

# BRIEFLY

**Israeli-Arab team to visit Syria:** A 40-member Israeli-Arab delegation will travel Sunday to Syria on temporary Egyptian travel documents and plans to meet President Hafez Assad, AP reports from Jerusalem.

Abdul-Wahab Darawshe, a member of Israel's 120-member Knesset, said the unprecedented visit by Israeli citizens was to pay condolences to President Hafez Assad on the death of his son, Basil, who was killed in a traffic accident last month.

Darawshe has said the visit by the delegation of Arab intellectuals, local officials and religious leaders could create a better atmosphere for the Israeli-Syrian peace talks.

**Heroin seized in HK, 3 held:** A drug packaging and distribution centre was believed to be smashed in Hong Kong Wednesday, Xinhua reports from Hong Kong.

Following the arrest of three persons and the seizure of 450 grams of heroin. Acting on information, local narcotics bureau officers raided a premises in Tsuen Wan, the new territories, and arrested a man and a woman together with 450 gram No. 4 heroin.

Another 20-year old man was subsequently arrested as he returned to the flat during the raid, the arrested persons are still being detained for enquiries.

**Fire traps 35 S African miners:** Fire broke out Thursday in a mine east of Johannesburg, blocking the exit route and trapping at least 35 men underground, officials said, AP reports from Middelburg, South Africa.

Seventeen of the miners were in contact with rescuers and were known to be safe in a refuge area, said Noel Halgreen, a spokesman for Gencor Ltd., the mine owner. The whereabouts of the other miners was not known, Halgreen said.

The fire was burning at the Koorfontein mine near Middelburg, about 150 kilometres (95 miles) east of Johannesburg. He said it would take at least 24 hours to drill into the refuge area where the 17 miners were staying, the cause of the fire was not known.

**Fire at BBC's TV centre:** Two small fires broke out at the British Broadcasting Corp's Television Centre in west London Wednesday night and police said they may have been started deliberately, AP reports from London.

No one immediately claimed responsibility. The Irish Republican Army and animal rights militants are among groups that have firebombed London buildings in the past.

Staff were evacuated, briefly disrupting domestic BBC TV programmes, when the fires occurred shortly before midnight. The BBC reported that the fires were quickly brought under control and only minor damage was caused.

**Christopher to visit China, Japan:** Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Wednesday he will visit China and Japan next month, Reuter reports from Washington.

Christopher told the Senate foreign relations committee he will go to Japan to reinforce US demands that Tokyo cut its trade surplus with Washington and open its markets to US goods and services.

"I will be going to Japan next month to reaffirm our position to Japan's leaders," he said. Christopher said the aim of his visit to China would be to urge its leaders to make more progress on human rights.

**Road mishaps claim 12 in Germany:** At least twelve people were killed in traffic accidents across Germany after overnight snow made roads icy, police said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Bonn.

Chaos was reported on many motorways with multiple crashes and traffic jams.

Three people were killed and one seriously injured in the worst accident, near the western city of Muenster, when a British military truck crashed through a central barrier and collided with oncoming traffic.

**Mixed-race woman killed in SA:** A mixed-race woman was shot dead on Wednesday at a rally of South Africa's ruling National Party (NP), police said, Reuter reports from Rodepan.

A black NP supporter opened fire on African National Congress rivals during the rally but police said they were not certain one of his bullets had hit the woman.

"She appears to have been an innocent bystander," a police spokesman said.

**Aftershocks hit Iran:** Two strong aftershocks hit southeastern Iran Thursday after a quake which killed six people, Tehran radio reported, reports AP.

The shocks, measuring 5.5 and 5.9 on the Richter scale, hit the sparsely populated Afghan border region which was jolted by a quake measuring 6.6 on Wednesday.

It was not known if the latest tremors caused fresh casualties or damage.

Six people died and several hundred were injured in Wednesday's quake, which destroyed 200 houses.

