

# BRIEFLY

**Li invites Murayama:** Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama has accepted an invitation to visit China during a meeting with Premier Li Peng at the UN summit in Denmark, the official Xinhua news agency said Sunday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

Murayama is to visit China in May, it said, the two leaders met at the United Nations conference on social development, the agency said in a report from Copenhagen.

**Gorby concerned about Russia:** Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said on Saturday, the 10th anniversary of his appointment as Kremlin leader, he would run for president of Russia only under the right conditions. Reuter reports from Genoa, Italy.

"I am not as concerned about the future of my political life as I am about the future of Russia itself," Gorbachev said on the final day of a conference in the Italian port of Genoa on the post-Cold War world.

**Gerry Adams in US:** The leader of the Irish Republican Army's political wing arrived in the United States on Saturday for a fund-raising trip that will include a White House meeting with President Clinton, AP reports from New York.

This St. Patrick's Day will be one which will be celebrated at a time of great hope, and where there's a potential and a possibility of building a real peace," Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams said at John F Kennedy International Airport.

**Storm claims 3 in California:** Heavy rains and high winds pounded northern California on Saturday in a third day of storms that have left three dead, seven missing and thousands homeless, AFP reports from Monterey.

The powerful storm system was heading south but was not expected to leave the water-soaked region until Sunday. And up to 22 centimetres (nine inches) of rain had fallen by early Saturday.

**One run over in Lanka:** Riot police scaled off a central Colombo neighbourhood on Sunday, as enraged mobs attacked buses with stones and iron rods after one person was run over and killed in a traffic accident, police officials said, AP reports from Colombo.

"At least two buses have been smashed so far, and several passengers hurt," said a police official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

**Zimbabwe parties to boycott polls:** An alliance of eight small opposition parties announced Sunday it would boycott April elections, saying the party in power held advantages that made it impossible to hold a free and fair vote, AP reports from Harare.

The group protested constitutional provisions that gave President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front campaign funds from government coffers. Mugabe's party, which now holds 147 of the 150 parliament seats, also controlled newspapers, electronic media and security services that could be used to influence campaigning.

**400-kg cocaine seized in Germany:** Police and customs have seized 400 kilos (880 pounds) of cocaine in a container on board a ship from South America in the Hamburg port, the city's police said on Saturday, AFP reports from Hamburg, Germany.

The drugs, with a street value of 55 million dollar, were described by police as the most important local seizure of cocaine ever.

**Algerian forces kill 20,000:** Algerian security forces have killed 20,000 Muslim militants over the past two and a half years, Junior Interior Minister Noureddin Kasadali was quoted as saying on Saturday, Reuter reports from Tunis.

Algeria's main Arab-language newspaper Al Khabar also quoted the minister as saying that armed militant groups mustered between 3,000 and 4,000 men.

**Director's Guild award for Zemeckis:** Robert Zemeckis, director of the hit movie "Forrest Gump," has won the top award from the Director's Guild of America, AP reports from New York.

The prize was announced on Saturday at a New York ceremony and was to be presented to Zemeckis later Saturday evening in Los Angeles at a second ceremony.

**1000 hoodlums held in Jakarta:** A massive security operation directed against street hoodlums in the city's commercial centres led to the arrest of 1,000 people, the Bisnis Indonesia daily said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

"At least 1,000 street hoodlums have been arrested between March 1 and this morning," Bisnis Indonesia quoted police Colonel Muhantoyo as having said on Saturday.

**PPI won't support Berlusconi:** Italy's centrist Popular Party (PPI) on Saturday rejected leader Rocco Buttiglione's decision to join Silvio Berlusconi's Freedom Alliance for regional elections next month, Reuter reports from Rome.

At an emergency meeting, the national council of the PPI, successor to the scandal-torn Christian Democrats, voted against the move by 102 votes to 99 with an abstention.

**Int'l observers in Peru:** International observers arrived in Piura in northern Peru on Saturday to monitor a ceasefire between Peru and Ecuador, whose forces are supposed to pullback from a disputed border zone, a diplomat said, AFP reports from Peru.

Brazilian General Candido Vargas de Ferre led the 55-member delegation, which includes 40 military personnel.

**US won't train Guatemalan army:** The Clinton administration plans to suspend US training of Guatemalan military officers because of a lack of progress in resolving six human rights cases, US officials said, AP reports from Washington.

