



US President Bill Clinton greets supporters on South Main Street in Concord, New Hampshire on Friday. Clinton visited with elementary school children earlier Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

Pakistan worried at plan to deploy Prithvi into army

ISLAMABAD, Feb 3: Pakistan has voiced concern over reports that India plans to deploy surface-to-surface missiles in its army, saying such a move would threaten peace and escalate the arms race in the region, reports AFP.

A foreign office spokesman said here late Friday that Pakistan "has drawn the world community's attention to these reports."

The deployment of the Prithvi missile system "will be a threat to peace and security in the region and escalate an arms race," the spokesman said.

Leader of disputed Nogorno-Karabakh region declares independence

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 3: The leader of a disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan said Friday that his region is an independent nation with the right to choose its own destiny and elect its own leaders, reports AP.

"Our independence is a reality. It exists. Our people determine who they shall deal with and who they shall not," said Robert Kocharian, who considers himself president of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nagorno-Karabakh is inside Azerbaijan but populated mainly by ethnic Armenians. Armenia supports its war for independence.

Nagorno-Karabakh's forces have driven Azerbaijani government troops out of the enclave and also seized territory in Azerbaijan proper. More than 15,000 people have died in the course of the fighting and about 1 million have become refugees.

Chun confesses to payouts of \$ 126m since 1990

SEOUL, Feb 3: Prosecutors on Saturday said former President Chun Doo-hwan has confessed to payouts of \$126 million since 1990 in an attempt to engineer a political comeback, reports AP.

The money was distributed among hundreds of politicians and journalists, Chun told prosecutors.

Prosecutors said they were still trying to confirm Chun's confession independently and added that they had no immediate plan to call in alleged recipients of the money for questioning.

He had distributed the cash in an attempt to boost chances of his supporters running in parliamentary elections this April, prosecutors said.

Pakistan hands over Riyadh blast suspect to KSA

RIYADH, Feb 3: Authorities Saturday confirmed they had taken custody of a Saudi Arabian man deported from Pakistan in connection with a deadly car-bombing in Riyadh last year that killed five Americans and two Indians, reports AP.

Hassan Alsarai, a Saudi citizen living in Pakistan since 1990, faces an almost certain sentence of beheading by sword if convicted of involvement in the bombing.

It is unclear what role Alsarai is suspected of playing in the bombing. He was arrested earlier in the week by Pakistani federal agents acting on leads provided by Saudi security, a Pakistani Interior Ministry spokesman said Thursday in Islamabad.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency quoted an unnamed Interior Ministry source, its term for a spokesman, as saying the suspect has been handed over to Saudi authorities.

Preparation for Euro-Asian summit Asian nations to focus on economic, security issues

PHUKET, Thailand, Feb 3: Foreign Ministers from 10 Asian countries wrapped up a meeting here today to prepare for an unprecedented summit next month which will bring 25 Asian and European leaders to Bangkok, reports AFP.

The ministers said the meeting had been useful in setting Asia's agenda for the March 1-2 summit, and that participants had decided on a broad range of economic, political and security issues for discussion.

However, they were quick to downplay the significance of the meeting, saying only general areas had been identified for discussion and the real decisions would be made by the leaders themselves.

Major issues dividing the

European and Asian countries have been the backdrop to the meeting here, and the ministers cautioned against expecting results too soon and having both sides agree on everything.

"We are building a new partnership between Asia and Europe and we don't expect it to be done overnight," said Singapore's minister, S Jayakumar. "It has to be worked on."

European countries have expressed the desire to raise issues such as human rights at the Bangkok summit, while the Asian side would like to focus primarily on strengthening economic ties.

But the Asians have shown a grudging willingness to accept as inevitable talks on sensitive issues such as hu-

man rights, although the definition of legitimate areas for discussion remains to be seen.

"For this dialogue to be successful... both sides should realise they should not bring in controversial and non-relevant issues," Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said.

Asked if Indonesia would be prepared to discuss the Indonesian occupied territory of east Timor, Alatas said he considered the issue to be "non-relevant" to the summit.

