

Retd US army officers to train Bosnian govt troops

NEW YORK, Jan 15: Retired US Army officers are to train Bosnian government troops to bring them up to speed with Bosnian Serb forces by the time NATO pulls out its peacekeeping troops, the New York Times said today, reports AFP.

Quoting unidentified US government officials, the newspaper said the training programme would start within the next two months.

Officials of the Muslim-Croat federation, which controls nearly half of Bosnia, agreed last week on a US plan to hire retired US Army officers as instructors, the newspaper said. No current US Army officers will be involved.

The Bosnian soldiers will be trained in Bosnia and perhaps in a NATO country such as Turkey, according to Pentagon officials quoted by the newspaper.

The Dayton peace accords, signed in Paris on December 14, stipulate a 90-day embargo on the dispatch of all military equipment to the various parties in the Bosnian conflict, and a 180-day embargo for heavy arms.

Most of the bill for the training programme — estimated at between 100 million and 400 million dollars by a senior Pentagon official — will be picked up by Islamic nations.

Commenting on concerns that such a programme might raise among European nations, US Defence Secretary William Perry told the New York Times on Thursday: "I think they (Europeans) understand at this stage we don't want an arms race, and we will work this in the context of an arms control agreement."

Bid to curb illegal immigration Mexico slams US plan to beef up border security

MEXICO CITY, Jan 15: Mexican leaders on Sunday criticised US plans to increase border enforcement against illegal immigration from Mexico, calling them unneighbourly, reports AP.

Relations between the two countries could deteriorate as a result of the US initiative, said Antonio Garcia Sanchez, the government human rights official in Baja California state.

You cannot talk about being good neighbours when a neighbouring country and its supposed commercial partner adopts policies that have nothing to do with reality and only create conflicts," the official Notimex news agency quoted Garcia Sanchez as saying.

The United States said it will move more border agents and modern equipment to Arizona and California beginning on Tuesday. The effort is intended to prevent an expected surge of illegal immigrants that stems from normal seasonal increases and difficult economic times in Mexico.

In the longer term, it is part of a broad plan to control illegal immigration and smuggling, Attorney General Janet Reno and Immigration Commissioner Doris Meissner said on Friday.

The Mexican government expressed serious concern late Friday about reports the United States may include military forces in patrolling the border.

Mexico's Department of Foreign Relations said such a move "does not solve the complex phenomenon of migration, but contributes to worsening relations between border communities."

In Friday's statement, Meissner cautioned against reading too much into increased coordination with the US armed forces.

"The military has been on the Southwest border since 1991," she said. The number of military will be no greater than the current strength of 200 to 300, including National Guard personnel.

She added that the Clinton administration was determined "to restore the rule of law to the border after years of neglect."



A soldier guard at a crossroad going to the village of Pervomaysk in the southern Russia's Republic of Dagestan as civilians stand to demonstrate against the presence of the Russian troops in the Caucasus on Sunday. A group of Chechen fighters are still holding in this village some 160 hostages after the assault on a hospital of the region January 9.

China plans underground nuclear test on Feb 19

HONG KONG, Jan 15: China is planning an underground nuclear test next month, a Hong Kong newspaper said on Monday, quoting Japanese media reports, says Reuter.

The Jiji Press news agency and Tokyo Shimbun newspaper were quoted by the Hong Kong Economic Journal as saying China would carry out the test on February 19.

A site in Xinjiang in northwestern China was ready for the test, the report said.

China usually carries out tests between May and June, and from September to October because of weather conditions.

The report said the coming test had to be timed in February despite unsuitable weather, partly because Beijing wanted it done before the conclusion of a global nuclear test ban treaty later this year.

The paper said the timing could also be a warning against moves for Taiwan's independence in the island's presidential election in March.

Last year, Beijing carried out nuclear tests in May and August.

AP adds, China is willing to stop its military intimidation of Taiwan during the island's presidential election campaign, conditional on President Lee Teng-hui "behaving himself," a Hong Kong newspaper said Monday.

The Hongkong Standard quoted a source in the Chinese army as saying: "If there were signs of the Taiwan authorities returning to the 'one-China' principle, and they refrained from challenging us, the chances of a large-scale, highly publicised war game would be slim."

China has unnerved Taiwan with a series of exercises and missile tests following President Lee's visit last June to the United States. China claims Taiwan as a renegade province and accuses Lee of trying to make it a sovereign state.

Lee is running for a new term in the March 23 presidential election, Taiwan's first by universal suffrage.

