

BRIEFLY



The Prince of Wales wearing traditional cap and shawl during a visit to Mohammedi Park Masjid Complex in Rowdell Road Northbelt on Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo

**ROK FM arrives in Beijing:** South Korean Foreign Minister Gong Ro-Myoung arrived in Beijing yesterday for a five-day official visit to China. Xinhua reported, AFP says from Beijing.

**Avalanche kills 6 in India:** Six members of a family were killed in an avalanche in village Piaso in Himachal Pradesh's Lahaul and Spiti district early yesterday morning, PTI reports from Shimla.

**Japanese FM arrives in Moscow:** Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda arrived in Moscow late on Tuesday for a two-day visit. ITAR-Tass News Agency reported. Reuter reports from Moscow.

**Christopher to meet Qian:** US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will meet his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen in The Hague on April 21. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said on Tuesday. Reuter reports from Prague.

**Blast hurts 2 in Bahrain:** A bomb exploded at a hotel Tuesday night, wounding two people and keeping tension high in this tiny Gulf island state where seven people have perished in anti-government violence in the last week. AP reports from Manama.

**German TV actor Max Graf dies:** Max Graf, a beloved TV character actor, died Monday of cancer. He was 62. AP reports from Munich.

**Four found dead in Philippines:** Four people abducted by gunmen were found dead in the southern Philippines, police said yesterday. Reuter reports from Ozamis, Philippines.

**Mubarak holds talks with Demiril:** Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak held talks on Tuesday with his Turkish counterpart Suleyman Demiril in southern Egyptian resort of Aswan mainly on Middle East peace process and bilateral relations. Xinhua reports from Cairo.

**Police sent to reinforce troops in Cambodia**

PHNOM PENH, Mar 20: Some 150 policemen from the capital were sent to reinforce government troops Wednesday as they advanced on a key base of the Khmer Rouge guerrillas in northwestern Cambodia, reports AP.

The police were seen leaving Phnom Penh early Wednesday in a convoy of trucks. They waved to crowds along the road as they headed towards Pailin, a gem and timber trading town that is an important economic centre for the Khmer Rouge.

Polls in India between April 27 & May 21  
President refuses to sign two ordinances

NEW DELHI, Mar 20: India's ruling party has been snubbed by President Shankar Dayal Sharma and the country's autonomous poll panel head of the first general elections in five years, party sources said today, reports AFP.

In a rare act of defiance, the President refused Tuesday to sign two ordinances forwarded by the cabinet which sought to fix job quotas for poor Christians and reduce the election campaign period from three to two weeks.

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**Tigers attack army post: 25 killed**

COLOMBO, Mar 20: Tamil rebels attacked a military base on an island off northern Sri Lanka early Wednesday, killing seven soldiers, military officials said, reports AP.

The soldiers repulsed the attack by the rebels, who arrived in boats on the Kays island, killing at least 18 guerrillas, said Maj. Tilak Dunuwille, a military spokesman.

Five soldiers were also injured in the attack on the island off the northern Jaffna Peninsula, 300 kilometers (190 miles) north of the capital, Colombo.

Tamil separatists have been fighting for a homeland since 1983. They accuse the Sinhalese majority of discrimination against the Tamil minority. More than 40,000 people have been killed.

**US to welcome Muslim aid to Bosnia**

WASHINGTON, Mar 20: Muslim money to build up Bosnia's army would be welcome, the State Department said Tuesday, but Iranian weapons would not, reports AP.

At the same time, a department spokesman again reported no decline in the size of a mainly Iranian and Afghan foreign fighting contingent in the former Yugoslav republic.

And with a US programme to train and equip the army shelved until the fighters are expelled, Iraq stepped forward with an Islamic offer to take on the job.

In a Sarajevo interview with the Washington Times, Iran's ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mohamed Taherian, said members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference discussed details of a multilateral and package at a meeting last Wednesday in Islamabad, Pakistan.

The United States pledged 100 million dollars and Turkey 2 million dollars at a doors conference in Ankara last Friday, but other countries there were skeptical.

**Louis Farrakhan criticised for his remarks on US**

WASHINGTON, Mar 20: Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan was criticised on Tuesday for verbal attacks he made on the United States during his recent Mideast trip at a Congressional hearing attended by an overflow crowd of his supporters, reports Reuter.



Thousands of Sarajevans cross into the formerly Serb-held suburb of Grbavica as it reverts to Muslim-Croat federation control after four years of Bosnian Serb domination on Tuesday. Grbavica is the last of five Serb-held areas of Sarajevo to change hands under the terms of the Dayton peace agreement signed last year. — AFP/UNB photo

Kashmiris oppose polls in Apr

NEW DELHI, Mar 20: Kashmir's pro-militant politicians sharply criticised the federal government on Wednesday for scheduling the first election in war-torn state in six years, reports AP.

Last week, a Cabinet minister in New Delhi held India's first top-level negotiations with a group of Kashmiri militants, and he called the meeting with the nine rebels "a welcome beginning."

The federal government believes Kashmiris are getting tired of war and are willing to elect officials who could negotiate about limited autonomy for the state.

On Tuesday, India's Election Commission said elections will be held across India on April 27, May 2, 7 and 21, for a new 545-member Lok Sabha, the powerful lower house of Parliament.

Militant groups have been fighting for the independence of Jammu-Kashmir state since 1989, and many people supported the rebels by boycotting the last election held there that year.

But the All Party Hurriyat Conference, an organisation of 32 pro-militant political and religious groups in Kashmir, opposed the talks. And it took a similar stance regarding the election.

The Indian government is now trying to persuade Kashmiri civilians and militants to lay down their arms and participate in peace talks and elections aimed at ending the insurrection.