# Muslim-Croat truce takes effect today

ZAGREB, Feb 24: Bosnia's warring Croats and Muslims agreed a comprehensive ceasefire on Wednesday, to be followed eventually by an overall political agreement, UN special envoy Yasushi Akashi said, reports Reuter.

The ceasefire, according to a statement after the talks at a UN camp near Zagreb airport, takes effect at Noon (1100 GMT) on Friday.

It marks the first step in extending the demilitarisation of Sarajevo to other Bosnian flashpoints.

"I'm happy to announce that an agreement has been reached," Akashi told reporters after a UN-sponsored meeting in Zagreb between the Muslim-led Bosnian army commander Rashid Delic and his Bosnian Croat counterpart, Ante Roso.

Faced with the threat of NATO air strikes, Serb forces besieging Sarajevo and Muslims inside the city last week agreed to withdraw their weapons or place them under UN control.

The early success of the

Sarajevo agreement led to immediate calls for the same kind of agreement to pacify Bosnia's other main troublespots.

If it is to succeed, the Muslim-Croat truce will have to mean and end to the fight for control of the southern city of Mostar, where 60,000 Muslims are trapped in a Croat siege.

Croat-Muslim fighting has raged for most of the past year in central and southern Bosnia following the collapse of the two sides' shaky alliance against the Bosnian Serbs.



Bosnian General Rasim Delic (CL) shakes hands with Bosnian Croat General Ante Roso (CR), as they are watched by Yasushi Akashi (L), the UN secretary-general's special envoy for former Yugoslavia, and UNPROFOR Commander, French General Jean Cot (R) at Zagreb's Pleso airport, Feb 23. The two generals scheduled a ceasefire starting Feb 25. — AFP photo

# DPRK to allow IAEA from Mar 1 if US accepts 'small package deal'

SEOUL, Feb 24: North Korea has offered a "small package deal" to the United States that, if approved, would allow a UN team to inspect its nuclear facilities on March 1, a South Korean news agency reported Thursday, says AP.

The offer was made during US-North Korean working-level talks in New York Wednesday, the national Yonhap news agency reported, quoting a North Korean diplomat.

Tom Hubbard, US deputy assistant secretary of state, met with Ho Jong, deputy North Korean UN mission chief, Wednesday for the second time in two days to work out the terms of inspections by the UN International Atomic Energy Agency, it said.

Quoting Han Sung Yul, a counselor at North Korea's UN mission, Yonhap said progress had been made in the two days of talks, and that the two sides would meet again Thursday.

North Korea offered to permit IAEA inspections beginning March 1 if the United States accepts a "small package deal" that calls for setting a date for talks on improving ties between the countries.

**Kuwait pardons 180 prisoners**

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 24: Kuwaiti Amir has pardoned 180 prisoners and reduced the temporary detention sentences of 500 others to mark Kuwait's 33rd National day, the official Kuwait news agency reported today, says Xinhua.

The news agency quoted an official in the Interior Ministry as saying the Amir has issued an Amiri decree pardoning 180 prisoners convicted of misdemeanor and felony crimes and commuting the temporary sentence of 500 more to half their original sentences.

Yonhap said. The North Korean deal also calls for cancelling annual US-South Korea military exercises, dubbed "Team Spirit," and their consideration of a possible exchange of presidential envoys with South Korea to discuss a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, it said.

The United States has accepted all but one North Korean demand. The stumbling block is the exchange of presidential envoys between North and South Korea.

US and South Korean officials say the actual exchange of presidential envoys, not just consideration thereof, is a prerequisite to US-North Korean high-level talks.

The Communist North argues that such an exchange is "an internal matter" that cannot be a condition for bilateral talks with the United States, Yonhap said.

Washington and Seoul also say the cancellation "Team Spirit," which North Korea considers nuclear war preparations, would depend on the result of the nuclear inspections.

