

# BRIEFLY

## Lanka to reduce public holidays:

The Sri Lankan government is now working on a scheme to reduce the number of public holidays from 27 to 19 days, official sources said in Sri Lanka yesterday. XINHUA reports from Colombo.

The move to reduce public holidays to increase productivity and investor confidence was mooted by an opposition member of parliament, the sources said. According to the proposal, all alternate holidays in lieu of statutory holidays falling on weekends will be abolished, the sources said.

## Ebola fever death toll 57:

The World Health Organisation said that the death toll from the outbreak of ebola fever in Zaire stood at 57, up from a figure of 48 reported on Friday, Reuter says from Geneva.

The UN health agency said in a statement that 11 new cases were reported on Saturday, bringing the total to 76. All the new cases were reported in Kikwit, the town at the centre of the epidemic. The WHO said there were no new cases in either Mosongo or Yassa Bonga, two other towns where deaths have occurred.

## 2 Japanese fishing boats seized:

The US Coast Guard has seized two Japanese fishing boats in the Pacific, accusing them of illegally fishing in American territorial waters, AP reports from Agana, Guam.

The boats were seized 32 miles (51 kilometers) inside the US Exclusive Economic Zone near the island of Farallon de Pajaros in the northern Mariana Islands, a US commonwealth, the Coast Guard said Saturday.

## Norway wins Eurovision contest:

The Norwegian group Secret Garden won this year's Eurovision song contest Saturday with a plaintive tune called "Nocturne." AP reports from Dublin.

Spain placed second and Sweden was third. Twenty-three countries took part in the contest which draws huge TV audiences, but rarely brings lasting fame. The contest's most famous winner was the Swedish group Abba which sang "Waterloo" for a victory in 1973.

## 7 die in US plane crash:

An air guard C-130 transport plane crashed in Idaho on Saturday while on a routine training mission, killing all seven crewmen aboard, a US Defence Department spokesman said, Reuter reports from Boise, Idaho.

Colonel Phillip Coughter said the four-engine hercules plane was from the 302nd tactical air wing of the national guard, based at Peterson Air Force Base near Denver, Colorado. "The aircraft went down 30 to 40 miles (50 to 65 km) southwest of mountain Home in Idaho," Caughter told Reuters in Washington.

## Mortar kills 9 in Mogadishu:

At least nine children were killed and 18 wounded when a 120mm stray mortar fell on a school in the Bermuda district of southern Mogadishu on Saturday evening, AFP reports from Mogadishu.

Four of the dead children, aged between three and nine years, were from the same family and were in the school to learn the Quran.

Their teacher was among those seriously injured when he lost both legs in the incident.

## 282,209 bombs defused in Iraq:

Iraq's Civil Defence teams have defused 282,209 allied bombs and bombs left over from the 1991 Gulf War, the government newspaper Al-Jumhuriya said yesterday, Reuter reports from Baghdad.

"Civil Defence patrols have treated ... 282,209 rockets and bombs in the period extending from 17 January 1991 to the end of 1994," the paper said.

## Ex-French minister faces trial:

Ex-cabinet minister Alain Carignon goes on trial on Monday in the most serious of a wave of corruption cases that have jolted French politics, Reuter reports from Lyon, France.

The appearance in court of the former communications minister in outgoing prime minister Edouard Balladur's government takes place in the central city of Lyon 12 days after Carignon was released from seven months of pre-trial custody. The conservative Gaullist faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted on charges of corruption fraud and interfering with witnesses.

## UN experts to probe into VX gas:

UN experts left Bahrain for Baghdad yesterday to try to find out what happened to chemical products used to make a combat nerve gas, a UN official said, AFP reports from Dubai.

The team led by Charles Duelfer, vice chairman of the United Nations Special Commission on Iraqi disarmament (UNSCOM), will investigate discrepancies in Baghdad's records of chemicals used to make the gas VX, according to officials. Iraq has acknowledged that its scientists worked on VX from September 1987 to September 1988.

## Menem seeks second term:

President Carlos Menem, turning the spotlight on his economic record, sought a second term from voters in Argentina's national elections Sunday, AP reports from Buenos Aires.

In all, 14 candidates are running for the presidency, including Menem's main challenger, Jose Bordón, of the center-left alliance Prepasso.

