BRIFFIY

King Fahd pardons 4,000: King Fahd of Saudi Arabia pardoned more than 4,000 prisoriers, 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. Gulf rulers often pardon prisoners to mark religious or national occasions.

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 repot 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 Showdown Tuesday that "We cannot stop proliferation or clandestine activity until there is a global non-discriminatory regime."

The Nuclear non-Proli-feration Treaty in its present form is discriminatory, he added.

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.

Afghan leaders, who had asked for a visit by the UN mission as soon as possible, will ensure the delegation's security and enable it it to travel wherever and meet with whomever necessary, 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 hardliquor, and limit its alcoholdrinkers to beer.

Hours after the ban was lifted, a Damania Airways plane flew from Calcutta to Bombay early Wednesday, a reservationist

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.

The visit is part of an exchange aimed at increasing cooperation between the two parties. Leading DLP officials visited China last November in the first leg of the exchange.

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.

"Somalia has suffered the four horsemen of the apocalypse," said Hose Bastons, a doctor with the Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) group that is toiling to save lives in a Mogadishu clinic.

"They had war, hunger and now pestilence. They all lead to death," said the 32-year-old Spanish doctor, referring to the biblical depiction of the four ravages of mankind.

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 Mmabatho. The meeting, his first with King goodwill Zwelithini,

would be held on Friday, he said.

ISTANBUL, Mar 16: Up to

30 people died when a tanker

and a freighter collided inside

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

tered ships. each carrying a

crew of about 30 satlors.

burst into flames on impact.

Up to 10 'crew members were

still missing Monday, Turkish

dged to press for tighter secu-

Turkey immediately ple-

authorities said.

The Greek Cyprus-regis-

Mandela said his African National Congress (ANC) would push for a free, fair election in the Zulu-dominated Natal province despite chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's continuing boycott of the April 26-28 poll. Buthelezi is leader of the mainly Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party.

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.

"We are prepared to talk about asking from Congress some relief . . . in particular the F-16 aircraft that Pakistan has already paid for," in return for Pakistan agreeing to cap its nuclear programme, a State Department official said.

Congress imposed a ban on military aid to Pakistan in 1985 unless the president could certify that Islamabad did not have nuclear weapons and was not trying to develop

The White House has not provided such a guarantee since 1990, preventing the delivery of more than 70 F-16s ordered by Islamabad in the late 1980s at a cost of 1.4 billion dollars.

But Pakistan has already paid for 38 of the planes, and

American Music and Grammy Awards.

WASHINGTON, Mar 16: The

Clinton administration is con-

sidering 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, offi-

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 au-

European Union have refrained

for years from selling arms to

Myanmar but US officials sus-

pect that China is a weapons

supplier to Myanmar's military

The United States and the

The measures include a US

cials say, reports AP.

it is these that the US government is now considering releasing in return for Pakistan setting a "verifiable cap" on its

nuclear programme. The freeze on military aid has failed to persuade Pakistan to stop producing nuclear weapons materials, and Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has said that her country would not abandon its nuclear programme despite the pressure from Washington.

The new carrot and stick approach, which the government has already conveyed to Congress, would require legislation to lift or ease the freeze imposed by the Pressler amendment.

A State Department official said most congressmen approached had been positive towards the new ideas, but the author of the freeze, Republican senator for South Dakota Larry Pressler, is against lifting the ban.

Washington's aim remains one of Nuclear Non-Proliferation and persuading Pakistan to abandon its nuclear progra-

Singer Whitney Houston (R) 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

US to pressure Myanmar for

talks with Suu Kyi

cussions with U.N Secretary

General Boutros Boutros-Ghali

about the possible appoint-

ment of a special envoy but no

of Suu Kyi is part of a pattern

of alleged-abuses in Myanmar

highlighted in a recent UN re-

soldiers frequently use execu-

tions, torture, rape and other

atrocities against villagers.

especially those belonging to

pro-democracy uprising that

was brutally suppressed by

troops. Two years later, her

National League for Demo-

Suu Kyi headed a 1988

ethnic minorities.

The continued detention

The report said Myanmar

decisions have been made.

US officials have had dis-

mme, but the situation is currently at an impasse.

The government is not asking to overturn the Pressler amendment but is holding preliminary discussions with Islamabad on an easing of the military aid freeze in return for commitments from Pakistan. the State Department official

If Pakistan gave such guarantees, congress could perhaps vote an amendment to Pressler specifically allowing the release of the 38 F-16s without affecting the overall freeze, a State Department official said.

A Defence Department spokesman stressed that "We would not act without full compliance or agreement with congress.

The US aim was "through a step by step diplomatic approach to cap and then reduce and eliminate all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles that could deliver them," the spokesman added.

Another report from New York says, officials told the

- AFP photo

cracy scored a landslide elec-

tion victory that the Myanmar

junta has refused to recognise.

Richardson became the first

non-family member to visit

Suu Kyi since she was placed

Myanmar military to allow the

visit, coupled with its release

of about 2,000 prisoners, gave

hope to some that Myanmar

authorities were reassessing

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

their hard-line policies.

short-term.

The decision by the

under house arrest.

A month ago, US Rep. Bill

Times that the proposal is part of a policy to stem the spread of nuclear arms in South Asia, where India and Pakistan have fought three wars since 1947.

"The idea would be to see what you could get in terms of limits on the nuclear programme," an administration official told the Times.

