

# BRIEFLY

**Ghali arrives in El Salvador:** UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali arrived on Saturday in El Salvador as the United Nations prepared to dismantle its peacekeeping mission in the Central American country. AFP reports from San Salvador.

Arriving by plane from Honduras, Boutros-Ghali went to a hotel for meetings with representatives of the United States and the "four friends" of El Salvador— Colombia, Spain, Mexico and Venezuela — who are guarantors of a 1992 peace agreement.

**Ex-Mexican governor kidnapped:** Guatemalan kidnapped businessman and former Governor David Gutierrez on Saturday in the southeastern city of Villahermosa. Gutierrez's sister told the Mexican news agency Notimex. AFP reports from Mexico City.

Gutierrez, 56, was grabbed by three armed men while he was doing his morning exercises at a sports centre in Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco, his sister Leticia Gutierrez told the news agency.

**AI team ends Algeria tour:** An Amnesty international delegation has completed an eight day fact finding mission to Algeria, the official National Centre for Human Rights said on Saturday. AFP reports from Algiers.

During the visit, the two-person team from the London based human rights group met civilian victims of the country's three year conflict between armed Islamic militants and government forces, the centre said.

**OAU Secy-Gen in Rwanda:** Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim arrived in Kigali on Saturday for talks with Rwandan leaders on efforts to coordinate the war-scarred country's reconstruction. AFP reports from London.

He told a news conference at the start of a five-day fact finding mission that he was satisfied that peace had returned to Rwanda and that the situation was slowly improving, the BBC quoted Rwandan state radio as saying.

**17 die in Thai road mishap:** Seventeen people were killed and scores injured when a chartered bus collided head-on with a ten-wheeled truck in northeastern Nakhon Ratchasima province, police said on Saturday. AFP reports from Bangkok.

Eleven passengers died instantly in the accident late Friday and six were pronounced dead on arrival at a rural hospital. Forty-five were treated for injuries, hospital staff said.

**Gas leak leaves 10 dead in China:** A serious gas leak at a steel complex in China's eastern Anhui province has left 11 people dead and poisoned 55, a report seen in Beijing on Sunday said. AFP reports from Beijing.

A 15-tonne bulldozer broke an overhead pipeline supplying gas to the steel furnaces of the Ma'anshan Steel Complex in the early evening on Thursday. Saturday's edition of the Wen Hui Bao newspaper said.

**Rainstorm hits Nigeria:** At least 100 houses were destroyed in a rainstorm Adogi village in Nigeria's central Plateau state, the state run News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported on Saturday. AFP says from Lagos.

Farm produce, household items and electricity installations were destroyed by the rainstorm on Friday. NAN said Adogi and adjoining villages were also hit by power cuts.

**43 refugees picked up from Baltic Sea:** Swedish coastguards picked up 43 Afghan and Somali refugees found drifting in a small boat in the Baltic Sea and towed them to the island of Gotland where they arrived early Saturday, police said AFP reports from Visby.

The refugees including around 10 children were in good health despite their ordeal in high seas. Visby police believed they came from Russia or one of the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

**Iraq to free 2 Americans soon:** A senior Iraqi official says that two Americans jailed for illegally entering the country could be freed soon. AP reports from Nicosia.

"We think in the coming few days this problem should be solved," Hassab al-Oubaidi, a representative of the foreign relations department of the Iraqi parliament, told the Associated Press Television in Baghdad on Saturday.

**Sweden expels Russian spy:** An alleged Russian spy was expelled from Sweden on Saturday. The national news agency TT reported. AP says from Stockholm.

The 37-year old man, Mikhail Smirnov, was put on a plane bound for Moscow after he was arrested Thursday.

**Garcia puts off his return to Peru:** Former President Alan Garcia said on Saturday he had postponed his planned return to Peru after the government rejected the recommendations of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission aid regarding his pledge to arrest him. Reuter reports from Lima.

Garcia told Peruvian radio a recent ruling by the human rights commission, a body of the Organisation of American States (OAS), had cleared his way back into politics before the April 9 elections by recommending the restoration of his legal rights and an end to legal cases against him.

**Perry on Moscow trip:** US Defence Secretary William Perry arrived in Moscow overnight for a two-day visit in which he is to meet his Russian counterpart Pavel Grachev and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. AFP reports from Moscow.

A US embassy spokesman said that Perry had arrived from Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, at 11.30 pm (1930 gmt) on Saturday and would have no official meetings yesterday.

**4 hurt by boar in Tripura:** Four persons were injured, two of them seriously, by a boar at Bharatechandra Nagar under Belonia subdivision of south-Tripura district yesterday, according to official sources on Sunday. PTI reports from Agartala.

The boar went berserk and attacked the people after it was hit by a poacher's arrow.

