

# BRIEFLY

**Manmohan Singh visits KSA today:** Indian Finance Minister Manmohan Singh will visit Saudi Arabia over the weekend, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said on Thursday. Reuter reports from New Delhi.

It said Singh, who is scheduled to start a two-day tour on Saturday, will be the first senior Indian official to visit the Arab Kingdom since 1986.

**2 journalists slain in Algeria:** The latest assassinations of two journalists in Algeria was carried out by gunmen who forced them out of their homes, then shot and decapitated them, Algerian television reported on Thursday. AP reports from Algiers.

Ahmed Issaad, a reporter for the state television, and Nassereddine Lekhal, a journalist for the state-run daily El-Masa, were earlier reported by security services to have been stabbed to death in Boufarik, south of Algiers.

**Yellow fever kills 300 Nigerians:** A yellow fever outbreak has killed at least 300 people in Nigeria, a news agency said on Friday. AP reports from Lagos.

The News Agency of Nigeria said the outbreak began two weeks ago in the Orsu area of eastern Imo state and spread to neighbouring Orlu area, where at least 50 victims have been hospitalised.

**Teachers' strike in Ukraine:** Thousands of teachers demonstrated outside Ukrainian government headquarters on Friday to protest rising prices and shrinking salaries, AP reports from Kiev.

The three-day strike in Kiev is the most visible sign yet of the increasing unpopularity of an austerity plan President Leonid Kuchma says will eventually put Ukraine on the road to economic health.

**34 die in Kenyan road mishap:** Thirty-four prison warders and another person were killed in Kenya's worst road accident this year, officials said yesterday. Reuter reports from Nairobi.

The front wheel of a lorry carrying 64 people, including the warders, headed for an Independence Day parade in Nairobi, burst as it was coming down a hill on Thursday six km northeast of Nairobi, the Home Affairs Ministry said.

**Ortega suffers heart attack:** Former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, 49, was hospitalised in Cuba after suffering a minor heart attack, his Sandinista party announced on Thursday. AP reports from Managua.

Ortega was in "satisfactory" condition at a specialised hospital in Havana, the Cuban capital, a party statement said.

**2 get life for racial murder:** Two white men were sentenced to life in prison for killing a Marine because he was black, AP reports from Houston.

Jory Wayne Thomas, 21, and John Carillo, 20, were sentenced on Thursday, a day after they were convicted in the shooting death of Marine Lance Cpl Tarron Dixon. The 25-year-old serviceman was shot to death in 1991 near his Houston home, two days after he returned from five years of tours in Panama and the Persian Gulf.

**51 held for killing elephants:** Authorities have arrested 51 people for killing 16 Asian elephants to obtain their ivory tusks, a blow to the preservation of the endangered animals, an official report said on Friday. AP reports from Beijing.

The elephants were killed in a 240,000-hectare (592,800-acre) nature preserve in southwest China's Yunnan province, the Guangming Daily reported. Asian elephants are native to the sub-tropical southern Yunnan region of Xishuangbanna, but only about 200 still exist nationwide.

**Actor Lionel Stander dies:** Lionel Stander, the gravely voiced actor whose career spanned the screwball comedies of the 1930s and a supporting role on TV's "Hart to Hart" a half-century later, has died at 86, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Standar died at his Brentwood home on Wednesday morning from lung cancer, publicist Alan Nierob said on Thursday. At 17, Stander began his acting career on stage, and he appeared in many Broadway plays before turning 30.

**TV evangelist Bakker freed:** Television evangelist Jim Bakker, who was imprisoned for milking his followers out of millions of dollars, is a free man, AP reports from Hendersonville.

Bakker, who did 4 and a half years in prison, a month at a halfway house and four months of house arrest, was released at the stroke of midnight on Wednesday. The fallen preacher, who rose to fame in front of a TV camera, spent Thursday in seclusion at his mountain home in western North Carolina, where he had been living under house arrest.

## Palestinians take control of health, taxation in WB

**RAMALLAH, West Bank, Dec 2:** Yasser Arafat's government on Thursday took control of health and taxation in the West Bank, broadening Palestinian autonomy despite a pall cast on peacemaking by Islamic terror attacks, reports AP.

The move completed the initial stage of handing over day-to-day affairs in the West Bank to Palestinians.

It also came amid growing calls in Israel for shutting off Palestinians from Israel because of a series of attacks in which 32 Israelis have been killed since early October.

