

BRITAIN

Pindi, Delhi exchange 76 prisoners:

India and Pakistan Monday exchanged 76 civilian prisoners, most of whom had been jailed for illegal border crossing, witnesses said. AFP from Amritsar reports.

The exchange of 37 Pakistanis and 39 Indians, all males, by diplomats from the two countries took place at Attari-Wagha border road checkpoint, near this Indian Punjab state city.

The prisoners, ranging from 17 to 75 years in age, had spent one to seven years in custody, witnesses who spoke to some of them said.

'Certain US forces hold up START':

Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh on Monday accused certain forces in the United States of holding up completion of a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), AFP from Moscow says.

Completed negotiation on the treaty by the end of July has been set by US President George Bush as a prerequisite for holding a Soviet-US summit.

It is completely evident, Bessmertnykh said, that there are certain forces in the United States that do not want this agreement concluded or, at least do not want it concluded.

Iraq responds to Mubarak's plea:

Egypt's President on Monday received a "positive response" from Baghdad to a letter he sent Saturday warning of serious consequences if Iraq refused UN access to nuclear sites, Palestinian sources said in Cairo, reports AFP.

President Hosni Mubarak received the news from PLO Chief Yasser Arafat who was "the messenger of positive results of his talks with President Saddam Hussein in Baghdad."

The PLO leader arrived in Baghdad Sunday and delivered the Egyptian letter to the Iraqi leader in which, Mubarak warned of the 'danger presented by the situation, which risks the provocation of another coalition attack against Iraq's strategic installations.'

5 killed in Azeri clash:

Five people were killed and 30 wounded in clashes between Azerbaijani troops and Armenian villagers Monday, news reports said, AP from Moscow reports.

Dozens have died in recent weeks in the bitter dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, an enclave in Azerbaijan mostly inhabited by Armenians. Most Armenians are Christians; Azerbaijanis for the most part are Muslims.

Armenia's acting interior minister, Ashot Manucharian, said Monday's fighting occurred near the village of Erkech and that two residents and three Azerbaijani soldiers were killed, according to the Interfax news agency.

Officials reported 30 people injured.

The Armenian legislature on Monday approved a resolution calling for negotiations with Azerbaijan over the territory, the state news agency Tass said. No immediate word came from Azerbaijan.

Armenian officials said Monday that Armenians in the Azerbaijani villages of Buzluk and Manashid, south of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, were driven from their homes over the weekend, the government newspaper Izvestia reported.

CIA denies selling arms to Iraq:

The CIA on Monday denied a broadcast report that it secretly provided weapons to Iraq through a Chilean middleman during the Iran-Iraq war, AP from Washington says.

The report last Friday on ABC-TV's "Nightline" said President Bush's nominee for CIA director, Robert Gates, met with Chilean arms dealer Carlos Cardoen as part of a covert CIA operation to transfer arms to Iraq.

Gates was the agency's deputy director at the time of the alleged arms deal.

The CIA issued a brief statement Monday saying the allegations that it provided military equipment or technology to Iraq, "with or without authorization, are totally false."

"There has never been a covert action programme authorizing such action. Reports suggesting the contrary are without basis. Moreover, the CIA has never had a relationship of any type with Carlos Cardoen," the statement said.

Soviet-blast destroys forest:

A Soviet gas pipeline about 200 km (125 miles) north of Moscow has exploded, causing a fire which destroyed large areas of a nearby forest, the official news agency Tass said on Monday, Reuter reports from Moscow.

The Gryazovets-Moscow circle pipeline, near the village of Nekrasovskoye, was damaged but there were no casualties. It was not clear when the blast occurred.

Australia protests French N-test:

Australia protested to France Tuesday against its sixth nuclear test explosion in the Pacific this year, reports Reuter from Canberra.

The Australian seismological centre detected an underground nuclear explosion at Mururoa atoll in French Polynesia at 1810 GMT on Monday.

Foreign Minister Gareth Evans delivered what his office said was a strong protest during talks in Canberra with visiting French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Alain Vivien.

Blasts at two Manila banks:

Unidentified men bombed two Philippine banks in Manila in apparently coordinated attacks early Tuesday, police said, Reuter from Manila reports.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The explosions at two private commercial banks about 15 km (nine miles) apart occurred within minutes of each other, shattering windows. No group claimed responsibility.

