

## Nepal to block Tibetans march to Lhasa

KATHMANDU, Feb 11: The Nepalese government is ready to check a planned protest march to Lhasa by Tibetan refugees living in India. Home Ministry spokesman Sri Kant Regmi said today, reports AFP.

His statement followed Nepalese press reports that the Tibetans planned to organise the march through Nepal as part of a protest programme on March 10, the anniversary of the 1959 insurrection against Chinese rule.

Kathmandu regards Tibet as a part of China and would not allow Nepalese soil to be used against any other country, Regmi said.

"The Nepalese government is alert to check any activity that goes against this policy," he said.

Prime Minister Manmohan Adhikari earlier denied that Western countries were playing "political pressure" on his government on the Tibetan issue.

"Even if such pressure comes, we will not succumb to it," Adhikari told AFP. "Our policy does not allow any move

like the liberation of Tibet. We will not allow such things on the Nepalese soil against China because we think Tibet is an autonomous region of China."

The ruling Nepal Communist Party United Marxist and Leninist has sought to improve ties with Beijing which are seen to have soured when the previous Nepali Congress government allowed anti-China demonstrations by Tibetan refugees.

More than 20,000 Tibetan refugees live in Nepal and have emerged as a resourceful community controlling the country's carpet industry, which earns more than 200 million dollars through exports.

The Tibetans have also branched into low-budget hotels, lodges and restaurants, all of them proudly displaying photographs of their revered leader, the Dalai Lama, who fled Tibet in March 1959.

The Nepalese government has said the Tibetans were free to do business in Nepal but has warned them against staging anti-China activities.

## Afghan factions agree to form multiparty council

ISLAMABAD, Feb 11: In a major breakthrough, Afghanistan's warring Islamic factions have agreed to form a multiparty governing council that will meet Feb 20 in the battered Afghan capital of Kabul, the United Nations said Saturday, reports AP.

The council, which will serve as an interim government, offers the best hope of ending the savage civil war that's been raging among 10 Islamic factions since they ousted a communist government in April 1992.

A nationwide cease-fire is to take effect when the council assumes control of the country, said Charlie Santos, a member of the UN mission that has brokered the talks.

However, many obstacles to peace remain. Opposition groups are rocketing Kabul with regularity, and 15 people were killed in attacks Friday, Radio Kabul reported. There's

also been heavy fighting southwest of the city and in northern Afghanistan.

Many details of the UN plan must still be negotiated and the council will not take power when it convenes for the first time on Feb 20, said Santos.

President Burhanuddin Rabbani has agreed to the UN plan, which will require him to hand over power to the council. However, he has not fixed a date for his resignation.

"All sides are asking us to move quickly," said Santos, who was in Islamabad, Pakistan.

The council is to take over the security of Kabul, disarm the warring factions and remove heavy weapons that encircle the city. It's not clear how the body will perform these duties.

The council is expected to have about 25 members. It would include one representative from each of the warring

factions, as well as other prominent Afghans not linked to any of the militias.

"We have been waiting for this for a long time," Masood Khalili, President Rabbani's representative in Islamabad, said of the agreement.

But he said there must be a way to ensure that all parties abide by the agreements. Countless previous peace efforts have failed.

"We want some kind of assurance — what can the UN do against violators?" he said.

The United Nations has not proposed sending any troops to Afghanistan.

Another unresolved question is the role of the Taliban, a recently formed militia that has claimed a series of dramatic military victories in recent weeks.

The Taliban, made up of fundamentalist religious students, scored its biggest victory yet on Friday when it

captured the town of Maidan Shahr, only 30 kilometers (18 miles) southwest of Kabul. The group defeated Hezb-e-Islami, the main opposition group.

The Taliban has not aligned itself with any other faction, and sees the other groups as power-hungry and corrupt. It has vowed to march on Kabul and impose shariah, or Islamic law.

The group has expressed interest in the United Nations peace plan, but has not formally agreed to take part.

If the UN plan succeeds, it would bring peace to Afghanistan for the first time since Soviet troops entered the country in 1979 to prop up a communist government.