China had been widely expected to mount another exercise close to the election, and the front-page report in the English-language daily quoted the source as saying Chinese troops were on high alert and could be mobilised at once.

The final decision, however, has yet to be made by the central leadership," the source was quoted as saying.

Beijing would consider political and economic factors as well as its ties with the United States before taking any action, the source was quoted as saying. Meanwhile, China plans to provide better protection of human rights by setting limits on police detentions and making other improvements in the legal system, officials of government research institutes said Monday.

The revisions are under discussion by the standing committee of China's national legislature and may be enacted by August, the officials said.

West Bengal bans Samantha Fox

NEW DELHI, Jan 15: The communist government in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal today banned the British singer Samantha Fox from performing in the state, the Press Trust of India reported, says AFP.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has asked the organisers, the Central Exercise Athletic Club, not to invite Fox for its annual function saying that her performances "lacked dignity."

The news agency quoted Home Secretary Manish Gupta as saying that the government will not allow Fox to perform at the function, which was scheduled to be held on January 20.

The CPI(M), however, said the purpose of the function was laudable since a part of the proceeds were to be donated to the chief minister's relief fund for thalassemia patients in various hospitals.

The organisers of the function said that they have been planning "over a long period of time, and confirmation from Bollywood artistes were received. It is hard to say no to Fox at this stage."

Fox had performed in Bombay last year.

Myanmar will stick to 'one China' policy

YANGON, Jan 15: Myanmar will stick to its policy of supporting 'One China' a joint Myanmar China communiqué said.

The Myanmar side reiterated once again that Myanmar would firmly follow the 'One China' policy and recognise Taiwan as an inalienable part of China, said the statement, obtained by Reuters on Monday and issued at the end of a week-long visit to China by Burmese Prime Minister General Than Shwe.

"Myanmar will not establish official ties with Taiwan," the communiqué said. "The Chinese side appreciated Myanmar's position as thus states."

Myanmar is one of China's southern neighbours and a close ally in the region.

Then Shwe, who is also the leader of Myanmar's ruling state Law and Order Restoration Council, led a 52-member delegation to China from January 7-13.

US HR activist plans to return to China

HONG KONG, Jan 15: American Harry Wu, who risked imprisonment in China to expose human rights abuses, said on Sunday that he plans to return to the Chinese mainland someday, reports AP.

Wu, who was expelled from China last August after being convicted of spying, arrived in Hong Kong on Friday for what he said was a trip to shop and visit friends.

The human rights activist said he plans to return to China someday because that is his native country. He said the Chinese government should not stop him.

Wu spent 19 years in Chinese labour camps before migrating to the United States in 1985.

disputed city. He accused Ashrawi of staging a publicity stunt.

Sunday's incidents followed complaints supported by Israeli human rights groups and international observers that Israel is impeding the already short three-week Palestinian campaign by restricting candidate travel.

In addition to being stopped for displaying posters, Palestinian campaign workers and election officials from the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been blocked from travelling to Jerusalem or elsewhere in Israel without special permits.

Ashrawi said soldiers stopped her at a checkpoint and when she refused to move her car, Israeli troops tried to arrest her driver and bodyguard. A scuffle followed when they resisted.

Dror said the rules were designed to avoid confrontations with Israeli-nationalists, who oppose any symbol of Palestinian autonomy in the

88-member autonomy council to be chosen next Saturday to govern areas turned over to the Palestinians from Israel.

Seven people will be elected from east Jerusalem, where 150,000 Palestinians live. Palestinians want east Jerusalem — captured by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Mideast war as the capital of a future Palestinian state. Israel insists the entire, undivided city will be its capital forever.

Shlomo Dror, a spokesman for the Israeli army, said Israel and Yasser Arafat's self-rule government had agreed on rules that banned mobile displays such as cars bedecked with banners or flags.

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Troops block PLO candidates from entering Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, Jan 15: Israeli troops blocked two Palestinian candidates from entering Jerusalem in cars plastered with campaign posters Sunday and detained two Palestinians after a scuffle, reports AP.

Hanan Ashrawi, who gained prominence as spokeswoman for PLO leader Yasser Arafat, said her driver and a bodyguard were beaten up and arrested after she insisted on her right to enter Jerusalem to campaign in the first Palestinian elections.

"It is our right to have democratic elections," Ashrawi said. "This behaviour was unacceptable, brutal and illegal."

A second candidate, Samir Krish, was stopped by police at another checkpoint and barred from entering the city in a car that also displayed posters.

Both Ashrawi and Krish are seeking election to an



Portuguese President-elect Jorge Sampaio waves to the crowd from his campaign headquarters balcony in Lisbon on Sunday after his victory in the Portuguese presidential election was confirmed.