All six have an American connection, including the disappearance of Efraim Bamaca Velasquez, a Guatemalan rebel leader who is married to an American lawyer. The officials made the disclosure on Friday after the lawyer, Jennifer Harbury, said she planned to resume a hunger strike on her husband's behalf on Sunday, the third anniversary of his disappearance.

## DPRK ready to resume talks with Japan

TOKYO, Mar 12: North Korea has told Japan it is ready to resume talks on the normalisation of bilateral diplomatic relations, a newspaper said today, reports AFP.

Japan's three ruling parties received an invitation on Saturday from North Korea's ruling Workers Party which invited them to send a joint delegation to Pyongyang for the negotiations, the Mainichi Shimbun Daily said.

The Japanese ruling parties are the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the new party Seitokai.

Mainichi said the ruling parties were expected to agree Monday on the dispatch of a joint delegation.

# Killers terrorise Karachi, slip away after each attack

KARACHI, Mar 12: Two Americans are slain on their way to work at the US Consulate. A bomb outside a mosque kills 12, most of them children. Seven Pakistani men are tied up in their home and shot in the head, reports AP.

Killers are terrorising Karachi with impunity, slipping away after each attack into the vast, chaotic city and leaving behind horrific scenes of carnage and a befuddled police force.

Already this year, there have been about a dozen terrorist attacks in Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city and commercial centre. No one has claimed responsibility and no one has offered convincing evidence as to who is behind the attacks.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, whose government could be undermined by the attacks, met with top officials

# ROK speaker, vice-speaker freed from six-day captivity

SEOUL, March 12: Riot police stormed the official residence of South Korea's Parliamentary speaker today, freeing him and ending a six-day protest by opposition lawmakers, witnesses said, reports Reuter.

They said about 300 policemen forced their way into the occupied residence of National Assembly Speaker Hwang Nak Joo who had been prevented from leaving his home by the protesters.

The demonstrators left voluntarily after confronting the police.

Police also raided the home of Vice Speaker Lee Hang Dong and ejected another group of Democratic Party (DP) lawmakers, witnesses said. The opposition members who had also occupied Lee's resi-

dence since Monday scuffled briefly with police before being expelled from the dwelling.

A DP spokesman later said party members would begin a sit-in at the National Assembly later today in protest against the police raid.

The protests would continue until the ruling Democratic Liberal Party (DLP) abandoned plans to ram an electoral bill through parliament, he said.

"The current regime must take full responsibility for a possible political catastrophe caused by the exercise of public power, the spokesman said. We will not sit idly watching the DLP railroad the election bill."

A DLP spokesman said the DP had prompted the police

intervention and called the DP's protests "shameful". He urged opposition members to return to parliament.

The row over the electoral bill is centred on revisions which would ban political parties from participating in elections for country, ward and small city positions in June 27 local elections.

The ruling party says the ban is needed to preserve local autonomy but the DP charges the revisions are a plot to prevent an opposition victory in the local polls.

More than 5,000 posts are at stake in the elections to choose nine provincial governors, mayors of the six largest cities and other smaller cities, heads of countries and wards as well as 4,000 council members.



Para-military troops and polling officers look at ballot papers outside a polling station on Saturday after it was set up by some 50 opposition party activists in Jahanabad, in the eastern state of Bihar. Six people were killed in Bihar election-related violence. — AFP/UNB photo

# Kashmiris intensify attack

SRINAGAR, Mar 12: Muslim rebels stepped up attacks in Kashmir amid rising tension on Saturday as Indian soldiers besieged a town where scores of armed militants were suspected to be hiding inside an Islamic shrine, reports AFP.

A former state lawmaker, Bashir Ahmad Nengroo, and two senior administration officials escaped assassination attempts in the valley as troops dug in on the fringes of the town of Charisharief, police and press reports said.

Nengroo had just emerged from a mosque in the district of Pulwama when he was attacked by rebels, who fled after the ex legislator's bodyguard opened fire with his gun, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. Nengroo was unharmed.

Gunmen also fired bullets at a car in Srinagar carrying two senior Kashmir administration

officials, S-Rapoor Mohammad Zaki, who escaped unhurt, the police said. Some pedestrians suffered gunshot wounds, witnesses said.

Elsewhere in the Kashmir Valley, Muslim militants staged a dozen grenade attacks, leaving 10 civilians and two security men injured, the police said.

Guerrilla groups threatened more attacks in the coming days unless the army, pulled back from the vicinity of Charisharief, 37 kilometres (23 miles) from Srinagar, summer capital of Kashmir and urban hub of Muslim militancy.

