

## International

**Reagan lost ability to put his thoughts into words**

WASHINGTON, Jan 24 : Former US president Ronald Reagan has suffered a decline in his motor skills and has lost the ability to put his thoughts into words, his daughter Maureen Reagan wrote in today's *Newsweek* magazine, reports AFP.

Since Reagan, 88, was diagnosed in 1994 as having Alzheimer's disease, his condition has steadily declined, Maureen Reagan wrote.

"When people ask me how my dad is doing, my response is 'not so good,'" she said, adding that "his motor skills are going."

The former president can no longer engage in even some simple pursuits.

"Earlier in the disease we did jigsaw puzzles ... we started with 300-piece puzzles and worked our way down to 100," Reagan wrote.

**LTTE has spies in defence ministry**

COLOMBO, Jan 24 : Sri Lanka's separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas have access to classified information through spies at the defence ministry and there had been two known recent leaks, a state run daily said today, reports AFP.

The Sinhalese-language *Dinamina* daily said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas who are fighting government forces in the island's north-east had access to information from the defence ministry.

The state-run paper in front-page banner headlines said a planned snap curfew in the capital Colombo and a suburb had leaked to a Tamil newspaper and another daily, helping suspected Tiger rebels to escape.

Most of these officers who sabotage security measures taken by the government are also active supporters of the opposition, the *Dinamina* newspaper said.

**Megawati visits Spice Islands to halt strife**

JAKARTA, Jan 24 : Indonesian Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri Monday started a three-day visit to the Maluku Islands in a fresh bid to halt violence between Muslims and Christians, which has claimed at least 1,800 lives in the past year.

Megawati first visited Tual, the capital of Southeast Maluku district, now peaceful after waves of sectarian violence last year. As Tanga, a spokesman for the provincial governor's office in Amboin, told AFP.

On Tuesday she will meet Muslim and Christian religious leaders in Amboin, the capital of the Malukus, for talks on forging reconciliation between the two religious communities, Tanga said.

The day after tomorrow (Wednesday) she will visit Ternate, the capital of the newly established North Maluku province, he said.

**Iran ready to negotiate with US on ties**

TEHRAN, Jan 24 : Iran is "ready to negotiate" with the United States over resuming ties after a 20-year break but "only on the basis of mutual interest and equality," Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi said today, reports AFP.

In football, the two sides are equal but in politics they are not, Kharazi said in reference to the national teams' 1-1 draw in a landmark friendly in Pasadena, California, earlier this month.

**Aum guru's son rescued**

TOKYO, Jan 24 : Japanese police said today they had safely rescued the seven-year-old son of the Aum Supreme Truth sect founder Shoko Asahara, two days after he was kidnapped, reports AFP.

The boy, whose name is withheld, was rescued late Sunday at a hotel in the hot spring resort of Hakone, some 80 km west of Tokyo, a police spokesman said.

Police arrested a 29-year-old Aum member, identified as Akira Tone, on suspicion he used a fictitious name to stay at the inn with the son of Asahara.

**Anjouan rebels claim victory in referendum**

NAIROBI, Jan 24 : Residents of Anjouan have voted against bringing the self-styled Indian Ocean island back into the fold of the Comoros federation, a senior separatist official told AFP by telephone today.

He said unofficial results of a referendum held Sunday on the island, which unilaterally seceded in 1997, showed that a vast majority of voters were not in favour of joining a proposed looser Comoran federation in which the constituent islands would enjoy a greater degree of autonomy.

The rejection of the Anjouan accord won 90 percent of the vote, said the official, speaking by telephone from Anjouan's main town, Mutsamudu.



A Pakistan army soldier checks for explosive near their post which was attacked by Indian army troopers in the Chamb sector Sunday. Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf has vowed to teach India a "lesson" if its troops cross the disputed border in Kashmir. The warning followed a serious clash between the two armies in the Chamb sector on the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Kashmir between the two countries. — AFP photo

**'Indo-Pak fighting in Kashmir may escalate'**

ISLAMABAD, Jan 24 : New fighting between Pakistan and India in the disputed Himalayan state of Kashmir could escalate into a more serious conflict, Pakistani newspapers warned today, reports AFP.

In one of the worst confrontations in a year, 17 Pakistani and two Indian soldiers were killed late Friday on the Line of Control which divides Kashmir, according to New Delhi figures.

Islamabad said only two of its soldiers were killed and another five were missing, and blamed the attack on India.

The shadows of war are lengthening in the wake of the latest violation of the Line of Control by Indian troops," The News daily said in an editorial.

