

Phoolan walks out of prison a free woman



Devi, who had been held in the Tihar Central Jail here since October, was ordered released by Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gopi Gogoi on a personal bond of 50,000 rupees.

"You are being freed," Gogoi told the one-time outlaw after a 15-minute hearing at the crowded Tis Hazari court complex.

"She is a free woman as of now," Devi's lawyer, Kamini Jaiswal, told reporters before her client was driven by a dozen police escorts to Tihar to collect her personal effects.

The small courtroom was jam-packed as the judge pronounced the ruling.

Some 1,500 spectators including nearly 200 reporters and photographers had been waiting for Devi to be produced in the court, and police struggled to control the crowd.

The 32-year-old Devi appeared shy but cheerful after the judge read out his order. "I am very happy to be set free," she said.

Devi had been imprisoned since she laid down arms and surrendered to the authorities in February 1983.

Clinton to order air strikes on Serb bases if deadline not met

60 US warplanes on alert

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: President Bill Clinton told congress Friday that he was ready to order US planes to bomb weapons sites in Bosnia if Sunday's deadline for artillery withdrawal is not met, reports AFP.

"More than 60 US aircraft are available for participation in the authorised NATO missions," Clinton said in the notification to congress.

The president is to give a progress report on Saturday of the NATO ordered weapons withdrawal.

NATO has threatened to carry out air strikes if the ultimatum is not met, artillery around Sarajevo were under the control of peacekeepers Friday, but cautioned that the estimate came from incomplete reports.

"There is more to be done. We don't know how much has been done in the recent hours," he said, estimating that there were still hundreds of arms — mostly Serb — to be secured.

According to US estimates, Serb forces have up to 300 pieces of heavy artillery around Sarajevo.

Top security advisors met at the White House Friday before Clinton issued his formal congressional notification of military readiness in which he warned that all heavy weapons found within the exclusion zone would be subject to air strikes.

"Recent heavy weapons fire in the Sarajevo area has resulted in a continuing heavy loss of life as well as serious injuries among the civilian population," he wrote.

The administration has welcomed to Moscow's decision to send some 400 troops to Sarajevo to round up the Bosnian Serbs' arms but Friday a Washington official gave a cautious response to the move.

"This will be a useful contribution so long as its in the context of the UN, so long as these troops are under the operation control of UN commanders, he said.

Russia reversed its previous refusal to send troops to Bosnia on Thursday, after securing Bosnian Serb agreement to comply with the NATO deadline.

Secretary of state Warren Christopher meanwhile dismissed remarks by Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Vitaly Churkin that NATO air strikes would trigger an all-out war.

A Sarajevo report says: A senior UN peacekeeper said here Thursday that there had been no major withdrawal of Serb heavy weaponry from around Sarajevo despite Serb pledges to respect a NATO deadline for all big guns to be removed from around the city by Monday or face air strikes.

The UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) officer, who asked not to be named, told AFP only 15 Serb military trucks were seen Wednesday night leaving a Serb-held barracks on the outskirts of Sarajevo and that no convoys quit the region on Thursday after Bosnian Serb leader

Radovan Karadzic pledged to respect the NATO ultimatum.

His account contrasted with the optimism expressed late Thursday by UNPROFOR spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Bill Aikman who said: "Today, (UN military observers) gave us reports of a very significant withdrawal of Serb forces from the hills around Sarajevo."

"Literally they're moving out in convoys, not in individual vehicles," he told a press conference just hours after Karadzic said he was bowing to pressure from Russia to respect UN and NATO demands that all heavy weaponry be withdrawn from within 20 kilometres (12 miles) of the city.

When questioned today about the UN officer's remarks, Aikman said only that 15 trucks "could be an element of the overall" picture.

He said that providing the press with details of the Serb actions could create "a misleading overall situation".



Italian actress Sophia Loren listens to Mayor of Berlin, Eberhard Diepgen (R) during a reception at Berlin's town hall Feb 18. Loren is in Berlin to attend the international film festival. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Quake hits western Turkey: A moderate quake hit Turkey's western provinces, but no injuries or damage were reported, the Anatolia news agency said on Saturday. AP reports from Manisa, Turkey.