The Islamic factions took up arms shortly afterward. The drove out the Soviet troops in 1989, toppled the communists three years later and immediately began battling among themselves.

## Off the Record



Newly crowned Miss USA 95 Chelsi Smith, 21, of Texas, waves to the crowd Friday in South Padre Island, Texas, after winning the beauty contest among 51 delegates. Miss USA 95 will represent the US in the Miss Universe pageant in Windhoek, Namibia, May 12. —AFP photo

## Phoolan to embrace Buddhism

NEW DELHI: Phoolan Devi, the "bandit queen" who spent 11 years in prison after allegedly gunning down 22 men to avenge her rape, is embracing Buddhism, a press report said Saturday, says AFP.

Devi, who is in her early 30s, is to convert to the religion which preaches non-violence at an initiation ceremony Wednesday in the Western Indian city of Nagpur, the Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted a Buddhist monk as saying.

The monk, Dhammaviriyo, told reporters in Nagpur that the ceremony would be staged on a site where 100,000 low-caste Hindus converted to Buddhism in 1956, the news agency said in a brief report.

Devi, who is based in New Delhi, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Devi, a low-caste Hindu, was freed in February last year after spending 11 years in prison for allegedly shooting 22 uppercaste men to death to avenge her gang-rape.

Admired by many of India's 'untouchables' for striking back at oppressors, the former bandit recently announced plans to form a national non-political organisation dedicated to fighting for the rights of women and the poor.

## A magic-cure milk for impotency!

NABLUS, West Bank: A Palestinian shepherd is milking his billy-goat for all its worth, reports Reuter.

Koi Al-Arab, an Arabic weekly, reported today that dozens of Israelis and Arabs are on a waiting list to drink its milk, believing it will cure them of impotency.

Shepherd Mufid Abdel-Ghafer is charging them a cool 33 dollars a glass.

The newspaper said the goat was a male in every respect — the animal has sired 50 kids — except for one teat, which gives just two glasses of milk a day.

## BSF executes 5 Kashmiris

SRINAGAR, Feb 11: Kashmir was 'sense today following the alleged execution of five civilians by Indian border guards incensed by a Muslim militant attack, police and witnesses said, reports AFP.

News of the incident spread as the valley observed a general strike to commemorate the 11th death anniversary of Mohammed Maqbool Bhat, executed leader of the separatist Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF).

Witnesses alleged that paramilitary border guards shot dead five shopkeepers late Friday in the Zaina Kadal area of downtown Srinagar in retaliation for an attack by Muslim militant gunmen that left two troopers dead.

Forty other civilians were injured in the incident, which provoked anti-Indian street protests in Srinagar, summer capital of Kashmir and urban hub of Muslim guerillas, the witnesses said.

## Indonesian govt admits killings in East Timor

JAKARTA, Feb 11: The government acknowledged Saturday that some members of the armed forces were responsible for the killings of six civilians in East Timor last month, reports AP.

Murdiono, minister at the state secretariat, said President Suharto has ordered the armed forces chief, Gen. Feisal Tanjung, to investigate reports, about six East Timorese shot dead by Indonesian troops Jan 12.

"The armed forces chief has reported to the president, and it was said in the report that some members of the armed forces have acted out of procedure," Murdiono said after meeting with Suharto.

## Carter among 102 candidates for Nobel Peace Prize

OSLO, Feb 11: Former US President Jimmy Carter and Russian human rights commissioner Sergei Kovalyov are among the 102 candidates for this year's Nobel Peace Prize, a director of the Nobel Institute indicated Friday.

The nominees comprised 77 individuals and 25 organisations, Director Geir Lundestad told AFP.

He added that he expected numbers increase "due to late incoming letters and the fact that the five members of the Nobel Committee have the right to nominate other candidates."

