

# BRIEFLY

**12 Kurds killed in Iraq:** Gunmen killed 12 mourners at the funeral of a Kurdish guerrilla commander in northern Iraq on Monday while Iraqi Kurdish leaders held peace talks in Turkey, Reuter reports from Ankara.

Safeen Dzayee, Ankara-based spokesman of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) said fighters of the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) had fired on a crowd mourning the death of a KDP commander, Osman Kader Munawwer, in Suleimaniyah.

He said 12 people had been killed and 46 wounded in the attack. PUK officials could not be reached for comment.

**Palestinian policeman killed:** Unidentified assailants shot and killed a Palestinian policeman as he was on patrol near a Jewish settlement in the southern part of the autonomous Gaza Strip, a Palestinian source said. AFP reports from Gaza City.

The 23-year-old policeman, whose name was not disclosed, was struck in the chest near the Netzarim settlement, the source added.

He was the first Palestinian police officer to be killed on duty since Israeli troops withdrew from the West Bank town of Jericho and much of the Gaza Strip in accordance with an agreement signed May 4 in Cairo by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

**Chinese flood death toll 58:** Torrential flooding in the south China province of Guangdong has killed 58 people, injured 684 and stranded 440,000, the China Business Times reported yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

It said heavy rains on June 8 and 9 struck six cities and 23 counties, including Zhanjiang, Maoming, Foshan, Yangjiang and Guangzhou, affecting more than eight million people and cultivated acreage of 530,000 hectares (1.31 million acres).

Total economic losses were 5.8 billion yuan (666 million dollars) the newspaper said. It gave no other details.

**Indian train derails, 6 hurt:** An express train derailed in western India on Tuesday, injuring six people, a news agency reported, AP says from New Delhi.

Nine coaches and two engines of the train fell over as it travelled from New Delhi to Bombay, Press Trust of India said.

The cause of the crash — which occurred in Ankleshwar, 300 kilometres (185 miles) from Bombay — was not immediately known.

**Quake rocks East Java:** A strong earthquake rocked parts of East Java province early Tuesday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties, the Meteorology and Geophysics Agency said. AP reports from Jakarta.

The quake struck at 4:04 am (0904 GMT Monday) with a preliminary magnitude of 5.9, the same strength as one that hit the same area June 3.

**French HR activist dies:** Paul Milliez, a prominent professor of medicine and human rights activist, has died in Paris, his colleagues announced. He was 81. AP reports from Paris.

In addition to his teaching career at various Paris medical schools and hospitals, Milliez wrote several books, campaigned for abortion rights for French women, sought the release of Soviet political prisoners and marched with students during the protests of May 1968.

## Cong abandons bill to curb CEC's powers

NEW DELHI, June 14: For the second time this year, a government official who is leading a one-man crusade to clean up Indian politics has survived an attempt to clip his wings, reports AP.

On Tuesday, the governing Congress Party abandoned legislation during a special session of parliament that would have reduced Chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan's powers by appointing two more election commissioners with equal rank.

"We haven't been able to muster the two-thirds support for this legislation," Minister of State for Law and Justice HR Bhardwaj said in a speech before parliament.

Although the Congress Party has a narrow majority in the legislature, the bill was a constitutional amendment that would have required a two-thirds vote of support.

If it had passed, Seshan, who has infuriated politicians by changing election rules as an autonomous official, would have had to persuade the two new commissioners to support his reforms.

Elections are often violent in India, a country that describes itself as the world's largest democracy, and news reports of impersonation and intimidation of voters are common.

On election days, gangs of politically paid thugs often walk into polling stations where the rival party is expected to win and literally walk off with the ballot box.

On Sunday, a group of six prominent journalists, academics and a retired Supreme Court judge urged parliament

to leave Seshan alone. "Anything that undermines the autonomy and authority of the Election Commission virtually amounts to taking away the right to vote of the poor," they said in a joint statement.

