

China, India agree to ease border tensions

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: India and China on Friday agreed to hold regular meetings of their military personnel at the frontier in a bid to ease border tensions, reports AP.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said this was decided at a meeting of a special group of top Indian and Chinese officials to discuss a three-decade old border dispute. Press Trust of India news agency reported.

It quoted the spokesman as saying that the progress achieved by the talks of the Indo-China Joint Working Group were "meaningful and tangible."

Press Trust said the meetings would be held in June and October every year "as part of a series of confidence building measures for ensuring peace and tranquility" at the disputed frontier.

It said the two governments also decided to set up hot lines between army camps on both sides of the border.

The two countries will inform each other before starting military exercises in the area, Press Trust said.

The border dispute, which led to a 21-day war in 1962, has been a major irritant in India-China relations.

Beijing claims India is holding 36,000 square miles (90,000 sq kilometers) that belongs to China in what is now India's eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. India says China seized 14,500 square miles (37,000 sq kms) of land in 1962 in the northwest near the Indian state of Kashmir.

The working group was set up in December 1986 after the visit of late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Beijing. The group has held talks in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

The Chinese team was led by Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Xu Dunxin and the Indian side was led by Foreign Secretary JN Dixit, the top civil servant in the ministry.

Opposition alleges massive rigging Akalis urge Punjab governor not to install Congress govt

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: Opposition parties including the Janata Dal and the leftists Thursday alleged massive rigging and manipulation of Punjab polls by the centre. The polls would provide a rallying point for moderates and change the political climate in the state, reports PTI.

The Communist Party of India alleged massive rigging by the Congress (I) to get absolute majority in the elections held after a lapse of more than four years while the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said the poll result will not solve any problems in the state.

The Janata Dal leader and former Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed accused the centre of manipulating the assembly and parliamentary elections in the state and of having designs to divide the people on communal lines.

Prem Singh Chandumajra, on behalf of boycotting Akalis, urged the Governor not to install what he described as "the puppet and minority government of Congress (I)" in the state as according to him 90 per cent of voters did not take part in the polls and wanted cancellation of the elections.

The Congress said the new government was willing to talk to anyone to resolve the Punjab tangle.

An official spokesman said the centre met the demands of various shades of public opinion in holding the polls and initiating the political process in the state.

Meanwhile, Reuter reports

armed troops and police stood guard to prevent attacks by Sikh separatists who have fought a bloody 10-year insurgency in Punjab.

Singh, 70, was holding impromptu celebrations as he drove to Chandigarh from his home village about 70 km away, the candidates said.

Congress won 87 seats in the 117-member state legislature, and 12 of Punjab's 13 parliamentary districts in elections largely boycotted by the Sikh majority after the militants threatened to kill those who voted.

But the congress win could set back prospects for a solution to the revolt by the militants, who demand a separate homeland to be called Khalistan (land of the pure).

Holding garlands of flowers, winning candidates in Wednesday's election prepared in the state capital Chandigarh to greet a veteran Sikh politician tipped to be the first Chief Minister of the northern state after five years of direct rule by New Delhi.

Beant Singh, party president in the state, is likely to be elected unanimously the post, they said.

Around the building where the welcome reception was planned, scores of heavily-

Off the Record



NEW YORK: Michael and Carina Laird of Manhattan kiss at a rally outside the Irish consulate. Hundreds of demonstrators protested Ireland's refusal to allow a 14-year-old rape victim to travel to Britain for a legal abortion.

'20 baht for strawberry 50 baht for heroin'

OHAKIA, Thailand: "Please don't take it. Don't burn it, please. I am quitting, but, please, keep the drug for my mother and the rest of the family", reports Reuter.

A child of the Hmong hill tribe is begging a visiting drug rehabilitation worker. The visitor threatens to throw the 12-year-old boy's heroin into a fire.

The boy, Phor Sae Yang, promises the worker from Chiangmai's Mckean rehabilitation centre he will stop using heroin after just one more shot.

A policeman who talked Phor into getting treatment says more and more children in this mountain area 80 km northwest of Chiangmai are using heroin.

Phor told Reuters he earned 20 baht (80 cent) a day picking strawberries. He says his mother spends 50 baht (two dollar) a day on heroin.

Phor dropped out of school four years ago when his father was arrested for heroin trafficking. The boy became a drug runner and later started to use heroin himself.

Phor says most of his friends are heroin addicts.