About 1,000 people gathered Thursday in the northern Israeli town of Afula for the funeral of the latest victim, 19-year-old woman soldier Liat Gabai who was axed to death Wednesday.

A suspect detained Wednesday, Wahib Abu Rub, 24, from the West Bank town of Qabatiyah, has told interrogators he was from the Islamic Resistance Movement or Hamas, Israel radio said. The same group claimed the Oct 19 Tel Aviv bus bombing that killed 22 people.

Abu Rub admitted to the slaying in an interview on Israeli television. He said as he was led to the Nazareth court Thursday that he wanted to prove to fellow Palestinians he wasn't collaborating with Israel.

"They accused me to being a traitor. I wanted to prove that I wasn't," he said. "I killed the soldier to prove to my people I am a decent man."

Police Minister Moshe Shahal responded by calling Thursday for completely shutting off the West Bank and Gaza Strip from Israel.

"There is no alternative other than to demand separation," Shahal said.

## US, Egyptian students clash in Cairo

**CAIRO, Dec 2:** Egyptian and US students clashed on Thursday on the campus of the American University in Cairo, and officials later said four Americans involved in the incident were leaving the country, reports AP.

Students and witnesses said the fight started after US embassy officials arrived at the downtown campus to investigate an incident a day earlier near the campus in which four American students allegedly roughed up the Egyptian president of the Student Union, Mustafa Najam.

They said some 250 students gathered to demand that the diplomats leave the campus.

# US, allies have mismanaged war in Bosnia: Christopher

**BRUSSELS, Dec 2:** Secretary of State Warren Christopher confessed Thursday that the United States and its allies had mismanaged the war in Bosnia. He said they all have lessons to learn from the debacle, reports AP.

As the NATO foreign ministers moved to expand NATO to countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Christopher found himself cast in the embarrassing role of explaining the Clinton administration's decision to forego force in favour of diplomacy to try to rein in the Serbs.

"All of us ought to try to learn lessons from the experience in Bosnia," he told reporters, while trying to focus attention on NATO's future rather than the faltering attempt to quiet the conflict in the former Yugoslav republic.

Stoutly maintaining NATO had fulfilled the peacekeeping assignment given it by the United Nations, Christopher said the purpose in expanding the alliance and revamping the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a 53-nation East-West group, was to forestall other threats to peace on the continent.

A senior US official put it more bluntly. "While Bosnia is burning we are trying to concentrate on the larger structural issues that may prevent other Bosnias," he said.

NATO's projected expansion eastward would embrace the territory between Germany and Russia, where two world wars were fought in this century.

On Friday, Christopher intends to get formal approval from France, Britain, Germany and Russia for a new diplomatic initiative to try to draw the Bosnian Serbs into negotiations with the Muslims and Croats in Bosnia.

It calls for a cease-fire around Bihac, the northwestern Muslim enclave that Serbs are pummeling, a pledge to cease hostilities throughout the country for three to six months and then an international peace conference.

The lure for the Serbs, who control about 70 per cent of Bosnia, is an opportunity to press their demand for cross-border political ties to Serbia.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe and British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd made plans to fly to Belgrade next weekend to push the initiative. Christopher's aides said he did not intend to accompany them.

At the same time, NATO is considering contingency plans to withdraw the 24,000 UN peacekeepers now in Bosnia, hundreds of whom have been detained by the onrushing Serbs.

Christopher said an evacuation would require ground troops and the United States "would have a role in that." However, he said President Clinton had not decided specifically what American troops might do to extricate the peacekeepers.



NATO Secretary General Willy Claes (L) shakes hands with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher prior to the ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Thursday. — AFP photo

## Israel creating stalemate in peace talks: Syria

**DAMASCUS, Dec 2:** Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad on Thursday accused Israel of deliberately creating a stalemate in peace talks and of wanting to impose its "hegemony" on the Arabs, reports AP.

Assad, speaking before a new US peace shuttle in the region next week aimed at achieving a breakthrough, said Syria and Israel "have not agreed on any of the issues concerning withdrawal, peace and security."

Assad was addressing a joint press conference with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak here after the two leaders spent several hours discussing the peace process.

"We want total peace in exchange for a total (Israeli) withdrawal, but the Israelis' attitude reveals their aim: Total hegemony over the Arabs," Assad said.

The peace talks are deadlocked over the scope and timetable of an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, seized from Syria in 1967.

Egypt has been trying to narrow differences between Israel and Syria, which have not had formal direct negotiations since February.

The talks, launched at the 1991 Madrid peace conference, were "in stalemate" because of the Israeli position, Assad said.