The injured have been hospitalised, the sources added.

**Georgian rebels kill 6 in Abkhazia:** SUKHUMI, Georgia, Apr 2: Georgian militants attacked a cemetery and a city building in separatist Abkhazia and killed six people, including five policemen, the Interfax news agency reported Sunday, says AP.

Seven people were taken hostage and nine were injured in the attacks Saturday in the city of Ghali, according to Asatnur Tarba, head of the Abkhazian security service in the separatist capital Sukhumi.

He told Interfax that 10 Georgian attackers surrounded the Ghali city cemetery and killed two policemen and a woman, injured five and took two as hostages.

# Kashmiris flee Char Sharief fearing Indian offensive

SRINAGAR, Apr 2: Residents are fleeing the besieged Kashmir town of Char Sharief in growing numbers amid fears that Indian troops may launch an operation to flush out dozens of heavily armed Muslim militants, reports AFP.

Tension has risen sharply during the past few days in the hill town where Muslim separatist guerrillas and Indian troops have been engaged in a standoff for more than three weeks, residents said.

An estimated 10,000 Indian soldiers have taken up positions on the outskirts of the town 37 Kilometres (23 miles) northwest of this Kashmir summer capital, effectively trapping militants from two pro-Pakistan separatist groups.

Police and residents said that firefights between the gunmen holding the town and Indian army and paramilitary troops dug in about two kilometres (1.2 miles) away had been growing in intensity during the past few days.

A makeshift camp has been set up here to accommodate the refugees from Char Sharief, which houses a mosque particularly sacred to Muslims in the Kashmir Valley. The Indian authorities have accused the militants of using the Islamic shrine as a sanctuary.

"People are fleeing their homes fearing trouble in the coming days," said a Char Sharief doctor. "Indian troops

are shelling the area, creating fear and panic."

"Residents are reeling under continuous firing," added Abdul Rashid, 33, a hospital worker who arrived in Srinagar from Char Sharief on Thursday with his wife and three children.

"People are scared and are fleeing their homes for safer places," he said.

Altaf Hussain, a shopkeeper who fled Char Sharief for Srinagar, said that "if this situation continues for another couple of days, everybody will have left the town."

"Troops are using loud speakers to broadcast war cries in the night," he said. They are repeatedly announcing, "surrender or we are going to storm the town."

Residents estimate that well over half of Char Sharief's pre-siege population of 15,000 had abandoned the town.

A commander of Indian paramilitary forces taking part in the siege said that militants were preventing other residents from leaving and intended to use them as "human shields."

"We want all of the innocents to come out," said Border Security Force (BSF) Commander P L Choudhary.

But he said no orders had been received to storm the town to flush out the dozens of militants from the Hizbul Mujahideen and Harkat-ul-Ansar separatist groups, which are battling for a merger of Indian Kashmir with Pakistan.



This August 9, 1993 file photo shows Irma Hadzimiratovic, 7, at a hospital in Sarajevo. Irma was airlifted to Britain for medical treatment after she was hit in the spine by shrapnel in a bomb attack that killed her mother. Irma died in a London hospital April 1.

— AFP/UNB photo

# Benazir's US visit: No progress expected on N-dispute

ISLAMABAD, Apr 2: Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visits Washington this week to step up her charm offensive on US President Bill Clinton, but no progress is expected on their nuclear dispute, reports AFP.

Even Foreign Minister Asef Ahmad Ali admitted "we do not expect any miracles" of the six day trip from Wednesday.

Pakistan and the United States were close allies during the Cold War, especially over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. But relations became icy after a US law in 1990 forced the suspension of all aid to Pakistan because of the Asian country's nuclear research.

Since coming to power in 1993, the Harvard and Oxford University-educated Benazir, has made improving ties one of her foreign policy priorities.

In recent weeks, gestures to Washington have been stepped up.

Raufi Ahmed Yousef, suspected mastermind of the 1993 bombing of the New York World Trade Centre, was extradited in February. There have been some spectacular drug seizures — 6.3 tonnes of heroin on March 24 — to ease

another major US worry, and unprecedented cooperation with US investigators after the killing of two US consular officials in Karachi.

The US administration, on its side, is increasingly indicating that the "Pressler Amendment" in Congress, which forced the aid suspension, is not working. The law has not stopped Pakistan pursuing its programmes.

Congress is not convinced though, a diplomat said "a major step" towards a non-proliferation guarantee would be required to get relations back on track.

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 2: Seven people were killed and 33 others wounded in a fresh outbreak of political violence in South African townships, police said today, reports Reuter.

Police spokesman Andy Pleke said three people were killed on Saturday night at a mine workers hotel in Germiston, apparently in retaliation for three murders on Friday.