"I promise that I will never take heroin again for the rest of my life," the boy says at the rehabilitation centre in Chiangmai after his first bath in a year.

The hill tribes children addicts is a critical situation, we can only help a few of them at one time, while thousands are becoming the slave of heroin every day," rehabilitation worker Tripath Jupiaroen said.

President turns into columnist



Mikhail Gorbachev

offered to other newspapers through the syndication service.

Because it was too windy

AKRON, Ohio: A second attempt to launch the around-the-world balloon Earthwinds was scrubbed early Saturday morning because it was too windy, reports AP.

"We're not going to be continuing with the process because winds did not let down as we thought they would," project spokesman William G. Armstrong said shortly after midnight.

Armstrong said weather conditions would be re-evaluated later Saturday.

The trip, captained by Scottsdale, Ariz, airline pilot Larry Newman, is an attempt to take an hourglass-shaped helium balloon around the world at an altitude of about 35,000 feet (10,700 metres).

Newman and his crew, Don Moses and Russian cosmonaut Vladimir Dzhanibekov, have waited weeks for the right weather to take off.

Newman calls Earthwinds a "one-time, disposable aircraft" that can't be recovered and launched again once it's airborne.

A launch attempt last week was scrubbed because winds at ground level were too strong.

BRIEFLY

Teresa returns to Calcutta

Mother Teresa returned to Calcutta on Friday after more than two months abroad, during which she fell seriously ill in Mexico and was hospitalised in California. AFP reports from Calcutta.

A small group of well-wishers cheered as the 82-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner disembarked from her plane from Bombay, supported by two nuns from her missionary order of charity, which is based in Calcutta.

She was also garlanded by a delegation from the city's Roman Catholic Church Association.

Asked about her health, mother Teresa replied with a smile: "I am well and okay. God bless you. During her trip abroad she had suffered an attack of pneumonia, coupled with a heart condition."

One Kurd killed in clash

Police firing to disperse a crowd of Kurds in this southeastern town Friday killed one person, an official said, AP reports from Turkey.

A crowd of about 1,000 was protesting the murder of a Kurdish journalist earlier this week in the nearby city of Diyarbakir, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He said that the demonstrator was killed when police fired in the air to disperse the crowd. No details were available.

Journalist Halit Gungen, who worked for the leftist weekly 2000's Dogru (Towards 2000) was shot dead Tuesday by an unidentified gunman in the magazine's office.

Koirala to visit China

Prime Minister Gijra Prasad Koirala on Friday said he will visit Beijing on March 16 at the invitation of the Chinese government, AP reports from Nepal.

Announcing this in Parliament, Koirala said the visit will be to "further broaden the basis of mutual friendship, understanding and confidence" between Nepal and China.

This will be Koirala's first trip to China since he became prime minister in May.

Quake may hit Tokyo

A seismologist warned a parliamentary committee Friday that a devastating earthquake of 7 or more on the Richter scale could hit the Tokyo area and suggested Japan's capital be moved "as soon as possible," AP reports from Tokyo.

Kiyoo Mogi, chairman of the semigovernmental Coordinating Committee for Earthquake Prediction, did not name a safer place that can accommodate the nation's capital, news reports said.

Japanese and foreign disaster experts have predicted in recent years that a big earthquake was likely to hit Tokyo any time.

The Tokyo government predicted last year that a major quake would kill at least 10,000 people and hurt 150,000.

CIA to seek Kennedy murder file

The CIA will review long-classified files with a view toward possibly releasing them, including documents relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, according to Friday's editions of USA yesterday, reports AP from Washington.

CIA Director Robert Gates was announcing the review in an afternoon speech to the Oklahoma Press Association in Tulsa, Okla.

"The director... is going to talk about opening up historical documents," said Rep. Dave McCurdy, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee.

McCurdy told USA Today that the files to be reviewed relate to the Kennedy assassination, the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and the 1954 Guatemala coup.

Tigers kill 15 in Lanka

Tamil rebels Friday fired rockets, mortars and machine guns on a convoy of air force vehicles in eastern Sri Lanka, killing at least 15 men, military officials said, reports AP from Colombo.

They said 150 to 200 rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ambushed the convoy, killing nine airmen and six paramilitary soldiers.

The attack triggered a 40-minute battle but there were no immediate reports of any rebel casualties. The fighting occurred near Morawewa town, about 205 kilometers (130 miles) northeast of Colombo.

