

# BRIEFLY

**US-Russian talks begin today:** US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will hold fresh talks with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in Geneva this week. It was announced in Washington on Monday. Xinhua reports from Washington.

State Department Spokeswoman Christine Shelly said that the new talks, scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday, are part of a normal and continuing dialogue between the two countries and the issues to be discussed include Chechnya, European security, NATO expansion, Russia's arms transfers and its nuclear reactor sale to Iran.

**Turkish jets raid Kurd camp:** Turkish jets raiding targets inside northern Iraq have destroyed a Kurdish rebel camp at Bote, near the Iranian border. TRT state radio said yesterday. Reuter reports from Ankara.

It said the cross-border operation by 35,000 Turkish troops, backed by tanks and artillery, had spread out east along the border from the Iraqi border city of Zakho toward Bote.

**5 shot dead in Burundi:** Gunmen shot dead five people and wounded 11 others in a working class district in central Bujumbura, police said on Tuesday. AFP reports from Bujumbura.

Grenades were also thrown in the neighbourhood, known as Biza in the violence Monday evening, the police said.

**One shot near Pentagon:** US Defence Department police shot and seriously wounded a man near the Pentagon on Monday after he opened fire on them, a department spokesman said. AP reports from Washington.

Officers of the Defence Protective Service, which patrols the Pentagon and other Defence Department facilities, attempted to stop the man because he appeared to fit the description of a bank robbery suspect being sought by local police, spokesman Glenn Flood said.

**Briton jailed in Philippines:** A British national was found guilty on Tuesday of transporting illegal drugs in the Philippines and was sentenced to 35 years in prison. Reuter reports from Manila.

A Manila court found Nigel Richard Gatward, from Clapham, London, guilty of transporting 5.2 kg (11.5 lb) of heroin.

**Over 100 vehicles crash in US:** People scrambled from their mangled cars and frantically tried to flag down approaching drivers as more than 100 cars and trucks crashed in a series of wrecks on Monday on a foggy bridge over Mobile Bay. AP reports from Mobile, Alabama.

One person was killed, six were critically injured and at least 74 were taken to the hospital. "I was rear-ended by a truck, then a garbage truck just plowed through everybody," said James Coleman, who escaped without injury in the cluster of rush hour collisions on the Interstate 10 span.

**Moscow radio director killed:** The director of an independent Moscow radio station, radio Voks, has been murdered. Moscow Echo reported early Tuesday in a broadcast monitored in London by the BBC. AFP reports from London.

It said the body of Alexi Khropov was identified only on Monday after having been discovered in a car several days ago. "Nothing is known about the motives for the murder," Moscow Echo said, adding that Radio Voks had been off the air for about a month during the installation of a new transmitter.

**Quake shakes Indonesia:** An earthquake with an estimated magnitude of 5.7 on the Richter scale shook the Indonesian islands of Lombok and Bali, the official Meteorological and Geophysical Agency said on Tuesday. Reuter reports from Jakarta.

There were no immediate reports of damage from the quake, which hit the tourist resort islands on Monday at 3.14 pm local time with its epicentre 55 miles north of Mataram, the capital city of Lombok, the agency said in Jakarta.



President Nelson Mandela (foreground) stands alongside Queen Elizabeth II after she stepped ashore Monday to begin her state visit to South Africa, first since 1947. — AFP/UNB photo

## 35 Tajik rebels killed

**DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Mar 21:** Russian border guards using artillery pounded a group of Tajik militants trying to cross into their homeland from Afghanistan, killing at least 35 rebels, a news agency reported Tuesday, says AP.

The rebels were killed while trying to cross the Pyandzh river into Tajikistan on Monday night. Some of the rebels managed to flee back into Afghanistan, the Interfax news agency reported.

The Russian border guards did not suffer any casualties, the agency reported.

# Rao under new pressure following Tiwari's resignation

**NEW DELHI, Mar 21:** Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, struggling to restore unity in his Congress party following electoral setbacks, came under new pressure today following the resignation of a senior politician from his party posts, reports Reuter.

Former Cabinet Minister Narain Dutt Tiwari resigned from the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's executive body, on Monday night, plunging Congress into a new crisis while it was still licking its wounds after a round of provincial elections in which it lost two key western

# Benazir seeks US help to combat drugs, terrorism

**ISLAMABAD, Mar 21:** Preparing for an important visit to America, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto described her country today as a moderate but troubled Islamic state that badly needs help from the United States to combat drugs and terrorism, reports AP.

Benazir Bhutto noted that Pakistan had cooperated to extradite suspected drug barons and terrorists to the United States, but was still being punished under US sanctions imposed to protest the country's nuclear programme.

"One of the messages I will be taking to the US administration and Congress is that you are a fair nation and we've been allies," Benazir told a small group of American journalists, including The Associated Press.

"Help me strengthen the

forces of moderation by taking away the factors that fuel fanaticism," she said in the interview at her official residence.

Her administration is beset with a host of serious problems, including a stagnant economy, a powerful drug mafia, and escalating violence in the southern city of Karachi, the business capital.

