

BRIEFLY

39 burned to death in Vietnam: At least 39 people burned to death when a leaking gasoline pipeline exploded into flames in Quang Ninh, northeast Vietnam, the Vietnam News Agency (VNA) said yesterday. AP reports from Hanoi.

Most of the 39 killed and 62 injured in Tuesday's tragedy were local residents who had flocked to the site to collect the gasoline pouring out of the pipeline, owned by a state petroleum distribution company, VNA said.

Jackson puts off another concert: A bad tooth has forced pop singer Michael Jackson to postpone another Mexico City concert, the second cancellation in two days, news reports said Wednesday. AP reports from Mexico.

Jackson's doctors said the singer had to postpone a concert scheduled for Thursday night because he needed another day of rest after having a molar pulled, news agency Notimex reported.

The Gloved One canceled his Tuesday night show at the city's Giant Azteca Stadium after the infection forced him to have the tooth out.

2 Palestinians shot in Gaza: Israeli troops, fearing they were about to be blown up by a car bomb, shot and wounded two Palestinians whose vehicle crashed into their own in the occupied Gaza Strip on Wednesday, military sources said. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

The driver of the Palestinian car was seriously wounded and his son was slightly hurt, the sources said, describing the crash as a traffic accident.

Clashes leave 10 dead in Congo: At least 10 people were killed on Wednesday in clashes between Congolese security forces and opposition militants in the capital, hospital sources said, Reuter reports from Brazzaville.

A nurse said 10 bodies had been brought to the morgue in Brazzaville's main hospital. Five were soldiers and the rest were civilians or members of opposition militias.

The Red Cross said the toll could be higher as medical teams could not enter the site of the clashes in the Bacongo district.

Car bomb explodes in Paris: A car bomb that police said was placed by common criminals exploded Thursday in a poor neighbourhood of the French capital. No one was injured, AP reports from Paris.

The bomb exploded outside a clothing shop that has been closed several months in the down-scale 10th district. The shop entry crumbled and windows in the block were blown out.

UNGA blasts coup in Burundi

NEW YORK, Nov 4: The General Assembly Wednesday condemned the coup in Burundi and supported the efforts of Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to promote the return of constitutional order and protect democratic institutions, reports USIS.

Adopting a resolution, by consensus, the assembly demanded that the military who attempted the coup lay down their arms and return to their barracks, and that democracy be restored immediately. It also asked nations and organisation to provide emergency humanitarian assistance "or any other assistance" to the people of

Burundi, United Nations report said.

US delegate Herbert Gelber said the United States strongly supports the condemnation of the military and demands that the elected government be restored to full power. The resolution "will send a clear signal to all that the international community is unanimous in its support of Burundi's democratic transition, and will condemn any attempt to reverse it," he said.

"We note with satisfaction that the coup attempt has apparently failed and several suspected coup plotters have been arrested or have fled the country," Gelber said. "Prime

Minister Kinigi and other members of the cabinet have taken important measures to reassert control over the country," said USIS today.

He said the United States applauds the bravery of the prime minister, foreign minister and other government officials who persevered throughout the crisis and are now working to consolidate the government's control over the situation.

"We are shocked and deeply saddened by the violence and mounting casualties in Burundi. We urge all sides to refrain from violence and respect the authority of the elected government," he added. Despite the assembly's reso-

lution, a top UN official said November 2 that the UN is unlikely to send any peacekeeping force into the country to help the government restore control.

Discussing his recent fact-finding trip to Burundi, Undersecretary General James Jonah said the UN is over-stretched in its peacekeeping operations and the costs are mounting, thus "all indications are that the council will not want to send a peacekeeping force to Burundi because of cost and the danger it presents to member states."

He said he looks "to the OAU to undertake new responsibilities," but he added that it would need logistic and other help from nations outside Africa.



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (R) being greeted by Senegalese President Abdou Diouf upon his arrival at Dakar Airport on Wednesday for a one-day visit. — AFP photo

Chretien takes over as Canada's Prime Minister

OTTAWA, Nov 4: Jean Chretien, whose Liberal Party was swept to power by voters dissatisfied with the Canadian economy, was expected to move quickly to start creating jobs after taking over as prime minister Thursday, reports AP.