In the eastern Ampara district, the militants Thursday shot and killed a Sinhalese woman and her two children, said the officials, who cannot be identified under briefing rules. The provocation for the killing was not known.

In the eastern Batticaloa district, police shot to death a suspected militant when he tried to flee while being questioned at a check point, they said.

US dismantling its last base in Philippines

SUBIC BAY NAVAL BASE, Philippines, Feb 22: The US Navy on Saturday began its first major step in dismantling the last American base in the Philippines, towing away a floating drydock where warships were repaired, reports AP.

The crew of the salvage ship USS Brunswick secured towing lines to the 1,900-ton drydock and sailed from Subic Bay on its 12-day journey to Oahu.

It was one of three drydocks at Subic, scheduled to be shut down by the end of this year after nearly a century of American operation.

Cuban crisis worse: Castro

HAVANA, Feb 22: Cuban President Fidel Castro said the crisis for Cuba caused by the breakup of its former ally the Soviet Union is worse than the 1962 missile crisis, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, reports Reuter.

"What is the October (missile) crisis in comparison with the situation in which we find ourselves following the disintegration of the Soviet Union," Castro said in remarks broadcast on Thursday night by state television.

"This is worse for us than the October crisis," he said.

It was the first time these remarks, originally made during a closed-door academic conference on the 1962 Cuban missile crisis held in Havana in January, had been broadcast in public.

The 65-year old Cuban leader indicated he had no intention of resigning at the moment, despite the multiple problems resulting from the disappearance of the former Soviet Union, Cuba's main ally and economic supplier for three decades.

"You might ask why they don't replace me... I would say it would be marvellous if they could replace me," he said.

But he added: "If during these difficult times, it might occur to be to resign, or suggest that they should look for someone else to do my job, they would say I was the biggest traitor, the biggest trickster in the world."

Castro said many news, younger people had been brought into the leadership of

India will seek Israeli help to combat terrorism

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: India, which established full diplomatic relations with Israel last month, plans to seek expertise from the Jewish state to combat terrorism, Defence Minister Sharad Pawar said Friday, reports AFP.

Pawar told the Press Trust of India (PTI) at an undisclosed military location in Northern India that New Delhi was exploring possibilities of drawing on "successful" Israeli counter-terrorism techniques.

The establishment of diplomatic ties has paved the way for drawing on its "successful experience to curb terrorism" Pawar said.

"Such an exchange would be of mutual advantage to the two countries," he added.

Shades of opinion existed, which were resolved through discussion. "We've managed to maintain unity as something sacred," Castro said.

He revealed new, sometimes surprising details of Cuba's 30 years relationship with the former Soviet Union, saying that on many occasions there were contradictions and criticisms from Moscow for the Cuban government's actions.

Castro said he did not think the United States was considering a conventional military invasion of Cuba, although such an attack could occur in certain circumstances.

CIS agrees with NATO to put CFE Treaty into force within 5 months

BRUSSELS Feb 22: Former Soviet Republics agreed on Friday at a meeting with NATO to overcome divisions over the share-out of military power and put a key treaty limiting Conventional arms in Europe into force within five months, reports Reuter.

The Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, widely seen as the corner stone of stability in post-cold war Europe, was signed in 1990 by 22 nations.

But it has been unclear since the breakup of the Soviet Union whether the republics would agree on how to share out the hardware limited by the treaty.

"They still have to agree on the details, but now we have a deadline," said one NATO sources, who asked not to be identified.

A North Atlantic Treaty Organisation statement issued after the meeting said all parties agreed the treaty would

enter into force in time for a Helsinki summit of the 48-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

That summit, designed to chart a new source for security and stability in Europe, is scheduled to take place in mid-July.

Friday's meeting included the 16 take place in mid-July.

Friday's meeting included the 16 NATO members and five eastern European nations which signed the CFE Treaty as well as all former Soviet Republics covered by the treaty, which provides for deep cuts in tanks and other military hardware in an area stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals.

The meeting agreed on a "road map" that would bring the treaty into force.

The former Soviet Republics committed themselves to reach agreement on sharing out military hardware among themselves by the end of May, leaving time for an extraordinary conference of all CFE signatories to approve the agreement.

Russian and Ukraine — the two most powerful republics — have been squabbling over control of the black sea fleet and control of the once-mighty Soviet armed forces.

Although naval forces and troops are not covered by the CFE Treaty, NATO sources said resolving disagreements over other military equipment would be a major step forward.



