

BRIEFLY

Top DPRK defence official dies:

North Korea's No 2 defence official, Kim Kwang Jin, has died at 69, official North Korean radio said Friday. AP reports from Tokyo.

Radio Pyongyang, monitored in Tokyo by Radio Press, a media monitoring service, said Kim died Thursday. The broadcast did not give the cause of death, saying only that Kim, vice defence minister, died of an "incurable illness."

It wasn't immediately clear what impact the death would have on the reclusive Stalinist country's defence hierarchy. Kim's death comes less than a week after the death of the defence minister, Choe Kwang.

Clinton, Yeltsin talk summit agenda:

President Clinton spoke by telephone Thursday with Russian President Boris Yeltsin to set the agenda for their upcoming summit, AP reports from Washington.

During their 20-minute conversation, the two presidents agreed on a three-part agenda that includes the issues of European security, reduction of nuclear arms and economic reforms in Russia, said national security spokesman David Johnson.

There was some mention of NATO expansion, Johnson said, but Clinton did expound on the subject.

Israeli killed in S Lebanon:

Shi'ite Muslim guerrillas killed an Israeli soldier and wounded at least three others in south Lebanon early Friday, a few hours after Israeli troops killed a guerrilla fighter, security officials said, AP reports from Nabatiyeh, Lebanon.

The security officials said members of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, or Party of God, fired machine guns and mortars at an Israeli outpost in the "security zone" that Israel maintains in south Lebanon.

Chinese navy ships head for 3 nations:

Two Chinese navy ships left Shanghai on Thursday on a visit to Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, the government's Xinhua News Agency said, AP reports from Beijing.

Guided missile destroyer No 113 and guided missile corvette No 542 will be the first Chinese navy vessels to visit Malaysia and the Philippines, Xinhua said.

Prince Philip to visit 9 nations:

Prince Philip will embark next week on a three-week, nine-country tour, Buckingham Palace announced Thursday, AP reports from London.

Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh and 75-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth II, will visit Hungary, Turkey, Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, the sultanate of Oman, Mongolia, Japan, Russia, Alaska and Canada. The tour starts Sunday in Hungary, where he takes a trip on the Danube river to Gemenc national park. The prince is visiting in his capacity as president emeritus of Worldwide Fund for Nature International.

Doctors allow Ramos for tour:

Doctors gave President Fidel Ramos a clean bill of health Friday, allowing him to proceed with a 10-day, five-country trip this weekend, AP reports from Manila.

Ramos underwent surgery in December to unclog an artery supplying blood to the brain, setting off fears he may not be fit enough to complete his term of office, which expires in June 1998. The president is to leave Sunday on a trip to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Qatar and Bahrain.

US may limit gun sales to aliens:

Responding to the shootings at the Empire State Building, two US senators introduced a bill Thursday that would make it illegal for non-immigrant foreigners to carry or buy firearms, AP reports from Washington.

"The current gaps in federal law are appalling," said Sen. Edward Kennedy, sponsor of the legislation along with Sen. Richard Durbin. "A foreign national can come to the United States on a tourist visa, or a work visa, and then obtain a handgun legally with ease."

Indo-Pak talks need no preconditions: Gujral

NEW DELHI, Feb 28: Indian Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said here today that the country's first talks with Pakistan for more than three years would go ahead without preconditions over the Kashmir issue, reports AFP.

Gujral sought to clear the confusion after a series of contradictory signals over whether the South Asian neighbours could freeze their differences over the Himalayan region before agreeing to meet.

Gujral told AFP: "The letter from the Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif, in response to a letter from the prime minister of India, did not lay down any conditions on either side."

"I would only go by the corre-

spondence. I am not taking notice of things said elsewhere."

Nawaz Sharif's letter, following a message of congratulation from HD Deve Gowda following the Pakistan general elections, proposed foreign secretary-level talks between the two countries next month, paving the way towards a prime ministerial summit meeting.

Gujral added: "The letter was helpful."

India and Pakistan last held official talks in January 1994 but the negotiations, at foreign secretary level, broke up in acrimony.

The Himalayan region is

currently divided between Indian and Pakistan and has

sparked two of their three wars since independence in 1947.

Post-Deng era begins with call for political reforms

BEIJING, Feb 28: China's parliament spokesman started the post-Deng Xiaoping era today with a call for political reforms to match ongoing economic changes, reports AFP.

"Deng Xiaoping is the chief architect of China's socialist reform. An important component of his theory... is that while developing our economy, vigorous efforts should also be made to restructure China's political structure," spokesman Zhou Jue said.

Deng repeatedly mentioned

reform on political system in the third volume of his selected works," he said in a response to a question on China's future reform.

Deng is normally credited in Communist Party circles with pushing economic reforms while maintaining the absolute control of the party.

Zhou said post-Deng political reforms would not lead to "a copy of the parliamentary system or the multi-party system that is practiced in the west," but did not clearly indicate their direction.