After nine years in opposition, the left-of-center Liberals are anxious to get off to a fast start. Chretien is expected to announce a meeting with provincial premiers to be implementing his 6 billion dollars (4.5 billion US) public works programme to create 120,000 jobs.

Kim Campbell, who became Canada's first woman prime minister after the resignation of Brian Mulroney only to be pulverised at the polls four months later, was offering her government's resignation to the governing Liberal Thursday morning.

Islamic states may be targets of western attack: Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 4: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad today said Muslim radicalism could make Islamic nations targets of Western Attack, reports AFP.

"There are indications that the West now regards Islam as a threat," he said, adding that this view had been shaped by a small group of Muslims who had led Westerners into believing that violence was the Islamic way of life.

Mahathir was addressing the annual meeting of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysia's largest political party which dominates the ruling 11-party National Front Coalition.

The 47-year-old UMNO's 1.9 million members are almost all Muslims.

Mahathir, who is Prime Minister by virtue of being UMNO chief, said that there was real danger of the Western powers targeting Muslims for attack following the end of the cold war and the collapse of communism.

"There is a real possibility that we will become the direct targets of Western attack and we can be totally destroyed because of our weakness," he said.

Mahathir, 68, Prime Minister since 1981, is widely viewed as a Muslim moderate and an outspoken critic of Muslim fundamentalism which he has said threatens to retard the economic progress of ethnic Malays.

The fundamentalist Parti Islam or Islamic Party, UMNO's

main rival, has failed to make much headway in Malaysia except in northeastern Kelantan state where it won power three years ago.

Mahathir told some 3,000 delegates and observers at the assembly's opening that Muslims were themselves to



Mahathir Mohammad blame for the bias and prejudice of non-Muslims.

"The wealth bestowed on the Islamic nations has not benefited them and instead has triggered wars among Muslims, turning Islamic countries into testing grounds for Western weapons," he said.

As such Muslims were helpless when fellow Muslims in Bosnia and Somalia were daily shot at, murdered and driven from their homes, Mahathir said.

77 fundamentalists killed in Algeria

ALGIERS, Nov 4: Algerian security forces have killed 77 armed Muslim fundamentalists in different parts of the country over the past 10 days, 10 of them on Tuesday, the forces said Wednesday evening, reports AP.

On Tuesday, five fundamentalists were killed in Mostaganem, in the west, four in Larbaa, near Algiers where three French consular employees were recently held hostage, and one in the nearby village of Sidi Moussa, security forces said.

On Wednesday, the security forces carried out a wide sweep in eastern parts of the capital and there was intermittent gunfire as special army units backed by police and paramilitary police moved into the area.

Soldiers standing 30 metres (yards) apart ringed the area and military units manned major intersections in an operation overseen by helicopter.

Monstrous traffic jams built

up as vehicles and passengers were searched at road blocks. People were unable to get in or out to go to work until the road blocks were lifted early in the afternoon.

Prime Minister Redha Malek has blamed the kidnapping of the three French, released at the weekend, on an armed Islamic group (GIA) headed by Algerian veteran Mourad Si Ahmed, 29, who is one of four people the authorities are hunting for.

The GIA implicitly claimed responsibility for the kidnapping when it issued a statement 24 hours after the French were seized to say what had happened. It termed the kidnapping a drop of water in the ocean of our struggle.

Meanwhile the kidnapers have given foreigners in Algeria one month to leave the country or face sudden death according to a copy of the warning obtained by AFP Wednesday.

Khamenei against ties with US

TEHRAN, Nov 4: Iran's spiritual leader Ali Khamenei yesterday strongly attacked the Iranians who support talks with the United States to resume relations, reports Xinhua.

Terming those Iranians as "naive, coward and ignorant", Khamenei said those people are unfamiliar with political issues and unaware of the dangers that such negotiation will entail.