Portugal has indicated it would like to bring up the issue of its former territory, where international groups say widespread violations of human rights have taken place since an Indonesian invasion in 1975.

Canadian Senate passes constitutional reform bill

OTTAWA, Feb 3: The Canadian Senate on Friday passed a controversial constitutional reform bill, giving Quebec and some other provinces a veto over future constitutional changes, reports AFP.

The bill has already been cleared by the House of Commons and will become law automatically with the signature of Governor-General Romeo LeBlanc in the next few days. This is just a formality.

The bill is designed to placate Quebec separatists who have long demanded, among other things, the right for the predominantly french-speaking province to veto proposed change to the constitution.

But it has been scorned by the Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard as meaningless. The bill gives each of five "regions" a veto over future constitutional change. The

regions are defined as Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, the three Prairie provinces and the four Atlantic provinces.

Efforts by the Progressive Conservative Party, which holds 50 of the 104 seats in the Senate, to delay implementation were defeated on Friday and the bill was eventually adopted by 48 votes to 36.

Prime Minister Jean Chretien, who has been chairing a two-day strategy meeting of his cabinet, announced after the Senate vote that he had asked the governor-general to prorogue Parliament.

That means all uncompleted business is dropped and a new parliamentary session will begin in the final week of February with a speech from the throne in which the governor-general reads out the government's new legislative plans.

US denies link with KSA's military aid to Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: The State Department said Friday that it had not backed Saudi Arabia's military assistance to Bosnia, in defiance of an arms embargo, but declined to say if Washington knew of the aid, reports AFP.

The Washington Post had reported that Saudi Arabia channelled 300 million dollars worth of arms to the Bosnian Muslims over three years in a secret programme that enjoyed tacit US cooperation.

Any arms deliveries to any of the factions in the former Yugoslavia would be in direct violation of a UN embargo.

State Department spokesman Glyn Davies denied "the allegations that the US government was in any way involved with the reported Saudi programme to arm the Bosnian government."

"We did not cooperate, coordinate or consult with any government regarding the provision of arms to the Bosnians," he said, adding that Washington had long

considered them "victims of aggression."

But he declined to say if Washington knew that Saudi Arabia had armed the Bosnian Muslims.

The UN arms embargo was declared on all sides of the fighting in the former Yugoslavia, but was widely considered to have hampered the Muslim-led government of landlocked Bosnia-herzegovina the most.

US ships have participated in a NATO blockade of the Adriatic, and if the US government had known of the violation it would have been required to report it.

"It was always our policy to abide by the arms embargo," he said.

A Saudi official quoted by the Washington Post said that this Bosnian arms programme was similar to a programme set up to back Muslim rebels battling Soviet troops in Afghanistan during the 1980s. This operation was not officially supported by the United States.

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Italian President Luigi Oscar Scalfaro (L) shakes hands with Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic at the presidency in Sarajevo on Friday. Scalfaro is on a one-day visit to Sarajevo to see Italian troops serving in the NATO peace implementation force (IFOR) in Bosnia. — AFP/UNB photo

After attempted military coup Guinea president holed up in bunker with ministers

CONAKRY, Feb 3: Guinea President Lansana Conte was holed up early Saturday in a bunker with several of his ministers as his presidential palace blazed after being shelled in an attempted military coup, an informed source told AFP.

As firemen strove to extinguish the fire in the cupola of the presidency, a crowd of young people led by the governor of Conakry Ousmane Camara staged a demonstration in support of Conte, the country's first elected head of state.

There had been no attempt by the estimated 2,000 rebel troops to storm the presidential palace and a reliable source said loyalist reinforcements were on their way to Conakry to bolster the regime.

The national radio went off the air at 2330 GMT by which time most of the city's inhabitants had returned to their homes in the suburbs.

By midnight the streets of the capital were virtually deserted but bursts of automatic gunfire were audible from adjoining towns.

Other AFP reporters saw several artillery rounds fired at the presidential palace. Conte was inside when the attack occurred but his condition was not immediately known.

The city was rattled by gunfire much of Friday, and sources close to the city hospital said at least 20 people died and more than 70 were wounded.

