

# BRIEFLY

**King Fahd pardons 4,000:** King Fahd of Saudi Arabia pardoned more than 4,000 prisoners, including foreigners, to mark the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the Interior Ministry said Sunday, AFP reports from Riyadh.

The amnesty was for 2,539 Saudis and 1,470 foreigners sentenced for common law crimes, not involving murder or drug-trafficking, a ministry statement quoted by the official news agency SPA said.

**India won't sign NPT:** Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao ruled out the possibility of India signing Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty in its present form, a report reaching here from London said on Wednesday, Xinhua reports from New Delhi.

The Prime Minister, who is on a three-day visit to Britain, told British Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Shoups Tuesday that "We cannot stop proliferation or clandestine activity until there is a global non-discriminatory regime."

**Eid celebrated in W Bengal:** Eid was celebrated throughout West Bengal with traditional religious fervour and gaiety on Monday, PTI reports from Calcutta. Members of the Muslim community gathered at different mosques to offer prayers. They later exchanged greetings among themselves and with other communities.

**UN team to visit Afghanistan:** UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has ordered a special mission to Afghanistan March 24 to explore how the United Nations can help warring parties reconcile and rebuild the country, AFP reports from United Nations.

The delegation to be headed by ambassador Mahmood Mestiri, former Tunisian Foreign Minister, will talk to Afghan leaders on how the United Nations can best assist in national rapprochement, UN spokesman Joe Sillas said.

**India lifts ban on Damania plane:** A commuter airline that was grounded for safety violations that included a drunken brawl aboard one of its planes resumed flying Wednesday after the ban was lifted, AP reports from New Delhi.

The government revoked the 1-week-old order Tuesday, after Damania Airways promised to strictly enforce safety regulations, stop serving hard liquor, and limit its alcohol-drinkers to beer.

**CPC team in South Korea:** A delegation of Chinese communist party members arrived Wednesday on a first-ever exchange programme with South Korea's governing party, AP reports from Seoul.

The five Chinese delegates, who will be in South Korea for a week, will visit the National Assembly and meet with Chairman Kim Jong-pil and other top officials of the governing Democratic Liberal Party.

**Over 100 die of Cholera:** A cholera epidemic is bringing more death to Somalia, killing more than 100 people already in a land exhausted by civil war and famine, Reuter reports from Mogadishu.

**Mandela-Zulu King meet Friday:** ANC leader Nelson Mandela, after a tumultuous welcome in Bophuthatswana homeland, said on Tuesday he would meet the King of South Africa's powerful Zulu nation to seek peace in strife-torn Natal province, Reuter reports from Mbabatho.

**30 die in Turkey**  
ISTANBUL, Mar 16: Up to 30 people died when a tanker and a freighter collided inside the Bosphorus Strait, Istanbul authorities said Monday, as Greek and Cypriot officials slammed Turkey for "unacceptable delays" over its salvage operation, reports AFP.

**Massive attack on Indian troops in Kashmir**  
SRINAGAR, India, Mar 16: Muslim militants staged massive attacks on Indian security troops across Kashmir to protest the overnight arrest of a top rebel leader in the northern state, witnesses and police said Sunday, reports AFP.

**Labour's ahead of Tories**  
LONDON, Mar 16: Britain's Labour, opposition party stays 25 points ahead of the Tories in an opinion poll published in the Guardian Wednesday, reports AFP.

**Clinton disappointed at results of talks with China**  
DETROIT (Michigan), Mar 16: President Bill Clinton denied Monday that he was softening his stance on China, and said he was disappointed in the results of Secretary of State Warren Christopher's visit to Beijing, reports AFP.

**US to pressure Myanmar for talks with Suu Kyi**  
WASHINGTON, Mar 16: The Clinton administration is considering measures to pressure Myanmar to open talks with Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel peace laureate and dissident leader who has been under house arrest since 1989, officials say, reports AP.

**India proposes co-production in defence sector with Britain**  
LONDON, Mar 14: India has sought transfer of British technology in the defence sector and proposed co-production, sub-contracts and joint marketing in defence industry, reports PTI.

**UK defence chief quits over infidelity**  
LONDON, Mar 16: Britain's chief of the defence staff, Peter Harding, resigned Sunday amid an uproar over allegations of marital infidelity, reports AFP.

**US ready to ease freeze on military aid to Pakistan**  
WASHINGTON, Mar 16: The United States may ease the freeze on military aid to Pakistan and unblock delivery of F-16 fighter planes in return for a pledge that Islamabad will halt its nuclear programme, US officials said Tuesday, reports Reuter.