The all-party Kashmir Freedom Conference, an umbrella organisation of anti-Indian political and militant groups, said it would launch a major "agitation" unless the army siege is lifted by Sunday evening.

"If the siege continues,

there will be a general strike on Monday," a spokesman for the organisation said. "And from Tuesday, we will start anti India demonstrations across Kashmir."

Shopkeepers downed their shutters early on Saturday amid rising tension following the Charisharief siege, which began Friday. Security forces were on high alert to prevent protests against the siege, the police said.

Army authorities, however, ruled out a storming of the shrine and said they wanted to lure out the militants and force them to surrender.

The officer said the army had confirmed reports that scores of heavily armed Muslim guerrillas were inside the Charisharief shrine, which houses the 18th century tomb of a Muslim holy man.

# Kazakh parliament dissolved

ALMA-ATA, Mar 12: The former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan was plunged into political crisis when President Nursultan Nazarbayev bowed to a challenge from its constitutional court and dissolved parliament, reports Reuter.

"Parliament is dissolved," Nazarbayev declared in a delayed reaction to a constitutional court ruling on March 6 that general elections in March 1994 were flawed.

He also told a hastily called news conference on Saturday night that he had accepted the government's resignation. But he reappointed top ministers, including Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin, to a caretaker administration.

He gave Kazhegeldin and a handful of senior ministers a week to form a stop gap gov-

ernment before fresh elections in two to three months time. He also cancelled visits to Indonesia and Australia due to start on March 16. ITAR-Tass news agency said.

The 1994 elections, the first contested poll in the vast energy-rich state since it became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991, drew the fire of international observers at the time.

Nazarbayev, a former Communist Party boss, brushed aside their findings, which said they found cases of multiple voting while election authorities had barred some potential candidates without giving a reason.

Despite the observers' misgivings, Western governments generally welcomed the election result because it en-

sured stability in Kazakhstan which, with its huge resources, has proved to be a magnet for Western investment.

But one candidate, Tatyana Kyvatovskaya, a well-known journalist who stood in an Alma-Ata constituency, brought a case to the constitutional court saying election authorities had violated the basic law.

The court ruled in favour of Kyvatovskaya's suit, deciding that the democratic principle of "one person one vote" had been broken and that election boundaries were wrongly drawn.

Nazarbayev vetoed its ruling. But the court voted on Friday to overrule him and told him on Saturday that its judgement meant it considered parliament to be illegal.

# Rabbanis troops capture key Kabul dist

KABUL, Mar 12: The Afghan government said today that its forces had captured a key district in southwest Kabul which an opposition Shi'ite Muslim group had handed over to the emergent Islamic Taliban militia, reports Reuter.

"Now we control the entire area and we are only mopping up," Defence Ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah told reporters.

Forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabhani and his top commander Ahmad Shah Masood thrust into the southwestern Karte Seh district after what witnesses described as the heaviest fighting in the Afghan capital for six months.

Thousand of civilians were seen fleeing the area on Saturday afternoon as government fighters moved into positions previously held by the Shi'ite Hezb-i-Wahdat faction and turned over to the Taliban last week.

# Blizzards leave 10000 Tibetans with frostbite

BEIJING, Mar 12: Blizzards in a main cattle raising area of Tibet have left more than 10,000 people with frostbite or snow blindness, an official report said Sunday, reports AP.

Although the storms in the Naggu region of Tibet have abated and no human deaths have been reported, about 40 per cent of calves in the area have died, the Xinhua News Agency said.

Earlier reports said the storms began hitting Naggu, north of the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, on February 15.

Xinhua said some people were short of food because they used grain stocks to feed their cattle.

Money, food, medicine, and clothing were being collected to be sent to the region, Xinhua said.

It said most people in the worst hit areas were out of danger and that roads had been cleared to allow relief supplies to get through.

# Scottish rebels send letter bomb to Tony Blair

LONDON, Mar 12: Extremist campaign for Scottish independence sent a letter bomb to opposition Labour Party leader Tony Blair but the device failed to explode, police said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The Scottish National Liberation Army told Britain's Press Association News Agency it had sent out six bombs.

Police confirmed later on Saturday that a "crude" incendiary device had been sent to Blair's rural home in northern England.