"At this moment a catastrophic confrontation seems a real possibility," the widely-repected newspaper said.

Rows over Kashmir have sparked two wars between the neighbours since they won independence from Britain in 1947.

Another major newspaper, *The Nation*, said Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf, who led the army during the Kargil clashes and then seized power in an October coup, had a major challenge on his hands.

"The fact that India has refused to de-escalate tension with Pakistan, despite repeated US advice to do so, is a danger signal that Pakistan can ill afford to overlook," The Nation said.

Heavily armed guerrillas

Nearly every day brings shelling across the border, and last year the two sides came close to a third war in 10 weeks of heavy fighting around Kargil in Kashmir.

Tensions between the two countries represent even more of a threat since both tested nuclear weapons in 1998.

The presence of nuclear weapons warrants prudence and restraint as this factor has changed altogether the degree and dimension of the danger the LoC represents, The News said.

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Heavily armed guerrillas

**India warns Pakistan to stop making threats**

'CTBT in a coma'

NEW DELHI, Jan 24 : Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes warned Pakistan's military rulers Monday to stop making threats and instead help build an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of bilateral talks, reports AFP.

"Instead of speaking in language of threats, (Pakistan) should make conditions for some talking," Fernandes was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India. "It is a pity there is no dialogue."

Fernandes' comments, after an address to a conference here on Asian security in the 21st century, follow weekend threats by Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf to teach India a "lesson" if its troops cross the disputed border in Kashmir, known as the Line of Control (LoC).

"Indians are not refraining from crossing the LoC out of any love for Pakistan," Musharraf said. "They would have done it long before if they could. We will teach them a lesson on the LoC or anywhere else."

Indian officials said 17

Pakistani and two Indian soldiers were killed late Friday along the LoC. Pakistan said only two of its soldiers had died.

The fighting was among the worst since a 10-week Kashmir border conflict erupted in May last year, claiming 1,000 lives on both sides.

Fernandes said Pakistan had yet to get over the military defeat Indian troops inflicted on Islamabad-backed Islamic separatists, whose incursion into Indian Kashmir triggered the fighting.

"It appears Pakistan is still smarting under (that) blow," the minister said. "It is time they got over this syndrome."

Indian and Pakistani troops routinely clash on the Kashmir frontier. Both countries dispute the ownership of Kashmir and control parts of the picturesquely Himalayan province.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since their independence in 1947, two of them over Kashmir.

A Muslim separatist drive in the Indian zone has claimed more than 25,000 lives since

1989. India blames the unrest on Pakistan, which denies the charge but offers open support for the insurgency.

Meanwhile, Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes today described the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as a moribund document, with little chance of short-term resuscitation.

Last year's vote by the US Senate against ratification of the CTBT resulted in the treaty sliding into a coma," Fernandes said in the inaugural address to an international conference on Asian Security in the 21st Century.

This has introduced serious uncertainties about the treaty coming into force in the foreseeable future," Fernandes said.

India has been under intense US pressure to sign the CTBT since it conducted a series of underground nuclear tests in May 1998.

During his speech, Fernandes stressed India's nuclear policy was purely defensive and "very close" in nature to that of its giant neighbour, China.

"We are committed not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states. Our strategy, therefore, will be one of retaliation only," the defence minister said.

This policy should reassure everyone who is not contemplating to pose a threat to India.

Fernandes also called for an "international" coalition to combat cross-border terrorism in Asia, which he warned was being driven by drug trafficking, money laundering and religious extremism."

He specifically targeted Pakistan, which India has been seeking to have labelled a terrorist nation following the recent hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane that New Delhi charges Islamabad with masterminding.

"What we are experiencing is the continuing tragedy, imposed on innocent people by Pakistan, through its transnational, transborder terrorism for over 15 years," Fernandes said.

The level and viciousness of violence has been increasing."

**Senior Pak police official sacked over Karachi blast**

KARACHI, Jan 24 : A senior police official has been suspended following last week's bombing in Pakistan's troubled city of Karachi that killed eight people and injured 22, officials said today, reports AFP.

AD Khwaja, a senior superintendent, was suspended after the bomb exploded in Karachi's downtown Arambagh Road, the Associated Press of Pakistan said.

The police official faced various charges of incompetency and irregularity, the agency said.

A spokesman for the governor of southern Sindh Province told the agency an investigation was underway.

**Arafat leaves Tunis for EU talks in Brussels**

TUNIS, Jan 24 : Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat left Tunis late Sunday, following a brief visit here, to fly to Brussels for talks with European foreign ministers on the Middle East peace process, reports AFP.