Move to send home 40,000 Vietnamese living in SE Asia

BANGKOK, Jan 15: Representatives of 32 countries met today to discuss ways to send home nearly 40,000 Vietnamese refugees living in camps across Southeast Asia, a United Nations official said, reports Reuter.

The steering committee of the international conference on Indo-Chinese refugees will try to determine why an end of 1995 deadline for the repatriation of all Vietnamese asylum seekers was missed, the official from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said.

The purpose of the meeting is to review what has been done and to see where the problems are," the UNHCR official told Reuters.

As of late last year there were 39,144 Vietnamese asylum seekers in Southeast Asia, about half of them in camps in Hong Kong. There were also 6,668 Laotians, all of whom were in camps in Thailand, the UNHCR official said.

Most of the Vietnamese have been interviewed by the United Nations and been judged asylum seekers, as opposed to genuine refugees.

Virtually all of the Vietnamese fled from their country by boat in the years following the 1975 communist victory there, though some also travelled across Cambodia to Thailand. Meanwhile, a senior US

official, speaking to reporters on the eve of the meeting, said there was no evidence Vietnamese returning home from camps in Southeast Asia would face retribution.

"There has been no evidence that those who have returned to Vietnam have been mistreated," US Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord told reporters at a weekend news conference.

"We will continue to watch this closely. That is the point we're trying to make to those in the camps around the region," he said.

Govt accused of holding 300 Tamil civilians in camp

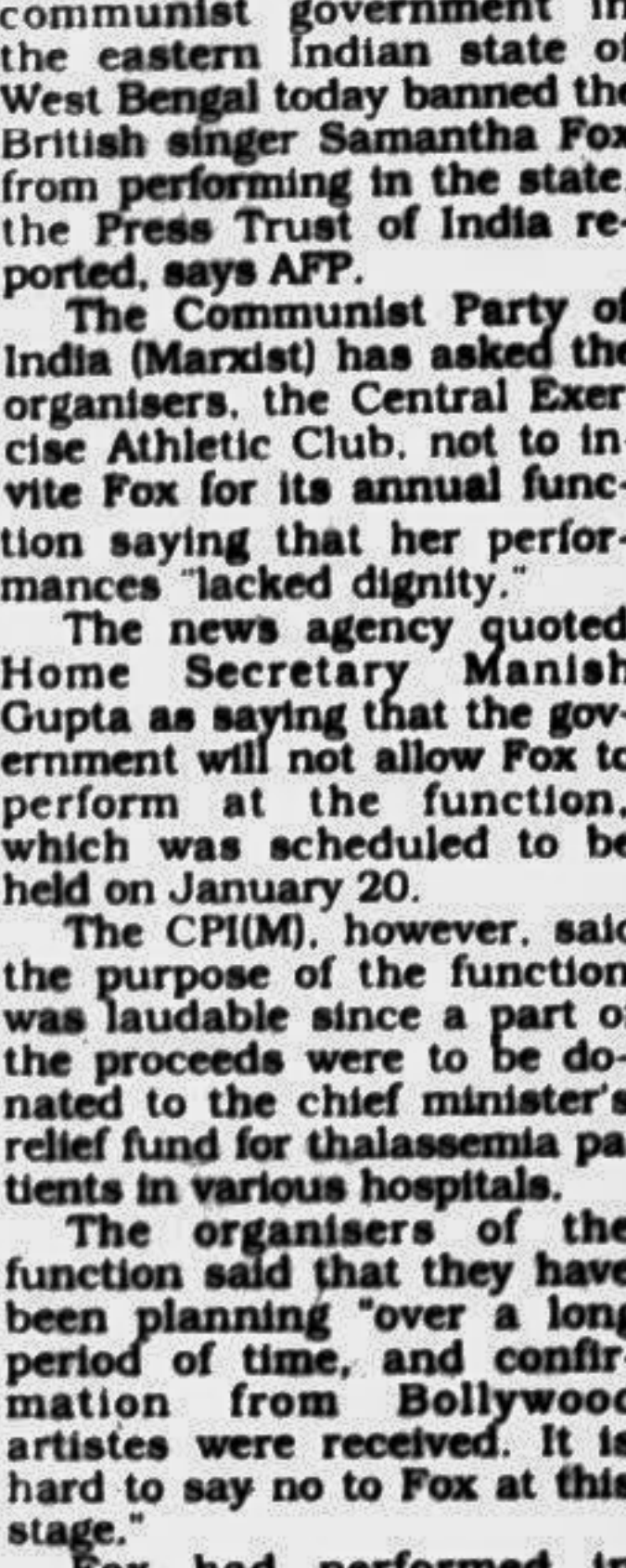
COLOMBO, Jan 15: Tamil rebels accused government forces Monday of holding 300 Tamil civilians in a church in northern Sri Lanka that resembles a Nazi concentration camp, reports AP.

