

# BRIEFLY

**US-Saudi meet held:** The US Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East, Robert Pelletreau, held talks Wednesday with Saudi leaders. Riyadh radio said, AFP reports from Riyadh.

He met Defence Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdel Aziz and Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal, it said without giving details.

**Top Russian spy defects to UK:** A top Russian spy has defected to Britain to spill vital nuclear secrets, the tabloid Sun newspaper said yesterday. Reuter reports from London.

It named him as Colonel Firzet Djabozov, 34, a senior officer in the GRU military and scientific espionage agency, and said he defected at London's Heathrow Airport during a break in a trip from Geneva to Chicago.

**Malaysian executed in Indonesia:** Indonesian judicial authorities have carried out their first execution of a convicted drug offender, a Malaysian sentenced to death in 1985 by an Indonesian court, the New Times weekly magazine said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Citing unidentified sources, Times said that Chan Ting Chong, 38, was shot by a firing squad in Cibubur, east of Jakarta, on January 13.

**Omar Sharif fully recovered:** Egyptian film star Omar Sharif said on Wednesday he was fully recovered from heart bypass surgery and ready for his favourite passion — playing a 24-hour bridge marathon. Reuter reports from London.

"I am 100 per cent recovered. In fact, I am much better than before," said the star of "Lawrence of Arabia" and "Dr Zhivago" before embarking on his first tournament in five months.

**Myanmar dissident surrenders:** The exiled son of a former Myanmar prime minister, who has campaigned for years against the Yangon military government, has returned to Myanmar and surrendered to the authorities, Myanmar television reported. Reuter says from Bangkok.

Zali Maw, the son of Ba Maw, prime minister during World War II, "returned to the legal fold on January 13, state television reported in a broadcast monitored in Bangkok late on Wednesday.

**Sikh newspaper owner shot dead:** The owner of a Sikh newspaper edited in London was shot dead on his way to work on Wednesday, police said. AFP reports from London.

Tarsem Singh Purewal, 60, described by Scotland Yard as a "prominent member of the Sikh community" and owner of the newspaper Des Pardes, was found dead in the street with a bullet wound to the chest.

**KL to increase peacekeepers:** Malaysia will increase its number of peacekeeping troops in Bosnia Herzegovina from the current 1,633 to 3,000, Defence Minister Najib Abdul Razak said on Thursday. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Najib told reporters the government is awaiting clearance from the United Nations to send the additional troops.

**3000 US marines to go Somalia:** US troops will use "overwhelming, intimidating power" when it evacuates UN peacekeepers from Somalia to minimise the risk of attack, Defence Secretary William Perry said on Wednesday. AFP reports from Washington.

A total of 3,000 US marines will be sent to Somalia to evacuate peacekeeping troops even though conditions have deteriorated and clan warfare has reappeared.

**Liberian council to be expanded:** Liberia's warlords agreed on Wednesday to expand the country's new ruling council, thus ending an impasse that threatened to reignite the West African state's five-year-old civil war. AP reports from Accra.

**New Bulgarian cabinet approved:** Bulgaria's parliament approved a new cabinet proposed by the former communist Socialist Party and its partners that promises to resolve the economic and social crisis the country has suffered since 1989. Reuter reports from Sofia.

The approval early yesterday of a cabinet line-up headed by Zhan Videnov, a Moscow-educated 35-year-old who rose to power through the former Komsomol, followed the Socialist Party's victory in an election last month.

**Manila to seek bodies of 3 Filipinos:** The Philippines will request Saudi Arabia to return the remains of three Filipinos executed in connection with a hostage-taking case. President Fidel Ramos said yesterday. AFP reports from Manila.

He also ordered the Foreign Department to investigate allegations made by a Filipino congressman that the three were innocent of the charges and were only attempting to prevent an assault on a Filipino maid.

**Moscow mayor injured:** Yuri Luzhkov, the feisty mayor of Moscow, was seriously injured in a car crash Thursday while travelling to his office in the centre of the Russian capital, an official said. AP reports from Moscow.

Igor Zverev, a deputy spokesman for the mayor confirmed a news report that Luzhkov was hurt Thursday morning while on his way to work.

**2 quakes hit Iran:** Two earthquakes measuring 5.1 and 4.8 on the Richter scale hit regions in southern Iran late Wednesday, the official news agency IRNA reported yesterday. AFP says from Tehran.

It gave no immediate report of casualties or damage from the tremors which struck the Tangestan region of Bushehr province on the Gulf.

**Wiesel to lead US team:** President Clinton has named Elie Wiesel, a Nobel laureate and Nazi death camp survivor, to head a delegation to ceremonies in Poland this week marking the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. AP reports from Washington.