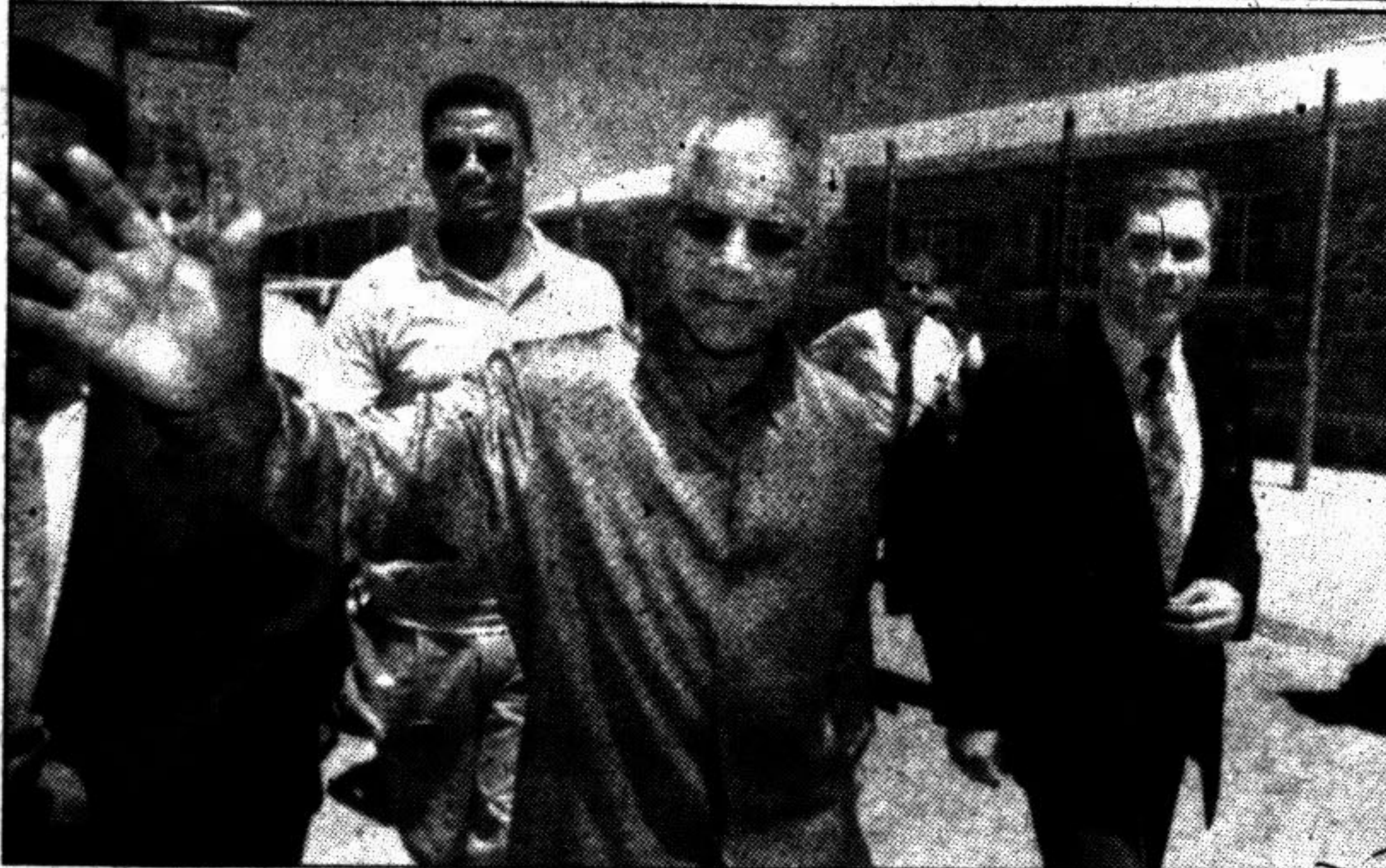
The official closing date for nominations was February 1.

As an international mediator, Carter has played a leading role in the search for long-term solutions to the Korean nuclear crisis and the war in former Yugoslavia.

Kovalyov, a supporter of the ideas and principles of late Andrei Sakharov, who won the peace prize in 1975, is Russian President Boris Yeltsin's human rights advisor, he has been at the forefront of internal criticism against Russia's brutal two-month intervention to crush a three-year separatist government in the breakaway republic of Chechnya.

