newspapers launched separate probes to nail the federal agency in the murder.

## Taiwan-born US scientist indicted

WASHINGTON, Dec 11: US authorities on Friday charged a Taiwan-born scientist central to the scandal over allegations China stole US atomic secrets, with improperly handling top-secret nuclear data, but not with espionage, reports AFP.

Wen Ho Lee has denied the United States its exclusive dominion and control over some of the nation's most important and sensitive nuclear secrets.

US Attorney John Kelly said after a New Mexico grand jury returned the charges.

Lee -- who denied any wrongdoing when he was fired in March from his job at the Los Alamos nuclear laboratories in New Mexico for security violations -- faces 59 criminal counts under both the 1954 Atomic Energy Act and the Federal Espionage Act. He could be sentenced to life in prison.

The indictment alleges that Lee tampered with, altered and concealed classified information concerning the design, construction, use and testing of US thermonuclear and geothermonuclear weapons," said Ron Lopez, spokesman for the US Attorney's office in New Mexico.

# China, Russia lay basis for 21st century partnership

BEIJING, Dec 11: Beijing and Moscow have laid the basis for a 21st century partnership aimed at countering the perceived US domination of the world stage, analysts said Friday.

"The results of the visit of President (Boris) Yeltsin will push forward our strategic partnership and be beneficial to global stability and a multipolar world," Xia Yishen, a career Chinese diplomat and senior researcher at China's Institute of International Studies told AFP.

Yeltsin's two-day summit with Chinese President Jiang Zemin cemented Beijing and Moscow's position against growing US military and political dominance, he said.

The two neighbours also is-

sued a joint communique which condemned Washington's attempts to amend the Anti-Ballistic Missile (AMB) Treaty.

Washington needs to amend the treaty in order to legally open the way for a proposed US National Missile Defence and a proposed joint US-Japanese Theater Missile Defence for East Asia.

The defence system is expected to be able to defend the United States and its allies against the attack of incoming nuclear missiles and if successful would give the US a clear global strategic advantage.

But both plans have been adamantly opposed by Moscow and Beijing.

"If the US violates the AMB treaty, one thing is very clear, and that is that China and Rus-

sia will strengthen consultations and cooperation on a joint reaction," Xia said.

Although neither side have committed to jointly building their own version of an anti-ballistic missile defence system, if the US violates the treaty seen as a pillar of today's global strategic balance, China and Russia would not stand idly by, he added.

But Bob Broadfoot, at the Hong Kong-based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy, said the summit was more posturing aimed at addressing the deteriorating relations between Washington and Moscow.

He discounted the possibility

that the heated rhetoric would go much beyond words.

"This does not mean that we will have a new China-Russian bloc pitted against the US because both countries need their commercial ties with the America," Broadfoot told AFP.

But China, like any other country, would continue to improve its military capabilities and strengthen its national security as its economy grows, he said.

"In this sense there is an arms race, but when has China ever not tried to improve its military capability? If there is new technology out there you are going to want it," he said.

Both sides also opposed the US-backed "new interventionism" which was most recently seen in the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia under the pretext of humanitarian intervention, Xia said.

China and Russia watched angrily as NATO circumvented the United Nations and unilaterally bombed Yugoslavia, denouncing the action as an "unprecedented effort to establish uni-polar dominance and interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. Xia said both sides viewed their joint opposition to the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia as leading the way to establishing internationally recognised conditions on global intervention into the affairs of sovereign states.

"Now what happened in Yu-

goslavia cannot happen again unless two conditions are met... the first being that a sovereign nation must invite international intervention and the second is that the UN must administer it," he said.

Xia said the West would not dare to intervene in Chechnya. China gave unequivocal backing to Moscow's offensive against Chechen rebels, saying in the communique it supported "the government of the Russian republic's action in fighting terrorism and splittism forces."

China sees reflections in the Chechen conflict in its own stand over Taiwan, which it views as a breakaway rebel province which will one day be reunited with the mainland through force if necessary.

Lee is also charged with the unlawful gathering and retention of national security information on the design specifics... of US thermonuclear and geothermonuclear weapons," said Lopez.

## News Analysis