"The US is the same dictator that the Muslim people of Iran kicked out of their home single-handedly. So there is no need for us to talk with dictators," he said in a meeting with a group of Iranian students on the eve of the anniversary of the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran on November 4 1979.

"The aim of the US in negotiation with Iran is to tarnish the image of Imam Khomeini and that of the Islamic Revolution and also to frustrate the oppressed nations of Asia, Africa and even Muslims in Europe and America," Khamenei said.

"Although we don't want to have relations with the US, Washington is setting preconditions for re-establishment of tie," he said, adding that if relations are to be restored one day, Iran shall be the one to set pre-condition for the US which has a long criminal record throughout the world and in Iran in particular.

The condition is that the Americans should express repentance of all tragedies they have created worldwide, he stated.

Accusing Washington of establishing a huge blood-thirsty dictatorship in the world under the cover of democracy, Khamenei said "unfortunately it (the US) has made the tool of the UN and Security Council to achieve its goals."

Iranian Majlis Speaker Nateq Nouri also yesterday ruled out the possibility for Iran to resume ties with the US, saying that problems between Iran and the US are insolvable.

Relations and negotiations between Tehran and Washington are out of question because of the unending aggression and brutality of the US administration throughout the

world, Nouri said.

Meanwhile, local Daily Jomhuri Islami yesterday urged the Iranian authorities to seriously confront with the US agents trying to pave the way for the revival of the US diabolic hegemony over the country.

"There are still some people who pretend to be sympathizers of people and the Islamic republic system but in fact support the US objective on behalf of their own interest," the daily said.

The US agents intended to show that campaign against the US has faded away and the situation is ripe to enter a new phase to establish relations with Washington, the Jomhuri Islami said.

Urging the dismissal of such agents in every position, the daily called on the Majlis officials to isolate them in the house of the nation.

In an anti-US rally Tuesday, Tehran University students shouted slogans that the US agents in the Iranian Majlis should be rooted out but they did not give names.

FAO to choose its new chief Monday

ROME, Nov 4: UN's biggest agency, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) will choose its first new chief in 18 years on Monday from among eight candidates who are all promising a shakeup, reports Reuter.

The candidates — an Australian government minister, a FAO assistant director-general from Chile, a Senegal ambassador, FAO officials from Bangladesh and India and three Europeans — call for reform of the agency, long criticised as an overstuffed bureaucracy.

"The FAO has more than 6,000 people in its payroll. This is obviously excessive," said a diplomat watching the election.

Member states will on Monday elect a new Director General who replace Edouard Saouma of Lebanon, leaving after three six-year terms of what critics have called autocratic leadership.

Gaddafi, Mubarak talk Lockerbie issue

SIDI BARRAMI, Egypt, Nov 4: President Hosni Mubarak and Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi held talks on the Lockerbie affair Thursday ahead of an expected UN Security Council meeting to toughen sanctions against Libya, reports AP.

Gaddafi arrived at a military base in the Mediterranean town of Sidi Barrami on the Egypt-Libya border in a white BMW car accompanied by dozens of bodyguards and more than 80 vehicles.

The Libyan leader, wearing loose brown pants and a shirt under a white abaya, met with Mubarak in a tent pitched on the base, 570 kilometers (356 miles) northwest of Cairo.

UN officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said this week that the Security Council could meet as early as Friday on the Libya case after Russia agreed to support new sanctions under pressure from US and British diplomats.

Russia, one of the council's

five permanent members, had threatened to veto a freeze on Libya's assets abroad and a ban on the sale of oil equipment to the country. It was worried that, with the new measures, Libya would not pay a US \$4 billion debt.

Libya has been under UN air, arms and diplomatic sanctions since April 1992 to force it surrender the suspects in the bombing, which led to 270 deaths.

A deal recently collapsed to have the men stand trial in Scotland, Arab and Western diplomats say the hitch was that the West refused to guarantee that high-ranking Libyan officials would not be implicated.

Gaddafi, who came to power in a 1969 coup, is now isolated internationally and facing internal turmoil. His troops quelled a rebellion within the army last month that opposition figures say was aimed at toppling him.