"It's part of an approach to address proliferation in South Asia generally."

A spokesman at the Pakistani Embassy in Washington told the newspaper that he was not familiar with any talks between his government and the Clinton administration on the matter.

The current dispute over India-held Kashmir, where Muslims are seeking to become either independent or a part of Pakistan has raised concern in Washington that it could escalate into a nuclear incident.

India set off a test nuclear explosion in 1974, Pakistan has never taken such a step.

India proposes

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

Harding, marshal of the air force, was accused of having an affair with the wife of Anthohy 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 Buck, 65, and his wife.

Spain, were separated in September. She is 30 years his junior.

Sienvenida Perez Blanco of

The allegations had prompted calls from the opposition Labour Party for Harding's,

resignation. " The defence of this covintry is just one hell of a mess and this is another part of the conundrum," David C.lark. Labour's defence expert said Saturday.

'Indo-Pak war unlikely in coming decade'

NEW DELHI, Mar 16: India and Pakistan, the two long time rivalry neigbours, are unlikely to come into a conventional war in the coming decade, says a new defence study available here yesterday. reports Xinhua.

The study titled "affordable credible defence of India." which was prepared by an eminent Indian defence analyst, Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, said 'transmutation of conflict is well under way with regular conventional war significantly giving way to irregular, nonstandard conflicts' although geopolitical uncertainties and unpredictability are likely to persist through the 1990s.

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, ther 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 subpoenated to appear Thursday before a Los Angeles country 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 spoiling them and went home by himself, said local police spekesman 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

Zhirinovsky asks Clinton not to be afraid of him MOSCOW: Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky

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. Zhirinovsky told journalists following an 80 minute meet-

ing 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,"

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

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 Zhirinovsky 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

impressionist Karl Buehr sold for 100,050 pounds (more than 150,000 dollars) at London's Phillips auction house late, Tuesday, reports AFP.

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

from southern England, is believed to have bought the painting at a fete for five pounds (7.5 dollars)

Labours ahead of Tories

25 points ahead of the Tories in an opinion poll published in the Guardian Wednesday, reports AFP.

The opposition party has also taken a substantial grip on key issue such as crime. taxation and the economy where the Conservatives usually dominate, the poll by the ICM Institute finds.

The results of the poll are as follows (with last month's ratings brackets): Labour 49 per cent (51 per cent), Conservatives 24 per cent (26 per cent), Liberal Democrats 22 per cent (20 per cent). Others 5 per cent (4 per

rity controls in the straight. which is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Traffic along the Bosphorus was suspended.

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

tected on the surface of the Black Sea. Meanwhile, in Athens, Cyprus' Minister for Transport and Merchant Shipping, Ada-Adamidis, accused Turkish authorities of reacting

with "unacceptable delays" to

the collision, which also set

off huge explosions.

There is not a lot of hope

of finding those missing." the prefect added. He told AFP that the firefighters had brought the blaze under control, although a

'small oil leak" had been de-

30 die in Turkey | Massive attack on Indian troops in Kashmir

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

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

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

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

a dozen Muslim rebel groups spearheading the campaign against Indian rule in Kashmir. More than 8,000 people have died in Kashmir, India's

since 1989 when the bloody

ran says, a radical Iranian daily

Another report from Teh-

Clinton disappointed at results of talks with China

campaign gained momentum.

The JKLF is one of the half only Muslim-majority state, government for pressuring Pakistan into withdrawing a UN resolution condemning India's human rights record in Kashmir. "Given India's black record

on Monday criticised the

in Kashmir, is it possible to absolve New Delhi of the savage killing of men, women and children? Asked Jomhuri Islami, close to Islamic hardliners. 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 posi-

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

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.

DPRK threatens to scrap talks with US

TOKYO, Mar 16: North Korea threatened on Tuesday to scrap high-level talks with the United States next week if Washington refused to honour an agreement aimed at resolving doubts over the North's nuclear programme, reports

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) monitored in Tokyo, quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying the North would be unable to attend the thirdround of talks if the United States did not meet its obligations.

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 poten tial 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.

LONDON: A painting of a mother and child by American

The painting "Tea-Time", which had been expected to

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 (838 dollars) The Telegraph reports that the vendor, an elderly lady

LONDON, Mar 16: Britain's nied Monday that he was soft ening 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.

16: President Bill Clinton de- with just a handful of limited propriate time. 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 soften ing 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

Beijing made up for this make a judgement at the ap- ences," Christopher said at a iffs in June to the Chinese on specific methods and mea-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 dif-

"I wouldn't describe it as a

breakthrough. It was a busi-

nesslike and productive meet-

ing. We began to narrow differ-

news conference following Communist government makthree 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-Favored-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.

human rights had not nar rowed but both sides were still trying to resolve the issue. He President Clinton has linked renewal of the low tarsaid a "common understanding

ing 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 Waren Christopher, saying better results had ben 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

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.

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.

partners, their activity near Russian shores has not diminished," said Adm Igor Kasa tonov. first deputy commander of the Russian navy.

Despite the fact that for-

mer "adversaries now are our

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

the Bosphorus Strait, Istanbul authorities said Monday, as Istanbul prefect Hayri Koz-Greek and Cypriot officials slammed Turkey for "unacceptable delays" over its salvage operation, reports AFP. The oil tanker Nassya, which collided with the freighter