

BRIEFLY



A little girl at Sarajevo's suburb Grbavica walks away with a biscuit in her hand she received from an Italian IFOR soldier (background) on Friday. The suburb will be transferred to the Muslim Croat Federation on March 19. IFOR troops have increased their presence in Grbavica after the increased looting and unrest during the last days. — AFP/UNB photo

8 MILF rebels killed in Philippines: Eight Muslim guerrillas were killed yesterday after they attacked three Philippine army detachments in the nearby province of Maguindanao, a military spokesman said in Zamboanga. AFP reports from Zamboanga, Philippines.

Major Fredesvindo Cobarrubias said an army soldier was wounded in the clashes, adding that the military had captured five rifles, a grenade launcher and a b-40 rocket launcher from the guerrillas who are believed to be members of the Muslim extremist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Cobarrubias said the Muslim guerrillas attacked the three detachments near the border of sultan Kudarat Province, sparking a battle that was still continuing.

Hillary Clinton to visit Bosnia: First Lady Hillary Clinton will visit US troops in Bosnia this month during a weeklong trip that will also take her to Germany, Italy, Turkey and Greece, the White House said Friday. AFP reports from Washington.

The White House said Hillary Clinton's March 23-April 1 trip was "to affirm the United States' commitment to democracy in that region of the world and to encourage and support American troops in Bosnia and their families."

Saudis carry out 1st execution this yr: A convicted Saudi Arabian murderer was beheaded Friday in the first known execution in the kingdom this year after a record 192 in 1995. AP reports from Riyadh.

The Interior Ministry said in a statement carried on Saudi television that Mohammed al-Oteibi, convicted by an Islamic court, was beheaded in the capital, Riyadh.

Bush awarded King Abdul Aziz Medal: Former US President George Bush met his Gulf War ally King Fahd of Saudi Arabia on Friday and was awarded a medal, Reuter reports from Dubai.

Saudi Television showed the king, who suffered a stroke in November, holding talks with Bush, before giving him the King Abdul-Aziz Medal. It gave no details of the award.

Ex - CIA intelligence chief dies: Ray S Cline, a chief of the CIA's intelligence Directorate in the early 1960s who later wrote it was "illogical" for the agency to employ the Mafia to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro, died Friday. AP reports from Washington.

Cline, who retired from the government in 1973, died at his home in Arlington, Virginia. He was 77 and suffered from Alzheimer's disease. Cline joined the CIA in 1949 and from 1962 to 1966 was chief of its intelligence directorate, the office that collects and analyzes raw data and classified information. From 1969 to 1973, he headed the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

2 held with heroin in Vietnam: Two men holding Portuguese passports were caught carrying 18 kilograms (almost 40 pounds) of heroin when they arrived on a flight from Thailand, a local news report said Saturday. AP reports from Hanoi.

It was the largest amount of heroin ever seized in Vietnam, said the Saigon Newswriter, an English-language newsletter. Customs officials at Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat Airport found the heroin in the luggage of Kong Thong Sam and Ho Kam Weng, believed to be ethnic Chinese, the report said. Police have detained them for investigation, it said.

Fire claims 1 in Russian Far East: One man was killed and two badly burned when fire broke out on a fishing boat that had docked for repairs in Russia's far Eastern port of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. AP reports from Moscow.

The refrigerator ship Katram caught fire early Friday, and the blaze was not put out until about 23 hours later, the Interfax news agency reported Saturday, citing the Ministry for Emergency Situations. It said the ship was completely destroyed.

Campaign to educate Indian workers on AIDS launched

NEW DELHI, Mar 15: Industrialists in India, the emerging epicentre of an Asian HIV/AIDS epidemic, on Friday launched a nationwide campaign to educate workers about the deadly virus and help prevent its spread, reports Reuter.

HIV is the virus that can lead to AIDS, or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is normally transmitted through blood or semen.

The state-run national AIDS control organisation counted 2,312 diagnosed AIDS cases in the country as of January 31 and more than 21,000 confirmed HIV-positive cases, said Health Secretary PP Chauhan at the announcement of the initiative.

"It's obvious that India is sitting on a powder keg," Chauhan said. "Any kind of

half-hearted response or delay is going to cost us dearly. The private sector can play an important role."

That World Health Organisation estimates there should be at least five million people carrying the disease in India by the end of the century.

With its population of 900 million almost half of whom are illiterate, the Indian government faces a daunting task in educating its people about health issues and relies heavily on Non-Governmental Organisations for support.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the nation's most powerful industry group, aims to do its part by enlisting its 3,000 members to initiate workplace AIDS policies and prevention programmes by the end of 1997, said Shankar Ghose, the confederation's AIDS Task Force Chairman.