# Mexican govt, rebels reach tentative accords

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, Mexico, Feb 24: Rebels and government negotiators reached tentative accords Wednesday on the insurgents' demands for bettering life for impoverished Indians in southern Mexico, reports AP.

"We have arrived at several fundamental points," said Zapatista rebel leader and spokesman Subcomandante Marcos after a third day of peace talks. He said the agreements will have to be approved by the indigenous communities involved.

"The talks are giving their first results," said government negotiator Manuel Camacho Solis. "The work had been very complex."

# Suharto to retire in '98

JAKARTA, Feb 24: President Suharto, who has ruled Indonesia for 28 years, said Thursday he would retire from politics after the end of his current term in 1998, reports AP.

"I will complete my duty according to the constitution and I will retire at the termination of this term," the 72-year-old Suharto was quoted as saying by Religious Affairs Minister Tarmizi Taher.

Suharto was re-elected for another five-year term in March 1993, before which many had speculated that he would not run for re-election because of advanced age.

But speculation about his eventual retirement resurfaced after Suharto told his American biographer, Prof Donald Wilson, last week that he would not become president for life and that he would step down when the time comes.

# UNHCR suspends repatriation of Afghan refugees

TEHRAN, Feb 24: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has suspended its operation to repatriate millions of Afghans living in Iran and Pakistan, the UNHCR said here Wednesday, reports AFP.

The decision was taken because of the "extremely unstable situation" in Afghanistan, where rival factions have battled since January 1, and also for financial reasons, a UNHCR official said.

Around 360,000 Afghan refugees living in Iran have been repatriated under the supervision of UNHCR since the operation began in December 1992.

But the official told AFP that the operation had been suspended until at least March 15, when the UNHCR would re-examine the security and financial situations.

"We can not send the refugees back and see them come back after a few weeks because of the civil war," he said.

The official stressed the organisation had received no financial contribution from the international community to finance the operation in 1994, and that funds left over from 1993 had dried up.

"The potential donor countries do not want to help as long as the factions continue to battle each other, he added.

Iran hosts some two million Afghan refugees from the 15-year civil war in their country, and another 1.5 million are in Pakistan.

have already left Iran since the fall of the communist regime in Kabul in April 1992, of whom 350,000 have benefited from aid programmes offered by the UNHCR.

The organisation gave 350,000 of the returning refugees 25 dollars and 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of what each.

# De Klerk cancels visits to 3 black townships

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 24: South Africa's National Party leader F W de Klerk had to cancel three engagements in a black and coloured townships due to violence on the first day of his northern Cape election campaign tour, reports Xinhua.

De Klerk was scheduled to deliver an elections speech Wednesday morning at a black township but was disrupted by a large and vociferous African National Congress (ANC) group.

The coloured township, adjacent to Postmasburg, drew one of the largest crowds, but there were several incidents of flag tearing and scuffling with the loud ANC chanters and dangers, making it impossible for De Klerk to speak.

After moving to a third spot, he got a brief message across before moving on to Postmasburg for a friendlier reception outside the town hall.

# India lifts veil on excesses by army

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: Faced with mounting international pressure, India is finally moving to address accusations of widespread human-rights violations by its security forces, reports AP.

The government of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao is opening up the country for scrutiny by groups such as Amnesty International after shunning them for years.

New Delhi is also showing a willingness to discuss the right situation with foreign governments and diplomats here. It has lifted the veil on excesses by the army and is making public action taken against erring troops.

An autonomous national human rights commission set up last year amid mounting concern over rights abuses has begun to make its presence felt.

The country's small but vocal human-rights groups are not impressed, however, they say the government's efforts are cosmetic, aimed mainly at warding off the growing criticism from abroad.

# Off the Record

## Clinton will be Roger's best man

WASHINGTON: First brother Roger Clinton says he's planning a walk down the aisle — as long as it isn't in the White House, reports AP.