Police said the bombings might be connected with nationwide strikes and protest rallies which leftist unions plan to hold on Thursday to demand cuts in fuel prices.

Sihanouk lauds Chinese role in brokering Cambodian peace

BEIJING, July 16: Bitter enemies in Cambodia's civil war opened talks in China today to thrash out differences over a United Nations peace plan that has opened the prospect of an end to 12 years of fighting, reports Reuter.

The working meeting of Cambodia's Supreme National Council (SNC) brings together Phnom Penh government Prime Minister Hun Sen, leaders of his main rebel enemies, the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge, and two smaller guerrilla groups.

The first public visit to China by an official from Phnom Penh's Vietnamese-backed government has raised hopes that China is ready to push its Khmer Rouge clients further towards compromise over the UN plan.

The plan calls for the United Nations to virtually run Cambodia in a period of disarmament before elections while national sovereignty is represented by the SNC.

Improved relations between China and Vietnam and a broad consensus on the road to peace by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council — China, the United States, the Soviet Union,

Britain and France — have heightened expectations that an end to Cambodia's agony is now in sight.

Representatives of the Big Five powers are due to hold a separate, overlapping session starting on Wednesday.

"China's role is very beneficial, very good in getting compromise in order to give Cambodia permanent peace and stability," Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who is chairing the two-day meeting, told reporters before talks opened.

A full meeting of the SNC in Pattaya, Thailand, last month agreed on a ceasefire, a moratorium on arms imports and to move the headquarters of the SNC to Cambodia but wide differences remain over the UN plan.

Sihanouk said the Phnom Penh government was not ready to accept UN administration of Cambodia, or demobilisation and disarmament. It wanted the status quo maintained before elections, with the SNC acting as a bridge.

In addition, Phnom Penh wants guarantees written into the UN plan to prevent a return to power of the Khmer Rouge, whose region of terror

Saddam invites Arab League observers to monitor work UN experts spot undisclosed N-facility plant in Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, July 16: UN disarmament experts said they had discovered a large unfinished uranium enrichment plant north of Baghdad that Iraqi authorities had not previously disclosed, reports Reuter.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director Hans Blix said the find was an example of inconsistencies in Iraqi declarations of its nuclear materials.

Under an April 3 Security Council ceasefire resolution, Iraq must reveal and scrap its weapons of mass destruction.

Professor Maurizio Zifferero, in charge of IAEA nuclear inspection teams in Iraq, told reporters late on Monday after addressing the Security Council that the hidden facility, near Al-Sharqat, a village between Mosul and

Tikrit, was about 18 months away from production.

He said the plant was identical to one Iraq had declared in Tarmia, near Baghdad, for enriching uranium through an electromagnetic method. Enriched uranium can be used to make a nuclear bomb.

The fact that only one of the twin facilities was recognised as a site for calutron activity is puzzling because Al-Sharqat is almost a carbon copy of the one they had declared, Zifferero said.

President Bush has threatened military action against Iraq if it persists in efforts to hide its facilities.

But Soviet Ambassador Yuli Vorontsov discounted an immediate military attack, saying: "We don't know where these materials are hidden who are they going to attack?"

All the experts agreed that Iraq had a clandestine atomic weapons programme. Iraq has maintained that its programme is for research and peaceful uses of atomic energy.

Blix said the programme was so expensive it could not possibly have been used to produce cheap electricity. "Most people would say it was not plausible that this was a peaceful programme," he said.

AFP from London says: President Saddam Hussein has asserted that Iraq has destroyed all of its nuclear arms-making equipment and he invited the Arab League to send observers to monitor the work of United Nations nuclear experts in Iraq, Baghdad Radio said.

In a broadcast monitored by the BBC on Monday, the radio

said Hussein said Iraq has "destroyed all equipment forbidden by Security Council Resolution 687 or assimilated". The resolution calls for the destruction of all of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Hussein invited the Arab League or Egypt to carry inspections alongside the United Nations experts.

"Iraq will supply this mission with all the information presented to the international missions so that Arabs will know the facts and be able to play a role in countering the allegations of the United States and its allies", he said.