Major's Bosnia policy appals Thatcher

WASHINGTON, Nov 4: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said Wednesday she was appalled by the policy of her successor, John Major, and other world leaders toward Bosnia, reports Reuter.

Interviewed on CNN's Larry King Live, Thatcher excluded President Clinton from her criticism. She said he had tried to have an arms embargo lifted so the Bosnian Muslims could defend themselves but had been rebuffed by European leaders.

Asked directly whether she was disappointed in Major's

performance, Thatcher said, "I am disappointed, worse than disappointed. I am appalled that the scenes we've seen on television haven't inspired and instigated some actions greater than just trying to get aid to the people."

She said the way the world had handled the war in the former Yugoslavia showed its leaders had failed to absorb the central lesson of the 20th century, which was "Never appease an aggressor."

The interview was part of a brief tour by Thatcher to promote her autobiography, "Margaret Thatcher — the Downing Street Years."

Security on her visit began Wednesday, is extremely tight after an upsurge of IRA violence in Northern Ireland and in mainland Britain.

Thatcher repeated her praise for former President Ronald Reagan and her somewhat less enthusiastic assessment of former President George Bush. Asked about Clinton, she said it was still very early to judge.

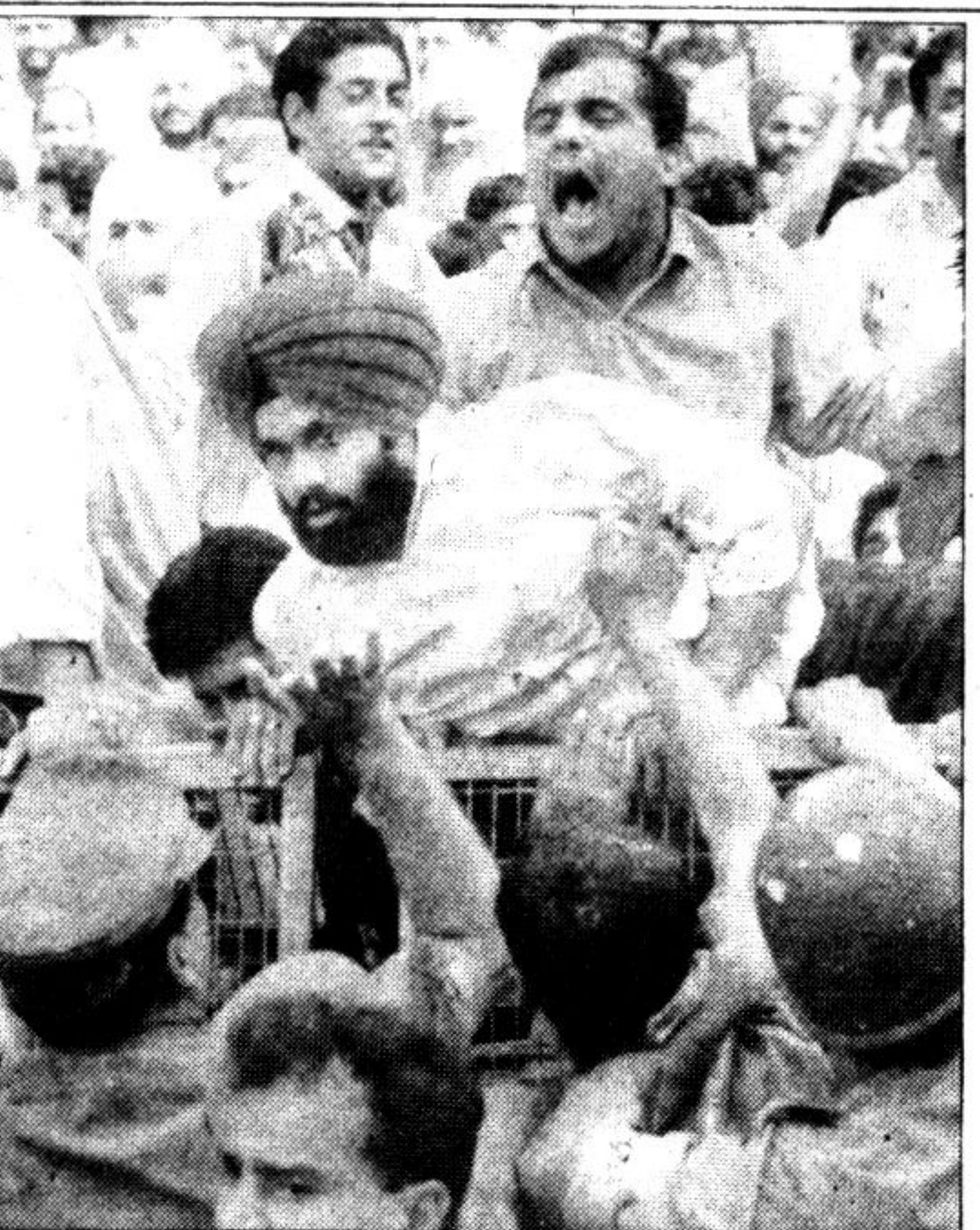
Thatcher also gave a plug to the North American Free Trade Agreement, saying free trade was only way to build property-

