

BRIEFLY



US Senator Phil Gramm waves on Friday to the crowd gathered at Texas A & M University to hear his announcement that he will run for president of the US. With Gramm are his wife Wendy (2nd L) and his sons Marshall (L) and Jeffery (R). — AFP photo

DPRK defence minister dies: North Korea's Defence Minister O Jin-U died early on Saturday of cancer at the age of 78, the official Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) reported. Reuter says from Tokyo.

KCNA, monitored in Tokyo, said that O — a Marshal of the Korean People's Army and the number two man in North Korea's ruling hierarchy — died at 2.30 a.m local time after a long illness from cancer.

US sells missiles to South Korea: The Clinton administration said on Friday that the United States has sold 112 million dollars in military missiles to South Korea for potential use against enemy ships and radar sites. Reuter reports from Washington.

The package includes 136 AGM-88B High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles (HARM), at a cost of 64 million dollars.

Blast kills 2 extremists in Egypt: Two Islamic fundamentalists were killed on Friday in upper Egypt when a bomb they were carrying exploded, police said. AFP reports from Minya, Egypt.

The blast happened as the two men were hiding in fields near the village of Kom al-Rahab near Samalut, 225 kilometers (135 miles) south of Cairo, police said.

Gaddafi warns NATO: Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi on Friday warned the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation against spreading to North Africa, calling on Libyans to fight such a plan until death. AFP reports from Tripoli.

His comment came as NATO's Secretary General Willy Claes on Friday began a dialogue with the ambassadors of five Mediterranean and North African countries.

2 BSF officials killed in Srinagar: Two Border Security Force officials including a deputy commandant were killed in a militant attack on the outskirts of Srinagar Friday evening. PTI reports from Srinagar.

An official spokesman said a group of heavily armed militants opened fire and hurled grenades at a raiding party at Buchpora on the outskirts of Srinagar in evening. The security forces returned the fire and in the ensuing encounter a deputy commandant and a head constable were killed.

Quake jolts 2 Japanese islands: A minor earthquake measuring 3.8 on the Richter scale jolted Kozu and Miyake islands in central Japan on Saturday the meteorological agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

There were no reports of injuries or property damages from the quake, police said.

US, Canada sign aviation accord: The United States and Canada signed a sweeping "open skies" agreement on Friday that will permit free air travel between the two countries. Reuter reports from Ottawa.

US Transportation Secretary Federico Pena and Canadian Transportation Minister Douglas Young signed the bilateral aviation agreement during President Bill Clinton's state visit to Canada.

Students stone minister in Nepal: In two separate attacks, student activists threw stones at a senior cabinet minister and a legislator, slightly injuring the lawmaker. AP reports from Kathmandu.

Both may have been the result of a rivalry between student groups allied with Nepal's new communist government and the centrist Nepali Congress Party that it defeated last year.

Attack on bust of Stalin, one held: A teacher was arrested after attacking a bust of Josef Stalin that marks the grave of the former Soviet dictator on Red Square, official said Friday. AP reports from Moscow.

The teacher, from the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don, approached the memorial on Thursday after walking past the graves of other Soviet leaders and heroes along the Kremlin wall.

Shanghai sets up largest library: Shanghai, China's largest industrial centre, is setting up a 500 million yuan library covering 80,000 sq metre the largest of its kind in Asia. Xinhua reports from Beijing.

The main building of the library consists of three parts, the tallest part measuring 106 metres, or 24 storied, with construction scheduled for completion by the end of this month.

3 CRPF men killed in road mishap: At least three Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed and four others seriously injured in a road accident in Imphal, official sources said. PTI reports from Imphal.

The three CRPF personnel were killed on the spot and the other four seriously injured last night at about 2030 hours at Uripok Yambem Lekai in Imphal.

US, ROK won't hold joint military exercise this yr

SEOUL, Feb 25: The United States and South Korea announced Saturday they will not hold their annual "Team Spirit" joint military exercises this year to encourage North Korea to abide by a nuclear deal, reports AP.

But the two allies said they will continue other minor joint exercises as readiness against military threats from North Korea.

The fate of "Team Spirit", usually held from March to mid-April, has been controversial. Washington and Seoul have tried to use it as leverage in pressuring North Korea to stay within an October 21 nuclear accord.

Under the deal with Washington, North Korea is to receive two light-water nuclear reactors plus substitute oil for power generation and im-

proved relations with Washington. In return, it must halt its suspected nuclear weapons programme.

The US and South Korea have repeatedly warned they could revive "Team Spirit", skipped last year, if the communist North fails to abide to the deal.

North Korea countered by threatening to pull out of the accord if the exercises were held.