The tremor, measured 3.8 on the Richter scale struck Manisa and Izmir at around 11 pm (2100 GMT) on Friday, it said.

Three aftershocks, forcing the residents to spend the night outside, shook the same area later.

Turkey's Aegean and Mediterranean coastal areas and the entire eastern region sit atop an earthquake-prone belt known as the Anatolian fault.

US Navy chopper crashes into sea: A United States navy helicopter has crashed into the sea, 16 kilometres (10 miles) off the coast of Somalia, a US military spokesman said here yesterday. AFP reports from Mogadishu.

The military spokesman said that all the four crew members on board the helicopter escaped injury in Friday's crash and had since been rescued by a motorboat sent in by the US military and returned to the US aircraft carrier Ichon. US military officials were still investigating the cause of the crash.

Navy destroys 7 LTTE boats: The Sri Lanka navy has destroyed seven Tamil rebel boats off the northern coast, military spokesman said yesterday. Reuter reports from Colombo.

He said the navy fired at the boats on Friday off the rebel-held Jaffna peninsula, where the Tamils are fighting for a separate state.

No rebel casualty estimate was available but each boat usually carries five people. On Wednesday, the navy said it destroyed three boats in the same area.

Zhirinovsky to visit Poland: Russian ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky will visit Poland March 12, national television reported Friday. AFP reports from Warsaw. Zhirinovsky will travel to Poland for the opening of the inaugural congress of the National Self Defence Front, a right-wing party with about 1,000 supporters. The ultra-nationalist deputy will travel as the guest of front leader and Polish businessman Janusz Byczkowski.

Myanmar seizes 412kg drugs: A total of 412 kilograms of narcotics including 19,264 kg of Heroin was seized by the Myanmar authorities in January this year, according to an official drug enforcement bulletin yesterday. Xinhua reports from Yangon.

In the month, legal action was taken against 687 persons in 475 drug-related cases.

High-tech weapons being stolen from US arsenals

NEW YORK, Feb 19: High-tech weapons of war are being stolen routinely from US military arsenals and sold on the streets through the black market, CBS news reported Friday, says Reuter.

The network said that since the Gulf War, the military had lost track of anti-aircraft missiles, plastic explosives, anti-tank rockets, machine guns and tons of other war material.

It said that a national guardsman convicted Friday in Michigan for stealing gun parts was part of a theft ring which operated undetected out of a

state armoury for eight years. CBS said the ring sold parts to a dealer who supplied, among others, the ill-fated branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas. Four federal agents and five branch Davidians were killed last February when agents raided the cult's compound.

The congressional general accounting office had inspected armouries across the United States and found that they routinely failed to keep proper records and maintained insecure computer systems and facilities.

Defence Secretary Charles Kuwaza told state-run Herald newspaper that the request was being studied and that UN finance and logistics would be taken into consideration.

The deployment would make Zimbabwe's forces the biggest from Africa in the 29-nation force in Somalia and the third largest overall after those from Pakistan and India.

Most western troops are preparing to pull out of Somalia by the end of March. The UN operation is being scaled down and peacekeepers from mostly developing countries are replacing western troops who are also taking out their equipment.



Yasushi Akashi (C), Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, talks to the media with a NATO South Commander, Gen. Mike Jeremy Boorda (L) and UNPROFOR Commander in Bosnia, Gen. Jean Cot (R) during their joint press conference February 18 in Zagreb. They briefed the press about possible NATO air strikes in Bosnia-Herzegovina. — AFP photo

UN body blasts Israel for human rights abuse in occupied areas

GENEVA, Feb 19: A UN commission on Friday condemned Israel for violating human rights in the occupied territories, adopting a motion put forward by several Muslim countries despite opposition from Washington and Moscow, reports AFP.

The text approved by the UN commission on human rights said the body "condemns the continued violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel with military force, including Jerusalem."

And it called upon "Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem."

The United States, Russia and Bulgaria objected to the resolution, which also welcomed the September accord on limited Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho signed in Washington by the PLO and Israel.

It added that "the violations of human rights will end through the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Palestinian territories."

Another resolution presented by countries in eastern Europe, calling on Israel to "abstain from installing any settlers in the occupied territories," was also opposed by the United States.

