

BRIEFLY

Nobel laureate Brodsky dies: Nobel Prize-winning poet Joseph Brodsky, a Russian exile who became poet laureate of the United States, died in his sleep Sunday. He was 55. AP reports from New York.

The poet's wife, Maria Brodsky, called police to their Brooklyn home after failing to wake her husband, said deputy commissioner Tom Kelly. Brodsky was pronounced dead at the scene of an apparent heart attack, Kelly said. "He was the only Russian poet who enjoyed the right to be called a great in his lifetime," Yevgeny Kiselyov, host of the Russian weekly news programme Itogi, told his viewers.

Ex-Cong chief Borooah dies: Dev Kanta Borooah, a former president of India's governing Congress party, died Sunday after a cardiac arrest, United News of India said. He was 82. AP reports from New Delhi.

Borooah was Congress president from 1973 to 1977 and is best known for his controversial slogan "India is India and Indira is India." The slogan was coined when former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed two-years of national emergency in 1975 by suspending all fundamental rights. Borooah, who sided with Mrs Gandhi, made up the slogan to convince Indians the importance of Mrs Gandhi.

300 PLO cops on way to Gaza: Some 300 Palestinian policemen arrived in Port Said Sunday on board a ship from Libya en route for the Gaza Strip, Egyptian port officials said. AFP reports from Port Said.

An official, asking not to be named, said the policemen would travel on by coach from Port Said, at the northern tip of the Suez Canal, to Rafah on the Egyptian border with the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip. "They are not Palestinians expelled by Libya but policemen who trained in camps in Libya and who Israel will allow to enter Gaza," he said.

Jet crashes in New Zealand: A New Zealand commuter plane with six people aboard has crashed into the side of a mountain in the northern part of south Island, a spokesman for search and rescue said yesterday. Reuter reports from Wellington.

He said he did not know if there were any survivors among the five passengers and pilot. The plane, a single-engine Cessna Caravan belonging to Soundsair, was found at about 7.00 pm (0600 GMT). Rescuers were at the site which was up a 1,000 metre (yard) mountain.

Vietnam sets up ties with Bosnia: Vietnam has established diplomatic ties with Bosnia-Herzegovina, according to a government announcement published yesterday in the press. AFP reports from Hanoi.

A statement was signed Friday in New York by Vietnam's Ambassador to the United Nations, NGO Quang Xuan, and the Bosnia-Herzegovina representative, Ivan Zdravko Mistic, on establishing diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level.

Chernomyrdin arrives in US: Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin arrived in Washington on Sunday for economic and technical cooperation talks with US leaders against a backdrop of Western fears that Moscow may be veering away from market reform, Reuter reports from Washington.

Chernomyrdin was met at Andrews air force base by Vice President Al Gore, his opposite number as head of the US side of a joint commission on technological and economic cooperation. He is to meet President Bill Clinton on Tuesday.

Ex-Iranian MP to die for murder: An Iranian Appeals Court has sentenced a former member of parliament to death for killing a man in an argument over partridge hunting, a newspaper said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Tehran.

The Daily Kayhan International said the court found Jaleleddin Farsi, a one-time presidential candidate, guilty of murder for shooting Mohammad Reza Rezakhani in 1993. Rezakhani, a retired Health Ministry official, had objected to Farsi's hunting of partridges. Farsi has said the shooting was an accident.

Floating cafe sinks in Thames: Police divers and helicopters searched the Thames River in London early on Monday for possible casualties after a floating restaurant overturned and sank. Reuter reports from London.

No one was reported to be on the boat when it overturned at about 11.30 pm (2330 GMT) on Sunday but the possibility could not be ruled out yet, police said.

8 job seekers killed in SA: Eight people were killed and at least 20 were wounded yesterday when gunmen opened fire on people queuing up for job outside a Johannesburg factory, police said. Reuter reports from Johannesburg.

Superintendent Wikus Weber said several men, armed with assault rifles and handguns, opened fire without warning on the queue outside a factory at Alrode, south of the city centre.

Peres optimistic about peace with Syria

JERUSALEM, Jan 29: Prime Minister Shimon Peres says he is optimistic about prospects for peace with Syria, contradicting his army chief who reportedly said an agreement couldn't be reached before elections, reports AP.

Gen. Amnon Shaha, the army chief of staff, reportedly told Peres' weekly Cabinet meeting on Sunday there was not enough time to reach a deal with Syria before Israeli elections, scheduled for October at the latest.

