



Reagan breaks hip in fall

LOS ANGELES, Jan 13: Former US President Ronald Reagan broke his right hip in a fall at his home on Friday evening and will undergo surgery in a California hospital, his office announced, reports AFP.

Reagan, who turns 90 on February 6, was listed in stable condition at St. John's Health Centre in Santa Monica, where he was brought after the accident, spokeswoman Sheri Lietzow said late Friday.

"He is fully alert, in good humour and in stable condition," his chief of staff Joanne Drake said in a statement. His wife, Nancy Reagan, was at his side and doctors have placed restrictions on other visits.

Reagan, who was US president from 1981 to 1989, retreated from public life after revealing in November 1994 that he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Indian peace promoters arrive in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 13: A six-member Indian delegation of former top ranking government and military officials has arrived in Pakistan to "continue the process of unofficial dialogue" between New Delhi and Islamabad sharing tense relations, reports published today said.

The team will lend efforts "to bring the two countries closer to peace and pave the way for official dialogue," Islamabad-based newspaper The Nation reported.

The Indian intellectuals and former bureaucrats will discuss with Pakistani counterparts the nuclear issue, nuclear risk reduction and non-proliferation.

India and Pakistan tested nuclear devices in May 1998.

The Indians will also meet with Pakistan's foreign minister Abdul Sattar, and chief Pakistani diplomat Inamul Haq.

Russia to cut 33000 interior troops

MOSCOW, Jan 13: Russia will cut down its interior troops by 33,000 men as part of a general 600,000-person reduction plan for the armed forces and other troops under a Russian Security Council decision, a senior Russian Interior Ministry official said Friday, reports Xinhua.

"To reduce troops, it is necessary to correspondingly change their tasks, that is, to lift or reduce some of them," Lieutenant General Stanislav Kavun, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Russian interior forces, told reporters here.

Specific units and positions subject to reduction will be defined only after the government works out mechanism for this, he said.

In any case, the reduction will not affect the troops' combat forces, especially those engaged in establishing order in Chechnya, the general said.

Moreover, discharged servicemen will receive all social protection they are qualified to have under law, he said.

Li Peng asks India to bury the hatchet

NEW DELHI, Jan 13: Li Peng, China's second-highest leader, today urged India to bury memories of a 1962 war and long-running border dispute, to take the relationship between the Asian giants to "new heights," reports AFP.

Li, who arrived to Tibetan protests to deliver a speech at the India International Centre to select intellectuals, diplomats and reporters, stressed New Delhi and Beijing's historical links, spanning more than 1,000 years.

"We agree that China and India are still lacking in mutual understanding and to achieve better understanding and trust is a pressing task," Li said.

"While not shying away from the problems and differences between us, we hope that far-sighted statesmen of our two countries will demonstrate courage and will make efforts to resolve these problems and

differences."

The former premier and current chairman of China's parliament stressed that "problems ... left over from history should not become impediments" and called on both countries to "elevate relations to a new height in the 21st century."

India says China still holds 40,000 square kilometres of its territory in Kashmir, while Beijing lays claim to a wide swathe of territory in Arunachal Pradesh.

The dispute triggered a brief but bitter border war in 1962 which shattered India's close ties with China and made a mockery of a then-prevalent popular slogan in India's national language Hindi, which translated as "India and China are brothers."

Li, who arrived in India Tuesday on a nine-day visit, the highest-level Chinese tour since New Delhi's shock nuclear tests in 1998 which soured relations,

said his ongoing trip had been fruitful.

"It has been very, very successful and I am sure it will bring tangible benefits," he said.

He also underlined that China had consistently maintained a friendly posture.

"We have never taken India as a threat," he said. "We place emphasis on keeping good neighbourly and friendly relations with India ... Nor do we intend to pose a threat to other countries or seek a sphere of influence."

An Indian foreign ministry spokesman in New Delhi on Friday had said both sides agreed that the thorny border dispute needed to be resolved soon.

"He (Li) said that a good beginning had been made with the exchange of maps of line of actual control last year," the spokesman said of an imaginary line that delineates the two territories.



A police officer tries to prevent Tibetan protesters from displaying a banner during a demonstration in front of the India International Centre in New Delhi, where Chairman of China's National People's Congress Li Peng was delivering a speech yesterday. Some 100 Tibetans staged a noisy anti-Chinese demonstration to denounce China's Tibet policy.

-AFP photo

60 Pakistanis freed from bonded labour camp

MULTAN, Pakistan, Jan 13: More than 60 people forced to work as fettered slaves for 13 years have been released from a bonded labour camp in a Pakistani village, officials said today, reports AFP.

They won their freedom after a judicial officer accompanied by police raided the camp, located at Manawala in Khanewal district, 50 kilometres from here, on Friday, they said.

The action was ordered by high court judge Munir Ahmad in response to a petition filed by advocate Rashid Rehman of the private Human Rights Commis-

sion of Pakistan, court sources said.

Police said they had arrested the owner of the camp where the bonded labourers, including 44 women and children, were kept in chains and made to work in a brick-making kiln without wages.

Heads of several of the destitute families who arrived here after their release thanked the judge and the rights commission for their freedom.

"We were trapped into forced labour. They offered us loans for working at the kiln and once there we were enslaved," 40-year old Mohammad Riaz told

AFP. "Armed guards kept a vigil as we toiled during day and at night we were chained in the camp. We received no wages and any demands were met with brutal beatings. We thank God the oppression has come to an end."

The kiln owner faces up to five years in jail under the local laws prohibiting bonded labour, police said.

Though rehabilitation is an uphill task for the freed families Riaz said, they had learned the brick-making trade and "we can earn our livelihood in freedom."

70 pc of Americans have confidence in Bush: Poll

WASHINGTON, Jan 13: A week before his inauguration as the 43rd US president, the overwhelming majority of Americans have confidence in George W. Bush's ability to handle the economy and world affairs, a new opinion poll showed Friday.

The survey by CNN television and Time magazine found seventy per cent of those polled said they had a lot of confidence or some confidence in Bush's ability to provide real leadership for the country today.

However, Bush is not the most popular member of his administration.

The approval rating for secretary of state-designate Colin Powell reached 77 per cent, according to the poll.

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IAEA to inspect Iraqi nuclear material

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 13: The International Atomic Energy Agency said on Friday it intends to carry out a limited inspection of nuclear material in Iraq conducted prior to 1998 under a Security Council resolution ordering Baghdad to eliminate all its weapons of mass destruction, it said in a letter of the 15-nation UN Security Council.

The inspection would have the limited goal of simply verifying that the known nuclear material, none of which is of weapons grade, was there and remained under seal, said Mohamed ElBaradei, director-general of the Vienna-based nuclear watchdog agency.

The IAEA is required to carry out these limited inspections once a year, and the last one was completed on Jan. 25, 2000, ElBaradei said in his letter dated Dec. 22 and circulated on Friday.

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