ARLES, France: Jeanne Calment smiles in front of the cake offered to her to celebrate her 117th birthday. Calment is reportedly the world's oldest known living person.

Major change in Saudi Majlis soon

RIYADH, Feb 22: After decades of promises, king Fahd is expected within days to announce the formation of a consultative council, the first step by the al-Saud dynasty toward sharing its absolute power, reports AP.

The king pledged during the Gulf War to establish the Majlis al-Shura, as it is known in Arabic, and hinted at a more clearly defined constitution.

Most Saudis believe the move will be the most profound change to emerge from the conflict that ended with Iraq's defeat.

Fahd gave a hint of what was coming last week to the Lebanese Arabic weekly al-Hawadeth.

In his only public statement to date, Fahd said majlis members "will, god willing, be from among the elite of the citizens and of a high intellectual caliber who will help us by considering matters that need opinion and foresight."

No one expects to call what emerges democracy. But many hope for more freedom of speech and other basic rights, such as an independent judiciary, General prescriptions in the Quran, the Muslim holy book, are now considered to be the constitution.

The majlis "is one of the most important effects of the war. It will make a real structural change," predicted Abdel Khalaq Abdul Hay, a political science professor at King Saud University.

The Gulf War, with the unprecedented presence of hundreds of thousands of non-Muslim troops on Saudi soil, put the Saudi leadership under new pressure for change in a theocratic society that has traditionally been closed to outsiders.

The king has been guarded about divulging details of his plans, promising only that an announcement would come before the start of the fasting month of Ramadan March 3.

UN Council okays 14000-man peace-keeping force for Y'slavia

(UNPROFOR). But in a last-minute change in the text, it only asked the Secretary-General to deploy immediately "those elements of the force which can assist in developing an implementation plan for approval by the council and a budget which together will maximise the contribution of the Yugoslav parties to offsetting its costs."

The force is designed to provide a breathing space while efforts continue to end the civil war which erupted last June when Croatia declared its independence from the Yugoslav federation. This prompted the republic's Serb minority to take up arms, aided by the Serb-dominated

UNPROFOR, comprising military, police and civilian components, is to be deployed in three so-called United Nations Protected Areas in Croatia with large Serbian populations—Eastern and Western Slavonia and Krajina. A number of military observers will also be stationed in parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina adjacent to Croatia.

The force, to which 31 countries have been asked to contribute personnel, was established for an initial 12-month period, unless the council later decides otherwise.

Boutros-Ghali was asked to "take the measures necessary

to ensure its earliest possible deployment."

The operation is the first mounted by the United Nations on the continent of Europe. UN troops have been stationed on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus since 1964.

Croatian Foreign Minister Zvonimir Separaovic told Reuters earlier in the day that he wanted the operation to get under way as quickly as possible "because we fear the possibility of the breaking of the cease-fire, which holds but not without difficulties."

Regarding help in defraying some of the costs, he said: "We can give some premises of

the former YNA (Yugoslav National Army) and open some other places. But we cannot give all our hotels or schools for these forces, or build new ones, because we have 700,000 refugees... who occupying these buildings."

AP reports: The soldiers will be deployed primarily in three Serbian-dominated enclaves within Croatia, which will be designated UN protected areas. Both Croatia and the Serbs claim these areas, and it is likely their future will be the key subject of future negotiations.

"We are very happy," said Yugoslav Ambassador Darko Silovic of Friday's council vote.

"The cease-fire was holding

Irani troops to back Khartoum Junta

CAIRO, Feb 22: Iran has sent 18,000 troops to south Sudan to back the military Junta in Khartoum against the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), according to exiled Sudanese opposition sources here, reports AP.

Eight thousand Iranian soldiers were deployed in the southern capital of Juba and northwards down the Nile between Malakal and Kosti immediately after Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjari visited Khartoum in December, the National Democratic Rally (NDR) said in a statement issued here Thursday.

only because everybody was expecting the peacekeeping troops to come in. It was very fragile and thin ice we were treading."

"Either this cease-fire holds or we will have another war," he said.

The resolution emphasized that the peacekeeping plan "is in no way intended to prejudice the terms of a political settlement's reference to disputes over the sovereignty of the Serb-dominated enclaves."

"We hope the resolution adopted today will facilitate attainment of a peaceful political settlement," said Thomas R. Pickering, the US Ambassador, who heads the Security Council this month.