

China urges N-powers not to strike first

GENEVA, Mar 25: China will not be the first to use nuclear weapons against other countries and urges other nuclear powers to do the same, a Chinese representative said here on Thursday, reports Xinhua.

He pointed out, "China has on many occasions strongly appealed to other nuclear powers to undertake similar commitments and to conclude an international convention to this end."

Tension grips Korean peninsula US considering options to counter DPRK's threat

WASHINGTON, Mar 25: The United States is considering other options beyond the deployment of Patriot missiles in South Korea to counter the threat of North Korea's nuclear programme, President Bill Clinton said Thursday, reports AFP.

He said that in order to promote the process of nuclear disarmament and realise the goal of preventing nuclear war, the Chinese government has recently taken further initiatives.

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De Klerk vows to ensure fair polls in Natal

PRETORIA, Mar 25: President Frederick De Klerk on Thursday said he would send military reinforcements to the Zulu stronghold of Natal but, in a veiled warning to Zulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, stopped short of threatening a state of emergency, reports AFP.

Zulu monarch and the Kwazulu Kingdom. A historic first meeting between the two was scheduled for March 18 in Ulundi, the Kwazulu capital, but was postponed by the ANC for security reasons after it was announced that it would be a public affair.

BRRIFFLY

CIS gets UN observer status: The General Assembly decided without a vote Thursday to grant UN observer status to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), linking most of the now-independent republics of the former Soviet Union, Reuter reports from United Nations.

But several countries, including the United States, in welcoming the decision, stressed that this did not imply entrusting the CIS with responsibility for peacekeeping operations, particularly in the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Israeli troops kill 4 in Hebron: Israeli troops firing rockets blew up Arab apartment buildings in Hebron killing at least four Muslim guerrillas during a two-day siege which ended on Wednesday, Israeli security sources said, Reuter reports from Hebron.

Mishap claims 15 in Jakarta: A minibus skidded off a road in east Java and plunged into a deep ravine, killing all 15 people on board, press reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Shooting in Russian missile site: A Russian soldier guarding a nuclear missile site at Barnaul in Siberia shot and killed several fellow guards and then hid in a car near strategic missiles, the Itar-Tass news agency said on Thursday, AFP reports from Moscow.

Mandela cancels campaign rally: African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela canceled several campaign appearances on advice from his doctor after contracting laryngitis, the ANC said Friday, AP reports from Johannesburg.

Synagogue firebombed in Germany: Arsonists firebombed a synagogue in northern Germany early Friday, police said. The attack damaged the synagogue's offices but caused no injuries, AP reports from Luebeck, Germany.

Bodo rebels kidnap tea estate owner: NEW DELHI, Mar 25: Tribal rebels have kidnapped the owner of a tea plantation in the far eastern Indian state of Assam, three weeks after the release of another tea executive abducted by a separate militant group, reports AFP.

Indian troops fired on Muslims in Kashmir without provocation: LONDON, Mar 25: The BBC said Friday it has obtained a confidential Indian government report which says Indian security forces fired without provocation on Muslims in Kashmir in October, killing at least 30, reports AP.

US operation in Somalia ends: MOGADISHU, Mar 25: Major-General Thomas Montgomery, commander of the US operation in Somalia, flew out of Mogadishu today, ending the 15-month US mission to the blighted horn of Africa country, reports Reuter.



Lankam opposition leader and former Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike, 77, addresses an election rally in the southern town of Matara March 21. Her party swept back to power in the southern provincial council March 24 election seen as a trend setter for the December Presidential election. — AFP photo

Israeli army, police on alert to prevent Arab attacks

HEBRON, Occupied West Bank, Mar 25: Israeli army troops poured into the occupied territories and police went to high alert elsewhere Friday as Arabs threatened vengeance attacks during the Passover holiday, Israeli media reported, says AP.

occupied Gaza Strip and West Bank, as well as in Arab east Jerusalem, began observing a three-day general strike Friday to mark a month since the Hebron mosque massacre.

Hebron where a Jewish settler killed 53 Palestinian worshippers on February 25.

Myanmar minorities for semi-autonomous states

BANGKOK, Mar 25: Myanmar's ethnic minorities demanded at a military-organised national convention in Yangon that the country be divided into semi-autonomous states under a central government, Myanmar radio reported today, says Reuter.

Even abroad, Maariv reported, security was being beefed up at Israeli embassies; at offices of the El Al, the national airline; and at synagogues.

"Self-administration by the ethnic nationalities with the supervision of the central government is the most important principle for the country," Kachin representative Swan Thu Naw was quoted as saying at Thursday's meeting.

But rebel sources were pessimistic about the convention's outcome. "It is a scheme planned by SLORC (the military junta) to prolong their power," a Karen source told Reuters.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), Myanmar's ruling military junta, initiated the convention in January 1993 to draft a new constitution and pave the way for democracy. Some 663 delegates attended Thursday's meeting, the radio said.

