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Off The Wire

National and international news from the Reuter News Report

South Korea alleges spying, sinks boat

SEOUL - South Korea said Sunday that it sank an armed North Korean spy boat and captured two northern commandos off its southeast coast Saturday, the worst incident involving the two Koreas since the Rangoon bomb blast that killed four South Korean ministers two months ago. Gen. Lee Ki-Baek said the commandos were seized as they approached the port of Pusan after being dropped by the alleged spy boat. The vessel was sunk by a joint naval and air operation about 20 minutes later.

The foreign ministry said Sunday it has instructed South Korean diplomatic missions abroad to explain the latest occurrence to foreign governments and to seek joint international sanctions against what it called "the dangerous North Korean terrorist group."

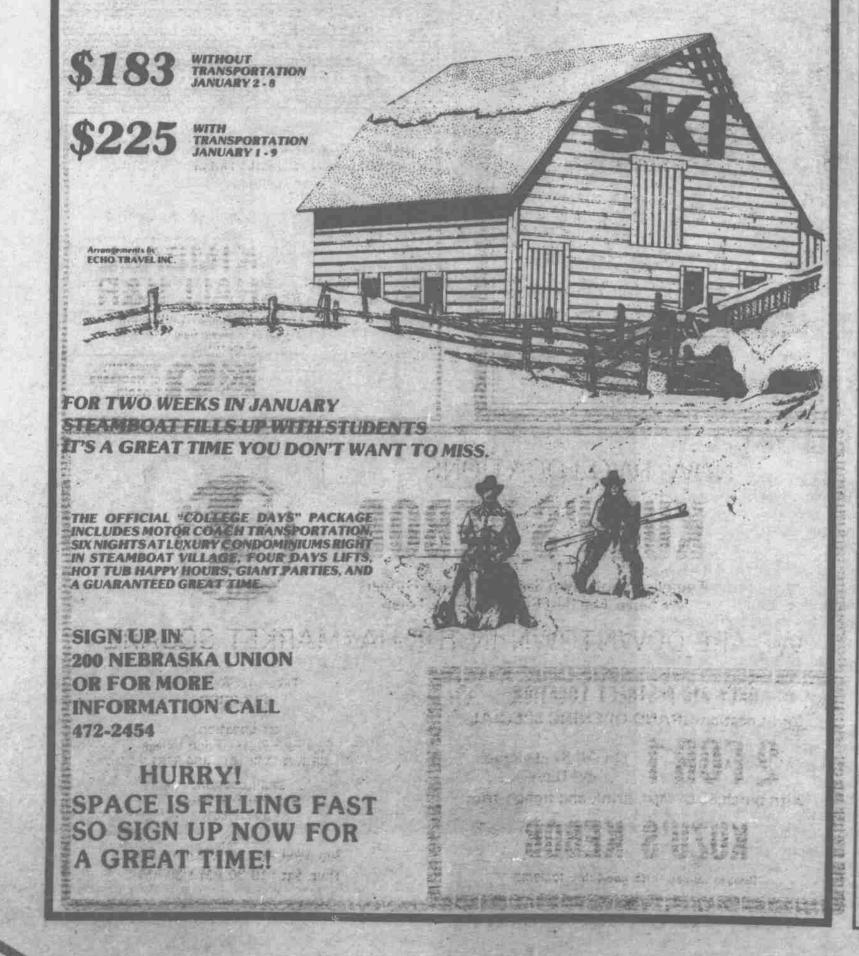
Druse Moslems end siege

BEIRUT, Lebanon — The Druse Moslem militia Sunday announced the lifting of a three-month-old siege of a Christian town in the Shouf Mountains so that 20,000 Christians can spend Christmas with their families and friends. Lifting of the siege of Deir Al-Qamar was announced at a press conference by a spokesman for Druse chieftain Walid Jumblatt.

Lebanese Christians welcomed the move but asked: "Where are they to go?" They said many of the people in the town are refugees from nearby Christian villages overrun by the Druse and would find it impossible to return to their homes.

Space experiments saved

HOUSTON — The crew of the space shuttle Columbia earned the title of "repairmen extraordinaires" Sunday after one crewman delved into the insides of an electric power unit to fix a short circuit and another made an impromptu "darkroom" to repair a camera. The crew and their scientific colleagues on the ground also rearranged some of the planned activities aboard Columbia to overcome another electronic problem and allow the successful operation of the other instruments. Scientists on the ground were planning what they want done if the shuttle remains in orbit an additional, tenth day as planned. The extension would allow them to conduct an investigation into oscillations in the sun's surface.



Leader to resume duties?

BONN, West Germany — The Soviet Union was told West Germany that Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, not seen in public since August, is recovering from illness and probably will resume his duties later this week, a Bonn government spokesman said Sunday. The statement confirmed a report in a Hamburg newspaper quoting a chief government spokesman as saying: "The Soviets have told me that Andropov will probably resume his duties on December 10." Andropov, 66, was elected to the post of Communist Party leader after the death of President Leonid Breshnev in November last year. He became president several months later. There has been persistent speculation in the West that ill health and Politburo rivalries have weakened his hold on power.

Reagan pledges support

WASHINGTON — President Reagan Sunday pledged that the United States would quit the United Nations if Israel ever were expelled from the international organization.

"Just so no one gets any ideas, let me be blunt. If Israel is ever forced to leave the U.N., the United States and Israel will leave together," Reagan said. The president made his comments during a brief appearance at a Jewish community center in Rockville, Md., where he participated in a candlelighting ceremony to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. Reagan, who scheduled the appearance before Sunday's air raids on Syrian positions in Lebanon, also promised the United States would stand by Israel during any threat to its security.