Seshan, who was appointed as chief election commissioner in 1991 and is halfway through his six-year term, has infuriated politicians by blowing a whistle on their corrupt activities.

In by-elections he has increased police protection at polling stations and invalidated suspicious results, moves that have increased voter turnout in areas notorious for election violence.

## Rocket duels kill 4 in Kabul

KABUL, June 14: Rival Islamic groups duelled with rockets and heavy artillery throughout the night, and hospital officials said Tuesday that at least four people were killed and 52 injured, all of them civilians, reports AP.

One rocket flattened a small mud house on the southern outskirts of Kabul, killing a young mother and her three-year-old son. Another rocket slammed into a home in central Kabul, killing two children, hospital officials said.

The duel was between Burhanuddin Rabbani and his arch rival, Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Since January 1, forces loyal to Hekmatyar have been trying to topple Rabbani, whose term in office expires June 30.

## Buckingham Palace denies report

LONDON, June 14: Buckingham Palace dismissed as "speculative gossip" on Monday a report that Princess Anne is being groomed for a role as surrogate queen consort to her brother Charles when he ascends the throne, reports Reuter.

The Daily Express newspaper, quoting the royal household, said in a front-page "exclusive" that the 43-year-old princess was destined for an increased role in the monarchy to fill the vacuum left by her brother's estranged wife Princess Diana.

The report was published to coincide with Anne's elevation on Monday to Britain's highest order of chivalry, the Order of the Garter, in honour of her work for the monarchy and the charities with which she is associated.

# US, ROK, Japan concerned at N Korean plan to quit IAEA

SEOUL, June 14: The United States, South Korea and Japan — the prime backers of sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear programme — all voiced strong concern Tuesday over the North's announcement it would pull out of the UN nuclear watchdog group, reports AP.

The North's plan to quit the International Atomic Energy Agency, announced by the communist state's official news agency late Monday, would make it virtually impossible to check whether North Korea is complying with an international nuclear arms-control pact it signed in 1985.

President Clinton and Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata discussed the development by telephone Tuesday, and Japan's Foreign Ministry said Clinton told Hata the North's move, if confirmed, would make the situation much more serious.

The IAEA, based in Vienna,

said Tuesday that North Korea had not yet officially communicated its intention to withdraw from the 120-member organisation. It said such notification would have to be made formally, in writing.

Agency spokesman David Kyd said two inspectors were still at the North's nuclear complex at Yongbyon.

"They have not been asked to leave the country as of today," he said.

In Seoul, South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo said the prospects for dialogue with the North had diminished.

"We have now run into a critical juncture where decisive and firm measures are necessary," he said.

Japan, in a Foreign Ministry statement, said the North's action "runs counter to the desires of international society," and urged it to reconsider.

Top South Korean security officials, meanwhile, met in

emergency session to discuss the development, which heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The two sides' 2 million troops are already on high alert.

After the two-hour security meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hong-koo said the North's move would only strengthen international resolve to seek UN sanctions, a process he predicted would take two or three weeks.

South Korea and Japan, much of which is within range of missiles test-launched by North Korea, have agreed, in concert with the United States, to push for punitive UN steps against the North that would gradually increase in severity.

Japanese coalition strategist Ichiro Ozawa told reporters that Japan had been asked to stop remittances by North Korean residents in Japan, but the Foreign Ministry said Japan would not take any separate measures prior to United

Nations action.

The North's move Monday was seen as retaliation for the first formal sanctions against it over its nuclear programme suspected of aiming to make nuclear weapons. The IAEA's governing board voted Friday to suspend 250,000 dollars in non-medical technical aid to North Korea.

Former US President Jimmy Carter, in Seoul for talks, plans to visit North Korea for four days starting Wednesday as scheduled despite the North Korean announcement. South Korea's national Yonhap news agency said, quoting South Korean officials who met him.

