

# BRIEFLY

**Swissair staff held in Thailand:** Thai police said Friday they had arrested a Swissair employee on a charge of drug trafficking. Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Police said Arno Bernard, 31, was arrested late on Thursday night at Bangkok's international airport as he was about to board a Swissair flight to Zurich, his hometown. Police said they found 1,930 capsules containing amphetamine in his travelling bag.

**Abacha names fresh cabinet:** Nigeria's military ruler General Sani Abacha on Thursday named his new cabinet, more than five weeks after he dissolved the previous body. Reuter reports from Lagos.

A statement said Abacha had approved the appointment of 36 ministers, including both military officers and civilians. The list, which did not specify portfolios, included seven members of the past Cabinet.

**3 hanged in Singapore:** Two Thai men and a Malaysian convicted in Singapore of drug trafficking were hanged on Friday, bringing the number of people executed under the city-state's tough drug laws to 102. Reuter reports from Singapore.

Don Promphinit, 31, and Krishna Malkham, 32, were executed on Friday morning. Singapore's Central Narcotics Bureau said. The men, construction workers, were both Thai nationals who were arrested for trafficking on January 10, 1993. Nasrul Esham Bin Shamsudin, a 21-year-old Malaysian landscape artist, was also executed on Friday morning. He was arrested on September 30, 1993, after he was stopped at the border checkpoint from Malaysia to Singapore.

**Armenia allows Russia base:** Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Armenian President Lev Ter-Petrosian on Thursday signed a treaty allowing Russia to have military bases in Armenia for 25 years. AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin's press service said the treaty would help "stabilise" the volatile Caucasus Mountains region and "strengthen peace." Russia is presently at war with the breakaway Caucasus Mountains republic of Chechnya. The new treaty allows Russia to base troops in the Armenian capital of Yerevan and in the northern town of Gyumri.

**Russia withdrawing missile:** Russia on Thursday began withdrawing its strategic nuclear missile force from the former Soviet republic of Belarus. AP reports from Moscow.

Belarus was one of four republics that inherited nuclear missiles from the Soviet Union when it broke up in 1991. It agreed to send its 81 SS-25 single warhead, long range missiles mounted on mobile launchers to Russia for dismantling in January, 1994. President Clinton visited Belarus to show appreciation for its willingness to give up its nuclear weapons.

**Guatemala okays death penalty:** Congress has approved the death penalty for kidnapers in an attempt to halt a wave of abductions for ransom. AP reports from Guatemala City.

Lawmakers voted unanimously on Thursday to authorise the death penalty for ransom kidnaping. Accomplices and accessories after the fact are subject to imprisonment for 15 to 20 years.

**Bomb defused in N Ireland:** British army experts on Thursday defused a bomb at a store in this Northern Ireland border town, the second such bomb found at the store since the IRA ceasefire, police said. AP reports from Newry, Northern Ireland.

Two anonymous telephone callers on Thursday warned of a bomb, which was found in a gym bag at the Texas HomeCare outlet in Newry. The area was sealed off for several hours before the army gave the all clear. The bomb partially exploded while it was being defused by a motorised robot, but no one was hurt, police said.

**6 Asian journalists honoured:** Six Asian journalists have been named Jefferson Fellows by the East-West Center. AP reports from Honolulu.

The programme which runs from April 30 to June 24, provides an opportunity for intensive study and dialogue on major issues in Asia, the Pacific and the United States.

**2 ferries collide in HK harbour:** Two China-operated catamaran ferries carrying more than 150 passengers collided in Hong Kong harbour on Friday morning, injuring 11 people, one critically, the Hong Kong government said. Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

The Marine Department said one of the ferries was carrying 99 passengers and the other 56.

**China's train to touch HK:** China's first high-speed train, now serving Guangzhou and Shenzhen in southern China, will be extended to serve Hong Kong from March 28, it was reported Friday. AFP says from Hong Kong.

The train, which can reach speeds of 160 kilometres an hour, will cut travelling time between Guangzhou and Hong Kong by nearly two hours and 40 minutes, the Guangzhou railway group told China-funded Ta Kung Pao.

**Mayas ready to talk with Mexico:** Indigenous Maya guerrillas in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas said on Thursday they were ready to renew direct talks with the Mexican government but demanded first the withdrawal of government troops from positions occupied in a recent military advance. Reuter reports from Mexico.

The rebels, in a statement, said they had already renewed contact with the government through letters and were ready for direct meeting with interior ministry representatives "when physical conditions exist this includes the federal army's return to its positions on February 8."

**Quake jolts Ankara:** An earthquake reaching 4.2 on the open-ended Richter scale hit the east Turkish city of Erzurum Friday but no casualties or damage were reported. AFP says from Ankara.

A 4.2-quake can cause moderate damage. The quake came a day after two earthquakes reaching 3.3 on the Richter scale shook the western Turkish region of Denizli. It was registered at 7:31 am.

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**Clinton-Adams' 5-minute talks**

WASHINGTON, Mar 17: President Bill Clinton and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams shook hands here on Thursday and spoke together for about five minutes when they both attended an event at Congress, a legislator who witnessed the event said, reports AFP.

It is the first time that a leader of the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has shaken the hand of a US president.