Deuba hails development of Indo-Nepal ties

KATHMANDU, Feb 28: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba today hailed the recent developments of Nepal-India relations, adding that the two neighbours will work as equal partners in trade and development of water resources, reports Xinhua.

Opening a two-day seminar here, Deuba said the positive development in bilateral relations between Nepal and India in the past year proved that the two countries are ready to explore strengths for mutual socio-economic benefits.

An electric power trade agreement and a landmark treaty on integrated development of the Mahakali River, Nepal's western boundary with India, have heralded a new era of bilateral cooperation in wa-

ter resources development, the Nepali prime minister said.

The two documents were signed last February during Deuba's official visit to India.

Referring to the Nepal-India trade and transit treaty signed last December in Kathmandu, Deuba said a new, significant dimension has been added to the economic relations between the two neighbours.

He said that the new trade treaty, in which India pledges to lift requirements on material and labour contents for Nepali exports, would contribute to increasing Nepal's export to India and help offset the country's current trade imbalance.

Bilateral trade was 628 million dollars last year with an imbalance of 386 million dollars in India's favour.

Tories lose by-polls by huge margin

LONDON, Feb 28: Prime Minister John Major's Conservative Party lost a by-election by a huge margin Friday in a vote seen as a barometer for the forthcoming British general election due around May 1, reports AFP.

The win for opposition Labour candidate Ben Chapman in Wirral South, the Northwest of England puts the Tories once again in a minority in the House of Commons.

Chapman, a 56-year-old former civil servant, polled 22,767 votes in a high turnout of around 70 per cent winning with a majority of 7,888 — a swing in the vote from the Conservatives of around 17 per cent.

Govt-rebel talks mark progress in Peru

LIMA, Feb 28: Hostage-holding leftist rebels occupying the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima marked progress in talks Thursday with Peru's government on "substantive issues" and humanitarian ones, reports AFP.

The meeting, which was the seventh, lasted two hours and 45 minutes, and more discussions were set for Monday, March 3, an official said.

The Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement rebels are demanding the release of 440 jailed guerrillas as the price of releasing the 72 elite hostages it holds.

US asks Thailand to stop deporting Karen refugees

WASHINGTON, Feb 28: The United States on Thursday demanded Thailand to stop forcible return of Karen refugees immediately, calling the situation on the Thai Myanmar border "very difficult and tragic," reports Reuters.

The refugees fled to the Thai side after recent fighting between Burmese troops and rebel Karen National Union (KNU) guerrillas, but were told they could stay only three days, after which the men would be sent back to the conflict area and the women and children to a "safe corridor" further south along the border.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said the United States was "deeply concerned" about the actions of the Royal Thai Army in forcibly repatriating some 900 Karen women.

4 key ROK officials sacked

SEOUL, Feb 28: South Korean President Kim Young-sam today sacked four key officials of his secretariat in a reshuffle forced by the fallout from a damaging loans scandal, reports AFP.

The reshuffle of the 13-man secretariat dominated by Kim's long-time associates was smaller than expected to maintain "stability and security," presidential spokesman Yoon Yeo-joon said.

"I apologise for failing to serve the president," said Kim Kwang-il, chief of the presidential secretariat. He was replaced

by former home minister Kim Young-tae.

Three other outgoing aides also blamed themselves for causing the three-month-long crisis prompted by labour agitation in December and the ensuing loans-for-kickbacks scandal.

"I should take full responsibility," said Lee Suk-cha, the president's economic pointman, who was replaced by Kim In-ho, chairman of the Fair Trade Commission.

Former MP Kang In-sup took the post of senior secretary of political affairs and Ryu Jaeh-ho, head of the supply adminis-

tration, became senior secretary for general affairs.

The new appointees were considered neutral and reflect the will of Kim Young-sam, a former dissident, to distance himself from his associates, who have dominated the secretariat since the president's inauguration in 1993.

It was the first reshuffle since the Cabinet, the presidential staff and top officials of the ruling New Korea Party (NKP) all resigned this week to enable the president to clean house following his apology for the scandal.

Rights groups call for withdrawal of French immigration bill

PARIS, Feb 28: As an immigration bill that has provoked protests and calls to civil disobedience edged toward final approval, civil rights groups issued a last-minute call for public protest to press for its withdrawal, reports AP.

The National Assembly, dominated by the governing conservatives, adopted the bill Thursday after three days of passionate debate. Its most contentious section was revised the day before.

With less than one-third of the 577-seat National Assembly present for the evening ballot, the 113-61 vote was a lackluster anti-climax for the emotionally charged bill. Low attendance is not unusual in voting on bills whose passage is assured.

Hours later, France's main civil rights groups, saying the bill is dangerous, called for a demonstration March 9 — two days before the Senate is to vote on the proposal.