Arafat, who had arrived here earlier Sunday, briefed Tunisian President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali on his just-completed talks with US President Bill Clinton.

Arafat had sought "urgent intervention" in the peace process from Clinton.

**God's Army storms Thai hospital, takes 700 hostage**

30 hostages bolt for freedom

RATCHABURI, Thailand, Jan 24 : Around 30 people bolted for freedom today from buildings in the hospital complex seized by dissident Myanmar gunmen, witnesses said, reports AFP.

The group of mostly middle-aged hostages had been hiding in a building in the hospital undetected by the gunmen, television reports said.

They fled down an alley way as Thai police armed with rifles gave them cover, television reports said.

Police in pickup trucks then took them away from the hospital at high speed.

The gunmen earlier released 10 members of staff from the hospital where Thai officials say around 700 people are being held hostage.

Thai Army commander General Surayud Chulanont told reporters the gunmen warned Thai forces to keep away from the hospital and to stop firing mortars at their group along the border.

"We have agreed to these two last conditions," he said.

The guerrillas also called on Thailand to pressure Myanmar to halt an offensive against them and asked for medical

treatment for injured comrades, officials said.

Paveena Moobutr, 21, a nurse trapped inside the hospital told reporters on her mobile phone that the gunmen were armed with M-16 assault rifles and had rigged up remote control bombs around the building.

"I saw it with my own eyes. I saw a big blue public bus drive into the front of the hospital and three to four gunmen in uniform and some others jumped out," she said.

She said around 700 people were being held hostage in the hospital, a figure confirmed by the health ministry.

"The deputy permanent secretary of the health ministry said there are around seven hundred people in the hospital," a health ministry official told AFP.

Thai police volunteer Chan-tas Tilokavichai told AFP the fighters had rigged up a bomb packed with ball bearings at the entrance to the hospital and had threatened to detonate it if Thai forces tried to oust them.



Thai police carry a woman (C) who is released from Ratchaburi hospital after being held by kidnappers yesterday. A group of 10 heavily armed ethnic Karen dissidents, known as God's Army and opposed to the government of neighbouring Myanmar, seized the hospital packed with some 700 patients and staff earlier in the day. — AFP photo

**'American Beauty' wins Golden Globe for best picture**

Caine ("The Cider House Rules"), Michael Clarke Duncan ("The Green Mile"), Jude Law ("The Talented Mr. Ripley") and Haley Joel Osment ("The Sixth

Sense").

Jolie plays an outspoken mental patient in "Girl Interrupted."

She edged out Cameron Diaz

and Catherine Keener (both nominated for "Being John Malkovich") Samantha Morton ("Sweet and Lowdown") Natalie Portman ("Anywhere But Here")

and Chloe Sevigny ("Boys Don't Cry").

Jim Carrey was named best actor in a musical or comedy for his portrayal of the late comic Andy Kaufman in Milos Forman's "Man on the Moon."

"This is a surprise. Another one. Second year in a row," said Carrey, 38, who last year took home the best dramatic actor Globe for "The Truman Show."

Spanish director Pedro Almodovar's "All About My Mother" was named best foreign language film, and Phil Collins' "You'll Be In My Heart" from "Tarzan" took best original song.

On the television side, HBO was the big winner with eight awards.

The cable network's Mafia drama "The Sopranos" won for best drama series -- besting "ER," "Once and Again," "The Practice" and "The West Wing" -- and three of its stars won statuettes.

HBO's "Sex And The City" was named best musical or comedy television series, while co-star Sarah Jessica Parker got a best actress award, and the network's "RKO 281," about the making of "Citizen Kane," was named best TV miniseries or motion picture.

**Indonesia defends crackdown on island near S'pore**

SINGAPORE, Jan 24 : Indonesia has defended its bloody crackdown on protesters seeking higher compensation for land on Bintan island, where Singaporeans hold the lion's share of investments, reports said today, says AFP.

"I am very sad by the turn of events. But if nothing was done, there will be problems for Bintan in the long run," the head of the Bintan District Assembly, Huzirin Hood, was quoted as saying by Singapore's Straits Times daily.

Bintan, about 50 km east of here, is a popular weekend resort for Singaporeans, who also hold the majority of the 1.35 billion-Singapore-dollar (808-million-US) in investments there.

In a pre-dawn operation Sunday, Indonesian troops moved in to quell nearly a week of protests outside the Bintan Beach International Resort by about 200 disgruntled villagers.

At least 13 people were injured, four of them