The clashes were between Shangaans, a minority tribe from eastern Transvaal and Xhosas, South Africa's second largest tribe.

# New front to fight Cong in Lok Sabha polls in offing

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: A strategy to form a united front is being worked out at the national level to fight Congress-I in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, veteran Janata Dal leader and former Orissa chief minister, Biju Patnaik said today, reports PTI.

Consultations with various opposition parties are in progress to finalise the strategy for putting up a formidable challenge to the Congress-I. Patnaik told PTI here.

"By and large, the united front will be similar to that of the erstwhile National Front," Patnaik said.

The Janata Dal leader was confident that the proposed front would be able to bag more than half of Lok Sabha seats in the non-congress ruled states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The Janata Dal leader described the victory of Congress-I in Orissa as 'marginal' and attributed the dal's defeat to its "over confidence and carelessness." He alleged that the Congress-I had spent huge amounts to win the elections.

# IRA's service unit disarmed

LONDON, Apr 2: The IRA's active service units have been disarmed and their weapons returned to the group's quartermasters. The Observer newspaper reported today, says Reuter.

The arms including rifles, machine guns and explosives, were taken from the units shortly after last August ceasefire to prevent potential groups of dissidents from wrecking the peace process, the newspaper, quoting British counter terrorist sources said.

But it added that Irish Republican Army volunteers were allowed to keep handguns to protect themselves from their pro-British loyalist rivals and to carry out bank robberies to raise funds.

The newspaper said anti-terrorist sources have detailed information on the quartermasters, including names and addresses but have decided not to seize the arms stockpiles in the interests of helping the peace process.

The IRA's refusal to scrap its arms has been a stumbling block in the Anglo Irish peace process for northern Ireland.

Britain has insisted that the IRA decommission its arms before it can take part in ministerial talks.



Twenty-year-old student Pavee Vichengrat (C) smiles after winning the Miss Thailand '95 contest on Sunday in Bangkok.

— AFP/ UNB photo

# Jayalalitha being sued for 'corruption'

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: A former film actress-turned politician, who rules the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu and has been portrayed as the Virgin Mary by supporters, is being sued for alleged corruption, dailies said today, reports AFP.

Jayalalitha Jayaram, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and charismatic leader of the powerful AIADMK Party, is being prosecuted by a centrist politician for alleged abuse of power and financial impropriety, they said.

Tamil Nadu governor M Channa Reddy on Saturday allowed Subramaniam Swamy, president of the Janata (people's) Party, to sue Jayalalitha for supposedly favouring friends in a coal deal and for personal involvement in a real estate scandal.



# Off the Record

**Just an overzealous fan**

MISSOURI: A man arrested on suspicion of stalking Miss America Heather Whitestone will not face criminal charges, reports AP.

The 35-year-old suburban St. Louis man is probably just an overzealous fan, prosecutor Bob McCulloch said.

"At the time he was arrested, he wasn't doing anything," McCulloch said. "She was unaware of his presence."

The man was arrested January 10 when he tried to enter a hospital where Heather was making a speech. He had written many letters to Heather and her mother, claiming to be a family friend, and had driven to her hometown of Birmingham, Alabama, to try to meet her.

After his arrest, the man was admitted to a state hospital, and he remains under a doctor's care. McCulloch said.

**And now gay beach resort**

ROI DE JANEIRO: Easter week will mark the opening of Latin America's first gay beach resort on Itacuruca Island, 42 miles off the coast of Rio de Janeiro, the daily O Globo reported Saturday, reports AP.

The Maria Ruca Beach Hotel will open with room for only 20 guests, but will be expanded to accommodate 100 within six months.

Guests will be transported to the hotel on a sailboat and will have total privacy, the newspaper said. The five-star services include beach parties and ecological hikes through the island's forest.

Two businessmen, who wish to remain anonymous, invested 1 million dollar to build bungalows, a sauna, restaurant, bar and other installations.

All hotel employees will be gay.

The hotel is also open to lesbian and heterosexual couples.

**Day care centre where slain 2-yr-old boy abducted**

LIVERPOOL: A day care centre will open this week in the shopping mall where a murdered 2-year-old boy was abducted in 1993, reports AP.

The case of James Bulger — beaten to death by two 10-year-old boys after being led from the Strand Shopping Center in Bootle, north Liverpool — captured world attention because of the brutality of his death and the exceptional youth of his killers.

Local pressure group Mothers Against Murder and Aggression sought to raise 30,000 pounds (dhs 50,000) to open a child-care center in a disused part of the busy mall, where James had briefly wandered away from his mother.

James' uncle Ray Matthews, said the new center was "a brilliant idea, and anything that will help keep children in a safe, well-supervised environment is welcome. It is good to see something positive like this come out of what happened."