"I am always optimistic", Peres told Channel 2 TV. He called the peace talks a "race for time." He told Israel's Channel 1 TV: "There is true progress with the Syrians."

Peace negotiations are to resume Monday in Maryland between Israeli and Syrian negotiators. Representatives of both sides were to meet separately with US officials over the weekend.

The Yediot Ahronot newspaper reported Sunday that

Israel has proposed dropping its demand for ground-based early warning stations on the Golan Heights in return for a large demilitarized zone in Syria.

The daily said US mediators were proposing that Syrian troops be kept far enough from a future border to allow Israel up to three days to mobilize troops in case of attack.

The paper cited unidentified Israeli sources as saying the proposal was the key to the success of peace talks. Talks last week focused on electronic warning systems and other substitutes for the ground stations Israel has sought.

The Haaretz daily said Syria also was demanding that Israel's reported nuclear capability be discussed. Israel has never officially confirmed it has nuclear weapons.

Army radio said Pares told Cabinet ministers Sunday that the nuclear issue was never raised in the talks.

Former Myanmar president San Yu dies

YANGON, Jan 29: Former President San Yu, one of Myanmar's last leaders to have come of age during the country's anti-colonial struggle, died Sunday at a military hospital in Yangon. He was 78, reports AP.

San Yu had received treatment at the hospital for several years following a heart operation he underwent in Houston, Texas, in 1983. The precise cause of his death was not known.

San Yu succeeded Gen. Ne Win as president of Myanmar's military government in 1981. He stepped down in 1988, shortly before the country's current military rulers took power.

San Yu was a medical student when Japan overran Myanmar, a British colony, during World War II.

International

14 others killed in renewed violence Tigers storm Pulmoddai army camp, kill 16 soldiers

COLOMBO, Jan 29: Tamil Tiger guerrillas stormed an army camp in northeastern Sri Lanka today, killing at least 16 soldiers with renewed violence elsewhere, defence sources here said, reports AFP.

Gunmen from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fired small arms and mortar bombs at the Pulmoddai army detachment in their pre-dawn assault, the sources said.

"An army captain was among the 14 security personnel killed in the attack," a military official said. He said heavy fighting continued for about four hours before the guerrillas were forced to withdraw.

Initial reports said that a large group of LTTE gunmen

and women were involved in the attack but there were no immediate reports of rebel casualties.

Army reinforcements which rushed to the coastal Pulmoddai camp also came under attacks following down the rescue operation, official said, adding that the military facility had been badly damaged by the Tigers.

The attack came hours after the LTTE ambushed troops in the neighbouring Wel Oya region, killing three troopers for the loss of at least 10 of their own cadres, a military spokesman here said.

In another development, an LTTE gunman shot dead a rival Tamil in the northeastern port town of Trincomalee today, local officials said.

The attacks marked an

upsurge in violence across the island's embattled northern and eastern regions since security forces captured the former rebel bastion of Jaffna in the north of the country.

Military officials said they still had no information about the Russian-built Mi-17 transport helicopter which went missing while on a flight over the Jaffna Peninsula last week with 39 security personnel on board.

The LTTE has claimed to have downed the transport helicopter but gave no details of the fate of the passengers.

In Jaffna itself, security forces were under constant harassment by a group of about 150 rebels still trapped in the area which once served as the capital of a de facto state of the Tigers, defence sources said.

AP adds: Tamil rebels attacked a military base and ambushed a police patrol early Monday, killing at least 16 soldiers and police commanders and losing two of their men, military officials said.

Thirty-two soldiers died and one was missing after more than 200 rebels fired rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns at their base in Trincomalee district, said Major Tilak Dunuwille, a military spokesman.

"They (rebels) surrounded the camp near Pulmoddai village and launched their attack," said Major Dunuwille.

Nearly 30 soldiers at the camp repulsed the assault with the help of reinforcements from neighbouring bases. Three soldiers were wounded.

No plan to hang onto office, says Niger's military leader

NIAMEY, Jan 29: Niger's new military leader, under fire from abroad for seizing power and halting his West African country's experiment with multi-party democracy, said he had no plans to hang onto office, reports Reuter.

Lieutenant-Colonel Ibrahim Bare Mainassara, the armed forces chief of staff, told French Radio on Sunday that he and fellow army officers stage Saturday's coup, the second in West Africa this year, out of patriotic duty.