South Korean newspapers, quoting unnamed government sources, reported today that Carter, in meetings with North Korean leaders, would convey US conditions for high-level talks with the North on improving ties, something the North has long sought.



US President Bill Clinton (R) offers a toast to Japanese Emperor Akihito during a state dinner at the White House in Washington on Monday.

— AFP photo

# Major pledges to shake-up cabinet

LONDON, June 14: Battered Prime Minister John Major has pledged to reshuffle his Cabinet and to win Britain's next general election after "his Conservative Party suffered its worst defeat this century in European elections, reports Reuter.

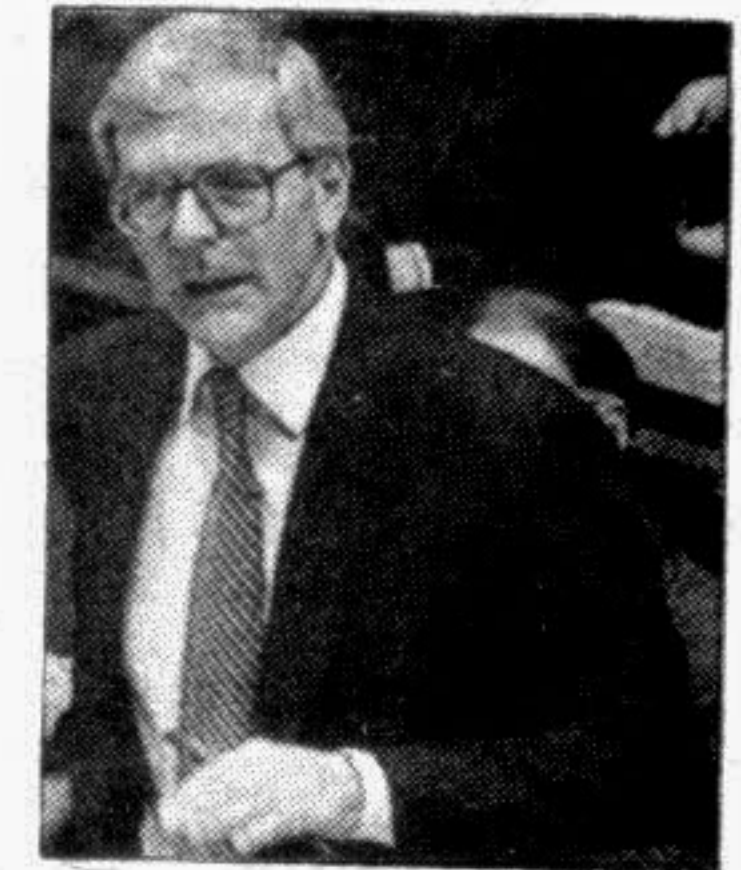
A jubilant Labour Party said its victory in European parliamentary polls represented an earthquake in the British political landscape while the Conservatives said a poor turnout had caused a mid-term blip from which they could recover.

The Conservatives, deeply unpopular after policy-u-turns and stinging tax rises, blamed lingering effects of recession and barely concealed divisions over Europe for their trouncing but Major's own position seemed no longer to be in immediate danger.

Questioned about his leadership, a defiant Major told reporters: "I am still here. We have a mechanism if people wish to challenge in the au-

turn, that's a matter for them. I don't expect one. I will be here waiting for it if there is one. I will beat it and I will be here through and through the general election (not due until 1997)."

Labour's Margaret Beckett said: "Results showed that the mantle of trust has now passed firmly to Labour. The people of Britain are now turning to Labour."



John Major

# Ghali for stronger OAU-UN relations

TUNIS, June 14: The UN chief executive on Monday told a summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) that the world failed embattled Rwanda, and pleaded for closer cooperation between the OAU and the United Nations, reports AFP.

Addressing some 40 African heads of state on the first day of the annual OAU gathering, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said that the ethnic carnage in Rwanda was a bitter failure, not only for the United Nations, but for the international community as a whole.