# Kozyrev pledges Moscow's support for Palestinians

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, Apr 2: Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev pledged Moscow's full support for Palestinian self-rule during his first visit to the autonomous Gaza Strip on Saturday, reports AFP.

Kozyrev, who held two hours of talks with Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat, said: "We know that Arafat's task of promoting peace and securing international recognition is difficult, but Russia is going to support the PLO chief until he succeeds."

Both men described their meeting as "warm, conclusive and positive."

"I was very moved and impressed to see Palestinian flags raised in Gaza and to see the Palestinians greet us so warmly," Kozyrev added.

The minister said he gave Arafat a message of support from Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Moscow is a co-sponsor along with Washington of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Kozyrev said donations pledged to the Palestinians to help them begin various projects linked to self-rule should not be long in arriving.

Arafat said he discussed with the Russian envoy "ways to boost the peace process and how we can overcome all obstacles to be able to implement the Oslo accords" on autonomy.

The Palestinian leader said Russia had an important role to play in peace negotiations, and said he had given Kozyrev a "special message" for Yeltsin. He did not give details.

The PLO has called on the international community to help break the deadlock in the peace process with Israel.

**'True Lies' comes to Beijing**

BEIJING, Apr 2: Arnold Schwarzenegger will get to ripple his muscles for the first time on Chinese screens in April, when the blockbuster movie "True Lies" comes to Beijing, reports AFP.

The movie, the fourth in a series of 10 top grossing film imports, will open for two weeks in cinemas all over the capital on April 20.

The heads of several domestic film studios who attended a preview of the film were "greatly surprised" by the special effects which went beyond their "wildest expectations."

# Govt-LTTE war of words dims prospects of an early end to war

COLOMBO, Apr 2: A bitter war of words between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger guerrillas has escalated, dimming prospects of an early end to the Island's bitter ethnic war, analysts here said today, reports AFP.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has charged her negotiating partner, the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with dodging political issues to resolve the conflict which has claimed more than 30,000 lives since 1972.

An impasse in preliminary talks since January and the LTTE's rejection of French mediation to end the stalemate signalled that the fragile peace effort was reaching an even more risky phase, a Tamil MP said today.

The parliamentarian who did not want to be named said fighting would be inevitable unless the Tigers agreed to political talks and the government further eased an economic blockade on LTTE-held territory in the North.

President Kumaratunga who initiated the peace process shortly after winning parliamentary elections in August, revised her own projections for establishing ethnic peace in the island, saying it may take longer than she expected.

"There is a doubt, a very serious doubt, she said when asked if she was hopeful of keeping to the original expectation of a solution in less than 14 months, the time spent by the previous government talking to the LTTE."

Kumaratunga, a member of the majority Sinhalese community, said the LTTE put forward fresh demands and went back on various undertakings to slow down her peace effort. The Tigers have been fighting for a separate state called Eelam.

The LTTE is acting and reacting in the same manner they did in the past 10 years. We are not at all surprised. We did not go into talks with a ruthless, undemocratic armed group with our eyes closed," she told reporters.

She said that the one of strongly worded letters by LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran, sometimes accusing the government of deception, did not contribute to the progress.

The LTTE has told the government it must completely lift an embargo on them, dismantle a key military camp in northern Sri Lanka and allow unrestricted fishing in the island's north by April 19 or face "dire consequences."

Retired airforce chief Harry Gunatillake said he believed Kumaratunga's tough stand meant little to the LTTE which was in a position of strength in the island's north where they maintain a de facto separate state.

"Chandrika can do some plain talking but she is not in a position of strength when it comes to the north. It is what the LTTE says that really matters because they call the shots," Gunatillake said.

He said the only option open to the government was to go for a military campaign against the LTTE but added that it was doubtful whether the president was prepared to take such an extreme action.

"I still hold on to the belief that the LTTE is biding its time," said Gunatillake who is close to the governing People's Alliance (PA) party of Kumaratunga.

However, he said the LTTE was likely to maintain the current truce "for as long as possible" as it did not want to be seen by the international community as the first part to break the ceasefire.

The ceasefire went into effect on January 8 and since then both sides have accused each other of minor violations. Military officials said that the LTTE had forcibly conscripted over 100 Tamil youngsters during the truce.

The LTTE has accused the military of continuing a recruitment and training drive

# Armed gang takes over hotel in Amsterdam

AMSTERDAM, Apr 2: An armed gang took over a hotel in central Amsterdam late Saturday and is holding an unspecified number of people hostage, police announced here, reports AFP.

Police deployed in strength around the Rokin Hotel but have had no contact with the hostage takers as all telephone links to the premises have been cut. Eight people were set free around 11.30 pm (2100 GMT) half an hour after police arrived on the scene.

Police suspect several hostage takers, who have so far made no claims are involved in the operation.