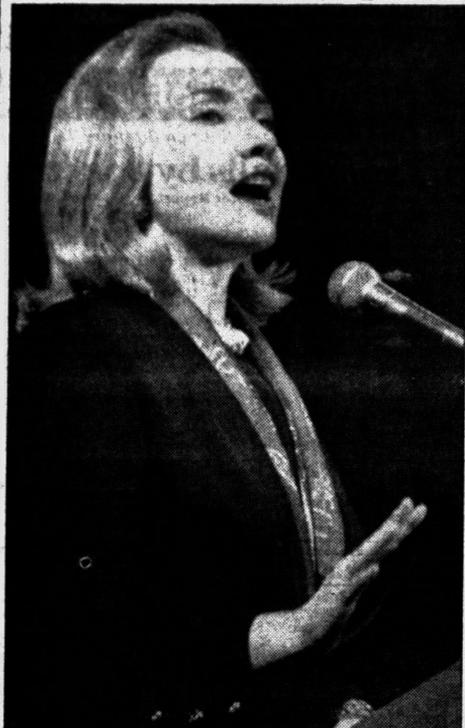


BRIEFLY



US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton speaks on Wednesday at the Chicago Theatre in Chicago to promote her new book, "It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us". Clinton, embroiled in two White House investigations, defended herself in a television interview as former aide took the blame for a controversial incident involving the White House travel office.

Attempt on Saddam's son: One of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's sons survived an assassination attempt Wednesday near Baghdad, the Russian news agency ITAR-Tass said in a report monitored by the BBC. AFP says from London.

The son is Qosay Hussein, chief of Iraq's security forces. Qosay had a narrow escape, whereas some of his bodyguards were killed as a grenade exploded in a palm grove 46 kilometres away from Baghdad, ITAR-Tass said in a report from its correspondent in Cairo. It gave no sources for the report. Saddam ordered an investigation among the entourage of his son, it added.

Khmers kill 13 Cambodians: At least 13 Cambodians were killed and 30 others injured when Khmer Rouge guerrillas launched a series of attacks on the border town of Poipet near the Thai-Cambodia borders, officials said, Reuter reports from Aranyaprathet, Thailand.

The Khmer Rouge guerrillas launched four different attacks on the western Cambodian trade town on Wednesday, beginning early in the morning, a Thai army officer said. Two villagers were killed in the morning attack while 11 others, including nine civilians and two Cambodian soldiers, were killed in later attacks, he said.

UN unveils 'poverty clock': Calling for a global war against want, the head of the UN development agency started a "poverty clock" Wednesday that ticks each time someone joins the ranks of the poor, AP reports from United Nations.

"One hundred and sixty years ago the world launched a crusade against slavery," said James Gustave Speth, head of the United Nations Development Programme. "Today, we must muster that will again to launch a similar crusade for a world against poverty." By the end of the year the clock, part of the United Nations' International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, is expected to register 25 million people who make less than about \$1 a day. Seventy per cent of them will be female.

23 killed in Andhra Pradesh mishap: Twenty-three labourers were killed in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh late Wednesday when the truck in which they were travelling crashed into a ditch, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported yesterday, AFP says from New Delhi.

Ten others were seriously injured in the accident, which occurred in Nalgonda district, it said.

Fujimori meets Ecuador's FM: Peru's President Alberto Fujimori on Wednesday met privately with Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Galo Leoro, who is in Lima for talks aimed at resolving a simmering border dispute between the two Andean nations, Reuter reports from Lima.

Government sources would not say what was discussed in the 20-minute meeting at the presidential palace but said Fujimori told Leoro he should "feel at home" while in Peru. Leoro and Peruvian Foreign Minister Francisco Tudela were to begin discussions later under a peace treaty that ended last year's Peru-Ecuador border conflict.

Barbara Jordan dies: Barbara Jordan, the first black from the south elected to the US Congress since the civil war, died Wednesday in Texas at age 59, sources close to her said, AFP reports from Washington.