**India proposes co-production in defence sector with Britain**  
LONDON, Mar 14: India has sought transfer of British technology in the defence sector and proposed co-production, sub-contracts and joint marketing in defence industry, reports PTI.



Singer Whitney Houston (l) poses with husband, singer Bobby Brown on March 15 at the eighth annual Soul Train Music Awards in Los Angeles. Houston received the Sammy Davis Jr Award for entertainer of the year. She was a multiple winner at the recent American Music and Grammy Awards. — AFP photo

## US to pressure Myanmar for talks with Suu Kyi

WASHINGTON, Mar 16: The Clinton administration is considering measures to pressure Myanmar to open talks with Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel peace laureate and dissident leader who has been under house arrest since 1989, officials say, reports AP.

The measures include a US campaign at the United Nations for an arms embargo against Myanmar and for the appointment of a special UN envoy to intercede on Suu Kyi's behalf with Myanmar authorities.

The United States and the European Union have refrained for years from selling arms to Myanmar but US officials suspect that China is a weapons supplier to Myanmar's military rulers.

US officials have had discussions with UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali about the possible appointment of a special envoy but no decisions have been made.

The continued detention of Suu Kyi is part of a pattern of alleged-abuses in Myanmar highlighted in a recent UN report.

The report said Myanmar soldiers frequently use executions, torture, rape and other atrocities against villagers, especially those belonging to ethnic minorities.

Suu Kyi headed a 1988 pro-democracy uprising that was brutally suppressed by troops. Two years later, her National League for Democracy scored a landslide election victory that the Myanmar junta has refused to recognise.

A month ago, US Rep. Bill Richardson became the first non-family member to visit Suu Kyi since she was placed under house arrest.

The decision by the Myanmar military to allow the visit, coupled with its release of about 2,000 prisoners, gave hope to some that Myanmar authorities were reassessing their hard-line policies.

Richardson has strongly advocated that the military open a dialogue with Suu Kyi but Myanmar officials recently indicated that no such step is being contemplated over the short-term.

## 30 die in Turkey

ISTANBUL, Mar 16: Up to 30 people died when a tanker and a freighter collided inside the Bosphorus Strait, Istanbul authorities said Monday, as Greek and Cypriot officials slammed Turkey for "unacceptable delays" over its salvage operation, reports AFP.

The oil tanker Nassya, which collided with the freighter ship Broker Sunday evening near the Black Sea entrance to the waterway, continued to burn Monday afternoon as fire fighters began to bring the flames sparked by its cargo of 95,000 tonnes of crude under control.

The Greek Cyprus-registered ships, each carrying a crew of about 30 sailors, burst into flames on impact. Up to 10 crew members were still missing Monday, Turkish authorities said.

Turkey immediately pledged to press for tighter security controls in the strait, which is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Traffic along the Bosphorus was suspended.

Istanbul prefect Hayri Kozakcioglu estimated the death toll at up to 30, while his office earlier spoke of at least 24 dead, about 10 missing, and 26 injured.

"There is not a lot of hope of finding those missing," the prefect added.

He told AFP that the fire-fighters had brought the blaze under control, although a "small oil leak" had been detected on the surface of the Black Sea.

Meanwhile, in Athens, Cyprus' Minister for Transport and Merchant Shipping, Adamos Adamidis, accused Turkish authorities of reacting with "unacceptable delays" to the collision, which also set off huge explosions.

## Massive attack on Indian troops in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Mar 16: Muslim militants staged massive attacks on Indian security troops across Kashmir to protest the overnight arrest of a top rebel leader in the northern state, witnesses and police said Sunday, reports AFP.

The guerillas also called a general strike to protest Saturday's arrest of Javed Mir, the chief of the outlawed Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) militant group in Kashmir.

Police said an Indian soldier and at least six Muslim guerillas died in separate gunbattles which erupted after Mir's arrest in Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital and the urban hub of a Muslim secessionist drive.

Gunbattles are still raging at several places in the Kashmir valley, a police officer said here.

The clashes began late Saturday and spilled into Sunday to protest the arrest of the 30-year-old JKLF leader, the most-wanted Kashmiri Muslim guerilla leader, in Srinagar.

The JKLF is one of the half a dozen Muslim rebel groups spearheading the campaign against Indian rule in Kashmir.

More than 8,000 people have died in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, since 1989 when the bloody campaign gained momentum.

Another report from Tehran says, a radical Iranian daily on Monday criticised the government for pressuring Pakistan into withdrawing a UN resolution condemning India's human rights record in Kashmir.