Other presidential candidates include Horacio Massaccesi of the centrist Radical Civil Union and Aldo Rico, head of the nationalist MODIN party and leader of two brief army rebellions since the restoration of democracy in 1983.

## Strong quake shakes Greece:

A strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.6 shook northwestern Greece on Saturday, slightly injuring 16 people and damaging hundreds of old houses, authorities said, AP reports from Athens.

The quake caused panic in scores of towns and villages across northern and central Greece. The Athens Geodynamic Institute reported that the tremor struck at 11:47 a.m. (0847 GMT) in the vicinity of the town of Kozani, about 300 kilometers (180 miles) northwest of the capital. Aftershocks continued to rock the region through the day.

## Iranian guards begin exercise:

Iranian Revolutionary Guards have begun a series of military manoeuvres in the northern Gulf, newspapers reported in Tehran yesterday, AFP says from Tehran.

The three-day exercise, code-named NASR-3 (victory-3), began Saturday and is aimed at "increasing the Islamic army's combat capability," they said.

# Official denies developing nuclear weapons Iran plans to build 10 N-plants in next 20 years

NEW YORK, May 14: Iran's top nuclear official said his country plans to build about 10 nuclear power plants in the next 20 years, but he denied US charges that it is trying to develop nuclear weapons, the New York Times reported in Sunday editions, says Reuter.

Reza Amrollahi, who has headed Iran's nuclear programme for about 15 years, also said he had signed a formal contract with China last year for two nuclear power reactors and the Chinese had begun to draw up blueprints and engineering reports for a site in southern Iran.

Amrollahi, the US educated director of Iran's atomic energy organisation, spoke with the newspaper on Saturday in a two- and one-half hour interview at his agency.

"We have a plan to take 20 years to get 20 per cent of our energy from nuclear," Amro-

llahi said, adding that there would be "something like" 10 reactors.

He denied reports of attempts by Iran or its Sharif University to buy materials such as fluorine cylinders and specialised magnets from foreign companies. "Wrong, I deny it totally," he said of the reports. "We never did."

He also denied a recent charge by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher that Iran tried to buy enriched uranium from Kazakhstan in 1992. "Definitely not. What is the use of enriched uranium for? I think the bomb age is over. We don't think we need a nuclear weapons."

Amrollahi said about 150 Russian nuclear experts are already working at the site of an ambitious nuclear energy project with Russia, a project President Bill Clinton tried unsuccessfully to get President

Boris Yeltsin to abandon at their summit meeting in Moscow this week.

He said 500 Russians would eventually be based at the site, in which Iran has invested 6 billion dollar for two reactors. Its 780 million dollar deal with Russia is for the completion of two partially built reactors.

The Iranian official also denied reports that Iran had negotiated or even discussed a plan to buy a gas centrifuge from Russia that could have rapidly enriched uranium to bomb-grade quality, according to the Times.

"This was a diplomatically-made cake," he said about Washington reports of a separate, tentative agreement with Russia.

Russia has agreed to supply enriched uranium needed to operate the plant, he said.

# Thai troops seize huge weapons from Karen camp

BANGKOK, May 14: The Thai military seized a large amount of weapons during a raid on a Karen refugee camp, the commander responsible for the Thai-Myanmar border said today, reports Reuter.

The weapons allegedly belonged to Karen National Union (KNU) guerrillas, Colonel Phibul Burcha said.

More than 150 border patrol police and soldiers stormed the Mae Lama Luang refugee camp and a nearby village in Mae Hong Son province late on Saturday, and confiscated rocket launchers, rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, sub-machineguns, pieces of anti-tank rockets and more than 20,000 rounds of ammunition, he said.

"We will continue to search for the weapons that might be hidden in the refugee camps to demonstrate to the Myanmar government that Thailand does not support any anti-Yangon guerrillas," Phibul Burcha told reporters.

Last week, the Thai military staged a surprise raid on four Karen refugee camps and also seized weapons.

# US navy intercepts vessel carrying fuel in Gulf

DUBAI, May 14: The US navy, enforcing United Nations sanctions against Baghdad, has intercepted a vessel in the Gulf carrying diesel fuel it believes comes from Iraq, a spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

Commander T McCreary said the Honduran-Flagged Mal, formerly known as Lett-1, was intercepted last week and was still in international waters in the Gulf waiting to be diverted to a port in the region.