The United States was the sole objector, with 49 member countries present voting in favour and Libya abstaining from the vote without explanation.

A further text "strongly condemning" the annexation of Syria's Golan Heights, captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war, was backed by 25 delegations, with one against and 25 abstaining.

Syrian president Hafez Assad demanded that Israel withdraw from the heights when he met with US President Bill Clinton in Geneva in January.

Crackdown on UAE beggars

ABU DHABI, Feb 19: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has decided to crack down on begging in the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, in a bid to protect the country's image, reports AFP.

Police have stepped up patrols in public places while municipalities are sending inspectors to mosques and other places to arrest beggars, officials said.

"Beggings gives a negative image of UAE society. It also annoys people during Ramadan," said Obaid al-Shamsi, Director of administrative affairs at Dubai Municipality.

But the commission supported the US and Russian sponsored peace initiative launched in Madrid in 1991, as well as Israeli-PLO accord and an Israeli-Jordan agreement on a common agenda, as "An important initial step in achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and urges all parties to implement agreements reached."

Iran and Syria voted against the resolution with abstentions from Sudan and Libya.

Another report says PLO negotiators have rejected an Israeli proposal for family reunification and described it as "an attempt to resettle Palestinian refugees in Arab countries. The PLO news agency Wafa

It quoted Abdul Fatah Hamid, a Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) negotiator in a working group on refugees, as saying that the Israelis at a meeting in Tunis last week suggested that Palestinians in the occupied territories should be reunited with their families in the diaspora.

"This Israeli suggestion for the reunification... is unacceptable because it is incompatible with UN resolutions and international laws and norms," Hamid said.

US rejects Russian call for int'l confere on Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: The United States rejected Friday a call by Russian President Boris Yeltsin for an international conference next week on Bosnia, reports AFP.

A state department spokesman said a ministerial conference takes time to arrange and to have one next week was not practical.

He added however, that Secretary of State Warren Christopher was in favour of a meeting sometime in the future.

The State Department was reacting to a statement by Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in Athens. Kozyrev said a number of countries, including Britain, France, Germany and the United States had been informed of this "initiative by President Boris Yeltsin."

The aim of the conference would be to secure more active participation by the United States in the peace process.

Attack on ANC supporters in Natal: 14 killed

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 18: An attack on African National Congress supporters preparing a voter education programme Saturday killed 14 people in Natal Province, according to state radio, reports AP.

The South African Broadcasting Corp said two others were wounded in the attack on a hut in Creighton, in southern Natal.

Few details were immediately available.

According to the SABC report, a group of election canvassers were sleeping in the hut when it was attacked. It was not clear what weapons were used.

India, Russia renew commitment to build N-plant

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: India and Russia have renewed their commitment to a 1988 agreement on constructing a major nuclear power plant in southern India after talks here this week, Russian representatives said today, reports AFP.

A "working protocol" was signed Friday before the departure for Moscow of Viktor Mikhaylov, the Russian Nuclear Energy Minister, who held four days of talks with Indian officials on the project, they said.

UN asks Zimbabwe to send 1000 more troops to Somalia

HARRARE, Feb 19: Zimbabwe said today the United Nations had asked it to send 1,000 more troops to Somalia to join the 1,000 already serving in a UN force helping to move food aid, reports Reuter.

Defence Secretary Charles Kuwaza told state-run Herald newspaper that the request was being studied and that UN finance and logistics would be taken into consideration.

The deployment would make Zimbabwe's forces the biggest from Africa in the 29-nation force in Somalia and the third largest overall after those from Pakistan and India.

Most western troops are preparing to pull out of Somalia by the end of March. The UN operation is being scaled down and peacekeepers from mostly developing countries are replacing western troops who are also taking out their equipment.

Draft accord for ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh signed

MOSCOW, Feb 19: A draft accord for a total ceasefire in the breakaway enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh was signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and authorities from the enclave itself Friday, Interfax reported, says AFP.

But hopes of a speedy settlement to the six-year war over the enclave were dampened by reports of a fresh offensive by separatist forces, and Turkish warnings that efforts to broker a solution to the conflict would remain stalled while Armenian forces continued to occupy part of Azerbaijan.