The election will be an experiment and an exercise in futility, Abdul Ghani Butt, a leader of the Hurriyat Conference, told reporters in Srinagar on Wednesday.

The Indian government is simply trying to turn Kashmir into a laboratory where it keeps on experimenting," he said.



Muslim women walk past a security bunker, put up to check the movements of Muslim rebels, in the Lal Chowk commercial district of Srinagar on Monday. Kashmiri are getting accustomed to heavy security in the streets of India's summer capital and even trespass security positions which were previously avoided. — AFP/UNB photo

US plans to go ahead with arms shipment to Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Mar 20: The Clinton administration notified the Senate today that it plans to go ahead with a long-delayed weapons shipment to Pakistan worth hundreds of millions of dollars, the Washington Post reported today, says Reuter.

Under the reported decision, Pakistan will finally be allowed to get navy P-3C military aircraft, Harpoon and AIM-9L missiles along with other army and air force gear worth 368 million US dollars.

It would also get roughly 120 million US dollars in cash that it paid in the late 1980s for US weapons that were never manufactured, as well as some new US aid worth tens of millions of dollars for its counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and peacekeeping efforts, the Post quoted US officials as saying.

Some lawmakers in both parties had asked the administration to hold up the shipment again when they learned of Pakistan's alleged recent purchase of specialised magnets from China for use in centrifuges that make enriched uranium, a key ingredient of nuclear arms.

The notification to the Senate was given during an unpublished visit by senior administration officials. A similar briefing is planned for House of Representatives lawmakers on Thursday, the Post said.

A Pentagon spokesman, air force Major Bruce Fitch, said he had no information about the reported decision to release weapons to Pakistan.

programme to build nuclear weapons. Under Clinton administration and Pakistani pressure last year, however, Congress in November approved a one-time exemption to the US law to let the deal go through.

Iraq has rebuilt military into regional power: US

WASHINGTON, Mar 20: Iraq's Saddam Hussein has rebuilt his forces into a smaller, stronger, better-trained military that once again poses the most dangerous short-term threat in the Gulf, a top US general said Tuesday, reports AP.

He's done a superb job of downsizing by consolidating forces and making his forces ready," said Gen. Binford Peay III.

Although Iraq has not mustered a force as large as the one that invaded Kuwait in 1990, it has modernised to a strength well beyond that of its neighbours, Peay told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Many of the top Iraqi military commanders who failed to stop the allied onslaught in 1991 have been replaced with a new generation of officers, many of whom got their training in the 1980s overseas — including in the United States, Peay said.

Peay, chief of the US Central Command, appeared with three other senior officers who urged lawmakers not to cut the defense force further or reduce America's overseas presence.

Peay was joined by Gen. George Joulwan, NATO military commander and chief of the US European Command; Gen. John Sheehan, chief of the Atlantic Command, and Adm. James Perkins III, acting chief of the Southern Command.

UN report says Ethnic separation forces still strong in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 20: Despite an end to the fighting the "forces of ethnic separation" in Bosnia remain far stronger than those who still want a multi-ethnic state, according to a UN report obtained Tuesday, reports AP.

The report by Carl Bildt, the senior UN official in Bosnia-Herzegovina, also warned of a rift in the US sponsored Muslim-Croat Federation and urged the international community to move quickly to help rebuild the economy devastated by four years of war.

Bildt's report to the Security Council was to be released Wednesday. UN officials said. The Associated Press obtained a draft copy Tuesday.

In the report, Bildt spoke of "extensive and constructive" cooperation between the United Nations and the US led multinational force which replaced UN peacekeepers under the Dayton peace accords.

Off the Record

**Pick-pocket police**

NEW DELHI: A New Delhi police constable was arrested for picking the pocket of a passenger in a crowded bus here, a day after four other policemen were held for attempted robbery, officials said Wednesday, reports AFP.

**Ocean-going bottle as message carrier**

LONDON: A British girl who put a message in a bottle and threw it into the sea was astounded to receive a reply three years later from half way round the world, reports Reuter.

**Police sent to reinforce troops in Cambodia**

**The spoils of war for Afghans — ruins and refugees**

KABUL, Mar 20: To the victors will go the spoils of war: a capital razed by rocket fire, a nation of impoverished refugees and a crippled economy whose development has been set back 35 years, reports AP.

Even if Afghanistan's civil war finally ends — and no immediate end is in sight — the nation will be haunted for decades by a legacy of devastation.

If we had a billion dollars right now to spend on rebuilding the country we could only bring it back to the level it was at in 1960," says Faramullah Tarzi, Afghanistan's nominal government.

Warplanes, rockets and mortars have thrashed Kabul, its people and its industry. Heaps of concrete slabs and twisted reinforcement rods clutter the sides of the capital's Jaday Maiwand Avenue.

1.7 billion dollars in annual regional trade through the mountain passes that separate Central Asia from the Indian subcontinent.

many warlords and the government. Other than opium, Afghanistan's farmers and traders are left with cotton, foodstuffs and handicrafts. Although Afghanistan is rich in natural resources, it does not have the means to extract or transport them to markets outside the country.

GCC leaders keen to enhance unity of member states

KUWAIT CITY, Mar 20: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders are keen for enhancing unity of member states, visiting new GCC Secretary General Jami Al-Hojjailan told Kuwait News Agency KUNA yesterday, reports Xinhua.

During his one-day visit here, Al-Hojjailan held talks with Kuwaiti Amr Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah soon after his arrival.

Al-Hojjailan said after the meeting that there were no differences but divergence in views with Qatar and his naming as new GCC Secretary General.

It is the right of Qatar to express its opinion and it will be at the service of all GCC member states," he said.