"Given India's black record in Kashmir, it is possible to absolve New Delhi of the savage killing of men, women and children? Asked Jomhuri Islami, close to Islamic hard-liners. Had the intervention been in the "long-term interest of a Muslim nation and the liberation movements in Kashmir?"

The daily urged the Foreign Ministry to explain the logic behind the intervention to the Kashmiri people in order to "reassure them that Iran has made no changes in its position."

## Clinton disappointed at results of talks with China

DETROIT (Michigan), Mar 16: President Bill Clinton denied Monday that he was softening his stance on China, and said he was disappointed in the results of Secretary of State Warren Christopher's visit to Beijing, reports AFP.

"I was disappointed at the results of the meeting with the Secretary of State," Clinton told reporters in Detroit, where he is attending an international jobs conference.

Foreign Minister Qian Qichen said before Christopher left Beijing on Monday that his government would never accept US "orders" on human rights, after arresting several dissidents in the run-up to the US official's visit.

Beijing made up for this with just a handful of limited human rights gestures before his departure.

Christopher nonetheless said before leaving Beijing that differences between the two sides were "narrowing," and stressed that while "more work clearly needs to be done," Washington's conditions for renewing Most Favoured Nation trading status (MFN) were not difficult to meet.

Clinton denied that this meant Washington was softening its position. "Our policy is the same," he said.

"We will just have to wait and see what happens between now and June," when MFN comes up for renewal. "I'll make a judgement at the appropriate time."

Clinton said last year that he would not renew China's MFN beyond June unless Beijing made significant progress on human rights.

Before Christopher's Beijing visit, senior US officials had said repeatedly that China had not made enough progress.

Reuter from Beijing adds: Christopher said on Monday there had been no break through in his talks with Chinese leaders but that they had begun to narrow their differences.

"I wouldn't describe it as a breakthrough. It was a businesslike and productive meeting. We began to narrow differences."

Christopher said at a news conference following three days of talks centred on human rights.

Meanwhile AP adds: The foreign minister warned Wednesday that a collapse of US-China trade relations over human rights would cause unbearable losses to Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The warnings are part of pressure tactics to persuade the Clinton administration to renew Most-Favoured-Nation trade status for China. Beijing already has said US businessmen will be shut out of the huge Chinese market if the low tariffs are denied.

President Clinton has linked renewal of the low tariffs in June to the Chinese Communist government making significant progress on human rights.

Foreign Minister Qian Qichen told a news conference he was disappointed with his weekend meetings with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, saying better results had been expected.

Christopher left Beijing on Monday after a visit marked by tough diplomatic talk and police harassment of several dissidents to prevent them from meeting with him.

Qian said differences over human rights had not narrowed but both sides were still trying to resolve the issue. He said a "common understanding on specific methods and measures" to deal with human rights had been reached, but he did not elaborate.

Qian again warned that "it will be impossible for China and the United States to have trade" if Washington revokes MFN. Such a trade war would cost billions of dollars in business and thousands of jobs in both countries.

He also said Hong Kong and Taiwan would suffer losses. Many Chinese exports bound for the US market are shipped through neighbouring Hong Kong. Both Hong Kong and Taiwan businessmen have huge investments in factories in China that export to the United States.

## India proposes co-production in defence sector with Britain

LONDON, Mar 14: India has sought transfer of British technology in the defence sector and proposed co-production, sub-contracts and joint marketing in defence industry, reports PTI.

The prospects of Indo-British cooperation in defence sector were explored when the British Defence Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, called on the Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao here today.

During their half-an-hour meeting, Rifkind discussed with Rao ways and means of enhanced cooperation between the two countries in defence industry, informed sources said.

India has shortlisted the British aerospace "Hawk" and the French "Alpha" jet for purchase of 66 advanced trainer jets for the air force and a decision is still pending with the government.

## UK defence chief quits over infidelity

LONDON, Mar 16: Britain's chief of the defence staff, Peter Harding, resigned Sunday amid an uproar over allegations of marital infidelity, reports AFP.

It was the latest blow to Prime Minister John Major's efforts to portray his government as being big on family values.

Harding, 60, tendered his resignation to Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind and it was accepted with immediate effect, the Defence Ministry said.

Harding, marshal of the air force, was accused of having an affair with the wife of Anthony Buck, a former Conservative lawmaker and former defence secretary.

Buck had said in a lengthy article in the Sunday tabloid News Of The World that Harding had had "a very intimate relationship" with Buck's wife while he was still married to her.

Buck, 65, and his wife, Sienvencia Perez Blanco of Spain, were separated in September. She is 30 years his junior.