He thanked 11 African nations for expressing readiness to help boost the UN mission in Rwanda to 5,500 men.

Boutros-Ghali said a solution to the crisis in Rwanda lay "in further negotiations within the

framework of the Arusha agreement," under which the mainly Hutu Rwandan government agreed last August to share power with rebels. The Egyptian UN leader said that a "real political partnership is now being established between our two organisations, aimed at maintaining peace in Africa and averting what seems to be the fate of our continent — to be a victim of bloody confrontations between people who ought, in fact, to be moving towards unity."

The most upbeat aspect of his speech concerned the process of "reconciliation and faith in the future of South Africa," which formally became the 53rd member nation of the OAU on Monday as President Nelson Mandela took up his seat at the body's 30th summit.

## Harjan youth beaten to death in Bihar

NEW DELHI, June 14: An "untouchable" Hindu youth was beaten to death by a mob and his higher caste wife stripped and clubbed with burning logs after they eloped, the Times of India reported today, reports AFP.

Mahavir Ravidas, who belonged to the Harjan, or "untouchable" community — the lowest rung in the Hindu caste ladder — died a day after he was assaulted by members of the Kurmi caste who opposed the marriage, the newspaper said.

His wife, Malati Kurmi, was publicly stripped and beaten with flaming logs, it added.

The Times of India said the incident occurred earlier this month in a village in the eastern Indian state of Bihar and that police reinforcements have been sent to the town.

## 42 murdered in Brazil

SAO PAULO, June 14: Twenty-one people were shot dead in separate execution-style massacres in Sao Paulo and 21 other people were murdered in what police described Monday as one of the bloodiest weekends in the city's history. Reuter reports from Sao Paulo.

At least two of the massacres took place within a six-hour period during a weekend in which a total of 42 people were murdered, Brazilian television quoted police as saying.

Gunmen in Taboao Da Serra on the outskirts of Sao Paulo burst into a house early Sunday and shot dead twelve adults, including a 75-year-old woman. Most of the bodies were found by police lying on the floor with shots to the head.

Police said most of those present had apparently been smoking crack at the house. The only survivor was a five-month-old baby who was spared by the killers.

In a separate attack Saturday night, three men entered a house in Itaim Paulista in eastern Sao Paulo and shot dead six men who were having dinner together. A seventh man was injured.

The victims were killed execution-style after being ordered to lie on the floor and place their hands on their heads. According to the survivor, the killers had shouted that they were police officers when they burst into the house.

Sao Paulo police discounted any police involvement and said they were working on the theory that these two massacres were revenge killings or drug-related.

# Jerusalem off the agenda for now, Arafat tells Rabin

JERUSALEM, June 14: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat has told Israel in a letter that the issue of Jerusalem should be off the agenda for now, a newspaper reported on Monday, says Reuter.

The daily Haaretz said the PLO leader had sent three letters to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin reaffirming his commitment to peace and proposing a lull in weeks of bickering over the status of the holy city.

Rabin confirmed to Israel Radio that he received three letters from Arafat but refused to detail their contents other than to say: "They don't touch on anything but the agreements and certain difficulties as described by Arafat among the Palestinian population in the territories."

Rabin added: "I will answer at the appropriate time."

Haaretz said: "Arafat responded to the demand Rabin presented to him after the publication of the (May 10) speech and expressed anew his commitment to the peace process."

Rabin demanded the reaffirmation after Arafat, in a May 10 speech to Muslims at a South African mosque, called for a "Jihad" (holy war or struggle) over Jerusalem, which Israel says is its eternal capital.

In the letters, Arafat proposed direct dialogue with Rabin and asked Israel not to hamper existing Palestinian institutions in Arab East Jerusalem, like PLO local headquarters.

The newspaper said senior defence and political officials

have decided to bar Arafat from Jerusalem when he visits

the Palestinian self-rule area of Jericho.

Israel has hinted strongly that Arafat would not be a welcome visitor in Jerusalem but has stopped short of saying he will be barred.