"We have substantial evidence that it loaded diesel fuel in Iraq," he said. The ship was carrying 2,850 tonnes of diesel fuel, he added.

He said it was the first such interception of a vessel since February.

Since October 1994, the US navy has diverted 13 vessels violating UN sanctions imposed on Iraq for invading Kuwait in 1990. Of the 13, eight carried oil and the rest dates.

# Croats begin pulling out from UN buffer zone

ZAGREB, Croatia, May 14: Croatia has begun pulling out its troops from a UN patrolled buffer zone in southern Croatia, but tensions remained high because rebel Serbs crept in after them, reports AP.

Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granic said Friday his country would pull its soldiers out of the southern buffer zone by Sunday, and that they would leave other UN-patrolled areas separating Croatia and Serb front lines in an unspecified "reasonable time."

While the United Nations sought to keep the front lines in Croatia calm, the warring armies went all out with new fury across the border in Bosnia.

Serbs and Croats lobbed 2,500 heavy shells at each other Saturday around a crucial Serb corridor and an adjacent Croat-held pocket of land.

The Serbs said they were forced for the second time in four days to close the highway through the corridor that links Serb-held lands to the west in Croatia and Bosnia with Serbia and Yugoslavia.

# Imelda takes oath as congresswoman

TACLOBAN, Philippines, May 14: A defiant Imelda Marcos took her oath of office as a congresswoman Sunday even though election officials refused to certify her as the winner. She declared that her victory showed the uprising against her husband nine years ago was a fraud, reports AP.

In Manila, election officials confirmed finding irregularities in official returns from Marcos family strongholds in last Monday's national elections. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., trailing in the Senate race, said the irregularities prove opposition claims that the voting was rigged.

# Dalai Lama names 6-yr-old boy as Panchen Lama

NEW DELHI, May 14: A 6-year-old boy in a remote corner of Chinese-controlled Tibet was named Sunday as the reincarnation of the second most important monk in Tibetan Buddhism, reports AP.

Tibet's exiled leader, the Dalai Lama, announced that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima had been revealed as the reborn Panchen Lama, and appealed to the Chinese authorities to let the boy be trained as a senior monk.

The announcement opens a potential quarrel between the Dalai Lama, who fled Chinese rule in Tibet in 1959, and China. Each claims to have final authority in recognising the reincarnation.

The Panchen Lama is second only to the Dalai Lama in authority and prestige.

Recognition of the reincarnation "is a religious matter and not political," the Dalai Lama said in a statement. "It is my hope that the Chinese government will extend its understanding, cooperation

and assistance." The Dalai Lama said that in 1991 China refused him permission to send a delegation to Tibet to begin hunting for the reincarnated monk.

Instead, Beijing named its own search committee and said it did not want "outside interference."

The previous Panchen Lama, who died in January 1989, was a controversial figure whom some Tibetans saw as being under the influence of Beijing.

But later, during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, he was imprisoned for eight years after complaining in a letter to Mao Tsetung about China's policies toward Tibet.

The Dalai Lama, in a statement from his home in exile in northern India, gave few details about the boy or how he was discovered.

He said only that the boy was born in the Lhari district in Nagechu four months after the previous Panchen Lama died.

# Off the Record

## "School can wait"

WINDHOEK, Namibia: With almost a half-million dollars in cash and prizes under her sash, Miss Universe Chelsi Smith reached one easy conclusion. "School can wait," the 21-year-old from Deer Park, Texas, answered quickly Saturday when asked about her postponed college education.

Smith began her reign after a few hours of sleep with a Rolls-Royce ride through the streets of Namibia's capital.

Such public appearances and luxurious trappings can intoxicate, and the sophomore said she wants to drink it all in before going back to college.

"I worked really hard to become Miss Universe and I am sure a lot of opportunities will now become available to me, so I am going to see," she said. "School will always be there if I want to go back."



## She found it pretty, big and salty

RIO DE JANEIRO: A 124-year-old woman fulfilled a long held dream when she walked down Rio's Copacabana beach and caught her first glimpse ever of the ocean, newspapers reported Wednesday, says Reuter.

"It's pretty, it's big and it's salty," former slave Maria do Carmo Jeironimo told reporters. "Look how it goes up and down."