US, Russia to work on converting N-arsenal to peaceful uses

WASHINGTON, Jan 29: US and Russian scientists have set aside decades of Cold War hostility to begin work on converting Russia's nuclear arsenal to peaceful uses at a secret city known as Arzamas-16, Newsweek said Sunday, reports AFP.

According to the report, Russian researchers at Arzamas and scientists from the US National Laboratory have been collaborating on projects involving cleanup technology, reactor safety and more controversial work on fundamental physics.

Ethiopian Jews storm Israeli PM's office

JERUSALEM, Jan 29: Police fired tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon at thousands of Ethiopian Jews who stormed the prime minister's office Sunday to protest a national policy of rejecting their blood donations, reports AP.

The anger over the discarded blood donations reflects years of simmering frustration in Israel's Ethiopian community, which has remained an underclass since Ethiopians first immigrated to Israel a decade ago in dramatic airlifts.

Protesters stoned the prime minister's office and police hurled the rocks back, injuring dozens of demonstrators and police. The crowd dispersed only after Prime Minister Shimon Peres promised an investigation.

Opposition leader goes on trial in Malaysia

MALACCA, Malaysia, Jan 29: A leader of Malaysia's main opposition party went on trial today on charges of "spreading hatred" in a case that has drawn concern from international human rights groups, reports Reuter.

Lim Guan Eng, deputy chief of the Democratic Action Party, has pleaded not guilty to violating the seditious act and the printing and publications act.

He faces up to six years in jail and disqualification from Parliament for publicly criticising the government's handling of an investigation into statutory rape allegations against the chief minister of the west coast state of Malacca.



Singapore's Cheng Siew Kee (C) smiles after she was crowned Miss Chinese International 1996 in Hong Kong Sunday. Ng Melissa Mei Heng of San Francisco (L) and Chung Amy of New York were respectively elected 1st and 2nd runner-up during the beauty pageant in which 19 women of Chinese ethnicity represented their cities of residence. — AFP/UNB photo.

Jordan reaffirms support for Palestinian state

AMMAN, Jan 29: King Hussein on Sunday reaffirmed Jordan's support for Yasser Arafat's quest for an independent Palestinian state with Arab east Jerusalem as its capital, a move that is likely to antagonise the Jewish state, reports AP.

Israel rejects Palestinian calls for an independent homeland in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and favours a confederation between Jordan and a Palestinian entity.

Israel, which captured the Arab sector of Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war, considers the reunited holy city to be its "eternal and indivisible capital."

King Hussein declared Sunday after a second round of talks with Arafat that Jordan supports the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

The king was speaking to reporters at Amman airport after he bade farewell to Arafat, who left for Sweden to receive a peace award from a Jewish organization there.

Last week, Arafat said at a joint news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres that it might be possible to establish a Palestinian state within 18 months.

Arafat, on his first trip to Jordan since his election January 20 as president of the Palestinian self-rule council, arrived in Amman Saturday from Egypt, where he also won Cairo's endorsement for a Palestinian state.

Omar Khatib, chief of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) mission in Amman, said Saturday that Arafat sought Jordan's support for Palestinian statehood and its intervention with Israel for a swift settlement of the Palestinian issue.

Jordan, with more than half its 3.8 million population Palestinian, has developed a warm relationship with Israel since the two neighbours signed a peace treaty October 26, 1994.

The kingdom ruled the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, for 17 years until it was overrun by Israel in 1967.



Journalists of the Turkish newspaper Hurriyet pose with the Turkish flag they hoisted on deserted Imia Island in the Aegean Sea off the Turkish coast on Saturday, after removing the Greek colors. Greece protested Sunday, sending a naval vessel to replace the Greek flag. Ankara touched off the sovereignty dispute at the end of December over the isle, one of several potential points of contention in the region between the two countries. — AFP/UNB photo.

One MQM activist killed in Karachi Indo-Pak troops trade fire along Kashmir border

JAMMU, Jan 29: Indian and Pakistani troops traded fire along the Kashmir border for the fourth day running today following a rocket strike on a Pakistani mosque which left 22 people dead, defence sources here said, reports AFP.

Indian and Pakistani troops stationed at four observation posts exchanged machinegun fire intermittently during the night, but the firing ended around dawn, the sources said in this winter capital of Indian Kashmir.