Rally protests China's military intimidation
20,000 Taiwanese march in Taipei
demanding independence

TAIPEI, Mar 16: More than 20,000 people marched here today to protest at China's military intimidation of Taiwan and demand the island become formally independent from the mainland, an AFP reporter saw, reports AFP.

Thousands of demonstrators marched through the streets of Taipei in bright sunshine, holding up protest placards, chanting anti-Beijing slogans and waving flags for pro-independence candidates in the March 23 Taiwanese presidential elections.

Some of the banners read "Taiwan is Taiwan, China is China, Taiwan is not a part of China," "down with aggression, down with reunification" and "Taiwan is a sovereign state."

Most of the demonstrators were students and young couples, some holding babies, but there were also many old people, handicapped, workers and people in tribal costumes.

Similar protests were held in Hsinchu in northern Taiwan, Taichung in the centre, and in Tainan and Kaohsiung, in the south of the island, sources there said. Attendance figures for those rallies were not immediately available.

The demonstrations were organised by two pro-independence community groups, World United Formosans for Independence and Taiwanese association of University Professors, and sponsored by the leading pro-independence political group, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

The protests came just a day after China announced it would hold a new military exercise just off Taiwanese territory, the sixth in an eight-month-long campaign of escalating intimidation.

Another report from Dubai says, the US Aircraft Carrier

Nimitz will arrive in the tension zone off Taiwan in "several days" after handing over its duties in the Gulf region to the USS George Washington, a US Navy spokesman said today.

The George Washington, whose warplanes have flown missions over Bosnia, sailed through the Suez Canal on Friday to join the 5th Fleet, which patrols the Red Sea and the Gulf. Commander T McCreary said.

He added that the nuclear-powered Nimitz will reach Taiwan in "several days," joining the US Aircraft Carrier Independence in the 7th Fleet.

The United States said

Thursday it had received assurances from China that there would be no intrusion of Taiwan as Beijing plans a new round of live-fire war games off the island.

But Washington has not reversed plans to increase its presence around the Taiwan Strait.

Each aircraft carrier battle group includes one cruiser, two destroyers and a frigate. The Independence has a crew of 5,500 and 70 aircraft.

In addition the Independence battle group has two submarines and two oil tankers, while the Nimitz battle group has an attack submarine, an

ammunition vessels and an oil tanker.

McCreary did not say when the George Washington would enter the Gulf where warplanes aboard US aircraft carriers start their missions enforcing the no-fly zone over southern Iraq.

Reuter adds from Moscow: A senior Foreign Ministry official said on Friday Russia was closely monitoring a crisis between Beijing and Taipei but reiterated that Moscow viewed Taiwan as an integral part of China.

"Russia's positions is such: There is only one China and Taiwan is part of it."



US Navy crewmen roll equipment early on Friday on the deck of the USS Independence sailing 200 nautical miles off the southern tip of Taiwan in the South China Sea. China accused the US of taking actions that "support and connive" with Taiwanese separatists, hinting that excessive US "interference" could eventually lead to war. — AFP/UNB photo

ROK protesters burn effigies of Japanese leaders

SEOUL, Mar 16: About 150 protesters rallied to condemn Japan for claiming a tiny set of islands between the two countries and burned effigies of Japanese government leaders, reports AP.

"Kick out the Japanese," they chanted, waving banners and pickets during a rally before the Japanese Embassy in central Seoul.

The protesters, mostly in their 60s and 70s, hooted and clapped hands as flames engulfed wood and paper effigies of Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and Foreign Minister Taro Aso. One protester slammed the burning effigies with a yard-long picket.

About 100 riot police, armed with shields and helmets, blocked the protesters about 20 meters (yards) from the embassy. No clashes or arrests were reported.

TB kills 3m people a year

LONDON, Mar 16: Tuberculosis is one of the world's deadliest diseases, killing more than three million people a year, but there is no immediate prospect of a new drug to treat it, health experts said on Friday, reports Reuter.

The deadly lung disease is resurgent because it has developed strains resistant to the anti-biotics previously used to treat it.

More than 95 per cent of TB sufferers live in the developing world. Consequently profits from any drug are likely to be lower than treatments developed for less serious ailments more prevalent in the prosperous West.

Glaxo major drug firms devoting resources to finding new drugs, said research was still in its infancy.

"I don't think it's possible to put a time-scale on it (a new drug) ... it is still a number of

years off," said Ken Duncan, leader of Glaxo's Action TB Research Project.

The project is a five-year cooperation scheme with academic research bodies worldwide backed by 10 million pounds (15.3 million) of Glaxo cash.

Duncan said the initiative was in its early stages.

"It's still too early in the whole process to be close to developing a drug, but one thing I can say is that we are certainly generating leads," he said.

Glaxo was briefing journalists on its TB operations ahead of the World Health Organisation's World TB Day on March 24: TB is the only disease who has ever termed a global emergency.