Jordan, a Democrat, first gained fame during the televised Watergate hearings in the House of Representatives that led to then-president Richard Nixon's 1974 resignation.

Rain breaks drought in Antarctica: A short spell of near-freezing rain has broken a 24-year drought at McMurdo Sound in Antarctica the site of major United States and New Zealand scientific bases, AP reports from Christchurch, New Zealand.

India to face stiff sanctions if it conducts N-test, warns US

WASHINGTON, Jan 18: The United States warned on Wednesday that India would face stiff economic sanctions including loan cutoffs from international financial institutions if it conducts a nuclear test, reports AFP.

A 1994 law known as the Glenn Amendment requires Washington to suspend economic and military aid as well as loans and export licenses to any country — apart from the five declared nuclear powers — that tests and nuclear weapon, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

It would also require the United States to oppose loans from the World Bank and

other multilateral lending institutions, which in the case of India would amount to billions of dollars a year.

Burns refused to confirm a Los Angeles Times report that the US ambassador in New Delhi, Frank Wisner, had warned India that any nuclear test would trigger the Glenn sanctions.

The warning from Wisner and other US officials reportedly followed US intelligence observations that suggested India might be preparing to conduct a nuclear test.

New Delhi has denied that it is preparing to conduct a second nuclear test.

The spokesman described in detail provisions contained

in the Glenn amendment and said Washington had "an ongoing senior-level dialogue" with the governments of India and Pakistan about the spread of deadly weapons.

"As a result of these discussions, the Indian government is well aware of our concerns," he said.

Any country that detonates a nuclear device would "only, and only possibly" be allowed to continue receiving humanitarian food aid, he said.

India conducted its first and only nuclear test in 1974, and no other countries apart from the five declared nuclear powers are known to have conducted nuclear tests since then.

Neighbouring Pakistan, with which India has fought three wars since the two countries were partitioned in 1947, has voiced concern about reports that India might be planning such a test.

Neither country has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The declared nuclear powers, to which the Glenn amendment would not apply, are Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States.

AP adds, India's reported plan to deploy a nuclear-capable missile and indications that the South Asian country may be preparing to conduct a nuclear test explosion are troubling the Clinton administration.

Rao urged to reconstruct Babri Mosque

CALCUTTA, Jan 18: The Dalit Muslim Suraksha Mahasangh Wednesday urged the Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, to make arrangements for reconstruction of the Babri Masjid before the coming general elections, saying that they will boycott the polls otherwise, reports PTI.

A delegation of the Mahasangh met the prime minister here and also requested him to take immediate step, to ensure job reservations, educational facilities and financial assistance to the Muslims and other minorities under the 15-point programme announced by the government.

Mahasangh sources said Rao assured the delegation of considering their demands.

The delegation was led by Karim Khan Chowdhury, all India general secretary of the Mahasangh.

Search & destroy mission launched against Tigers

COLOMBO, Jan 18: Hundreds of heavily armed soldiers were fanning deep into jungles in eastern Sri Lanka today as part of a major search-and-destroy mission against Tamil rebels, defence sources said, reports AFP.

Elite army commandos moved against positions of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the eastern district of Batticaloa amid monsoon rains, the sources said. The rains somewhat delayed the launch of the operation, a defence official said. "Troops are on the move but they are yet to confront the Tigers. The offensive is on a large front."

The operation was launched to stem the wave of stepped-up rebel attacks in the eastern region following the fall of the Tigers' main bastion of Jaffna in the north of the country earlier last month.

US for Yeltsin's reaffirmation of reforms

WASHINGTON, Jan 18: Shifting gears, the Clinton administration said on Wednesday it is essential that President Boris N Yeltsin reaffirm the Russian government's commitment to economic change, reports AP.

As those favouring capitalism have quit or been pushed from the Yeltsin government, administration officials have said repeatedly that dismantling the state-run economy in favour of capitalism depends on Yeltsin and Prime Minister Viktor S. Chernomyrdin remaining in power.