South Korea's Defence Ministry said the "Team Spirit" decision is designed to encourage North Korea to faithfully fulfill its obligations under the deal.

With such expectations, the two sides (Seoul and Washington) have agreed not to hold the Team Spirit exercise slated for March this

year", ministry spokesman Kim Young-chul said.

The US military command in Seoul made a similar announcement but said it will continue training its 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea.

"The cancellation of Team Spirit 1995 in recognition of the reduced tensions in no way reduces the importance of our staying trained and ready," the command said in a statement.

"We will do so using all of the resources, facilities, simulations and exercises available to us."

US Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord also said before leaving Seoul after three days of talks that other exercises will continue as long as North Korea is a danger.

The fact remains that conventional threats from North

Korea remain as vivid as ever," he said. "That's why we are maintaining our forces not only in Korea but also throughout the Asia-Pacific region."

Past "Team Spirit" exercises, an annual event since 1976, were held with about 200,000 US and South Korean troops mobilized.

The nuclear deal has hit other snags as North Korea continues to reject receiving reactors from its southern capitalist rival for technical and political reasons.

The United States maintains there is no alternative because South Korea is the only country that is willing to pay most of the estimated 4 billion dollar cost.

The North also is rejecting reopening dialogue with the South.

Asia to become world's biggest arms importer

WASHINGTON, Feb 25: Asia will become the world's biggest importer of arms by the end of this decade, a Pentagon study predicts, reports PTI.

Over the next six years, it says, East Asia will account for 30 per cent of the global demand for arms, with India and Pakistan buying an additional five per cent.

The US is the world's largest arms exporter, accounting for 53 per cent of the global market. The Pentagon expects that the US will probably hold that position for the foreseeable future.

Taiwan is expected to be Asia's single largest buyer in the coming years. The Pentagon predicts it will buy another 16.5 billion dollar worth of defence equipment in this decade. Japan is expected to buy about 14 billion dollars worth in the same period and South Korea about 12 billion-dollar worth. In total, Asian countries are expected to buy 76 billion to 87.1 billion dollar worth of arms from 1994 through 2000.

Nepal won't allow anti-China activities

KATHMANDU, Feb 25: Nepal will not allow any anti-China political activities to be conducted on its territory. Khadga Prasad Oli, Nepal's Minister of Home Affairs, said Friday, reports Xinhua.

He made the remark in an interview with Xinhua regarding recent reports that followers of the Dalai Lama, who resides in India, are planning to organise a so-called peace march via Nepalese territories to Lhasa, in the Tibetan autonomous region of China.

Oli emphasised that Nepal and China traditionally enjoy friendly relations and that Nepal regards Tibet as an indivisible part of the People's Republic of China.

Nepal will continue to adhere to its policy of not allowing its territories to be used against any other country, he added.

UNITA not serious about peace deal, says UN observer

UIGE, Angola, Feb 25: The United Nations' chief military observer to Angola said on Friday the rebel UNITA movement was not serious about a peace agreement signed last November to end Africa's longest war, reports Reuter.

UNITA is unable to show me that they have adhered to the 15 km (nine miles) troop demobilisation (zone) agreed to earlier this month by their own generals," Nigerian General Chris Garuba said in a visit to Uige in northern Angola.



US First Lady Hillary Clinton skates on the Rideau Canal on Friday with local school children during her visit with US President Bill Clinton to Ottawa. The First Lady earlier visited a children's hospital. — AFP photo

Russian troops prepare to move on towns still in hands of Chechens

MOSCOW, Feb 25: Russian forces in Chechnya are preparing to advance on towns still in the hands of rebel fighters in an effort to widen their control over the small separatist region, reports Reuter.

Moscow's Ostankino television, quoting military officials, said on Friday the Russians were planning to move on Chechnya's second major city, Gudermes.

The city lies to the east of the regional capital Grozny, which Russian forces captured earlier this month after weeks of bloody fighting.

Independent NTV television said Russian forces were also trying to expand the area

they control along a key road through Chechnya linking Rostov in southern Russia and the Azerbaijan capital Baku.

Russian forces pounded Chechen positions on the outskirts of Grozny on Friday using mortars, howitzers and multiple-barrelled rocket launchers to block rebel routes into the capital.

"The Russians are shelling places closer to Grozny now, trying to keep our fighters getting in... our turn will come later," said Aslambek Ismailov, a Chechen commander in Argun, east of Grozny.

Russia's government press service said the situation in Chechnya remained tense and

Moscow's forces were under permanent attack by rebels.