Wiesel has expressed unhappiness at the Polish government's arrangements for the ceremonies, saying Jews should have a larger role in marking the liberation of a concentration camp where 1.5 million people were killed, 90 per cent of them Jews.

## Rousing welcome to Arjun Singh in Delhi

# Intensive power struggle in Cong

NEW DELHI, Jan 26: A power struggle in India's Congress (I) Party intensified today as Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's chief rival, facing almost-certain expulsion from the ruling party, maintained his defiant posture, reports AFP.

Dissident leader Arjun Singh arrived in New Delhi to a rousing welcome from his backers after a tour of southern India and immediately threw down a challenge to Rao for a debate on the party's highest policy-making forum.

He urged the 73-year-old premier, who is also party president, to summon the All India Congress Committee to debate issues at the core of their rift.

"But I don't know whether such a meeting will be called," Arjun Singh, 64, said at a press

conference where he ruled out a compromise with the party leadership. "There is no question of it," he said.

Arjun Singh, who is known to nurse ambitions of becoming prime minister, quit the cabinet on December 24 and raised the banner of revolt after Rao led the party to humiliating state electoral defeats.

He has accused the premier of "running away from reality" instead of tackling issues such as corruption and a perceived voter disenchantment with economic reforms launched in 1991, blaming Rao for the electoral washout.

He has also deplored an alleged lack of urgency in probing the 1991 assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and asked the party to apologize to Muslims for failing to stop the 1992 demolition of

the Ayodhya mosque by Hindu extremists.

Arjun Singh said he had raised issues that were important for the party. "It is unfortunate that some take it personally," he said in a dig at Rao, who ordered his suspension from the party on Tuesday.

"People will cast their votes on these very issues," the rebel leader said, referring to elections due in six states in February and March.

Arjun Singh, who now plans to launch a nationwide tour to gather public support, said he would "try to avoid till the last" a split in the party. If the party splits, "it will not be because of me," he added.

He was greeted by cheering, placard-waving supporters as he emerged from the airport. A placard read: "Principles are more impor-

tant than power, we are for Arjun."

Arjun Singh's return from the south came a day after the Congress leadership prepared the ground for his expulsion, accusing him of damaging the party's image "in the eyes of the people."

A "charge-sheet" released by the party accused Arjun Singh of trying to "advance his long-brewing political ambitions and hurt the party's electoral prospects by creating disaffection in the ranks of Congressmen."

The irony of his actions lies in the fact that on the one hand he describes himself as a loyalist of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and on the other he has tried to damage the Congress Party, which is sanctified by their blood and sacrifice," it said.



Sri Lankan Premier Sirima Bandaranaike (L) is helped to a meeting yesterday by visiting Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia who arrived in Colombo on a two-day official visit as outgoing chairman of SAARC. — AFP photo

## Muslims hoist Indian flag to avoid clash with BJP

HUBLI, India, Jan 26: A group of Muslims hoisted the national flag over a disputed prayer ground today apparently averting a new round of clashes with Hindu activists on India's Republic Day, reports Reuter.

"I hope the controversy has been closed with today's flag hoisting," said local police commissioner K S Mendiger, who deployed a 5,000-strong security force around the southern town to prevent disturbances.

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had threatened storm the ground and hoist the Indian tricolour.

Last August, six people were killed when BJP activists at-

tempted to raise the flag on Independence Day.

The Anjuman-i-Islam Muslim Trust, which manages a mosque nearby, says it holds the lease to the prayer ground and considers it sacred. The BJP says the ground is publicly owned land.

The Anjuman Trust agreed to hoist the flag itself at the urging to the left-of-centre Janata Dal, which recently won control of Karnataka state.

Thirty members of the trust were present for the private ceremony early today when the Indian flag was run up a makeshift flag pole.

"We are happy that the Anjuman-i-Islam has hoisted the flag, but they should have invited the public," said BJP

state representative Ashok Kapwe. "It's a national festival and I hope this will be a regular feature."

Police released 200 BJP activists who had been held throughout Karnataka to prevent renewed clashes.

But security remained tight in Hubli, 400 km from the state capital, Bangalore, and riot police armed with automatic weapons ringed the prayer ground.

Politicians say the BJP has found the flag issue to be an effective way of wooing voters.

In southern India where the party, the main opposition grouping in the national parliament, has recently made in-

## Chinese rocket explodes

BEIJING, Jan 26: A Chinese rocket exploded in a ball of flames today, destroying the telecommunications satellite it was carrying and dealing a new blow to China's drive to carve out a share of the lucrative satellite launch market, reports AFP.