Paul Nunn, chief of WHO's Research and Surveillance Unit for TB, said the disease would kill 30 million people over the next decade unless

steps were taken to halt its spread back into areas where it was thought to have been eradicated.

"TB is a global problem. TB is found everywhere. There is no country, no matter how small, without some cases of TB," he said.

Glaxo scientists hold out some prospect of medical advances. They said they were exploring methods ranging from attacking the whole bacteria to boosting the human body's own immune system.

Studies have also tried to develop specific chemicals to try and attack parts of the TB bacteria, wash as its cell walls.

Another method, pioneered in South Africa by scientists linked to Action TB, is inspired by the world of crime-fighting. It tracks the spread of the disease by genetic fingerprinting the bacteria in the hope that more can be learnt about the way it is transmitted.

US Muslims blast release of 'Executive Decision'

WASHINGTON, Mar 16: US Muslims on Friday protested the release of a new Hollywood film entitled "Executive Decision" saying it unfairly stereotypes Muslims and Islam, reports AP.

The Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations said "informational leaflets" were planned at movie theaters in at least 13 states Friday "to offer basic facts about Islam and to help explain why Muslims believe the film unfairly stereotypes their community."

The new Warner Brothers film, directed by Joel Silver and starring Kurt Russell, includes "depiction of a terrorist performing Islamic prayers" and "terrorists claiming to be 'soldiers of Allah,'" the council said.

"Given Hollywood movies' usual images of Islam I can understand their point, although 'Executive Decision' is actually better than one," Stephen Witt of Knight-Ridder newspapers wrote in a review of the film referring to the criticism.



From L to R: Zulu Goodwill Zwelithini, President Mandela and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi after the meeting held at the Royal residence in Nongoma northern KwaZulu Natal region on Friday. The inconclusive meeting was to pave the way for a Zulu peace rally aimed at ending ten years of political killings in the province. — AFP/UNB photo

UN takes low profile as crisis emerges in East Asia

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 16: As China's war games raise tensions throughout East Asia, what role is the world's peace-keeper playing to lessen friction and avert war? None. At least in public, reports AP.

China ended its missile tests off Taiwan on Friday, but announced a new round of manoeuvres even closer to outlying Taiwanese islands.

The United States has sent the aircraft carrier USS Independence and its battle group to stand just off Taiwan, and another flotilla is on the way.

Although China and the United States have each promised to avoid conflict, the presence of military forces from two major powers in the narrow Taiwan Straits has increased stress throughout one of the world's most stable and

prosperous regions.

The stakes are high. And it is a classic example of the limits the United Nations faces in dealing with a potential crisis and its inability to live up to the idealistic role envisioned by its founders a half century ago.

Article I of the UN Charter, ratified in 1945 at the end of World War II, declared that the main mission of the United Nations was "to maintain international peace and security" and "take effective, collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace."

So far, however, the UN Security Council, which met until 3:30 am (0830 GMT) last month to discuss Cuba's downing of two US-owned Cessnas,

has not met to discuss the war games in the Taiwan Straits. After China announced new manoeuvres, the council spent the day discussing Somalia.

In his only public statement on the matter, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali last week expressed the hope that "all concerned will exercise restraint" to avoid "tensions in the area."

He went on to echo China's position, and that of the United Nations, saying Taiwan is a "province of China" and relations between Beijing and Taipei are "an internal matter."

The United Nations has, in fact, "intervened" in internal crises, such as Angola and Rwanda. But the United Nations will only act when invited or when the international community decides that the

problem could spill beyond a country's borders.

The situation in the Taiwan Straits involves two of the five permanent members of the Security Council — China and the United States. Each can veto any resolution or official statement.

The veto held by the permanent council members, which also include Russia, France and Britain, has in the past prevented any concerted UN effort to curb violence in such places as Vietnam and Chechnya.

The United Nations took a vigorous role in efforts to end the war in Afghanistan only after the Soviet Union decided it needed the organisation to resolve the conflict so it could withdraw its troops.

Off the Record

Infant voter!

TAIPEI: Taiwanese election officials could never be accused of failing to get out the vote in the first direct presidential elections on March 23, reports Reuter.

A Taiwanese couple were surprised to receive an official election notice for their three-month old baby as well as themselves, the United Daily News reported yesterday.

After checking with local authorities in Yungho near Taipei, the parents were told a new employee probably entered the wrong data into the election commission's computer.

World's first test-tube Panda

BEIJING: The world's first test-tube breakthrough to save China's endangered national animal, a senior researcher said on Friday, reports Reuter.

China's panda experts, battling hunters, shortages of its favourite arrow bamboo and the animal's poor reproductive capability, have already successfully bred some cubs through artificial insemination.

The next step is a test-tube panda, and 14 professors, researchers and experienced veterinarians are involved in the project in central Sichuan Province, a major panda habitat, the Xinhua news agency said.