Many of the Tamils held at St Soosaipar Church in Jaffna city are old people who are underfed and "traumatised," the separatists said in a statement from their London office. "They have a dazed look and are wandering around aimlessly within the barbed wire fences of the church like insane people."

Military officials denied the rebel claim, and it was impossible to verify independently because the Sri Lankan government has barred journalists from visiting the region.

The rebels based their accusation on the experience of five civilians who they said were arrested by soldiers when they visited their homes to pick up their belongings in military-controlled regions.

Off the Record



New York Times columnist William Safire is presented with a pair of boxing gloves by NBC's Meet the Press host Tim Russert on Sunday. The boxing gloves were in response to President Bill Clinton's comment that if he were an ordinary citizen he would punch Safire in the nose because of Safire's newspaper column criticising First Lady Hillary Clinton.

Teacher starred in more than 100 pornographic videos

YARMOUTH, Massachusetts: A high school teacher was placed on leave after officials learned he produced and starred in more than 100 pornographic videos, reports AP.

There was no indication that students were involved in the videos. It was unclear what rules the teacher broke, except for using poor judgment, said superintendent Michael D McCaffrey. The teacher is on leave pending an investigation.

"Our immediate concern was to get him out of the classroom and away from students," said Alice Boyd, chairwoman of the Dennis-Yarmouth School Committee. "We expect our teachers to maintain character that is an example for young people."

Officials would not identify the teacher or his department, except to say he taught at Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School for at least 10 years. There are 4,584 students in the Cape Cod district.

The Boston Sunday Herald reported that McCaffrey learned of the videos from a resident who saw one at a video store. The tapes were released as "Bob's Videos," and the latest was produced in August.

"His name is all over the box," McCaffrey said. "It's not a covert thing."

It took only five minutes

CAIRO: Actor Omar Sharif says he has an illegitimate son from a "five-minute" encounter with an Italian journalist, reports AP.

"The Italian journalist came to interview me about 25 years ago," Sharif said in an interview published Sunday in the Egyptian magazine Rose el-Youssef. "And it happened in five minutes."

Sharif, 63, said the woman whom he identified as Lola de Loka called him a year later to announce that she had a baby boy. He said he and his son resemble each other, but that he has had little contact with him.

"Generally, I consider my son as the one whose mother I love...not from a woman I hardly knew and did not love," he told the magazine.

He said that he only loved one woman, his former wife and Egyptian actress, Faten Hamama. They had one son, Tareq.

The Egyptian-born Sharif, best known for his role in the 1965 film "Doctor Zhivago" has again made Cairo his home after living for years in London and Paris.

Sudan considering nat'l mobilisation to face Ethiopian offensive

KHARTOUM, Jan 15: Sudan is considering a national mobilisation to face an "offensive" by Ethiopia against its territory, the government daily Al-Engaz Al-Watani reported today, says AFP.

The paper quoted an unnamed official from Sudan's Islamic Popular Militia who called for a general mobilisation to "resolve and thwart the offensive" in which Ethiopian troops reportedly invaded Sudan's eastern Gedaref province.

Sudanese President Omar Al-Beshir meanwhile told his cabinet on Sunday that "measures have been taken to contain the situation" on the border with Ethiopia, the paper said without providing details.

Khartoum lodged a complaint against Ethiopia at the United Nations on Saturday

and called on Addis Ababa to withdraw its troops from a number of Sudanese border posts they reportedly occupied.

Relations between the two countries soured after Ethiopia accused Sudan of harbouring Muslim militants wanted for the attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June.

Ethiopia called last Wednesday for an emergency meeting of the Security Council because of Sudan's refusal to extradite three men wanted for the attack.

Sudanese Federal Government Minister Ali Al-Haj Mohammed accused Cairo and Washington of conspiring with Addis Ababa in taking the extradition case to the UN.

Rebel tory MP will return to party's fold

LONDON, Jan 15: Embattled British Prime Minister John Major received a boost today when a rebel conservative legislator said he would discuss returning to the ruling party's fold to increase the premier's slender parliamentary majority, reports Reuter.