by the World Bank before it recommends that donor countries give aid to the Palestinians.

The bank had set November 5 as a deadline before the two billion dollar pledged at a global aid conference last month in Washington begins to funnel in over a period of five years.

The outpouring of pledges was prompted by the PLO's September 13 accord with Israel on limited autonomy.

Arafat also named several West Bank businessmen and analysts to the organisation, including economist Yousif Sayeigh and West Bank millionaire Maher Misri.



Activists of India's ruling Congress (I) Party shout anti-American slogans and try to break a police barricade outside the US embassy in New Delhi yesterday. Several thousands youths demonstrated to protest a senior US official's questioning of Indian rule over Kashmir. — AFP photo

Demonstration outside US embassy in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Nov 4: Several thousands members of the Youth wing of India's ruling party demonstrated outside the US embassy here today to protest at a senior US official's remarks questioning Indian rule over Kashmir, reports AFP.

But club-wielding riot police felled the protestors attempt to march on the mission, erecting five layers of steel barricades in the high-security diplomatic enclave.

Several demonstrators jumped over the barricades but police picked them up and threw them back, witnesses said.

Trucks mounted with water cannon surrounded the protestors, who were urged by their leaders to calm down and not fight with the security forces, averting a confrontation.

The demonstrators, led by the president of the Youth Congress (I) Party, Maninder Bitta, marched to the diplomatic quarter, chanting "US down, down" and Clinton, do not meddle in Indian affairs."

Bitta met with US embassy representatives and gave them a letter of protest condemning the

highly objectionable, unfriendly and uncalled-for remarks made by the US official.

The letter said the remarks had served to encourage Muslims militants campaigning for Kashmir's separation from India.

Today's protest was called by the Youth Congress (I) after the US official, during a background briefing for reporters in Washington last week, questioned the validity of Kashmir's 1947 attachment to India for the first time.

New Delhi strongly protested at the remarks and summoned US Charge d'Affaires Kenneth Brill to the foreign office.

India and rival Pakistan hold parts of the Himalayan territory, and Indian-held Kashmir has been ravaged for the past four years by a violent secessionist campaign by Muslim militants.

The separatist rebellion in India's only Muslim-majority state has left more than 7,000 people dead since 1989. India and Pakistan have gone to war twice over the region since independence from Britain in 1947.

Financial body to oversee foreign aid in WB, Gaza

TUNIS, Nov 4: PLO leader Yasser Arafat has set up a financial body to oversee investment of foreign aid in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, reports AP.

Arafat appointed Ahmed Qureia to head the Palestine Emergency Development Reconstruction Authority which will be responsible for building up the territories, according to PLO sources Wednesday who demanded anonymity.

Qureia is currently director-general of the PLO Economic Department in Tunis. The new body was required

US envoy asks Somali clans to give up arms

WASHINGTON, Nov 4: American envoy Robert Oakley, nearing the end of another mission to Mogadishu, is urging 15 competing clans in Somalia to give up their weapons. He is telling them that would help stabilise the African country and bring foreign assistance, reports AP.