The explosion — shown live on national television — was the third accident since December 1992. But Chinese officials said the 160-million-dollar setback would not hold up the marketing of the long march satellite launchers.

Television views watched the long march 2E rocket to turn into a ruddy ball of fire

about a minute after taking off from the Xichang satellite launch center in the southwestern province of Sichuan.

The rocket was carrying the HS 601 Apstar-2 satellite, built by Hughes Aircraft Corp of the United States. The owners were the Apt Satellitiz Co based in Hong Kong but partly controlled by Chinese firms with links to the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

The Xinhua news agency said the rocket exploded but no cause was immediately given.

The initial launch went off smoothly, but the rocket exploded before the satellite

could reach orbit, Xinhua said, quoted sources at Xichang.

"Experts are analysing the cause of the blast, based on obtained data," it added.

A national aerospace industry company official told AFP: "It seems the rocket and the satellite exploded at the same time but it is still too soon to say exactly what did not function."

The loss came on the heels of the breakup of an Australian satellite, Optus B2, in December 1992 and the explosion of a Chinese rocket in April 1994 at Xichang in which two people were killed and 20 injured.

## Off the Record



Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini is flanked by unidentified deputies as she attends the congress of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) on Wednesday. MSI officials, including party leader Gianfranco Fini, are meeting in Fuggio outside Rome for three days of debates to repudiate their role as the heirs of Mussolini's Fascists and vote the party out of existence to merge with the National Alliance founded less than a year ago by Fini. — AFP photo

## 'Iran biggest N-threat to US, allies'

WASHINGTON, Jan 26: The US Secretary of State Warren Christopher has told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the US views Iran as the biggest potential nuclear threat to the US and its allies, reports PTI.

He said in testimony that Iran was engaged in a crash effort to develop nuclear weapons with cooperation from some other nations.

"These efforts risk the security of the entire Middle East. The US places the highest priority on denying Iran a nuclear weapons capability," he said.

US officials identified countries which the US is pressing not to have any nuclear dealings with Iran as Russia, and China.

## Russians face strong resistance in Chechnya

MOSCOW, Jan 26: Russia said today its forces were meeting stubborn resistance from Chechen independence fighters and were increasing efforts to wipe them out, reports Reuter.

The government said in a statement that Chechen fighters, who have been defying a Russian military campaign to crush their bid for independence, were spreading their military activity beyond Chechnya's borders to neighbouring Dagestan.

Heavy fighting engulfed the shattered Chechen capital of Grozny Wednesday with Russian forces raining down artillery shells and mortar bombs on Chechen positions in outlying districts from the city centre.

Russian army and Interior Ministry troops launched a full-scale onslaught on Grozny on New Year's eve.

## Blast outside Russian military HQs in Georgia

TBILISI, Jan 26: A bomb exploded outside the headquarters of Russia's Transcaucasus Military District in the Georgian capital Tbilisi today, a Russian military spokesman said, reports AP.

The bomb went off at 1:58 am (22:58 GMT) by the entrance gate, smashing windows and causing other superficial damage, according to Col. Alexander Demayanov of the Russian forces.

There were no casualties.

Security was tight Thursday around the building, located in the suburb Sabartalo district in the south of the city.

## Pigeon droppings do the damage

INDIANA: A woman who slipped on pigeon droppings outside the Columbus post office has filed suit charging she was injured so badly she no longer can work as a babysitter, reports AFP.

Mary Holland, 66, filed a lawsuit saying she injured her neck, back, shoulder, wrist, hip and ankle when she fell down in front of the post office.

"She just slid around in it and eventually fell," said Shari Kinnaird, her lawyer.

Holland is asking for 75,000 dollar in compensation. She asked the post office for compensation in February 1992 but was turned down. She filed the lawsuit on December 20.

## Honoured ironically

SAN FRANCISCO: A Japanese woman who helped save an estimated 8,000 Jews in World War II was robbed in her hotel as she travelled the United States to be honoured for her and her husband's work, reports AFP.

Yukiko Sughara, 81, and her son and daughter-in-law were robbed by an unarmed man who demanded their money and passports, the Japanese consulate said.

Sughara and her husband, Chihue, who was Japanese consul general in Lithuania during World War II, saved thousands of Jews by issuing them exit visas.

Because of his efforts, the diplomat was dismissed from the Japanese foreign service in 1945. He died in 1986.

California legislators honoured the diplomat's widow on Wednesday as she toured the United States to meet some of the people she helped save.