Conte said in a radio address that eight civilians were killed by a tank shell fired in the centre of the city as part of what he called an attempted military coup.

He urged the mutinous troops on the streets to "return to their barracks," but most failed to move and shortly afterwards gunners opened up on the presidential palace setting it ablaze.

US to send aid for DPRK: Overriding South Korean reservations, the United States announced on Friday it was contributing 2 million dollars to help alleviate famine in communist North Korea, Reuter reports from Washington.

The State Department said the US Agency for International Development would grant the money to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to buy food for North Korea, where floods last year devastated farmland.

Farrakhan meets Nigerian FM: US black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan met Nigerian Foreign Affairs Minister Chief Tom Ilkison Friday and told him his six day visit to Nigeria was meant to "see the truth" about the country, AFP reports from Abuja.

"We have come to see the truth so that we can do justice to the people of Nigeria and the world," the controversial leader of the Nation of Islam Movement told the minister.

Schoolboy kills teacher, 2 in USA: A 14-year-old boy with a high-powered rifle killed a teacher and two students and seriously injured another student in their classroom Friday, police said, AP reports from Mores Lake, Washington.

The student was arrested shortly after he entered Frontier Junior High School, went to a classroom and began firing, police said.

Dancer Gene Kelly dies: Gene Kelly, who splashed through puddles with athletic exuberance in "Singin' in the Rain" and kicked up his heels in "On the Town" and "Anchors Aweigh," died Friday. He was 83, AP reports from Los Angeles.

A former ditch digger whose choreography grew so influential even Madonna and Michael Jackson consulted him, Kelly died at home of complications from strokes suffered over the last two years, publicist Warren Cowan said.

Ice causes flood in Yellow River: Thousands of people have been evacuated from upper stretches of the Yellow River because of fears of flooding caused by ice, an official report said Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

Local army units have been sent to smash the ice which threatens to cause flooding along unfrozen sections of the river upstream from north-central Shaanxi province, the newspaper China Daily said.

7 miners killed in South Africa: Seven miners were killed in a rockfall Friday at a gold mine near Johannesburg, the mine's owners said, AFP reports from Johannesburg, South Africa.

Marc Gonsalves, a spokesman for Johannesburg Consolidated Investments, said five bodies had been brought to the surface and two other bodies discovered underground were being retrieved from the Randfontein estates mine, located 80 kilometres (50 miles) west of Johannesburg.

Russia sells license to China to build fighter

MOSCOW, Feb 3: Russia has sold China a license to build SU-27 fighter jets in a deal worth more than two billion dollars, the commander of the Russian air force told the Interfax news agency on Friday, reports AFP.

General Piotr Deinekin said the deal was signed at the end of last year and that Russia is negotiating similar contracts with other countries.

Moscow committed to providing China with assembly lines to build the planes and to train people to run them.

Serbs to maintain hold on parts of Sarajevo defying deadline

SARAJEVO, Feb 3: Bosnia's Serbs will maintain their hold on parts of Sarajevo despite a Dayton peace accord deadline that falls midnight Saturday for the Muslim Croat federation to take authority for these areas, high representative Carl Bildt said here Friday.

Bildt, the civilian authority of the Dayton agreement, said he would "use the next six weeks to prepare the transfer of authority."

"I believe all parties agree that we need this time in order to overcome the fears and to create new understanding."

Herzegovina and the federation." Bildt said in a statement.

Serbs in four Sarajevo neighbourhoods and suburbs have said they are afraid of administration by their former Bosnian enemies.

Some 10,000-12,000 of 70,000 people living in the Ilidza, Iljazi, Grabavica and Vogosca sectors have already left with possibly over half of those remaining set also to go. This handover is particularly important because a fall-out for Serbs and Muslims to live together in Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, could torpedo the peace process. It is also symbolic because the Bosnian war began in these neighbourhoods in April 1992.

The ground commander of peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, British Lieutenant general Sir Michael Wall, told reporters at a bridge in Gravica Friday, clearly the cessation of the flow of peace is going to be

a slowing process. It's not going to happen overnight."