Benazir wearing a cherry red outfit with a white scarf, conceded that her government lacked the money to combat these problems on its own. US sanctions are making the problems worse.

"An old (American) friend, an ally, a front-line state against extremism, militancy, terrorism and the narcotics trade is being undermined," Benazir, said of her country.

"Should the United States not review its policies to strengthen a moderate Pakistan?"

The Americans and the Pakistanis have been working closely on two highly publicised terrorism cases.

Law enforcement officers from both countries took part in the February 7 arrest in Islamabad of Ramzi Yousef, accused of masterminding the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing in New York. Yousef has been extradited to stand trial.

Two American workers at the US Consulate in Karachi were gunned down March 8, and Pakistani police and FBI agents are trying to track down the killers and determine whether the shooting was retaliation for Yousef's arrest.

Pakistan has arrested six men in the northwestern city



General view of the two-day conference of the 52-member nations of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which opened on Monday at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. OSCE members adopted a European Stability Pact that aims at stifling potential conflicts in former communist countries in eastern and central Europe and recognises the inviolability of existing frontiers and the particular rights of national minorities. — AFP/UNB photo

## Russian minister in India to discuss arms deal

**NEW DELHI, Mar 21:** India is likely to buy Russian propelled guns and the deal would be one of the key issues to be discussed between visiting Russian First Deputy Defence Minister Andrei Kokoshin and Indian defence officials. It was learnt here today, says Xinhua.

Kokoshin, who is in charge of arms production, arrived here late last night for a three-day visit to India.

Russia makes MSTA self-propelled artillery guns which can fire 152 mm shells from a moving platform to a maximum distance of 18 km. The guns

are mounted on an engine driven tracked or wheeled chassis and can be moved rapidly in the battlefield.

India needs 600 self-propelled guns. It has floated a global tender and has asked for a response only from international bidders who can mount 155 mm guns on a T-72 base, which India makes, officials said.

The visit of the Russian deputy defence minister is intended to enhance bilateral military-technological cooperation.

The two sides signed an agreement on setting up a joint venture for manufacturing product support and spares during Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's visit to Moscow in July last year.

Since then Russia has been awarded a contract to upgrade nearly 100 Mig-21 BIS interceptor fighters which form the mainstay of the Indian Air Force (IAF). The IAF is presently evaluating a proposal to buy the new generation of SU-30 long-range interceptor from Russia.

India and Russia are also working out ways to modernise some of the 60 Mig-29s with IAF by fitting a new long-range radar which can track 10 targets and engage two.

## Polyakov returns to earth today

**MOSCOW, Mar 21:** Russian cosmonaut Valery Polyakov returns to earth tomorrow after a record-breaking 438 days in space and Russian officials said his triumph could help pave the way for manned rockets to Mars, reports Reuter.

"This is a great step forward," said Sergei Tafrov at the Cosmonaut Training Centre in Star city, just outside Moscow. "It's part of the preparation for flights to Mars."

Kenneth Mitchel, space station liaison officer at the US embassy in Moscow, said Polyakov's record stint in space was a significant achievement. "To make trips to Mars we have to know the effects of long-duration missions in space," he said.

Polyakov, 52, broke the endurance record of one year in space when he spent his 366th day in orbit on January 9th.

One of only five people to spend over 300 days in space, he is due to land in the steppe lands of Kazakhstan on Wednesday.

## Maid's hanging in Singapore Filipino opposition calls nationwide protest

**MANILA, Mar 21:** Filipino leftists announced plans today for nationwide protests and urged Filipinos to boycott Singapore products to show outrage over the city state's hanging of a Filipino maid, reports AP.

President Fidel Ramos, himself a target of nationwide anger over Friday's hanging of Flor Contemplacion, urged a return to "sanity and sobriety" and accused opposition politicians of exploiting the case in advance of national elections May 8.

But the storm generated by Singapore's refusal to postpone the hanging continued unabated. Contemplacion was convicted of murdering a fellow Filipino maid and a 4-year-old Singaporean boy in a fit of rage.

Countless Filipinos remain convinced she was innocent.

On Tuesday, the governor of Bulacan province, which borders Manila to the north, announced he was "banping" Singaporeans and ordered banners erected at the provincial capital telling Singaporeans they were unwelcome.

Airline sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, says many Manila travel agents refuse to handle bookings for Singapore Airlines. At the airline's main ticket office, a sign has been hung stating "this building is owned by Filipinos."

Officials in widely scattered areas of the Philippines have burned Singaporean flags, flown the Philippine flag at half-staff and joined in denouncing the execution.

Philippine media have transformed Contemplacion, a 42-year old mother of four, into a national heroine and symbol of the suffering of the millions of Filipinos who seek jobs abroad.

## Afghan power transfer put off for another 15 days

**ISLAMABAD, Mar 21:** The transfer of power in Afghanistan has been put off for another 15 days as United Nations special mission has yet to finalise the new mechanism for the power transfer, reports Xinhua.

"We are not yet ready for transfer of power in Afghanistan," UN special envoy on Afghanistan Mahmud Mestiri, was quoted as saying by Pakistan official news agency APP Monday.