**Libya blames US for UN decision**

**TRIPOLI, Dec 2:** Libya on Thursday blamed the United States for the UN's decision to renew for another four months the international sanctions in force against Tripoli since April 1992, reports AP.

The official news agency Jana said, Washington "violated the internal rules of the (UN) Security Council by putting the sanctions issue up for discussion two days ahead of the planned date, and during an informal meeting."

The US administration was "serious in its (peace) efforts," Assad said, but Israel was "obstructing these efforts."

He dismissed Israel's accords with the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Jordan, saying "the result (of the accords) is not peace."

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher returns to the region on December 6 in another bid to relaunch peace talks between Syria and Israel. It will be his seventh Middle East tour this year.

## Off the Record

**Hollywood's 'most beautiful couple' breaking up**

**LOS ANGELES:** Leading man Richard Gere and supermodel Cindy Crawford, whose marriage three years ago made them perhaps the most beautiful couple in Hollywood, have separated, reports AP.

The pair announced their breakup in a statement issued on Thursday by their public relations firm.

"This personal and painful decision was made between us in July," they said. "Since that time we have been trying to work things out, but due to the recent conjecture in the press, we have decided to make a statement at this time."

Last month, a British tabloid published a photo of a woman hopping over Gere's garden wall. But model Laura Bailey said she was visiting a friend next door.

Gere, 45, and Crawford, 28, married three years ago. There have been recurring rumours that each of them is gay and their marriage troubled.

In May, the couple published a full-page ad in the Times of London, proclaiming their heterosexuality and their commitment to one another.



Actor Richard Gere (L) and supermodel Cindy Crawford

**Emeka praises Lankan efforts to resolve crisis**

**COLOMBO, Dec 2:** Visiting Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeaka Anyaoku has lauded the Sri Lankan government's efforts to resolve the ethnic conflict in the island's northeast, officials said on Thursday, reports AP.

Anyaoku paid tribute to the new People's Alliance government at a meeting on Wednesday with Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, who briefed the Commonwealth envoy on the position of peace talks with Tamil rebels, officials said.

The Secretary General expressed admiration for the courage and imagination of the government in embarking on the peace process, a Foreign Ministry statement said.

Anyaoku, who arrived here on Tuesday on a four-day official visit, is also due to call on President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her mother Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

## New lease of life for 'special child of God'

**JOHANNESBURG:** Mumbo Sapo was so disfigured by burns when he was barely a year old that his family left their Zambian village and raised him in isolation in the forest, reports Reuter.

spine was deformed, his head grew, attached to his left shoulder, he could not close his eyes and his lower lip knitted itself to his jaw, baring his teeth. No outsider could understand his attempts to speak.

Now at the age of 14, he has had three operations at a South African hospital with more to follow and surgeons charmed by his infectious new laugh hope he will be able to lead a normal life.

"He is a special child of God. His survival so far has been a miracle," spokeswoman Marlene Parsons of Johannesburg's privately run Gaden City Clinic said on Thursday. "We want to help him have an independent adult life."

As a little child he had received no treatment for the burns he suffered when he fell into a cooking fire in Muchomo village, in eastern Zambia. His disfigurement was so severe his family were hounded out of the village, Parsons said.

## Lisa Presley denies media reports

**LONDON:** Lisa Marie Presley denied reports on Thursday that she and her pop superstar husband, Michael Jackson, are divorcing after six months of marriage, reports Reuter.

In a statement issued through her publicist in New York, Presley said the reports that appeared in US and British newspapers on Thursday were false.

"Once again the media is being very irresponsible and spreading false rumours," said the daughter of rock n roll king Elvis Presley. "Michael and I are very happily married and very much in love."

## Police kill 6 leftists in Andhra

**NEW DELHI, Dec 2:** In renewed fighting between left-wing guerrillas and the police in a southern Indian state, six rebels were killed in separate attacks on Friday, a news agency said, reports AP.

The Peoples War Group, an organisation fighting for poor farmers, has carried out a series of attacks to disrupt Thursday's voting to elect a new legislature in Andhra Pradesh state.

During the final week of campaigning, about 30 people, mostly policemen, have been killed in land mine explosions blamed on the group. Three rebels were killed when they tried to disrupt voting on Thursday.

On Friday, three rebels were killed in a gunbattle with the police in Karimnagar province, while three others were killed in as many different encounters elsewhere in the state, United News of India said. The area is about 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) south of New Delhi.