The allegations had prompted calls from the opposition

## Saddam urges UN to allow oil export

NOCOSIA, Mar 16: Iraq's President Saddam Hussein has called on the United Nations to implement a UN Security Council resolution allowing Iraq to resume its oil exports, reports AFP.

Saddam Hussein told the Iraqi government Sunday that Iraqi Foreign Minister Tarek Aziz, who is to go to New York this week, would tell the Security Council that Iraq had met its side of the bargain, and would ask the council to fulfil the promise it made in Article 22 of Resolution 687.

That deal traded UN monitoring of Iraq's military potential for permission to resume oil exports.

The Security Council is due to meet Friday to review economic sanctions imposed on Iraq in retaliation for its invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

## US subs active off Russian coast

MOSCOW, Mar 16: US submarines remain active off Russia's shores and some even collided with Russian vessels last year, a Russian naval commander said Wednesday, reports AP.

Despite the fact that former "adversaries now are our partners, their activity near Russian shores has not diminished," said Adm Igor Kasatonov, first deputy commander of the Russian navy.

Citing naval statistics, Kasatonov said there were "contacts and even collisions" between US submarines and Russian vessels last year, but gave no figures.

## Off the Record

### Jackson's mother to testify

LOS ANGELES: Michael Jackson's mother has been called to testify before a grand jury investigating allegations that the pop star sexually molested a young boy, her lawyer said Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Attorney Richard Steingard said the reaction from Katherine Jackson, who has steadfastly proclaimed her son's innocence, was "a mix of anger and surprise."

The matriarch of the Jackson clan has been subpoenaed to appear Thursday before a Los Angeles county grand jury that is deciding whether criminal charges should be filed against the 35-year-old entertainer. Steingard said.

A separate grand jury sitting in neighbouring Santa Barbara county, the site of Jackson's Neverland Ranch, is also looking into the allegations made last August by a 13-year-old boy.

The latest twist in the case came the same day Los Angeles prosecutors said they would take another month to wrap up their criminal investigation.

### Son tears down mother's house

TOKYO: A man who was quarreling with his mother drove to her house with a power shovel and tore it down, police said, reports AP.

Kiyomi Suzuki, 42, of Kita-Shiohara in northern Japan, had argued frequently with his mother over the upbringing of his three children, of whom he had custody after a divorce.

When Suzuki visited his mother's house Tuesday night, with the children, he accused her of spitting them and went home by himself, said local police spokesman Hidemasa Takagi.

Suzuki returned at around 11 pm driving a backhoe, a machine used to dig trenches. After evacuating the children, Suzuki tore down his mother's two-story wooden house in about 20 minutes, Takagi said.

The mother, 69-year-old Masako Suzuki, escaped. No one was hurt.

Suzuki, who owned the backhoe for his job as a fish breeder, was arrested on suspicion of destroying property, Takagi said.

Kita-Shiohara is 250 kilometers (155 miles) north of Tokyo.

### Zhirinovskiy asks Clinton not to be afraid of him

MOSCOW: Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy said Tuesday that US President Bill Clinton should not be afraid of him and warned Washington not to support reformers who lost last year's parliamentary elections, reports AFP.

Zhirinovskiy told journalists following an 80 minute meeting with former president Richard Nixon that he had passed on a message to Washington and that he would be prepared to meet with Clinton to explain his views.

"I would like Clinton not to be afraid of my party," Zhirinovskiy said.

"It is necessary to have a meeting, not just with Nixon but directly."

The right-wing leader, who made an unexpectedly strong showing in the December elections to parliament on an aggressive anti-western campaign, dropped part of his hardline rhetoric however during his talks with Nixon and appeared to be seeking recognition from Washington.

An aide to Nixon, Dmitry Simes, said that the 81-year-old former president was "interested in the discrepancies between (his) previous statements and what he said today," adding that his views were "very conciliatory."

Simes said that Zhirinovskiy had given Nixon two copies of his autobiography "The Final Thrust South," one of which, was to be handed to Clinton.

### 'Tea-time' sold for more than \$1.5 lakh

LONDON: A painting of a mother and child by American impressionist Karl Buehr sold for 100,050 pounds (more than 150,000 dollars) at London's Phillips auction house late Tuesday, reports AFP.

The painting "Tea-Time", which had been expected to reach a mere 2,000-3,000 pounds (3,000-4,500 dollars) was sold to New York dealer James Barry Hill, said press reports on Wednesday.

Buehr worked in Giverny in France in the early 20th-century and his last work at auction offered in Chicago last year sold for 559 pounds (\$88 dollars).

The Telegraph reports that the vendor, an elderly lady from southern England, is believed to have bought the painting at a fete for five pounds (7.5 dollars).