In a tonal shift on Wednesday, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns lauded resigned Russian economic specialist Anatoly Chubais and said that when Chernomyrdin comes to Washington this month he will hear a message from US officials: "Change must continue and the West will continue its support."



Visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (R) and her Japanese counterpart Ryutaro Hashimoto (L) review an honour guard during an welcoming ceremony at the Akasaka State Guesthouse in Tokyo on Thursday.

Japan urges Benazir to sign NPT

TOKYO, Jan 18: Visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was urged on Wednesday by Japan to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Jiji Press said, reports AFP.

Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda made the request in a meeting at a Tokyo hotel.

But Benazir, told Ikeda that Pakistan could sign the NPT only if India took the same step. "We cannot take a unilateral measure," she reportedly said.

She expressed concerns about reports by a US paper that India was preparing for a nuclear test, Jiji said.

Earlier this week in meetings in Islamabad with visiting Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, Benazir urged Canada to use its influence to prevent Islamabad's rival India from conducting a second nuclear test.

Her Foreign Secretary, Najmuddin Sheikh, also warned on Sunday that if India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, conducted another test it would destabilise the region.

New Delhi has denied a New York Times report last month which quoted US experts.

Chechens launch break-out from Pervomaiskoye Turkey confident of settling Chechens' ship hijack drama

SINOP, Turkey, Jan 18: Turkey looked confident of a bloodless settlement of a pro-Chechen ship hijack on the Black Sea after weary gunmen offered to free all 200 hostages on board if no rescue attempts were made before it reached Istanbul, reports Reuter.

"I believe the incident will end with the peaceful surrender of the activists," Interior Minister Teoman Unusan told private Kanal television after a top-level security meeting.

The leader of the hijackers, Muhammed Tokcan, has

assured Turkish intelligence chief Sonmez Koksak that the gunmen will end the action if security forces cooperated with their arrival, the semi-official Anatolian news agency said.

The agency quoted Koksak as telling Tokcan late on Wednesday that the ship would be allowed safe passage to Istanbul, where it was expected to arrive late today or early on Friday.

"There will be no intervention," Anatolian quoted Koksak as telling the gunmen's leader Muhammed Tokcan.

Reuter adds from London: Chechen hostage-takers launched a break-out from the besieged southern Russian village of Pervomaiskoye early today, Russian officials told ITAR-Tass news agency.

ITAR-Tass, in a report received by the BBC, said it was told by the Russian Federal Security Service that at 2:30 am Moscow Time (2330 GMT) a group of Chechen fighters broke out of the besieged village of Pervomaiskoye and fired on Russian Interior Ministry troops.



Russian soldiers fire Grad missiles on Pervomaysk, where a group of Chechen fighters are still keeping some 160 hostages on Wednesday. Russian officials announced that since the Chechens have resisted the assault after three days of bombardment, the military operation will continue with heavy artillery.

2 new planets with 'life' supportable environments discovered

SAN ANTONIO, Texas, Jan 18: US space scientists said on Wednesday they had discovered two new planets whose environments might be able to support life, reports Reuter.

The giant planets, 35 light-years away from the earth, are thought to have surface conditions that would allow the formation of water in liquid form, and therefore, life.

"Life is now possible. There is a harbour, a site, on which life might form," Geoffrey Marcy, the San Francisco State University astrophysicist who made the discovery, told Reuters after a presentation at the annual meeting of the American Astronomical Society.

"We watched 'Starwars'. We watched 'Star Trek'. And 'Star Trek' captain Jean-Luc Picard had no trouble finding

planets, but we professionals did," he said. "And now, finally, there's a site for Jean-Luc and for extraterrestrial life."

Using the 120-inch (305-cm) telescope at the university of California's Lick Observatory near San Jose, Marcy and fellow researcher Paul Butler discovered the new planets in the Virgo and Ursa major constellations. Both are bigger than Jupiter and visible to the naked eye.

One of the planets is thought to have a surface temperature of 185 degrees Fahrenheit (85 degrees Celsius), below water's boiling point of 212 degrees Fahrenheit (100 degrees Celsius). "That's cool enough to permit complex molecules to exist, ranging from carbon dioxide to complicated organic molecules," Marcy said.