## BJP leader shot dead in Manipur

IMPHAL, Feb 11: The General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in charge of the north eastern region, Shantimalapatni Modhumangal Sharma, was shot dead by two gunmen at his residence in Tera Bazar area on the outskirts of Imphal town, about four kms west of here, early this morning, reports PTI.



President Nelson Mandela waves Friday as he walks past South Africa's notorious prison on Robben Island off Cape Town where he spent 18 of his 27 years as a prisoner. The day February 10 marked a reunion of former political prisoners on the island. — AFP photo

## US suspends arms sales, aid to Ecuador, Peru

WASHINGTON, Feb 11: The United States has suspended all arms sales, aid and military training for Ecuador and Peru, the state department announced Friday, reports Xinhua.

The move was seen here as sign of frustration, expressed by Washington with the failure to bring an end to the fighting that erupted in late January between the two South American countries over a disputed border area.

State department spokeswoman Christine Shelly said in a statement: "In response to the continuing conflict on the border between Ecuador and Peru, the United States government has suspended deliveries of defence articles,

as well as new international military education and training.

She said that the state department had also suspended all previously issued licenses and approvals authorising the export or other transfer of defence articles or defence services to Peru and Ecuador.

In addition, Shelly said that it was also US government policy to deny all applications for licenses and other approvals to export or otherwise transfer defence articles or services to the two countries.

Exceptions to this policy might be made for certain items for banking and financial institutions, she indicated.

Washington understood, she

added, that Argentina, Brazil and Chile were taking similar measures. The three countries and the United States are guarantors of a 1942 accord signed in Rio De Janeiro and they have been attempting to negotiate an end to the Ecuador-Peru border conflict.

US officials said today's move taken by Washington was largely symbolic and its financial impact was limited.

"We are doing everything we can to push them towards accepting the proposal," a US official was quoted as saying. "We thought this would be a helpful step in convincing these nations to accept the proposal the guarantors have offered for a peaceful solution."



Muslim Palestinians attend the Ramadan noon prayers on Friday at Jerusalem's Old City Mosques compound, the third holy Islamic site. Some 7,500 people attended the prayers. — AFP

## Dudayev directing fighters from bunker outside Grozny

MOSCOW, Feb 11: Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev is directing his independence fighters from a bunker two or three kilometres (around a mile) outside the capital Grozny, his spokesman Movladi Udugov was quoted as saying today by a Moscow news agency, reports AFP.

He added that Dudayev had sent a telegram Friday to the heads of the Commonwealth of Independent States meeting in Alma-Ata conveying his scorn to those who have allowed the aggression against the Chechen republic.

According to Udugov, Russian warplanes and artillery on Friday bombed Grozny and

around 15 other districts, including Ajdy, a southern suburb of the capital, Gudermes, 40 kilometres (25 miles) east of Grozny and villages in the mountains in the south of the breakaway Caucasus republic.

Udugov said between 12,000 and 20,000 Russian soldiers had been killed in the conflict, against only 800 in the ranks of the independence fighters, and at least 40,000 civilians.

The Russians have said they have lost just over 1,000 men and killed more than 6,000 Chechen fighters since Moscow sent in its troops on December 11 to crush the tiny, mainly Muslim, republic's

three-year bid to secede from Russia.

Earlier, Chechen leaders meeting under President Dzhokhar Dudayev have vowed to pursue "the armed struggle" against Russian troops unless Moscow agrees to negotiate with them.

The so-called Congress of Chechen People, meeting at an unspecified site and date, pledged to continue resistance to the Russian intervention "if Russian authorities again decide to ignore Chechnya's offer to halt military activities and open negotiations," said Ingush presidential advisor Poytir Kosov.

## BRIEFLY

**Russia will sell subs to China:** Russia is to sell China several diesel powered submarines, the first of which has already been built, according to a spokesman for the Russian navy quoted Friday by the Interfax news agency, AFP reports from Moscow.

The spokesman, who was not identified by the agency, accused the United States of "getting all worked up" about the deal.