Roger Clinton told television show "American Journal" that he plans to wed Molly Marin, whose expecting a child this spring, on March 26. He dismissed reports that he wasn't welcome to have the ceremony at the White House.

"We were asked to get married at the White House... while we were up there for Christmas with our families, and we said no," Clinton said. "I was afraid that it would turn into a media event."

His older half-brother, President Clinton, will be best man. "We had to clear it. ... I had to make sure that he wasn't in some summit meeting overseas somewhere", he said.

The interview is to air Monday.

## Faux Pas '83

LOWDEN: A winemaker who botched a batch of sweet white wine is owing up to his mistake and trying to profit from it as well, selling it as sherry under the name "Faux Pas '83," reports AP.

Vintner Marty Clubb said the result — named after the French phrase for blunder — is an elegant dark sherry. Clubb's L'Ecole No 41 Winery west of Walla Walla usually makes a dry, barrel-aged wine from semillon grapes, but this particular batch in 1983 picked up a little too much oxygen, turning it acidic.

Sherry is commonly made from palomino grapes, not the semillon variety. But this batch smelled like sherry, so L'Ecole switched the process, inoculating it with flor yeast and aging it for 10 years in oak casks.

Clubb said 158 cases will be available in April for under 15 dollars per bottle.

"We were kind of stuck with this," Clubb said. "It was kind of a salvage, but we turned it into an absolutely beautiful bottle of wine."

## Bobbitt copycat crime on the rise

NEW DELHI: A woman cut off the penis of her drunken husband in southern India after he pestered her to have sex, newspapers here reported Thursday, says AP.

Palani Ammal took a blade and sliced off her husband Muntian's penis in a fit of anger "unable to bear his harassment," police were quoted as saying.

The incident occurred Tuesday night in the village of Kumarapalayam in Tamil Nadu state.

The Indian Express said Muntian, a bootlegger, returned home drunk and began to press Palani Ammal to have sex. She refused, sparking a quarrel which led to the attack.

Meanwhile, AP reports from Seoul: A South Korean man was found dead Thursday with his penis cut off, in what could be a second Bobbitt copycat crime in less than a month, police said.

An unidentified man in his 60s, estimated to have been dead for two weeks, was found in a haystack behind a church in Kimjae city, 220 kilometers (136 miles) southwest of Seoul, they said. His penis had been cut off with a sharp instrument, they said.

In an earlier case, Park Soo-bum a 42-year-old construction worker, was found January 26 bleeding from a severed penis. He died hours later at a hospital from loss of blood.

His wife and mistress are both under police investigation. Police had speculated that Park's attacker might have been influenced by the much-publicised Lorena Bobbitt case in the United States.

# Iran, Iraq to continue talks for better ties

TEHRAN, Feb 24: Iran and Iraq have decided to carry on with talks aimed at creating an "atmosphere of trust" and better relations, informed sources said here Wednesday, reports AP.

The decision was taken at the end of week-long negotiations between Iraqi Foreign Ministry undersecretary Saad Abdelmajid Al-Faisal and Iranian officials.

Faisal arrived here last Thursday on the first high-level Iraqi visit to Iran since the 1991 Gulf War, after which Baghdad accused Tehran of backing a Shiite Muslim uprising.

The fate of prisoners from the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war was at the centre of the discussions.

Iran say Iraq still holds 8,000 soldiers or civilians, and that the issue must be resolved before relations are normalised.

The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates there are still 1,000 Iranian prisoners, while Iraq denies holding any.

Iraq says Iran holds 20,000 of its citizens, a figure close to ICRC estimates but which Tehran has neither confirmed nor denied.

Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, who met Faisal on Wednesday, said Tehran and Baghdad should continue their talks to create a "climate of confidence" toward better ties.

He reiterated Iraq's opposition to the dismemberment of neighbouring Iraq, which was rocked by the Kurdish and Shiite uprisings after the war for Kuwait three years ago.