But so far, the results are disappointing, the States Department spokesman, Michael McCurry, said Wednesday in a report on Oakley's trip. Oakley is due to return here this weekend.

Oakley is pursuing a diplomatic solution to the strife in Somalia to set the stage for an

orderly withdrawal of US peacekeeping troops by March 31. He has talked with aides of Mohammed Farah Aidede, but not with the warlord himself, McCurry said.

The United Nations has called for Aidede's arrest in the slaying in June of 24 Pakistani peacekeepers.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher on Tuesday described Somalia as a "failed state" and said "we need to have a national dialogue on how far we ought to go in expanding our natural and national resources" in dealing with it and Haiti, which he placed in the same category.

Oakley is working against a backdrop of fears that the US withdrawal could weaken US peacekeeping efforts and lead to more civil strife in Bosnia.

In asking the clan leaders to give up their weapons, Oakley is depending on their voluntary cooperation. US peacekeepers would not try to force them to comply, officials said.

The March agreement, which had been "more or less placed on the shelf," is now back in play as a framework for an overall settlement, McCurry said. Nearby African governments are cooperating in the approach.

However, the US official said, "overall, the progress on disarmament has been disappointing. We recognize that."

But, he said, "if we continue to press that process and continue to engage the various clan elders in a discussion about the need to disarm, that could prove fruitful, and that's clearly one of the things that Ambassador Oakley has on his agenda."

The incentive for the clan leaders is a chance to gain international support and economic assistance, which depends on conditions of security in Somalia, particularly the capital, Mogadishu, McCurry said.

Off the Record

Pandas to go on tour as friendship envoys

BEIJING: China announced Thursday that panda diplomacy is coming to the Taiwan Straits, reports AP.

A pair of rare giant pandas will be sent next month to the island of Taiwan, where they will spend a total of six months in two zoos, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Taiwan is the seat of the rival Chinese Nationalist government, and mainland China's Communist rulers long have considered it a renegade province. The panda exchange is the latest sign of easing tensions across the Taiwan Straits.

There are only 1,000 to 1,500 pandas left in the wild in China their only native home. They are dying out because of human encroachment on their mountain homes in central and southwestern China.

In the 1970s and 1980s, China sent pandas around the globe as furry friendship envoys. But the United States now refuses to import the pandas, citing international law on endangered-species protection, and panda diplomacy has reduced to a trickle.

Envelope sold for \$3.3m

ZURICH: The so-called Crown Jewel of Philately, an envelope with two stamps sent from Mauritius to Bordeaux in 1847, was sold on Wednesday for five million Swiss francs (3.3 million dollars), a record for one postal item, reports Reuter.

The envelope, known as the Bordeaux cover, and found by a French schoolboy in dusty archives in 1902, was bought at a Zurich public auction by a middle-aged woman who declined to say who she was.

Murderer flees jail 5 days before judgement

MANILA: Rolito Go wasn't in court Thursday to hear the judge sentence him to life in prison for murder. He had fled his jail five days earlier, reports AP.

Go, a wealthy construction company owner, was convicted Thursday of murdering college student Eldon Maguan in a traffic altercation in 1991.

We are sad and happy at same time, said the victim's sister, Grace. What's the use of his being guilty if he's not here to serve his sentence? For all we know, he is already out of the country.

Go escaped Saturday after drinking alcohol with his jail guards. The guards are under investigation.

In a letter sent to a columnist after his escape, Go accused the judge of trying to extort money from him, the Naquan family of buying a conviction and state prosecutors of unfairness.

But Go's case already had attracted publicity because of special treatment by his guards. Last year, two of his guards were fired after allowing him out of his cell to attend a Gloria Estefan concert.

Jailbreaks are common in Philippine prisons, notorious both for corruption by jail authorities and squalid conditions.

Government investigations have shown that well-to-do convicts are allowed the use of cellular phones, beepers and occasional liberties for a fee.