**Abu Nidal's hit man arrested:** A man believed to be the top assassin for Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal has been arrested in this southern port city, security sources said Saturday, AP reports from Lebanon.

The man was identified as Mahmoud Khaled Eintour, alias Abu Ali Majed, 48, a Palestinian with a Jordanian passport. The sources said he headed the assassination branch of Abu Nidal's Fatah Revolutionary Council faction.

**Hurd-Kozyrev talks Tuesday:** British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev are to hold talks in Sweden Tuesday, the foreign office said on Friday, AFP reports from London.

A Foreign Office spokesman said the two, who will both be in Stockholm on visits next week, would discuss the situation in Bosnia and in the breakaway Russian republic of Chechnya.

**Gunmen kill 2 Filipino soldiers:** Muslim gunmen ambushed a military convoy escorting an engineering team outside this southern capital, killing two soldiers and wounding 20 others, police said today, AFP reports from Philippines.

Police superintendent Joseph Descalla said the attack happened Friday in a mountain village near here and came within days after Muslim gunmen freed two employees of a government irrigation project they had held hostage for four months.

**Egypt rejects US report on HR:** Egypt rejected Friday a US report on human rights abuses in its territory, saying it was based on incorrect information from "dubious" sources, AFP reports from Cairo.

Abdel El Saffi, Deputy Foreign Minister for International Relations said the report released last week lacked credible information and "vaguely mentioned cases of torture" without providing details.

**Army officer killed in Chiapas:** A senior officer was killed and 10 other troops wounded Friday in a rebel attack as army units deployed in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas with orders to arrest rebel leaders, the official news agency Notimex said, AFP reports from Mexico City.

Notimex, citing military sources, said the attack took place in the community of Nuevo Momon near Las Margaritas as federal army forces were moving into areas controlled by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN).

**Rebels kidnap aid workers in Sudan:** Rebel gunmen on Friday were holding five foreign aid workers kidnapped in upper Nile province of southern Sudan but had released six others, U N officials said, Reuter reports from Nairobi.

The U N Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) said three foreign aid workers for the U N Children's Fund (UNICEF) and one each for Swiss disaster relief and Medecins Du Monde (MDM) were still held hostage by southern rebel Commander Gordon Kong Bangpin.

**India has started to design radar:** India has started to design and develop a sophisticated radar, the Central Acquisition Radar (Car), which is designed to guide all missiles, besides tracking targets with pinpoint accuracy, Xinhua reports from New Delhi.

The radar is an upgraded version of the multifunction phased array radar which is undergoing user trials now.

**7 die in Ukrainian plane collision:**

A new model Antonov aircraft crashed after a test flight collision with another plane monitoring the flight, killing all seven people aboard, a company spokesman said Saturday, AP reports from Kiev.

The An-70 experimental cargo plane crashed Friday after it came into a "scraping" contact with an An-72 monitoring the test, said Victor Bolgak, a spokesman for the Antonov Aviation Consulting Bureau.

He said the plane went down after its control mechanisms were knocked out in the collision. Five crew members and two test observers were killed in the crash.

**Road mishap claims 9 in Haryana:** At least nine persons were killed and ten others injured, five of them seriously, when a van they were travelling in collided head-on with a Haryana roadways bus near village Smapala on the Hisar-Delhi national highway last night, according to information received yesterday, PTI reports from Hisar, Haryana.

**Rutskoi lashes out at Yeltsin:** Hard-line opposition leader Alexander Rutskoi lamented the state of the Russian army on Friday and blasted President Boris Yeltsin and military decision in the Chechen war, AP reports from Moscow.

"We are seeing the destruction of the Russian army," said the former Vice President, a Soviet major general and a veteran of the Afghan war. "If a state cannot defend itself, it is not a state."

**Sumatra road mishap takes 11:** At least 11 people were killed and several others injured when a truck rammied into a minibus on a highway in north Sumatra province, Antara news agency said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Antara quoted a north Sumatra police official as saying that both the truck and the minibus were speeding before the head-on collision some 200 kilometres (124 miles) south of north Sumatra's Medan city on Friday.