Movladi Udugov, head of the Chechen Information Service, told Interfax news agency that the rebels attacked a Russian tank column on Thursday night and destroyed three tanks. There was no confirmation from the Russian side.

Russian forces completed their encirclement of Grozny on Tuesday more than two months after being sent in to crush Chechnya's bid for independence.

Fighting has spread to towns and villages in outlying areas, from which the rebels are infiltrating snipers and commando units into Grozny.



Some Iraqi worshippers are gathered at a Baghdad square on Friday to pray for an end to UN embargo imposed four and a half years ago. Iraqi government officials also attended the prayer session of 25,000 in the capital. — AFP photo

Sabotage campaign feared Chinese security forces in Tibet on red alert

BEIJING, Feb 25: Chinese security forces in Tibet have been placed on red alert amid fears of a sabotage campaign by separatists to mark the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Tibet autonomous region, a human rights group said today, reports AP.

The Washington-based International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) cited a highly classified Chinese government document as saying separatists in the region were being armed by exiled Tibetan groups, ahead of official celebrations for the September anniversary.

A copy of the document provided by ICT said the clique led by Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, had spent a huge amount of US dollars to purchase arms and ammunition to conduct armed harassment.

The document written by the region's party secretary for

political and legal affairs Zi Ceng, called on party and security organs to strengthen covert action and develop a strict surveillance network on key persons, particularly key persons coming from abroad.

It also identified Nepal as the site where the Dalai clique was allegedly recruiting new refugees and sending them to India to receive spy training.

In recent months, the official Chinese media has repeatedly referred to threats of violence in Tibet, always linking them to Tibetan exiles.

The document specifically mentioned a clandestine organisation in eastern Tibet known as the Chusud Gangdruk, which it said was being equipped with arms and ammunition to conduct armed harassment in border areas.

The Dalai Lama has always rejected the use of violence against Chinese rule in Tibet.

NATO opens security talks with ME, N African states

BRUSSELS, Feb 25: NATO, stressing it was not embarking on a "crusade against Islam", cautiously opened a controversial security dialogue with five Middle East and North African states on Friday, reports Reuter.

Hard-pressed NATO Secretary General Willy Claes, his credibility threatened by a bribery scandal gripping Belgian politics, held separate meetings with representatives from Morocco, Israel, Egypt, Mauritania and Tunisia.

NATO sources stressed the low-key nature of the opening round of talks which they said focused on ways to explore the development of areas of mutual concern.

"Claes wanted to get an idea of where we go from here, neither US nor NATO went into any details. Contents of the talks will be dealt with over the next few weeks," an Israeli diplomat said.

NATO sources said the same formula was followed with the other states invited to NATO's high-security Brussels complex.

Alliance planners, expressing concern over extremism and weapons proliferation, say they want to extend security and stability on NATO's southern flank. The move has been strongly pushed by southern members Portugal, Spain and France.

But the initiative has brought howls of protest from Middle East countries not included in the process and led

to sharp criticism of Claes by member states who accuse him of clumsily misrepresenting the matter as a drive against Islamic extremism.

In remarks clearly timed to coincide with the start of the talks, Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi said the dialogue was linked to plans for joint naval exercises with Israel and poses a potential threat to Libya's security.

Christopher to go ahead with ME, Gulf tour

WASHINGTON, Feb 25: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will go ahead with a tour of the Middle East and Gulf next month despite a stomach ulcer that has landed him in hospital, the State Department said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Department spokeswoman, Christine Shelly said exact dates for the tour had not been fixed but Christopher was expected to leave Washington on March 7 or 8.

Christopher was diagnosed on Thursday during a visit to Canada as having a small bleeding stomach ulcer. He returned to Washington on Friday afternoon and checked into a hospital for a stay expected to last one or two days, officials said.

Shelly did not specify which Middle East countries Christopher would visit.

Off the Record

Trial of molesters on TV

SINGAPORE: Singapore's state-run television will soon be broadcasting trials of men charged with molesting women in a bid to shame them and to deter others, reports AP.

Television and still cameras are at present banned from court rooms, but Chief Justice Yong Pung How gave special permission to televise cases where the accused has pleaded guilty to molestation, Television Corporation of Singapore reported Saturday.

The approval, requested by the police, was given as Yong "noted with concern the rising trend of such cases," the television station reported.

In current efforts to embarrass the culprits, Singapore's newspapers publish the photograph of convicted molesters and describe graphically their actions, usually groping women in lifts or in crowded buses.

Such offenses are categorised here as "outraging the modesty" of women and offenders are fined, jailed and caned, a punishment that is prescribed for a wide range of crimes including vandalism.