The radio said an unidentified "third party" was charged with transmitting the proposal to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who recently warned Iraq to comply with the United Nations.

Iran declares open and full support for Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD, July 16: Iranian Revolutionary Guard Commander General Mohsen Rezaei on Monday declared Tehran's "open and full support" for Muslim militants fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, Pakistan's official AFP news agency said, reports Reuter.

The agency quoted him as saying in a speech in the Pakistan-ruled part of the disputed Himalayan state that all Islamic countries must support

the militants fighting for independence or union with Islamic Pakistan.

"My presence here ... was to demonstrate our open and full support and to assure you that you are not alone in this just struggle," he told refugees from Indian-ruled Kashmir in the Azad (free) Kashmir capital Muzaffarabad.

Rezaei said only Pakistan and Iran were now in the forefront in supporting "the just struggle of the Kashmiri

people" adding that they would work together at the United Nations and other forums for a solution of the problem.

AFP quoted him as asking all Islamic countries to "extend all possible support and cooperation to freedom fighters and to exert all pressures on the Indian government to stop its unholy acts of terror against the Kashmiri nation".

Pakistan denies Indian charges that it is training and arming Kashmiri militants.

Pakistan rules one-third of Kashmir and India the remaining two-thirds where more than 3,200 people have been killed in the militants' revolt since January 1990.

Two of three wars between India and Pakistan since their independence from Britain in 1947 were fought over Kashmir.

India regards all of Kashmir as an integral part of the country. But Islamabad says that Kashmiris, most of whom are Muslim must decide in a UN-mandated plebiscite whether to join Pakistan or Hindu-majority India.

The main militant group, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, wants the state to be independent of both countries.

Turkish envoy in Athens hurt in blast

ATHENS, July 16: The acting Turkish Ambassador and two of his staff were injured in a car bomb blast in the diplomatic district of northern Athens today, officials said, reports AFP.

Charge d'Affaires Deniz Bolukbasi, who is currently standing in for Ambassador Gunduz Aktan, was hospitalised along with embassy attaché Nilgun Kececi and driver Adil Yildirim, but they were not in serious condition, the embassy said. A passer-by was also slightly hurt.

The bomb went off as Bolukbasi's chauffeur driven car passed by a booby-trapped car in the northern Athens suburb of Palaio Psychiko, site of several diplomatic missions. The Turkish embassy itself is in central Athens.

The attack came two days before a visit by US President George Bush, who will then travel on to Turkey.

The bombing has not been claimed, but police suspected the November 17 terrorist group which has carried out a string of attacks in Greece, including the last anti-Turkish actions in 1988. These blew up Turkish diplomatic cars but caused no casualties.