They said Pakistani rangers fired a total of some 15,000 rounds at Indian pickets in Rajpura, Fagwari, Dewara in the Akhnour sector of the border during the night and that Indian troops retaliated.

The firing was limited to machine guns, the defence sources said, adding that artillery or rockets were not used by either side. No casualties were reported.

"We are exercising restraint," an Indian defence spokesman said, adding that Indian troops were on "high alert."

"Very tight vigilance is being maintained on the border," he added.

Another AFP report from Karachi says an activist of the opposition Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) was killed in an early-morning gunbattle with security forces in Karachi today while two others died in a clash overnight.

An unidentified civilian died in sniper fire elsewhere in the city Monday bringing to four the death toll in the country's commercial hub since late Sunday.

Police said Mohammad Khalid, alias Commando, was shot dead and his accomplice Allah Walla was injured after an exchange of heavy fire in the city's volatile western district of Orangi.

Off the Record

Live chicken-eater!

MANILA, Jan 26: One contestant at a beauty contest in the northern Philippines trumped her competitors in the talent category by eating a live chicken on stage, a local daily reported here today, reports AFP.

The Philippine Inquirer said that earlier in the beauty pageant held in La Paz town in Tarlac province on Tuesday, one of the 12 contestants had performed a tribal ceremony, sacrificing a chicken with the use of a knife while dressed in complete tribal regalia as part of the talent portion.

But even this could not compare with another contestant, dressed in a jungle woman costume, who took a live chicken, tore at the bird's flesh with her bare hands and ate it, complete with spurring blood and innards.

The unusual act shocked the audience but earned a cluck of contentment from the judges.

The newspaper, quoting the La Paz police chief, senior Superintendent Doroteo Reyes who was among the panel, said the contestant, who it did not identify, got a perfect score of 10 for "originality."

Crematorium itself cremated partly

MANILA: Philippines officials set ablaze 140 kg (310 lbs) of seized narcotics in a ceremony at a crematorium yesterday but ended upsetting the crematorium itself on fire, reports Reuter.

One woman employee fainted and others rushed out in panic after a fuel overflow touched off the fire in the decades old incinerator, officials said.

Firemen put out the 15-minute blaze which broke out while methamphetamine hydrochloride — known as "Ince" — was being burnt. The crematorium was partially damaged.

This is the first time anything like this has happened," government engineer Cirilo Cruz said.

The drugs, the biggest ever single seizure made in the Philippines and valued at 10.7 million dollar, were confiscated on January 21 from an alleged Chinese trafficker killed by the police in a gunbattle in a Manila suburb.

They get the license though not equal

SAN FRANCISCO: Lori Guidos and Cheryl Deaner went to city hall, paid 35 dollars and received a certificate that said San Francisco officially recognized them as partners, reports AP.

While they had the certificate, they watched heterosexual couples get marriage licenses and head for civil wedding ceremonies.

"People get a piece of paper for the marriage license and people get a piece of paper for domestic partners, but they're not equal," Guidos said.

The city's Board of Supervisors is scheduled to vote on Monday on a proposal that would allow the city to perform symbolic domestic partnership marriages. The union, which could be performed for homosexual or heterosexual couples, would carry no legal weight.

At least 3,000 unmarried couples, most of them gay, already have filed as domestic partners since the city legalised the procedure in 1991.

Italian tycoon denies links to Hawala scam

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: An Italian businessman who reportedly had close links with assassinated Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi yesterday denied a press report that he was involved in the country's current corruption scandal, reports AFP.

Ottavio Quattrocchi, who represented the Italian company Snamprogetti in India, said the news report by the Indian Express daily was "totally false, malicious and politically motivated."

"I absolutely deny paying any money to Surendra Kumar Jain (the businessman at the heart of the 20-million-dollar scandal)," Quattrocchi told the Press Trust of India in a message faxed from the Malaysian capital.

Jain is accused of having paid huge sums of money to at least 115 top politicians and bureaucrats between 1988 and 1991 and acting as a middleman for several foreign companies.

Three serving ministers

and the leader of the opposition have resigned after federal detectives said their names figured in the scandal, which was unearthed after raids on Jain's lavish country retreat near New Delhi.

The Indian Express on Saturday said Jain had told detectives from the Central Bureau of Investigation that he had Quattrocchi had collaborated closely in many projects and that Quattrocchi used influence to swing deals.