Yong was quoted as saying that other types of offenses could also be covered on camera if that helps reduce their incidence. The television report did not say when the courtroom broadcasts would begin.

Singapore credits its harsh laws with producing one of the lowest crime rates in Asia. According to the latest statistics, the crime rate in 1993 was 162 per 100,000 people, compared with 434 in Hong Kong. The rate has decreased progressively in Singapore from 230 in 1990.

Police recorded 427 molesting cases in 1993, including two committed by women. The figure in 1992 was 382, and 360 in 1991. About one-fourth of them are committed by habitual offenders.

Man executed for selling obscene books

BEIJING: A man who produced and sold tens of thousands of copies of books deemed pornographic by the Chinese government has been executed, and an accomplice was given a suspended death sentence, official reports said Saturday, reports AP.

Gu Jieshu, 30, was executed Friday after the Supreme People's Court rejected his appeal. Executions in China are by a bullet to the back of the head.

Zhang Jun, also 30, was sentenced to death with a two-year suspension, which means the sentence can be commuted to life imprisonment if he shows good behaviour in the two years.

Lankan military says

LTTE abducting youths in recruitment drive

COLOMBO, Feb 25: Suspected Tamil rebels abducted a youth in eastern Sri Lanka, raising concerns that guerrillas were using the truce to kidnap young men and force them to join the fight against government troops, the military said Saturday, reports AP.

"At least 60 to 70 abductions have been reported in eastern Sri Lanka since the truce began," said Brigadier Nihal Jayakody, the military's spokesman.

Many more young men may have been forcibly taken by the rebels to their underground camps since the truce began eight weeks back, but the disappearances have not been reported to the military, Jayakody said. Eastern Sri Lanka is controlled by the mili-

tary but the rebels operate from jungle bases in the area.

The latest abduction occurred in Trukovill village, in Batticaloa district on Thursday.

When President Chandrika Kumaratunga's officials negotiated a truce so that they could resume peace talks, the military had warned that the ceasefire may be used by the rebels to regroup and strengthen their forces.

The have repeatedly accused the rebels of extorting money from civilians and stockpiling large quantities of food and other essential items.

The ceasefire began Jan 8, and has held despite accusations of minor violations on both sides.

Lankan film industry collapsing

COLOMBO, Feb 25: Sri Lanka's film industry appears to be collapsing under strict government censorship and an invasion by Western movies and TV shows filled with sex and violence, reports AP.

The nation's film industry once produced a minimum of 35 movies annually. But last year only five were made, and this year only two are known to be in production.

At the same time, cinema admission has dropped from 74 million people in 1978 to 29 million in 1993, and the number of movie theaters has declined from 360 to about 260.

All this has left the 48-year-old Sri Lankan film industry as the big loser. "The industry has collapsed," D B Nihalasingha, a renowned film director, said in an interview.

Sri Lankan films face strict censorship rules enforced by

the government, so few directors try to make sexy movies.

Once films are cleared by the censors, they are distributed to cinemas by the powerful state-owned Film Corp, which doesn't give theatres a choice of which Sri-Lankan movie they will receive.

Currently, the corporation is holding 106 censor-approved movies, some dating back to August 1992, because there is a shortage of cinemas to release them to.

"Naturally, no director can afford to produce movies if he has to wait more than three years for them to be screened," admitted Sumith Amerasinghe, chairman of the Film Corp.

The decline in movie making is leaving many actors and film crews jobless in an industry that once employed 20,000 people.

In 1977, the government

relaxed restrictions on Western movies, and some cinemas are attracting large crowds by screening cheap, X-rated films received from Hong Kong distributors, or a few well-known Hollywood films such as "Jurassic Park."

But Sri Lankans also have access to the West through television, which first appeared in Sri Lanka in 1979. It was followed by black market Hollywood videotapes that allow people to avoid the censors by watching sexy and violent movies at home.

Last year, a private TV station began telecasting some of Star TV's channels, showing the latest Hollywood movies.

This month, the Film Corp. ordered television stations to telecast only for movies a month. But two of the country's privately owned TV stations are ignoring the order.

Sri Lankan moviegoers

seem to want films similar to ones produced in the West, but native film makers are still relying on simple, clean-cut adventures that will clear the censors.

Television companies find they pay far less to rent Western-made movies than to make their own 30-minute TV series, and the movies also tend to generate more advertising revenue.

As profits have declined over the years in movie houses showing Sri Lankan films, many owners have refused to repair them.

This week, the Film Corp. threatened to close rundown cinemas that aren't repaired within three months.

But the owners responded by threatening to close the theatres unless the government abolishes the Film Corp, removes a tax on movies, and lifts restrictions on film imports.