The assailant apparently entered the hotel room through an unlocked sliding glass door, said John Barita, general manager of the Hotel Mivako.

"We don't think the crime had anything to do with who they were, other than that it's ironic because they were here to be honoured by our society, and then fell victim to street crime," he said.

## Acquit or grant retrial

TIRANA: The widow of Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha serving an 11 year jail term for fraud, has called on the country's Supreme Court to acquit her or grant her a retrial, a judicial official said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Nexhmije Hoxha, sentenced by an appeal court in 1993 for embezzlement of public funds under her husband's hardline Stalinist regime, urged in a letter that she either be released or retried on less serious charges of violating citizens' rights, said Supreme Court official Hkristofor Peci.

Under the alternative charge, 73-year-old Hoxha could have her sentence commuted.

Last November, together with a number of other imprisoned former officials of the disgraced communist regime, Hoxha had her sentence cut by a third.

The widow of the man who between 1946 and his death in 1985 ruled over Europe's most repressive regime was sentenced to nine years at her original trial in 1993.

## Israel to build new houses in West Bank

JERUSALEM, Jan 26: Israel will build hundreds of new houses in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank despite protests by the Palestine Liberation Organisation that such a move would make a mockery of peace talks, reports Reuter.

A ministerial committee decided on Wednesday to approve the building of more than 4,000 housing units in three West Bank settlements close to Jerusalem. The committee included Cabinet members who in the past have vehemently opposed Jewish settlements.

An Israeli government official last week revealed plans by the Housing Ministry to build 30,000 units in and around Jerusalem in three to four years that spurred left-wing ministers' protests and the ministerial committee was formed.

Ben-Eliezer declared victory after Wednesday's meeting.

"Despite unequivocal demands for a (building) freeze, a total freeze, building continues," he told Israel television.

Palestinians had demanded halt to all settlement activity, especially in Israel's vaguely defined greater Jerusalem area, encompassing Arab east Jerusalem.

The PLO regards Arab east Jerusalem as the capital of future Palestinian state. Israel, which captured and annexed east Jerusalem in 1967, vows never to cede an inch of it.

PLO leader Yasser Arafat, visiting Jordan, said Israel should not expand any of its settlements on occupied lands. "What we (Israel and the PLO) agreed on is that there will be no more confiscation of land for settlements... not to expand them and not to increase their number," Arafat said.



South Korean President Kim Young-Sam (R) accompanied by his wife Son Miang-Sum (2R), receives the Martin Luther King, Jr Non-violent Peace Prize on Thursday from Coretta Scott King (2L), the widow of the late US civil rights leader, at a ceremony held at Kim's residence. At right is Dexter Scott King, the son of Martin Luther King. — AFP photo

## Congress policy angers Muslim voters in India

BOMBAY, Jan 26: Muslims, who feel betrayed by India's ruling Congress party, have vowed to take revenge during next month's five state assembly polls by switching crucial support to other parties, analysts said yesterday, reports Reuter.

Feelings are running high in the nation's Muslim community, which totals about 120 million in a nation of 900 million, two years after the Congress government failed to stop Hindu zealots demolishing a 400-year-old mosque.

The attack sparked off countrywide communal riots in which over 2,000 people were killed.

"Muslims felt betrayed by the mosque's destruction, in spite of numerous assurances from the Congress party the shrine would be adequately protected. Many Hindus believe that the mosque stood on the birthplace of the God Ram.

## Tamil Tigers blamed for fresh demands

PARIS, Jan 26: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has accused Tamil separatist rebels of unfairly adding new demands in talks to end a 12-year civil war, reports Reuter.

In an interview published on Wednesday by the French daily Le Monde, Kumaratunga said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting for a separate homeland in the north and east, had a better bargain from a current truce than the government.

She said the government had sent two freighters of food and medicine to the rebels Jaffna stronghold after a first round of talks this month.

But they had only responded with the release of about 20 prisoners and had added the dismantlement of military camps around Jaffna to their demands.

"This is not very fair-play towards my government

which, despite considerable personal and political risks, is trying to solve the conflict for the first time in Sri Lanka's history," she said.

Kumaratunga said she had cancelled a planned major military offensive, when she came to power last November. But she held out the threat of resuming war.

"If the guerrillas do not want peace and keep on being difficult, I am not saying that I will go to war, but a determined and honest government with a well-equipped army can certainly win the war," she said.

"But we want peace, and the LTTE know that," she added.

She dismissed fears that the armed forces were dragging their feet in the peace process and said the overwhelming majority of the military wanted the war to end. "The military is very cooperative at the moment."