Even abroad, Maariv reported, security was being beefed up at Israeli embassies; at offices of the El Al, the national airline; and at synagogues.

The newspaper said the attacks were planned for the Passover holiday which begins Saturday night and lasts for eight days. Israelis traditionally spend the spring holiday outdoors and touring the country.

Police commissioner Rafi Peled advised Israelis "who valued their safety" to avoid hot spots.

"I don't advise going to Hebron or (the West Bank town of) Ramallah during the holiday," he said on Israeli radio.

Israel radio said forces along the border were also placed on high alert, and that some troops serving in south Lebanon were transferred to the occupied territories to bolster forces there. All leaves had been cancelled, the daily Ydiot Ahronot said.

Wijetunga defeated in local polls

COLOMBO, Mar 25: President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga suffered a humiliating electoral debacle Friday in southern Sri Lanka and indefinitely extended a curfew in the region as the opposition won a key local council, reports AFP.

The opposition People's Alliance (PA) led by former Premier Sirima Bandaranaike polled 550,512 votes at Thursday's southern provincial council election to win control of local administration.

The alliance won 32 seats in the 55-member administration while the UNP took the balance 23 after polling 443,423 votes in the election conducted under proportional representation.

Wijetunga's UNP lost almost all the small electoral units in the three districts of Galle, Matara and Hambantota. Some 73 per cent of the 1.5 million electorate had turned out to vote.

The election was held only in the southern province but it is seen as an important rehearsal for presidential elections in December.

Liz undergoes hip replacement surgery



LOS ANGELES, Mar 25: Actress Elizabeth Taylor underwent hip replacement surgery as planned and the operation went smoothly, her doctor said Thursday, reports Reuter.

"There were no surgical complications," Doctor John Moreland said in a statement issued the day after surgery.

He said patients who undergo the procedure normally stay in hospital for a weekend recover fully within three to six months.

Off the Record

Women subconsciously control sexual response

LONDON: Women subconsciously control their sexual response to determine who fathers their babies and when, British researchers reported on Thursday, says Reuter.

Biologist Robin Baker and colleagues at Manchester University studied theories that women subconsciously but physically control reproduction by determining whose, and how many, sperm compete for an egg.

They do this by timing their orgasms and by expelling excess sperm, Baker told a conference of the British Psychological Society.

"The female definitely has the upper hand," Baker said in a telephone interview. "She is making the subconscious judgement."

Baker studied information from 35 couples who volunteered for an intimate study, and used data from a poll of more than 3,500 women.

They found that women tended to expel sperm from their partners when they were in a monogamous relationship. Baker said his studies indicated this was because sperm are more likely to inseminate an egg if there are fewer of them in the women's body.

The women were able to control how many sperm remained in their bodies in part by controlling their orgasms.

Snoring can make men fat

LONDON: Snoring can make men fat and impotent, British doctors reported on Thursday, says Reuter.

They said sleep apnoea, a form of snoring that disturbs sleep, reduced secretion of the male hormone testosterone.

Dr Christine Vesselinova-Jenkins of London's Lister Hospital and colleagues studied men suffering from sleep apnoea.

She told a conference at the London clinic that the men's disturbed sleep patterns also seemed to disrupt production of growth hormone, deficiency of which could cause obesity.

"Severe snoring and shortage of dreaming sleep are responsible for erection failures of an organic nature," a statement from the London Clinic said.

Sleep apnoea stops the flow of air at the nose and mouth. The reduced flow of oxygen reduced testosterone secretion, Vesselinova-Jenkins found.

Bodo rebels kidnap tea estate owner

NEW DELHI, Mar 25: Tribal rebels have kidnapped the owner of a tea plantation in the far eastern Indian state of Assam, three weeks after the release of another tea executive abducted by a separate militant group, reports AFP.

Indian troops fired on Muslims in Kashmir without provocation: BBC

LONDON, Mar 25: The BBC said Friday it has obtained a confidential Indian government report which says Indian security forces fired without provocation on Muslims in Kashmir in October, killing at least 30, reports AP.

BBC World Service radio said the report states that a claim by the Indian Border Security Force that its troops fired in self-defence after being fired on themselves is untrue.

The BBC quotes the report as saying there were no gunmen in the crowd, of 3,000 Muslim demonstrators at Bijbehara in the northern state's Kashmir Valley.



Ernesto Zedillo (L) coordinator of the political campaign of Luis Colosio for the Mexican presidency helps carry his casket March 24. Colosio was assassinated at a campaign rally March 23 and Zedillo is considered to be one of the front-runners for the candidacy of president. — AFP photo

US Marines covering withdrawal of the last US servicemen began boarding helicopters and overcraft in the last stages of "operation quickdraw", ending the military operation aimed at protecting delivery of humanitarian supplies but which resulted in heavy combat and deaths of some 30 US troops last year.