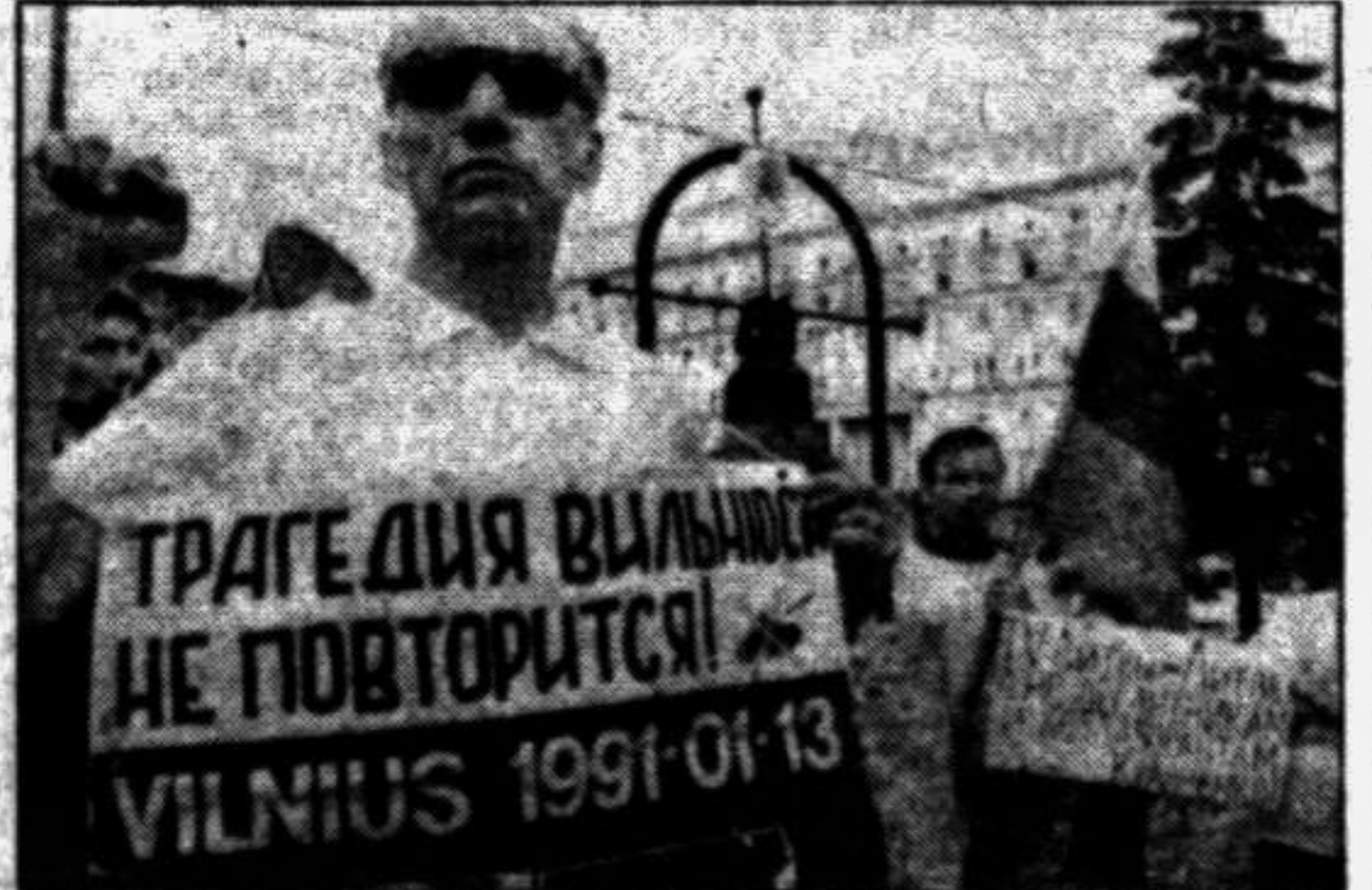
Floods hit 3 Indian states: 60 killed

NEW DELHI, July 16: At least 60 people have been killed in floods lashing three Indian states, as pounding monsoon rains forced thousands to flee their homes, newspapers reported today, reports AFP.

Twenty-two people died in the western state of Gujrat, while 13 were killed in Assam and 25 in Arunachal Pradesh, both far eastern states, in the past week, the Hindustan Times and other dailies, here said.

The 25 deaths in Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China, were caused when flash floods washed away a village in the West Jang region, forcing the government to rush army and paramilitary troops there for rescue operations.

The reports said survivors in the village were shifted to safer areas.



MOSCOW: Unemployed Lithuanian journalists stage a demonstration outside Moscow's 'Lubjarka' KGB headquarters (background) July 15 to protest the continuing occupation by Soviet Army troops of Vilnius television and radio headquarters since January 13, 1991. —AFP/UNB photo

US to abandon Clark Base

MANILA, July 16: The United States has decided to abandon Clark Air Base because of heavy damage and continuing threats from Mount Pinatubo's eruption, Philippine Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus said here today, reports AFP.

But US negotiator Richard Armitage, visiting the base, refused to publicly announce the withdrawal pending final instructions from President George Bush, though he was "quite pessimistic" about Clark's prospects.

Clark and Subic Naval Base, the largest US military facilities overseas, have been devastated by the volcano's five-week-old eruption.

Subic is now operational but Clark, located closer to Pinatubo, remains crippled by ash emissions that could endanger jet aircraft for years.