# Myanmar troops advance to attack Karen HQ

BANGKOK, Mar 12: Myanmar troops were en route today to attack a makeshift Karen rebel headquarters along the Thai-Myanmar border after gunmen killed several Yangon gas-pipeline workers in Karen territory, border sources said, reports AFP.

Some 1,000 Yangon soldiers, supported by 100 trucks carrying weapons and ammunition, were travelling from Phra-an for the assault on the Karen National Union (KNU) at Kanaelay, Thai military-run television reported.

Myanmar patrols, attacking in a three pronged formation, had already clashed with Karen insurgents in a village near the camp early today, a Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) official told AFP by phone.

By midday, however, the tension appeared to have ebbed slightly, with border sources reporting villagers

freely crossing the Moei river for trade. Armed gunmen had struck Wednesday for the first time at an international gas pipeline project in Karen-majority territory in southern Myanmar, killing five workers and injuring 11 others.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack, though the KNU has officially stated it considered the pipeline a target.

Roughly 1,000 Karen rebels have been stationed at Kanaelay, on Myanmar's eastern border and 30 kilometres (18 miles) south of Kawmoora which junta forces overran less than a month ago.

Directly across the river from Thailand's Phob Phra district, the camp was hastily erected for a meeting of the KNU's central committee last week.

# Off the Record

## Chinese school to teach sex and love ethics

BEIJING: China's first school offering courses which discuss sex and love ethics and give advice to the jilted has opened in Beijing, state media said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

"Love is an art. It involves certain skills, and especially communicative skills," the official China Daily quoted Xia Xiaoming, associate professor of sociology at Beijing Technical University, as saying.

The school, which opened on Friday, is the first of a chain that the Beijing Municipal Women's Federation and the Beijing Marriage and Family Research Society plan to set up, Xinhua news agency said.

"We wish the youngsters less pain and regret in their romance," Chen Yiyun, a teacher at the school and a renowned expert on family and marriage, told China Daily.

Urban Chinese must attend sex education classes at local hospitals before they can marry, but the curriculum is strictly limited to contraception.

Centuries of feudal rule have led to a deep-rooted aversion to open discussion of sex, resulting in widespread ignorance and misunderstanding.

Four decades of puritan communist ideology has only made matters worse, with Chinese embarrassed to discuss sex among themselves and teachers unwilling to teach students about human reproduction.

## Divorce at 80

SEOUL: An 80 year old South Korean woman was granted a divorce here after suffering 59 years of abuse from her husband because she could not bear children, newspapers reported Saturday, says AFP.

The Korea Times said the woman, a resident of Seoul, had raised a child by a surrogate mother as well as adopted her sister's daughter to try to satisfy her husband, but he had continued to abuse her and forced her to hand over all her possessions.

The Seoul family court had attempted to reconcile the two, but the woman was adamant, and the husband ordered to pay alimony and support, the Times said.

## Royal honour, but not a knighthood

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II is expected to bestow a royal honour, but not a knighthood, on President Nelson Mandela during her trip next week to South Africa, a British newspaper reported Sunday, reports AP.

The Mail on Sunday said Mandela was being considered for one of four lesser honours: Companion, Order of the Bath, membership of the Royal Victorian Order or — what the newspaper deemed "a stronger possibility" — the Order of Merit.

Citing unnamed British government sources, the newspaper said the queen wouldn't give Mandela a knighthood out of concern that Winnie Mandela, the president's estranged wife, might begin calling herself Lady Mandela.

"The advice from the British Embassy in Cape Town and the Foreign Office is that many black, as well as white, South Africans would be outraged at the prospect of Winnie Mandela enjoying a title," the paper said.

Winnie Mandela has served as deputy minister for arts, culture, science and technology in her husband's Cabinet since last April's elections, but stands accused of taking bribes and of undermining the president's authority over the African National Congress.

A spokesman for the Foreign Office declined to confirm any details of the Mail on Sunday report.



# Yeltsin loses support of Russia's Choice

MOSCOW, Mar 12: The main pro-Yeltsin party withdrew its backing on Saturday, saying it would not support the Russian president if he seeks a second term next year, reports AP.

The Kremlin's brutal, unpopular, costly war against breakaway Chechnya gives Boris Yeltsin "no chance for reelection," Russia's Choice said in a statement issued after a plenary session on Saturday.

"This war is a difficult test for all democratic and free market institutions," party leader Yegor Gaidar told the delegates.

He warned that those behind the war, "don't have Chechnya as their final target. Their final target is democracy in Russia."

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