Jain alleged the Italian businessman had paid his commission in an illegal foreign exchange transaction from Belgian and Swiss bank accounts.

Quattrocchi, whose name figured during a kickbacks scandal over the purchase of Swedish Howitzer guns by India and led to the fall of Rajiv Gandhi's government, denied any wrong-doing.

The whole report in the newspaper smells of a motivated attack on the late Rajiv Gandhi and myself," he said.

DPRK diplomat in Zambia defects to ROK

SEOUL, Jan 29: A North Korean diplomat posted in Zambia has followed in the footsteps of his wife and defected to the South Korean embassy in Lusaka, the foreign ministry here said today, reports AFP.

Hyun Sung Il, 37, a third secretary at the North Korean embassy in Lusaka, sought political asylum in South Korea after reaching the South Korean embassy there on January 23, a ministry spokesman said.

"His motive for the defection is something political," the spokesman said, adding that Hyun's current whereabouts and other details were being withheld from the public until he had been safely escorted to South Korea.

Hillary wins admiration, sympathy for grand jury appearance

LONDON, Jan 29: Hillary Rodham Clinton's appearance before a grand jury won sympathy abroad, admiration — even disbelief that she could be there, reports AP.

From Sweden to Britain, Russia to Switzerland, Mrs Clinton's four-hour interrogation about her law firm's billing records in the Whitewater case was the subject of media comment.

Most noted that it was the first time the wife of an American president had come before a grand jury — and that Mrs Clinton had appeared confident and unruffled.

"Cool as a cucumber, you have to hand her that," wrote Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in The Sunday Telegraph, a conservative London newspaper, adding that she had made "her mark yet again as a very unusual First Lady."

"One is almost tempted to join the cynics in suspecting that her appearance at the US District Court House was a show of political theater staged by the special prosecutor to salvage his own reputation," wrote Evans-Pritchard.

Others saw even baser motives behind the decision to haul Mrs Clinton before the grand jury.

In a Saturday editorial headed "Witchhunt," Switzerland's Basler Zeitung said the reasons for the intensive Whitewater investigation "are of a political, not a legal nature. Conservative circles have for months been conducting a witchhunt on the First Lady. In the hope that something will stick to her husband, new suspicions are constantly being raised."

"Other Clinton critics have discovered a welcome opportunity finally to silence the career woman who speaks out for the disadvantaged."

self, it cannot be excluded that the alleged "witch" will again turn into a heroine."

The German-language Swiss weekly Sonntags Zeitung said: "Party politics alone is not to be blamed for the decline of the First Lady: she bears responsibility herself."

It accused her of evoking mistrust "by resisting congressional investigations into her past," and disclosing only what was demanded of her. "She thus followed exactly the recipe that is guaranteed to turn the smallest affair into a gigantic scandal," the weekly said.

Expression of Stockholm, Scandinavia's largest daily newspaper, agreed, commenting on Friday: "Today's hearing has more to do with politics than with law."

Some believe that, despite her strong, confident appearance outside court, the fact

that Mrs Clinton was called to appear will prove damaging to President Clinton.

"Despite all the efforts of the Clinton spin doctors, and Hillary's evident ability to bat away awkward questions, the fact that she was called to testify is a public relations disaster," wrote Nick Peters and James Adams in the Sunday Times of London.

"The only first lady in America to be subjected to such an indignity, the affair was manna from heaven for Republicans who are praying for more in the form of official charges of a cover up."

Bill Clinton before the Jury. Bill's future is at stake, ran the headline over 11 Giorni of Milan's report on Saturday.

At issue is the mystifying reappearance of billing records that outline Mrs Clinton's work for the failed Arkansas savings and loan at

the centre of the Whitewater criminal investigation.

Polis indicate Mrs Clinton's popularity has plummeted and that a majority of Americans do not believe she has told the whole truth.

Massimo Teodon, a political analyst writing for 11 Messaggero of Rome on Sunday, said the case points up the "crucial" relationship of "politics and truth" in American public life.

Americans, he said, can forgive a lot in their politicians, but not lying.

Moscow's Moskovsky Komsomlets newspaper appeared bemused Saturday that such an important figure could be made to testify in such a forum.

In other parts of the world, the interrogation of the first lady could be imagined only in a nightmare, it concluded, wondrously



minorities and women ... If she succeeds in presenting a convincing defence for her-