Mestiri announced last month in Kabul that Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani had promised to end his self-extended term, on March 21.

"Rabbani has shown willingness to step down but our mechanism is not ready," Mestiri said today.

## LTTE asks Lankan govt to supply basic amenities

**COLOMBO, Mar 21:** Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka have called on the government to supply essential goods and basic amenities to the northern people, it was reported here today, says Xinhua.

A peace delegation comprising government members of parliament visited the rebel-controlled Mannar district last weekend and talked with some rebel leaders there.

The rebel leaders assured that they would not damage government property and they have no objection to government supplying essential goods and basic amenities to the people of the north.

## British ship with N-waste defies Chilean ban

**SANTIAGO, Chile, Mar 21:** Loaded with tons of plutonium and banned from approaching land, a British freighter battled Monday against 30 foot (10 metre) waves and gale force winds as it crawled past the tip of South America on its way to Japan, reports Reuter.

The freighter facing extremely rough and stormy seas, "entered Chile's 200-mile (320 km) territorial waters in defiance of a ban issued by the government last week," Chile's acting foreign minister said.

## France backs Rushdie

**PARIS, Mar 21:** France will try to get its European partners to pressure Iran to ensure the safety of Salman Rushdie, the British writer living under an Iranian death threat, Foreign Minister Alain Juppé said Monday, reports AP.

Rushdie, on a two-day visit to France, said he hoped the European Union would seek "guarantees" from Iran that no attacks related to the death threat issued six years ago would be carried out in Europe.

# BJP opposes polls in Kashmir

**NEW DELHI, Mar 21:** India's main opposition party today denounced the government's move to hold elections in Kashmir, saying a free and fair poll was not possible in the troubled state, reports AFP.

"The situation in Kashmir has gone from bad to worse (since Muslim separatism erupted in 1989)," said Sikander Bakht, vice president of the Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party).

"Any claim by the government that it has contained and controlled the situation is bunkum," he said.

"The condition in Kashmir is not conducive to the holding of elections," he said. "We don't agree that the present situation calls for elections."

The BJP's comments came a day after Home Minister Shankar Rao Chavan sought the opposition's views on the possibility of conducting elections in Kashmir to pick a local government for five years.

Kashmir, where the last state assembly polls were held in 1987, has been under federal rule since January 1990. Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao said early this month that elections may be held in the state in June or July.

The current spell of federal rule in Kashmir expires July 18.

Bakht said "everything is unstable in Kashmir," where more than 10,000 people have died since 1989 in a bloody Muslim separatist campaign which shows no signs of ending.

"The fabric of the Kashmiri society is unstable," said Bakht. "The administration has been infiltrated (by militant supporters), and militancy has spread from the Kashmir Valley to (neighbouring) Jammu (region)."

"Now even foreign mercenaries are active there," he added.

# Off the Record

## Warning against sexy headlines

**SINGAPORE:** The government has warned local magazines that they risk being banned if they use sexy headlines and cover pictures in a bid to increase circulation, reports AP.

Information Minister George Yeo told parliament on Monday that some editors continued to use sexual themes excessively despite a warning last month.

Action will be taken against them if they stepped out of line again, Yeo said while responding to complaints by an independent legislator who described the covers of some women's magazines as "quite shocking."

The legislator, Kanwaljit Soin, said although the articles were "fairly innocuous" their titles were deliberately made sexy to catch readers' attention.

All publications in Singapore require an Information Ministry licence to operate.

Besides, the government applies strict censorship to keep out pornography and nudity from television, movies and books. But recently, some magazines sensing some relaxation in official standards, had begun publishing articles considered bold by Singapore standards.

## 20 British MPs homosexual?

**LONDON:** Gay activists today targeted 20 British members of parliament, two of them cabinet ministers, claiming they were homosexuals and urging them to "come out," reports Reuter.

Outrage, which has already provoked controversy in the Church of England with claims that 10 bishops or former bishops are gay, did not name the politicians.

Spokesman David Allison said outrage sent letters to the 20 MPs a few weeks ago, urging them to follow the example of two members of the 651-strong House of Commons who have admitted being homosexual.

The group denied it was threatening to expose them if they remained silent.

Outrage says most of the 20 MPs concerned are members of the ruling Conservative party, but they also include a senior Labour MP and representatives of the minority Liberal Democrat and Ulster Unionist parties.



Chinese models show off local designs at a rehearsal in Shanghai Monday for the first Shanghai International Fashion Cultural Festival held yesterday. Shanghai, once dubbed Paris of the East, is using the festival as a launch pad to become an international fashion centre. — AFP/UNB photo

## Major reshuffle in Fiji cabinet

**SUVA, Mar 21:** Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka announced a major cabinet reshuffle after his government was thrown into crisis today with a second resignation in five days, reports AFP.

Labour Minister Militonu Leweniqila quit his cabinet position without offering any public explanation while Rabuka was still grappling with the resignation on Friday of Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Harold Powell.

Leweniqila refused later to say what prompted his resignation.