The meeting took place in a room in Congress and was witnessed by about 60 people. Republican New York Congressman Peter King said.

"They shook hands and had a five-minute conversation," King said it was "a very amicable chat."

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The unsanctions against Iraq must not be used to punish the Iraqi people and should remain a temporary means of pressure," The Vatican said on Thursday following a meeting between the Pope and Iraqi Deputy Premier Tareq Aziz.

Vatican spokesman said the meeting between the Pope and Aziz focused on the "grave humanitarian situation caused by the severe sanctions imposed against Iraq by the UN Security Council."

The Pope on several occasions has called for the UN embargo to be reexamined so as not to affect the civilian population.

Aziz, who arrived here Wednesday from New York, also held talks with the Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano.

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Yousef, an Iraqi accused of masterminding the World Trade Centre attack that left six dead and more than 1,000 injured, was arrested in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad last month. He was immediately extradited to the United States. He has pleaded innocent and remains in custody in New York.

The News report did not link the six suspects to any specific crimes. Pakistani officials could not immediately be reached for comment on Friday, the Muslim Sabbath.

Pakistani authorities are under tremendous pressure to crack down on terrorism and escalating violence.

**Cambodian troops advance on Khmer positions**

THAILAND, Mar 17: Cambodian government troops advanced on Khmer Rouge positions near the Thai border following a pre-dawn artillery bombardment today. Thai army and Khmer Rouge sources said, reports Reuter.

The government guns were directed at the Maotit rebels' Kla-Nguab base and its satellite camps about 20 km south of Poipet in western Cambodia, a Thai army officer reported.

A Khmer Rouge official told reporters in the Thai-Cambodia border area that the rebels had spotted about 600 government soldiers and four tanks some 10 km from Kla-Nguab.

A Thai army source told Reuters that as of two weeks ago, Leng Savy was still in Ph-

**US call to extend truce in Bosnia**

WASHINGTON, Mar 17: The Clinton administration is calling for an extension of the ceasefire in Bosnia beyond its scheduled May 1 expiration, reports AP.

"I think it's essential we all rededicate ourselves to achieving a broader settlement that includes all the people of Bosnia," Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Thursday during a commemoration of the first anniversary of the creation in Washington of a federation that united Bosnia's Muslims and ethnic Croats.

"I call on all sides to respect the current cessation of hostilities and to extend it before it expires on May 1," Christopher said.

At a later news conference, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke answered, "yes," when asked whether the administration was in favour of extending the ceasefire in Bosnia in lieu of reaching a settlement there.

Calling for greater US support for their fledgling alliance, Bosnian and Croatian leaders in Washington for the anniversary said Serbia eventually will succumb to international pressure to join the peace process.

"There is only one solution," declared Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granic. "Reintegration of Croatian Serb territories into Croatia, isolation of (Bosnian Serbs), mutual recognition of all states of the former Yugoslavia and finally, the lifting of sanctions against Serbia."

During the anniversary celebration and subsequent meetings with top administration officials, the visitors stressed that the international community needs to put more pressure on Serbia to get serious about the peace process.

Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic already has rejected a US-inspired peace plan that would suspend the crippling trade sanctions against his country in exchange for recognition of Bosnia and Croatia.

The US recently has also taken the lead in defusing a potentially dangerous situation caused by Croatia's decision to evict UN peacekeepers deployed along a buffer zone between its army and rebel Serb forces who hold nearly 30 per cent of Croatia's territory.

A draft accord that would allow a smaller UN force to patrol Serb-held parts of Croatia's border with Bosnia and Serbia, thus effectively isolating the Croatian Serbs, has been discarded among the Serbs. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic has already rejected it.

**Australia renews offer to mediate in Lankan crisis**

COLOMBO, Mar 17: Australia has renewed an offer to mediate in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, just two weeks after Tamil rebels rejected a similar offer from France, diplomats said today, reports AFP.

The Tamils, a minority in mainly Sinhalese Sri Lanka, are fighting to carve out a homeland in the northeast.

In a statement issued in Canberra and released here by the Australian High Commission (embassy), Foreign Minister Gareth Evans recalled that in 1990 Australia had offered to facilitate mediation by the Commonwealth.

"Australia's offer has been renewed to successive Lankan leaders and we remain available in circumstances make it a useful option," Evans said.

He urged the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to begin political talks with the Sri Lankan government because the current peace process was the "best opportunity in over a decade" for peace in the island.

Evans said both sides had to compromise to achieve a settlement.

Earlier, LTTE guerrillas rejected France's mediation bid on the grounds that a retired French diplomat picked as an intermediary was close to Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

**4 foreigners, two others arrested in Pakistan**

ISLAMABAD, Mar 17: Pakistan has arrested six men with alleged links to Ramzi Yousef, a prime suspect in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York, a newspaper on Friday, says AP.

The six were arrested March 11 in the northwestern city of Peshawar and include three Sudanese, an Iranian and two Pakistanis, according to The News, a leading English-language daily.

The report said they were arrested after an investigation revealed that Yousef made several telephone calls to them in Peshawar.

Yousef, an Iraqi accused of masterminding the World Trade Centre attack that left six dead and more than 1,000 injured, was arrested in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad last month. He was immediately extradited to the United States. He has pleaded innocent and remains in custody in New York.

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