In Tunis, Arafat said on Monday that fanatical forces on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides would not be allowed to impede the Middle East peace process and urged Rabin to maintain the "peace of the holy city."

"From here, I want to tell Rabin, let us maintain the peace of the brave and the achievements of this peace for our peoples, children and the whole region," he added.

# AI blasts treatment of inmates in US jail

LONDON, June 14: Amnesty International criticised the treatment of inmates in a US prison on Monday and called for the urgent review of conditions it described as inhuman and degrading, reports Reuter.

The international human rights group said the standards at Oklahoma state penitentiary's H-unit, which houses death-row prisoners, were "shocking" and in breach of both US and international law.

"Prisoners are confined to a concrete world in which they never see a blade of grass, earth, trees or any part of the natural world," the group said in a statement.

"No prisoner should be confined long-term under these conditions."

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# Polks results spark political debate in EU member states

UNDATED, June 14: European elections results sparked domestic political debate in major EU member states Monday, but the poll appeared unlikely to have much impact on the balance of power within the union's parliament, reports AFP.

The poll dealt a blow in particular to Spain's socialist Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez, whose party was well beaten into second place by the right-wing Popular Party, while Britain's Conservatives lost almost half their seats in the Strasbourg Assembly.

But those looking to take power elsewhere also saw their hopes dashed, as ruling parties in Germany, Italy and to a lesser extent France, saw their domestic record largely confirmed, albeit by an apathetic electorate, with turnout barely 50 per cent on average across the 12 EU states.

# Russia to cut army by Oct

MOSCOW, June 14: Three days after President Boris Yeltsin said more army troops must be let go, Defence Minister Pavel Grachev said Monday that new cuts will reduce the army to 1.9 million by October, reports AP.

Grachev said an appropriate directive has been sent to the troops already, the Interfax news agency reported.

There currently are 2.2 million servicemen in Russia's armed forces, Interfax said.

In a nationally telecast news conference last Friday, Yeltsin said: "The army should be more active in cutting the number of servicemen. I cannot understand their indecision. We cannot, society today cannot maintain a 3 million-strong army — the size of the Soviet army."

# Off the Record

## Bill runs out of steam during morning jog

WASHINGTON: It might have been the humidity. Or it could have been jet lag. Whatever the problem was, President Clinton ran out of steam during his morning jog Monday, reports AP.

After a quick start that left the air-conditioned press van behind, Clinton stopped often on his usual route, clearly tired as he chatted with tourists and fellow joggers. He thrilled one family as he paused to shake their hands in front of the Capitol, leaving the mother starting at her hand.

Clinton finally gave up the run in front of the Smithsonian Museum of American history, walking the rest of the way to the White House.

For Clinton, who spent last week in Europe, the weather could have dampened his enthusiasm. At 7 am, about the time he set out on the jog, the temperature already was 72 F (22 C) and the humidity was 100 per cent.

## Grandma completes degree started 4 decades ago

EUGENE, Oregon: It took 14 years and countless missed lunches before a university secretary finally completed what she started four decades ago: her college education, reports AP.

"It feels so good to have accomplished this," Diane Hunsaker, 50, said during commencement ceremonies Sunday at the University of Oregon, where she received her degree, with honours, in psychology.

Mrs Hunsaker started college as a teenager, but left school when her husband was drafted in 1960. She returned to the classroom in 1980 after the youngest of her five children turned 7.

Since then, she has taken classes during her lunch break. Her husband, Frank, said he often found his wife studying late at night, wrapped in a blanket on the floor. Sometimes, she fell asleep with her head on the book.

"It seems like it's been a long time in some respects and not in others," Mrs Hunsaker said. "But when you think about the fact that your youngest daughter is a mother now, it puts it into perspective."

Mrs Hunsaker's youngest daughter is 21 and the mother of a newborn daughter who was christened Sunday — just before grandma's graduation.