Sir Richard Body resigned from the party's whip — which effectively ensures members of parliament back their leader — in November 1994 over Major's policies towards the European Union (EU).

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"We will continue to watch this closely. That is the point we're trying to make to those in the camps around the region," he said.

Present at the steering committee meeting, which began on Sunday, are representatives of the first asylum countries, such as Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia.

There are also representatives of the origin countries, Vietnam and Laos, as well as of the resettlement countries including the United States, the UNHCR official said.

Some Southeast Asian countries have criticised legislation introduced in the US Congress last year demanding more thorough checks of asylum seekers before their repatriation.

Lord agreed with Southeast Asian critics who say the legislation virtually brought the voluntary repatriation programme to a halt.

Lord said the United States was working out the final details of new plan known as Track Two, which would give Vietnamese asylum seekers another chance to emigrate to the United States, but only after they returned to Vietnam.

"We would be willing to interview certain categories of people once they have returned to Vietnam. They would therefore have a sense they could leave the camps, no back to Vietnam and get one more chance at an interview," he said.

Lord, who is due to travel to Vietnam on his tour of the region, said he would take the issue up in his talks in Hanoi.

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BRIEFLY

100 Greek take control of jail: Some 100 prisoners took control of the Volos Jail in central Greece late Sunday and large forces of police were despatched to the scene pending the outcome of negotiations, a police spokesman said, AFP reports from Athens.

Most of the rebels had been transferred to Volos from the Korydallos prison in Athens in the wake of a mutiny there in mid-November in which four people were killed and 67 injured.

New Japanese FM to visit US: Japan's new Foreign Minister, Yukihiko Ikeda, will visit Washington Thursday to meet his counterpart, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Japan's public broadcaster reported Monday, AP reports from Tokyo.

The Japan Broadcasting Corp (NHK) also said diplomatic officials are trying to arrange a meeting with President Clinton during Ikeda's stay, which would end Sunday.

Foreign Ministry officials were unavailable for comment on the report because of a national holiday in Japan Monday.

Saudi crown prince meets Arafat: Saudi Arabia's acting ruler, Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdel Aziz, met Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Riyadh on Sunday, the official Saudi news agency SPA said, AFP reports from Riyadh.

Arafat said he was visiting the country to discuss the peace process and Palestinian elections, due on Saturday, Saudi Arabia, one of the Palestinians' main financiers until it accused the PLO of supporting Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War, has promised 100 million dollars to aid reconstruction of the Palestinian autonomous areas.

Gore arrives in Egypt: US Vice President Al Gore arrived in Egypt early yesterday for a one-day visit to discuss US-Egyptian economic relations, Reuter reports from Cairo.

The US embassy in Cairo said Gore would meet Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak later in the day and participate in a meeting of the joint economic council, which is trying to develop economic cooperation and trade between Egypt and the United States. He is also scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Kamal Ganzouri and the Speaker of the Egyptian parliament, Fathi Serour.

Ex-US generals to visit Cuba: A delegation of former US generals and admirals will inspect a controversial nuclear power project in Cuba next month, news reports said Sunday, AP reports from Mexico City.

In a dispatch from the Cuban capital of Havana, Mexico's official Notimex news agency said that 10 retired US officers will visit Cuba from February 5-10. The group will include experts in nuclear energy. The presence of high-ranking retired American military officials would be extraordinary in Cuba, one of the last remaining battlegrounds of the Cold War.

Czech first lady ill: Olga Havlova, wife of Czech President Vaclav Havel, is suffering from cancer and is in serious condition, a presidential spokesman said Sunday, AP reports from Prague.

"The condition of Mrs. Olga Havlova has deteriorated significantly in the first days of January," Ladislav Spacek, Havel's spokesman, said in a statement released to The Associated Press on Sunday.

Red Thunder Cloud dies: Red Thunder Cloud, a singer and storyteller who was the last known speaker of the Catawba American Indian language, died after suffering a stroke. He was 76, AP reports from Worcester, Massachusetts.

Thunder Cloud, who lived in Northbridge and also was known as Carlos Westez, died January 8 in St Vincent's Hospital, friends said. In addition to his singing and storytelling, Thunder Cloud also sold his own line of herbal teas made from plants he collected in the woods around his home.

Floods kill 7 in SA: Police said yesterday at least seven people were killed and over 500 left homeless at the weekend in the second wave of floods in three weeks in South Africa's Kwazulu-Natal province, Reuter reports from Durban.

Police spokesman Inspector Vish Naidoo told Reuters heavy rains on Friday night had washed a taxi carrying eight people into a river near Ladysmith in the north of the province.