Jerônimo, who lives in the coffee growing state of Minas Gerais, was invited to Rio by the city's mayor after she read a newspaper article in which she said she never had seen the ocean.

Born to a family of slaves on May 5, 1871, Jerônimo won her freedom at age 17 when Brazil's ruler, Princess Isabel, abolished slavery in 1888.

## Queen is no longer that rich

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II has slipped sharply down the chart in this year's Sunday Times list of Britain's Richest 500, reports AP.

This doesn't indicate a reversal of fortune so much as a new definition of what constitutes personal wealth.

The queen's wealth is a closely kept secret and the newspaper's tally is an estimate.

This year the Sunday Times did not count the nation's art collection as the queen's personal property, leaving her with a modest 450 million pounds (706.5 million dollars), compared with 5 billion pounds (7.85 billion dollars) a year ago.

Hans and Gad Rausing, the Swedish-born brothers behind the Tetra Laval food packaging company, are still top of the list, but their personal fortune is also falling, from 5.2 billion pounds (8.2 billion dollars) to an estimated 4 billion pounds (6.28 billion dollars), the newspaper said.

Ex-Beatle Paul McCartney placed 20th with a fortune put at 420 million pounds (659.4 million dollars), and composer Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, at 25th has reportedly amassed 380 million pounds (596.6 million dollars).

## ..... But you cannot make them think

BATON ROUGE, Louisiana: It's a lesson Bill Cosby learned long ago: You can give people an education, but you cannot make them think, reports AP.

To illustrate the point Friday, for Southern University graduate, Cosby told how his father's street smarts got him on A in a college philosophy course.

The class was debating the old question: "Is the glass half-empty or half full?" Cosby went home and ran that by his father.

The unhesitating reply: "It depends it 'if you're pouring or if you're drinking."

Cosby said he repeated his dad's response the next day, impressed his classmates and got an A.



French President-elect Jacques Chirac (L) chats with President Francois Mitterrand Saturday at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris before the final of the French Soccer Cup, opposing Paris Saint-Germain to RC Strasbourg. — AFP/UNB photo

# Congress dissidents may support opposition

## Rao likely to face no-confidence

NEW DELHI, May 14: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was under increasing pressure today from party dissidents and the opposition to quit over the torching of a shrine in Kashmir, but he was still keen to hold elections in the troubled Muslim-majority state, reports Reuter.

Rao was likely to come under severe pressure this week in parliament as dissidents and opposition parties spent a hectic weekend charting strategies to slam him over his "inept handling" of the crisis in Charar-e-Sharif town.

A shrine to Kashmir's patron saint, Sheikh Nooruddin Wali, and 1,200 houses in the town were gutted in a blaze on Thursday. Kashmiri militants and Indian troops have blamed

each other for the destruction. The burning of the shrine has also led to wartime rhetoric between India and Pakistan. India accuses its neighbour of arming and backing Muslim separatists. Islamabad denies the charge.

Congress dissidents on the weekend demanded Rao's removal and leaders of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) threatened to bring a no-confidence motion against the government in parliament.

BJP spokesman Krishan Lal Sharma late on Saturday charged the government with "inaction and incompetence" in dealing with the situation in Charar-e-Sharif. He told reporters that BJP

was likely to move a no-confidence motion in parliament either on Monday or Tuesday. BJP's Lok Sabha, lower house, leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee said on Friday the party would move the motion this week.

"We are keeping our options open," Sharma said.

Congress dissidents said they might support the opposition parties in parliament if they moved a no-confidence vote.

Dissident leader, former human-resources minister Arjun Singh, who was expelled from the party three months ago, has already demanded Rao's resignation. "Accountability is something which is absolutely crucial to democracy," he said.

# Suha denies rift in marriage

LONDON, May 14: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's wife denied rumours of a rift in their marriage on Friday and said her husband knew before she did about the baby she is expecting in the autumn, a British newspaper said on Friday, reports Reuter.

In an interview in Gaza with Today Newspaper, Suha Tawil, a Palestinian Christian researcher who married Arafat in 1992, said that because of her husband's position she is sometimes deprived of special moments.

"After they took the blood test they immediately rang him in his office," she said. "Then I had to wait until three in the morning to talk to him (about the baby) and see his reaction."