The truce accord was reached during a meeting here between Armenian Defence Minister Sergei Sarkisyan, his Azeri counterpart Mamedraff Mamedov and the enclave's representative Bako Saakian, the ministry told the Interfax

agency. Talks between the three sides are being mediated by Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev.

Delegates agreed to fix the date and duration of the truce following consultations with the political leaders of all parties, the agency said.

The accord is the latest in a series of draft ceasefires to end the war in the Armenian-majority enclave in southwestern Azerbaijan which has claimed more than 20,000 lives. All previous truces have been violated.

Cambodian troops kill 6 Khmers

PHNOM PENH, Feb 19: Cambodian troops killed six Khmer Rouge guerrillas who were looking for cattle to steal in a northwestern province, military officials said today, reports Reuter.

The clash occurred on Thursday in the Srey Snam district of Siem Reap Province, when government troops confronted about 60 Khmer Rouge guerrillas.

"Their aim was to enter the district to catch villagers' cattle but unfortunately they met government troops," said Defence Ministry spokesman Brigadier General Nehan Monor.

Ex-lottery winner dies homeless

STRASBOURG, France: A handyman who once won 600,000 francs (dfrs 100,000) in a lottery-style game has died homeless, freezing to death in a freight container, reports AP.

Gilbert Schaeffer, 50, died Monday as the temperature in this eastern city dipped to -5 degrees Celsius (23 F), one of at least three homeless who died in France during a recent cold snap.

Investigators have discovered that Schaeffer had 60,000 francs (dfrs 10,000) in a savings account. He had been homeless for a week after a fight with his girlfriend, with whom he had lived. According to police, Schaeffer won a game called Millionaire in 1992, taking 600,000 francs (dfrs 100,000). A heavy gambler, he had also once won 240,000 francs (dfrs 60,000) in a horse race.

Off the Record

Pregnant fox battered for disturbing CM's sleep

NEW DELHI: Police raided an animal sanctuary in Calcutta and battered a pregnant fox into aborting because the beast's howls were disturbing the Chief Minister's sleep, a newspaper reported today, says AFP.

A police team sent to silence the fox went on the rampage in the sprawling Central Park on Thursday night, uprooting trees and shrubs in their attempt to trace the animal, the Pioneer Daily said.

The fox aborted and collapsed under a hail of baton blows, it said. The baby fox died minutes afterwards. The injured mother was transported by the sanctuary's workers for treatment at the Calcutta zoo.

The fox, one of a pack released into the sanctuary in breeding programme, had woken up West Bengal State Chief Minister Jyoti Basu with its howls.

The Pioneer said word of Basu's disturbed slumber "somehow" reached the police, who justified the raid on the animal park on grounds that they had the right to go any place in search of a "criminal."

Perfume saleswoman fired for bad body odour

TORONTO: A perfume saleswoman says she was "destroyed, ashamed and humiliated" by her firing for allegedly having bad body odour, reports AP.

Sharon Bagnall wept in court Friday as she described her dismissal from Calvin Klein Canada.

Bagnall, 52, worked for about 18 months as a fragrance demonstrator at Calving Klein counters in Toronto department stores. She has filed a 150,000 dollars wrongful dismissal suit against the cosmetics company.

Bagnall said she was told in 1991 that she was being fired because she had ignored warnings about her body odour and disruptive conduct.

Calvin Klein says Bagnall had been warned about disruptive behaviour and a "serious personal hygiene problem" several times.

"I was stunned," Bagnall testified. "I was at the lowest point I'd ever been in my life. I was destroyed."

Bagnall said that if Calvin Klein officials thought she had a hygiene problem, they should have spelled it out more clearly.

Group marriage festivity

JAIPUR, Rajasthan: A unique three-day festivity will be witnessed at the Sawai Man Singh stadium here, when at least a hundred couples tie the nuptial knot on March 12 blessed by hundreds of guests, reports PTI.

The convener of the ceremony, Shiv Shanker Gupta, said such group marriages are organised under the auspices of All India Khandelwal Vaisya Committee and in the last four years, they have performed 100 marriages. He said the boys and girls are introduced to each other a day before the wedding day, providing them an opportunity to choose their mate.