The world's first test-tube panda could be born in a laboratory within five years, it quoted Zhang Anju, head of the research group and chairman of the China Panda Breeding Technology Committee, as saying.

Researchers will try to acquire an ovary from a dead panda, from which egg cells are to be extracted and put into a culture, explained Zhang, a deputy to the annual session of the National People's Congress, or parliament, in Beijing.

When an egg cell mature, it will be nurtured together with a panda's sperm to complete external fertilisation and the zygote will be nurtured in a test-tube until an embryo forms, he said.

'A thousand jails will not stop my care for the sick, needy'

MANILA: Congresswoman and former First Lady Imelda Marcos, already convicted of graft and facing numerous further charges, declared yesterday that "a thousand jails will not stop my care for the sick and needy," reports AFP.

The widow of the late deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos made the statement after a Senator asked this week why she was being allowed to roam freely, even after being convicted of graft in 1993 and sentenced to at least 18 years in jail.

"A thousand jails will not stop my care for the sick and needy my lenten prayer for my detractors: lord forgive them for they know not what they are doing," she said in a handwritten note sent to news agencies.

She did not elaborate what care she was providing to the sick and needy, although she has long styled herself as a protector of the downtrodden despite her extravagant sleeping apress and jet set lifestyle.

She faces numerous further charges of having helped plunder government coffers during her husband's 20-year reign, but remains free while her 1993 conviction is being appealed.

Puruliya arms-drop case CBI launches manhunt for 3 prime suspects

NEW DELHI, Mar 16: India's main investigating agency has launched a manhunt for three prime suspects allegedly involved in the air-drop of a huge consignment of weapons over an eastern district, the Press Trust of India said Friday, reports AP.

Police said the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was scouring the eastern district of Dhanbad for the three men — Satyanarayana Gowda alias "Randy," Daya Mainkrang Ansari or "Deepak" and a New Zealander who travelled on a forged passport using the name Kim Palgrave Davy.

Posters of the men were plastered across the coal-rich area, adjoining Puruliya district, where a Russian-made AN-26 plane dropped at least 250 AK-56 assault rifles, pis-

One killed as Indo-Pak troops trade gunfire along Kashmir border

JAMMU, India, Mar 16: An Indian villager was killed and another critically injured when Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy gunfire on their disputed border in Kashmir, officials said today, reports AP.

Indian officials said the villager, Viriam Singh, was killed overnight when Pakistani rangers reported to an unprovoked firing in the frontier area of Pindi some 35 kilometers (21 miles) from this Kashmiri winter capital.

The Pakistani forces fired some 50 rounds at Indian troops late Friday, a spokesman for the paramilitary Border Security Force (BSF) said, adding their men fired back sparking one of the heaviest gunbattles in recent times.

"The firing is still continuing," a BSF spokesman asserted. "We retaliated with equal force," the spokesman said. A civilian was seriously injured in the firing at Ramgarh area, about 45 kilometers (27 miles) from here.

Shakuntala Devi, a resident of Pindi where Viriam Singh died, said villagers had begun to migrate to neighbouring areas out of fear.

"The firing continued the whole night," she said. "Our children are not able to even step out of the house."

Indian and Pakistani paramilitary troops regularly trade fire across the border in divided Kashmir almost on a daily basis. But normally no one is hurt.

India, which holds the southern two-thirds of Kashmir, has fought two of its three wars with Pakistan over the Himalayan province since 1947.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training Muslim guerrillas in Kashmir, Islamabad denies the charge but extends moral and diplomatic backing to the anti-India rebellion in the Indian-held Kashmir.

700 police sent to Pailin Cambodia expects to take main Khmer base soon

PHNOM PENH, Mar 16: Hundreds of military and civilian police have been sent to Cambodia's northwest in anticipation of the army soon capturing the main Khmer Rouge base at Pailin, an Interior Ministry official said today, reports AP.

The official confirmed a report in the Khmer-language Rasmel Kampuchea (Light of Cambodia) newspaper which said that 700 police had recently arrived in Battambang province and would be in charge of maintaining order in Pailin once it was captured.

The government expects to capture Pailin, the gem-and-amber rich Khmer Rouge economic hub about 80 kilometers (56 miles) southwest of the provincial capital of Battam-bang Town, in the coming days, the report said.

The police, commanded by Kein Savuth, the chief of the National Military Police (Gendarmerie) and Kong Saran, the Deputy Police Commissioner of Phnom Penh, will be there to develop and maintain Pailin once we take it, the official said.

Military observers here have painted a cautious picture of the government's current offensive against the Maoist guerrillas, noting that a similar push on Pailin in 1994 ended with the army being forced to retreat a month after they had captured it.

They have pushed back several self-imposed deadlines for Pailin since the beginning of the year, the latest being March 15.