"This planet could conceivably have rain, or even oceans."

The other, at an instance from its sun comparable to that of earth from its sun, appears to have a region in its atmosphere which would allow liquid water, the scientists reported.

The planet, too, is in a solar system that most resembles that of earth. "It almost smells like the planets in our own solar system," he said.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) administrator Daniel Goldin, who spoke at the conference on Wednesday, hailed the findings.

The exciting part is we found the planets where water could exist. And we know on earth wherever we find water, we find life. That gets the mind thinking," he told

South Korean embassies placed on special alert

SEOUL, Jan 18: South Korean embassies have been placed on special alert over fears Pyongyang may retaliate following a series of defections by North Koreans to the South, government officials said today, reports Reuter.

"All embassies usually know they have to take precautions because we always have threats from North Korea," said an official at the Foreign Ministry who asked not to be named.

"But this time, they have been told to be on special alert," he told Reuters.

The official said Seoul's Embassy in Zambia, where two North Koreans recently sought asylum, was taking special precautions by re-enforcing security around the compound.

Police protection provided by the Zambian gov-

ernment has increased at this time," he added.

The two North Koreans — Choi Soo-Bong, the wife of the third secretary in the North Korean Embassy in Zambia, and an embassy martial arts teacher — arrived in Seoul on Tuesday after defecting to the South Korean Embassy in Lusaka.

Pyongyang's Embassy in Zambia alleged Choi was kidnapped, a charge denied by South Korea.

Another official at the Foreign Ministry said South Koreans abroad had been asked to be alert to any possible North Korean provocations following the defections.

"North Korea is capable of doing anything, such as kidnapping our citizens, and then saying they defected to the North," said the official, who declined to be named.

Off the Record

Frosty reception for Madonna

Buenos Aires: Outraged that Madonna has been cast as legendary first lady Evita Peron, hardline Peronists are venting their anger on the walls of the capital city, reports AP.

Graffiti such as "Evita lives. Get out Madonna" has been splashed over walls near Buenos Aires' international airport and parts of the city centre.

Madonna is expected to arrive in Buenos Aires this week along with co-star Antonio Banderas, who will play leftist rebel Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

The film, directed by Alan Parker, is due for release later this year. Shooting will begin early February.

Graffiti may not be the only opposition Madonna will face during her stay.

President Carlos Menem has called Andrew Lloyd Webber's Broadway musical "a total and utter disgrace." Buenos Aires archbishop Antonio Quarracino called Madonna, "pornographic and unsuitable — an insult to Argentine women."

Webber's musical portrayed Evita as a corrupt populist who slept her way to power.

Eva Duarte de Peron was born in Buenos Aires province and moved to the capital at age 15 to become a radio, film and stage actress.

Ten years later she met army Col Juan Domingo Peron, who was preparing himself for the presidency. In 1949, they were married and by 1946 Peron was president and she was the most powerful woman in the country.

Losing interest in fatwa

WASHINGTON: Author Salman Rushdie said Wednesday he is "losing interest" in determining the status of an Islamic religious edict calling for him to be killed, reports AP.

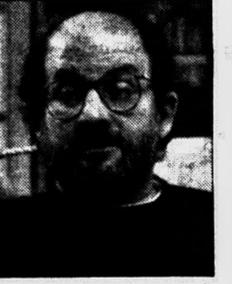
Rushdie has been in hiding since Iran's late spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa, or religious edict, and a 1 million dollars bounty in 1989 saying Rushdie must be killed because his novel "The Satanic Verses" blasphemed Islam.

Appearing in Washington to promote his latest novel "The Moor's Last Sigh", Rushdie said Iranian government officials have conducted a "charm offensive" to placate critics in the West over the affair, which has soured relations between Iran and many Western governments.

"I don't know what lessons to draw from this," Rushdie said at the National Press Club. "But the fact is that I'm, losing interest."