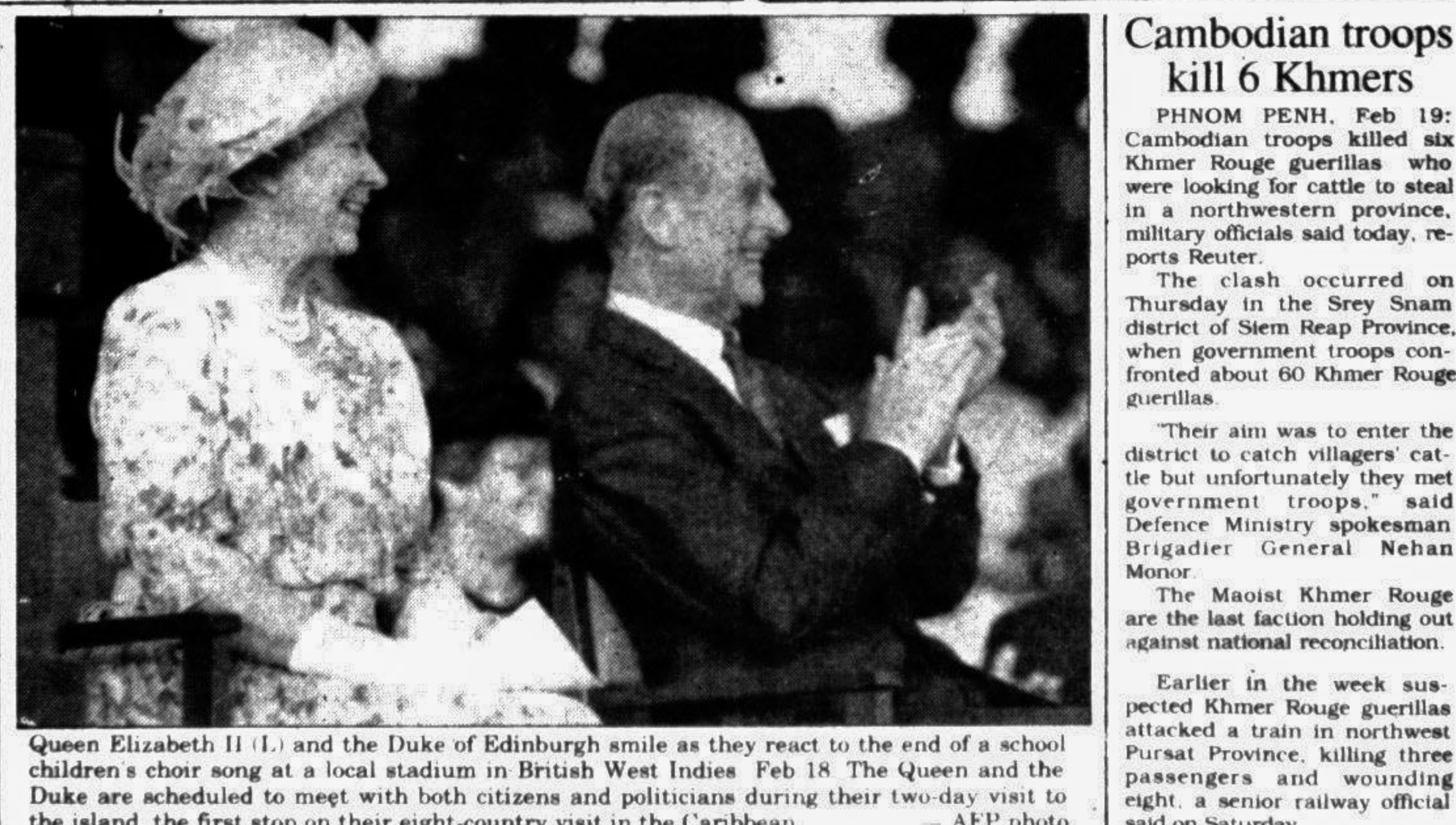
He said the committee has already received 116 entries and expects a thousand more from boys and girls interested in getting married.

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Queen Elizabeth II (L) and the Duke of Edinburgh smile as they react to the end of a school children's choir song at a local stadium in British West Indies Feb 18. The Queen and the Duke are scheduled to meet with both citizens and politicians during their two-day visit to the island, the first stop on their eight-country visit in the Caribbean. — AFP photo