Terrorist attack on Taj feared

NEW DELHI, July 16: Indian authorities now fear that terrorists may try to strike at the Taj Mahal, one of the world's most alluring tourist attractions and special security measures for the 17th century monument are planned, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said in a despatch from Agra, where the white marble mausoleum stands, that a high-level three-member police committee had been set up to ensure stricter vigilance at the Taj and at Agra Airport.

The agency quoted a police spokesman as saying the move had been taken following an upsurge of "terrorist" activity in the five districts of Agra, in

Uttar Pradesh state, 200 kilometers (124 miles) from New Delhi.

Tens of thousands of foreign tourists annually visit the Taj Mahal, built by Mughal ruler Shahjahan as a memorial to his wife the Empress Mumtaz.

Bandits who 15 years ago used to waylay those travelling through scrublands on the road from Delhi to Agra have all but disappeared, but recent weeks have seen an upsurge in Sikh militant activity in the area.

Sikh militants are fighting a bloody campaign for a homeland in the northern state of Punjab, but their activities spill over into neighbouring northern states.

Typhoon kills 23 in China

HONG KONG, July 16: At least 23 people were killed and 34 others injured when typhoon Zeke lashed southern China's Hainan and Guangxi provinces, a semi-official Chinese news agency reported here today, reports AFP.

in the mid-1970s killed one million Cambodians before they were toppled by Vietnamese invaders who installed Hun Sen in 1979.



EL SALVADOR: Members of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla group patrol the streets of this small FMLN-controlled town, 208 kms (140 miles), northeast of San Salvador July 14. —AFP/UNB photo

15 Burmese returnees put behind bars

BANGKOK, July 16: Burma's military authorities have jailed 15 people and fined 22 others who were repatriated from Thailand as illegal immigrants, official Rangoon Radio reported, says Reuter.

A total of 38 Burmese, including a nine-month-old baby, were returned from Thailand on July 11, the Radio said on Monday evening.

Twenty-two were fined the equivalent of about 230 dollars and 15 were jailed for six months as they could not pay the fine imposed under Burma's immigration law, a transcript of the report seen on Tuesday said.

The remaining returnee, a young boy, was tortured and released, the report said.

Rangoon Radio said the returnees were casual labourers or jobless and were being tested for AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). None were fugitives or had links with banned insurgent groups, the radio said.

Last month it reported that 84 people were jailed and 185 fined out of 440 sent back from Thailand.

Tens of thousands of Burmese live and work illegally in Thailand. They include several thousand dissidents who fled the brutal suppression of a pro-democracy uprising by the ruling military in 1988.

Off the Record

Gorbachev to experience Cinderella plot

LONDON: Will Mikhail S Gorbachev get his wish or turn into a pumpkin after asking western leaders for economic help? Either way, the Soviet leader will experience a Cinderella plot before he leaves London, reports AP.



Jokes linking him to the rags-to-riches fairy tale sprouted at the Group of Seven economic summit Monday as Gorbachev's press secretary announced his boss would go to the Royal Opera House on Thursday for Rossini's "La Cenerentola," based on Cinderella.

"Well, the choice was made by the host," said Vitaly Ignatenko. "Yes. Sure he (Gorbachev) knew the plot."

Warming up, he added, "They will probably discuss this particular plot ... with Prime Minister (John) Major at informal dinner at 9 o'clock."

Gorbachev will present his case for economic assistance on Wednesday at the conclusion of this week's economic summit of the seven industrialized democracies. But he's staying over and having dinner with Major on Thursday before returning to Moscow on Friday.

Since Gorbachev is only scheduled to attend the first act of the opera, he won't be on hand when Cinderella produces the glass slipper that entitles her to live happily ever after.

Another possible omen for Gorbachev is his London address — 13 Kensington Palace Gardens, the home of the Soviet ambassador.

"But for President Gorbachev this is the lucky number," Ignatenko said.

After a long pause, he added: "I hope so."