The bill is aimed at giving new muscle to efforts to curb illegal immigration, mainly from France's former colonies in Africa. Detractors say it is a ploy to appease the extreme-right National Front party, which blames immigration for France's record 12.7 unemployment rate and an array of social ills.

"Behind the pretext of the fight against illegal immigration, the real intention is to seriously disrupt the integration process of immigrants in France," said a joint statement from three organizations, the

International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, the Movement Against Racism and for the Friendship of Peoples and SOS — Racism.

The bill allows police to search work places for illegal employees, search immigrants' vehicles and confiscate passports of foreigners.

It also could make it more difficult for longtime residents to renew their 10-year residency cards. They must prove they are not "a threat to public order" and maintain a "regular residence" in France — an effort to crack down on fake addresses.

The focus of protest was on a now-deleted plan to require French hosts to announce the departure of certain foreign guests to authorities.



Palestinian woman vents her anger at Israeli soldiers as hundreds of Palestinians demonstrate near the hill where Israel plans to build a new Jewish neighbourhood, Thursday, in Jebel Abu Ghoneim (Har Homa). — AFP/UNB photo

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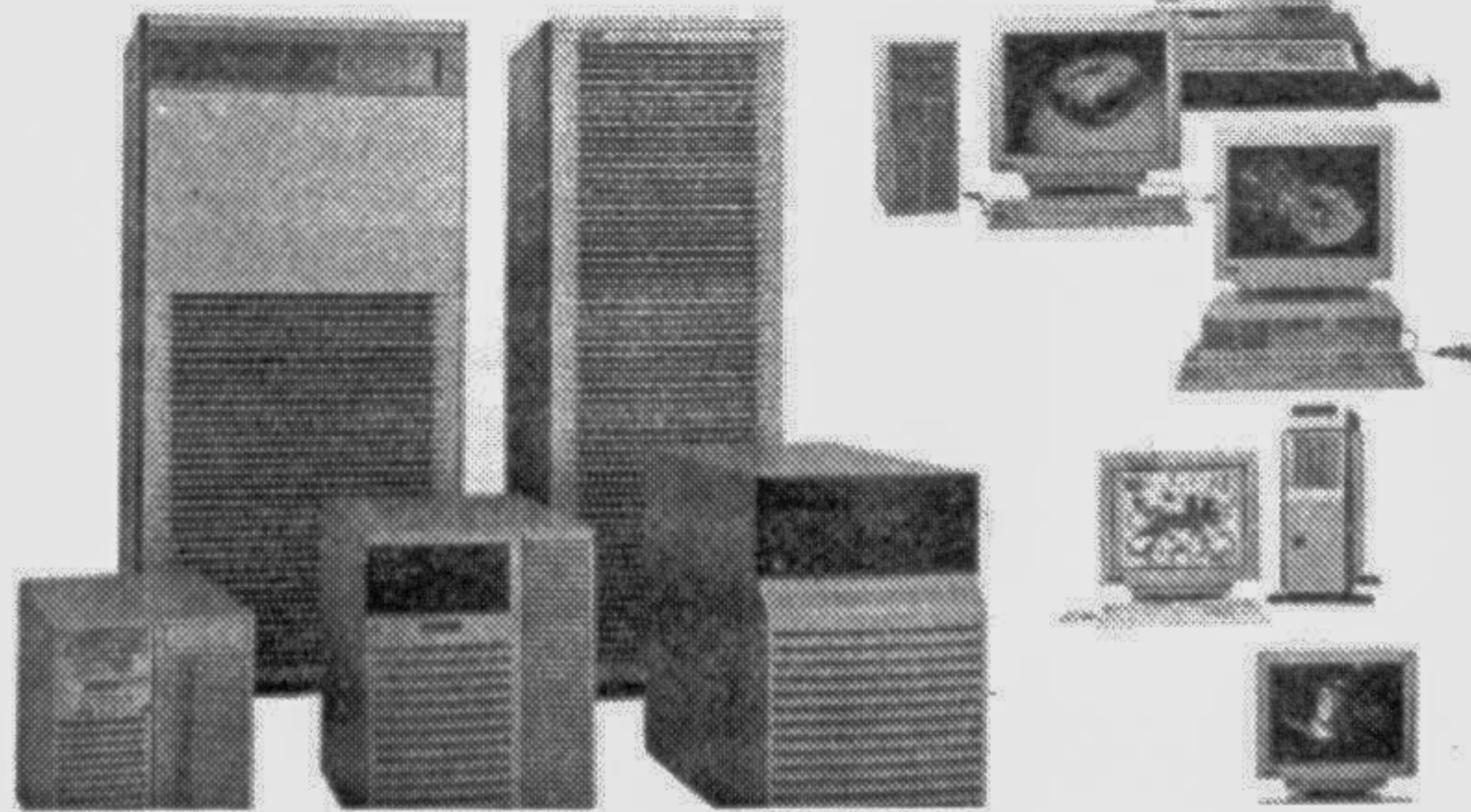
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