Faisal said his country wanted to normalise ties with Iran and invited Velayati to visit Iraq.

The two countries decided to conduct joint searches in the combat zones in Iraq for missing soldiers.



Muslims protest against the alleged failure of police to protect them Feb 23 outside a police station after angry Hindus tried to attack Muslim homes following a powerful bomb blast which killed three people in Kashmir's winter capital. Hundreds of demonstrators in Hindu-majority Jammu blamed the blast on Muslim guerillas fighting for secession from India — AFP photo

# Guatemalan civil servants occupy govt HQ

GUATEMALA CITY, Feb 24: About 100 civil servants occupied Guatemalan government headquarters Wednesday as thousands outside blocked off Guatemala City's main square, demanding a 40 per cent pay raise, reports Reuter.

Entry to the building, the National Palace, was controlled by strikers and government members were stuck inside.

"We can't leave, and no one can come in," Hector Rosada, President of the government's peace commission, told Reuters by telephone.

# Security forum may subdue Asian economic, political disputes

SINGAPORE, Feb 24: Pacific rim countries, led by the Association of Southeast Asian nations, hope that a new security forum in the region will subdue economic and political disputes before they lead to armed conflict, reports AP.

"If we fall in this, we put peace and security in jeopardy," Singapore Defence Minister Yeo Ning Hong said Wednesday.

Still in the planning stage, the ASEAN Regional forum is scheduled to hold its first meeting in Bangkok in July, in conjunction with the group's annual foreign ministers meeting.

Besides Singapore ASEAN includes Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Approved last year, the forum will include ASEAN's major trading partners the United States, Japan, the European Community, Australia, Canada, South Korea and New Zealand.

ASEAN planners said the forum would deal with a full range of security matters from arms transfers and military exercises to the movement of refugees and illegal migrants across international borders.

The push for political stability to safeguard Asia's growing

economic prosperity is gathering momentum in a post-Cold War period that has produced economic chaos and conflict in other parts of the world.

In Asia, concern over the future role of the four major powers in the region — China, Japan, the United States and Russia — has contributed to the search for a more institutionalised means of debating and resolving security problems.

It is critical that nations set up and maintain process of communication and cooperation, both formal and informal so that we are constantly engaged in constructive dialogue

and exchanges, enhancing mutual understanding and confidence," Yeo said.

He spoke at the opening of the Asia-Pacific Defence Conference that has drawn about 250 government officials and defence industry executives.

The three-day conference was taking place at the same time as Asian Aerospace 94 a major exhibition of warplanes, missiles and other military hardware.

While most of the world is cutting back on military forces, Asia is on an arms buying spree. Countries in the region are snapping up the latest in fighter aircraft, submarines

and missiles from the United States, Europe and Russia.

Some worry that such sales will fuel an arms race that could turn up the heat on a host of regional disputes.

Yeo mentioned only the dispute over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea and worries about North Korea's nuclear programme as potential hot spots.

During the Gold War the 27-year-old ASEAN excluded regional security issues from its annual agenda to avoid getting entangled in military rivalries among big global powers. This policy began to shift in 1991 when the once stau-

nchly anti-communist ASEAN invited officials from Moscow and Beijing to its annual meeting.

Tokyo cannot assume an active military role, however, because some other Asian countries fear a possible resurgence of Japanese military power.

East Asian countries have more or less mistrust and misgivings about Japan and harbour apprehension for the increase in Japanese military capability. Prof Shunichi Ogawa of Tokyo's National Institute of Defence Studies, told the conference

# HK legislators okay partial democratic reform

HONG KONG, Feb 24: Hong Kong legislators passed Governor Chris Patten's partial democratic reform bill today, clearing the way for legislation containing his most controversial proposals despite furious Chinese opposition, reports Reuter.

The legislative council approved on a voice vote the bill which implements less contentious reforms such as cutting the minimum voting age to 18 from 21.