Nevertheless, the Indian-born British writer said he is wary of the recent statements since Iranian officials won't put it in writing. Security at the event was tight, with bodyguards standing next to the table where Rushdie spoke and a dog to sniff bags for bombs.

Rushdie said that in recent months officials in the Iranian government have not only said they are not interested in carrying out the edict, but that they never sought it in the first place.



India won't ask ASEAN to help solve Kashmir issue

BANGKOK, Jan 18: India will not use its new status as a full dialogue partner with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to seek backing for its territorial row with Pakistan over Kashmir, India's foreign minister said, reports AFP.

"India is determined to work for peace and stability in the region," Foreign Minister Pramab Mukherjee told the Bangkok Post on Wednesday. "That is our priority, not the Kashmir issue."

India and Pakistan both claim Kashmir and have fought three wars over the divided territory since they gained independence from Britain in 1947.

But Mukherjee, in Bangkok for a meeting of the Thai-India joint commission,

said the two nations would try to work out their differences themselves.

ASEAN groups Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The leaders of the seven nations agreed at their summit in Bangkok last month to upgrade India's status from a regional trade partner to full dialogue partner despite the concern by some members over the lingering Kashmir dispute.

Mukherjee called the move "encouraging and positive," the Post reported.

As a dialogue partner, India will join the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which discusses security matters, and will attend ASEAN post ministerial conferences.

3 retd ROK generals held over Kwangju massacre

SEOUL, Jan 18: Prosecutors today arrested three re-tired military generals over the 1979 coup headed by disgraced former president Chun Doo-Hwan and the massacre of pro-democracy protesters that followed, reports AFP.

Television showed Yoo Hak-Seung, Hwang Yung-Si and Lee Hak-Bong being from-marched from the prosecutor's office to cars taking them to prison.

"I am innocent. I will fight back in court," Lee said.

The Seoul District Criminal Court approved their arrest on insurrection charges related to the 1980 massacre of demonstrators in the southern city of Kwangju that cost more than 200 lives by official count.

They are the first former army officers to be arrested in connection with the bloody crackdown, a watershed in South Korea's history.

However, arrest warrants for two other coup co-leagues, Chang Sea-Dong and Choi Sae-Chang, were withheld pending deliberation on a suit challenging the constitutionality of a landmark law that paved the way for the indictment of former junta members.

Chun filed the suit on Wednesday shortly after prosecutors asked for the warrants for the five accused of helping him stage the coup and also for their alleged role in the 1980 massacre.

In his petition, Chun, 64, described the law, passed in December with the blessing of incumbent President Kim Young-Sam a former opposition leader who took office in early 1993, as unconstitutional.

Chun, who is recovering in hospital from a 27-day hunger strike, has refused to cooperate with legal proceedings against him.

Turkey to play key role in training Bosnian army

ANKARA, Jan 18: Turkey will sign a military agreement with Bosnia and plans to play a leading role in training and equipping its army, a top Turkish general said Wednesday, reports AP.

Strong Turkish support for Bosnia could be a contentious issue among the major players in the region.

The Russians in particular have said that they want to reduce the military capabilities of all sides in Bosnia, instead of building up those of the Muslim-led government and its Croat allies.

But Turkish General Cevik Bir, the deputy chief of staff, said his Muslim nation planned to sign the military agreement Monday with Bosnia.

Details still have to be worked out, he said, but the training could take place either in Turkey or Bosnia.

"We can obtain a leading role for this mission. We are a NATO-member country, but also a Muslim country," Bir said.

Bir said the two sides were waiting for the outcome of armament talks in Vienna, which are to determine the scale of the armies of former warring sides in Bosnia.

Under the Balkan peace accord signed last month, there is a 90-day embargo, ending in mid-March, on military equipment being supplied to the participants in the Bosnian conflict. There is a 180-day embargo on heavy weapons being supplied.

The general suggested that Turkey might sell military equipment to the Bosnian army, possibly locally made armoured combat vehicles, as long as it was permitted by the agreements