## New Mexican president vows to check corruption

**MEXICO CITY, Dec 2:** Ernesto Zedillo began his term as Mexico's president by vowing to clean up the justice system, fight poverty, strengthen democracy and renew efforts to end an Indian revolt in southern Mexico, reports AP.

Zedillo, who rose from youth as a shoeshine boy to earn an economics doctorate from Yale, was sworn in Thursday before 1,500 Mexican and foreign officials at the Chamber of Deputies.

He received the green, white and red presidential sash from former President Salinas de Gortari to begin a six-year term at the helm of this nation of 90 million.

"We think he will be a good president," said Carmen Valencia, a 60-year-old housewife. "He came from below and understands poverty."

Not everyone agreed. About 80 protesters among a crowd of hundreds clashed with riot police, hurling rocks and burning two vehicles after the ceremony. Police responded with tear gas. A Red Cross spokesman said 58 people were injured.

The protesters had emerged from a peaceful gathering by about 10,000 at the Monument of the Revolution in downtown Mexico City. They shouted "Out with Zedillo!" and called for an end to the 65-year rule of his Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI.

Zedillo, 42, said one of his first acts would be to introduce a constitutional amendment for a "profound transformation" of the justice system, now subservient to politicians and often accused of corruption.

He also vowed to balance the overwhelming power of the presidency by strengthening congress and local governments.



A woman cries on Thursday in Sarajevo near the grave of her boyfriend Denis Sefer who died recently at a frontline near here. She placed a heart with the message "I love you so much" on his grave. — AFP photo

# Russia upsets NATO plans to reach out to ex-Warsaw Pact foes

**BRUSSELS, Dec 2:** Russia upset NATO's plans for expanding its membership to former Warsaw Pact foes Thursday by claiming the move would create a new division in Europe, reports AP.

In an extraordinary session, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev departed from a prepared speech to criticize the allies for ordering aides to draw up terms and conditions for future membership.

If the strategy of NATO has changed, then that is something which requires further discussion," Kozyrev told foreign ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Moscow's strategy is partnership. That is clear. If NATO's strategy is partnership as well then we can begin working on this program as soon as possible," Kozyrev added.

Willy Claes, the Western military alliance's new secretary general, tried to reassure Kozyrev that NATO was not taking a new direction.

"It is no change in strategy or policy of NATO. There is nothing new," he told the Russian just before he left NATO headquarters. "We are not willing to organize new divisions in Europe."

Kozyrev's outburst only added to the alliance's woes.

There have been unprecedented strains in recent weeks between the United States and its European allies over the crisis in Bosnia.

In an effort to heal the wounds, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher swung behind the European view that diplomacy, not force, is the best way to deal with the conflict. It was a major policy switch by Washington under pressure from the Europeans, led by Britain and France.

In the past, Moscow has strongly opposed any move by NATO to draw in its one-time partners in the Warsaw Pact, the defunct Eastern military alliance led by the Soviet Union.

The Europeans in particular have been uneasy about pushing expansion for fear of upsetting Russia, still a formidable military power at the edge of allied territory.

In an effort to overcome Russian objections, the allies had agreed to develop a "far-reaching relationship, corresponding with Russia's size, importance and capabilities."

They had insisted they had no intention of forming a hostile bloc threatening Russia.

"Having just overcome the division of Europe, we have no desire to see the emergence of new lines of partition," the ministers said in a statement.

NATO has been anguishing in recent years over whether — and when — to open its doors to its former foes in Eastern Europe, Poland, Hungary and others have repeatedly demanded coveted membership and the security guarantees that would go with it.

In an effort to meet their demands — but without upsetting Russia, the allies thought they had found a good formula.

At a summit last January, President Clinton and other allied leaders approved a US initiative, Partnership for Peace, to bring former foes closer, but without membership.

Twenty-three nations, including Russia, have enrolled in the project, which allows them to take part for the first time in military exercises and other alliance activities.

On Thursday, the allies decided to go further by ordering aides to conduct a 12-month study of the terms and conditions for expanding the Western military alliance.

## Nepali Cong urges new govt to bring political stability

**KATHMANDU, Dec 2:** The former leader of the Nepali Congress (NC) party has urged the new communist government to place priority on fostering political stability and national consensus on important issues, the state-run news agency, the RSS reported today, says AP.

"Without political stability in the country, solution to other problems cannot be found," the RSS quoted Ganesh Man Singh as saying.

"There are many different problems before the new government and they are all serious, but political instability is the most serious," he said.