# Iraq denies UN charges of making chemical weapons

BAGHDAD, May 14: Iraq denied today UN charges it might be hiding material to make chemical weapons, reports Reuter.

It also accused Rolf Ekeus, Chairman of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) in charge of dismantling Baghdad's deadliest weapons, of colluding with the United States and its Central Intelligence Agency to prolong sanctions against Iraq.

The tactic pursued by the Chairman of the Special Commission in collusion with the CIA is to raise fabricated accusations and doubts and then send an inspection team to verify them," said Babel newspaper published by President Saddam Hussein's

eldest son, Uday. This attack on the United Nations and United States were made as Ekeus's Deputy, Charles Duelfer, travelled to Baghdad to investigate suspicions that Iraq might have hidden material used to make chemical weapons.

Babel said Saturday's decision by the UN Security Council to maintain sanctions intact aimed at carrying out its "plan of genocide against our people."

The ruling Baath party newspaper Al-Thawra reacted angrily to recent UN charges that Iraq might still be hiding chemical equipment. "Is it logical? Is it logical for Ekeus to open closed files?"

# Election in Belarussia

MINSK, May 14: Belarussians went to the polls today in their country's first post Soviet general election, but most attention was focused on four parallel referendums championed by President Alexander Lukashenko, reports Reuter.

Voters were expected to give overwhelming backing to at least two of the four plebiscites — on economic integration with Russia and giving Russian equal status with Belarussian, the rarely used state language.

Although few opinion surveys were published during a quiet campaign.

# 'Chinese foreign policy based on Confucius, Mao philosophies'

BEIJING, May 14: Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen today quoted Confucius and Chairman Mao Tsetung to back his rejection of allegations that an increasingly affluent China posed a threat to peace, reports Reuter.

"China will never threaten or invade other countries," Qian told an international forum called "China and its neighbours" in Beijing. "Instead it will always be a positive factor for world peace and development."

His remarks came a day after Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chock Tong warned the

forum that the growing military assertiveness accompanying China's dizzying economic growth had aroused deep feelings of unease in the region.

Dismissing anxieties over whether China will pose a threat to other countries when it is economically developed, Qian chose to quote from Confucius.

"The ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius once said: 'do not do unto others that you do not like others to do unto you' Qian said."

Goh had said China's rising power and arms build-up had stirred anxiety and cited

Beijing's disputes with several countries in South East Asia over territories in the South China Sea.

Underlining Beijing's desire for peace, Qian stressed that a developing China was eager to build its economy and wanted to cooperate with the rest of the world to do so.

The late Chairman Mao Tsetung once wrote in his poem: "So many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently: the world rolls on time presses. Ten thousand years are too long, seize the day, seize the hour," Qian said.

The foreign minister also

chose the opportunity of the forum held by the US based Asia Society to cite improvements in ties with the United States.

Relations have long been rocky, but are emerging slowly from the freeze that followed Beijing's crackdown in 1989 on student-led pro-democracy protests in Tianamen Square and more recently from bitter trade disputes.

"In the past one year or more, thanks to the concerted efforts of both sides, progress has been made in Sino-US relations," he said. "High-level contacts have markedly increased."

The two Asia-Pacific giants averted a bruising trade war in March when they reached a last-minute agreement over US demands that Beijing crack down on infringements of intellectual property rights that were costing US business hundreds of millions of dollars each year in lost trade.

Qian urged understanding between two very different nations, adding that some level of differences were inevitable, an oblique reference to continued US concerns over the human-rights situation in China.

"What is important is that under the new situation we should discard the Cold War mentality, transcend the ideological differences and have a clear understanding of the major common interests between our two countries," Qian said.

He called for resolution of differences through talks based on mutual respect.

"We should do everything to prevent them from hindering and obstructing the improvement and development of our bilateral relations where lies our overall interests," he said.

# Two Algerian militant groups plan to unite

PARIS, May 14: A leader of Algerian Muslim fundamentalists in exile claims the two main militant groups plan to unify, questioning the authenticity of a threat by extremists, an Arabic newspaper reported Sunday, reports AP.

The Islamic Salvation Front, fighting Algeria's military-backed government in a three-year-old insurgency that has left more than 30,000 dead, has sought to extend control over all militant forces and boost its negotiating clout.