Short breakup beefs up marital ties

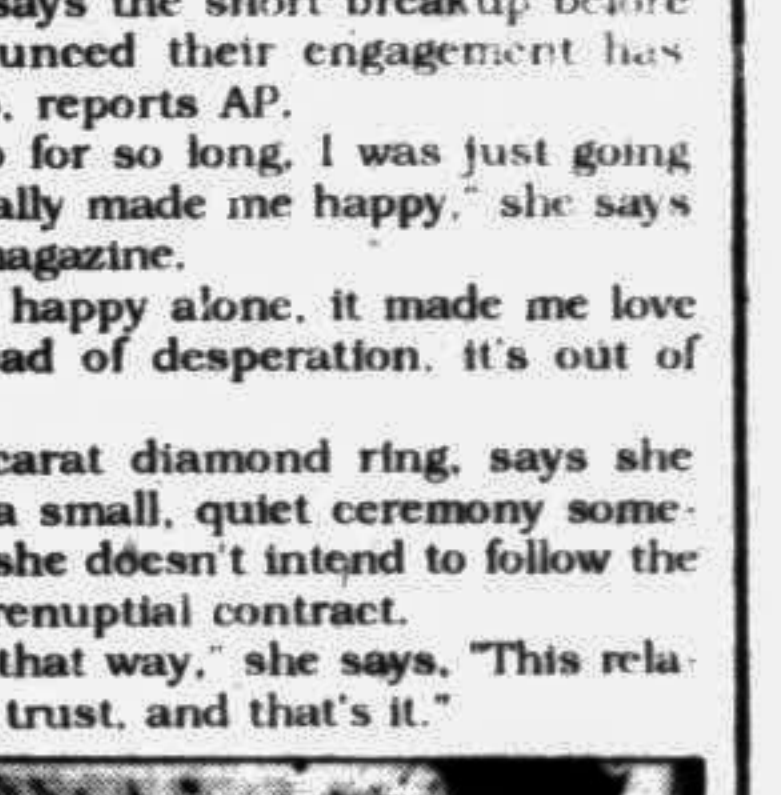
NEW YORK: Marla Maples says the short breakup before she and Donald Trump announced their engagement has strengthened their relationship, reports AP.

"I was into this relationship for so long, I was just going with it without knowing if it really made me happy," she says in the July 22 issue of People magazine.

"When I realized I could be happy alone, it made me love him more freely — now instead of desperation, it's out of choice."

Maples, sporting a 7 1/2-carat diamond ring, says she hopes they will be married in a small, quiet ceremony sometime this winter. But she says she doesn't intend to follow the first Mrs Trump in signing a prenuptial contract.

"I don't think we're doing it that way," she says. "This relationship is going to be built on trust, and that's it."



PETRINJA, Yugoslavia: An elderly couple, residents of Croatian village of Prinjavor cry July 15 in front of their house after a missile attack on their village by Yugoslavian Army forces. Army forces also opened fire on Croatian National Guard, killing at least one person. Two other Croatian villagers came under Yugoslavian Army missile fire on Tuesday. —AFP/UNB photo

The guys tend to be more flashes'

NASHVILLE (Tenn): Singer-songwriter Holly Dunn says male country-music stars tend to sell more of their hit records, but the women last longer, reports AP.

"A man can come out of the box and sell a million units. On the other hand, the changing of the guard with the men is much quicker than it is with the women," the 33-year-old singer said in an interview.

"They have no legs to stand on as far as any kind of history; we're in the trenches slugging it out year after year. The guys tend to be more flashes," she said.

A woman star will sell an average of 100,000 to 200,000 records, then if they get into the Female Vocalist of the Year category, might sell a million, Dunn said.

"That's after eight or 10 albums," she said.

The San Antonio native is known for her 1986 hit "Daddy's Hands," about her father, who's a minister.

She won the Country Music Association's Horizon Award in 1987.

Martial arts to keep children away from drugs

HOUSTON: Film star Chuck Norris is promoting a public school programme to steer children away from drugs and crime by building their confidence through martial arts, the cornerstone of his movies, reports AP.

Norris said his Kick Drugs Out of America Foundation has tentative approval to begin in three schools in the Houston Independent School District.

The foundation would hire martial arts experts to train sixth-graders twice a week, exposing them to physical and mental discipline. Norris told the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on Friday.

The programme "will instill the leadership and strength to say no. It has worked in my karate schools," Norris said.

The actor, who lives on the West Coast, is looking for a ranch to buy in the Houston area.

"I just like it better here," he said. "I want to live here and I want to be close to the programme."