Referring to the Saturday, midnight deadline, Walker said, "We tend to talk about these days as if they are time lines and once gone they're gone."

He said the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) was still "monitoring compliance" from earlier deadlines in the Dayton peace accord for Bosnia.

Walker spoke to reporters at the brotherhood and unity bridge, the main connection across the Miljacka River between the Serb and Muslim parts of Sarajevo.

The bridge, a front line during the war of concrete and sand bag barriers, risked during the peace to become the Bosnian capital's Berlin Wall.

But IFOR, which has swept clear army checkpoints throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina Tuesday took down the barricades at the bridge and on Thursday said there would be freedom of movement across it.

This symbol was somewhat tarnished on Friday when Serb police banned journalists with IFOR passes from crossing unless they had another pass from the Bosnian Serb government in Pale, 15 kilometres (nine miles) east of Sarajevo.

"You have seen Gravica yourself. It is a grim place where a lot of reconstruction effort is needed," Walker said about the suburb where most windows in the high-rise apartment houses are blown out and shrapnel marks scar walls.



An old woman from the Srebrenica enclave, which was overrun by Serbs last summer hurls stones at the local government building over the chain of police officers in Tuzla on Friday. The Srebrenica women demonstrated for the third day against the continued silence of the whereabouts of their missing relatives. After two hours of demonstrations outside the government offices without any reply, the demonstration turned violent and the 300 women and children blocked roads, tried to force their way into the building and threw stones, smashing most of the windows in the office complex. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Only those without sin can call her unsuitable

BUENOS AIRES: A Roman Catholic bishop has offered to bless pop star Madonna, saying only those without sin are fit to call her unsuitable to play Evita in the movie version of the Broadway musical, reports AP.

"Jesus even sees in a prostitute, and I'm not saying Madonna is one, the makings of a saint," Lujan Bishop Emilio Oggenovitch told the Diaricis Noticias news agency Friday.

"Why shouldn't I bless Madonna?" he added. "Christ did not judge the prostitute. He said: Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

Many Argentines have complained that Madonna, famed for her raunchy stage antics, is unfit to play the part of former first lady Eva Peron, whom many Argentines consider a saint.

Madonna arrived in Argentina this month to shoot the film. Even now she comes under a barrage of criticism from anti-feminist supporters, including calls for her to be "burned alive."

Bishop Carlos María Ugarte, head of the modern-day Communist Party, has labeled Madonna "totally unsuitable" to play the part, the Buenos Aires Archdiocese's Antonio Quarnecino has called her "blasphemous... an utter disgrace."

Oggenovitch begged to differ. "Although it's true this woman has shown sacrilege in some of her performances, I believe that rather than judge the person playing the part, we should concentrate on how she does it," he said.

"It's important to ask: How does Christ see Madonna? He doesn't look at what she has done, rather at what she can become and then do," he said.



Misuse of internet!

NEW YORK: Three 13-year-old boys have been accused of plotting to blow up their school after learning how to build a bomb over the internet, police said on Friday, reports Reuter.

The boys were arrested on Wednesday after other students at Pine Grove Junior High School in Minoa, New York, heard rumours of their plans and police were alerted, said Capt. William Bleyde of the nearby Manlius police department.

The boys planned to break into the school on Saturday and plant a home-made fertilizer bomb in the office, he said.

One of the boys, believed to be the ringleader, admitted to police that the three eighth graders learned how to build the bomb from instructions they found on the internet, the global network accessible from home computers.

Lawsuit filed to admit blacks in SA whites' schools

PIETERSBURG, S Africa, Feb 3: Provincial authorities filed a lawsuit Friday to force an all-white primary school in a remote farming town to admit three black pupils and to guarantee their safety, reports AP.

The dispute exposes racial prejudice that has flared publicly on occasion since Nelson Mandela became South Africa's first black president in 1994, but poses little threat of derailing his programme to building a multiracial society.

The school last week prohibited the three children from enrolling. Their home has recently been sprayed with graffiti as the case has gained national attention.