

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

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

Gong, on his first visit to China since taking office, is in China at the invitation of his counterpart, Qian Qichen, the report said. He is accompanied by five Foreign Ministry official and his wife, it said.

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. The victims, two men, two women and two children, were asleep when the tragedy struck, reports reaching here said. Four bodies had been extricated so far. The killed. belonging to three generations, were Sonam Blazor (80), Chonu. (77), Rinzing (33), Dolma (32), Wangud (12) and Tenzing (8)

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.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Grigory Karasin told a news briefing Ikeda was expected to hold talks with President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

"We believe a new step will be taken in strengthening good neighbourliness and an impulse will be given to further activisation of relations in various directions," Karasin said. 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.

The meeting, which has been in preparation for some time, comes at a time of increasingly strained relations between the United States and China over Taiwan, arms sales, trade and human rights.

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.

The bomb blew out the aluminum door at the street entrance to the Baisan International Hotel's Fitness 2000 health club and shattered windows in the lobby of the white, five-story building.

The official Gulf News Agency said it was planted in a stairwell on the first underground level. It said the explosion eracked walls and smashed windows in the hotel's accounting offices, slightly injuring two employees with glass shards.

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

Graf had withdrawn from public life some time ago. Bavarian Radio, which chose him from 750 applicants in 1947 for a role on its children's programme, announced Tuesday that he had died in a Munich hospital.

Famous for his Bavarian dialect, he starred beginning in 1960 in "Comedy Stable," a sometimes coarse series of folksy skits in which Graf often played the happy scamp. As the father in the television play "The Three Polar Bears." he appeared with his great folk actor role models. Michl Lang and Franz Froehlich.

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.

The bodies of the victims, who were seized at gunpoint on Sunday in Midsayap on Mindanao Island, were found along the national highway, a police report said. Among the victims were a 10-year-old girl and her father. Police said they had no idea about the motive for the murders

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. Demirel, who arrived in Egypt earlier Tuesday, also discussed with Mubarak the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported.

### 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 for-warded by the cabinet which sought to fix job quotas for poor Christians and reduce the election campaign period from three to two weeks.

Sharma's decision came just hours before the Election Commission announced that parliamentary polls would be held between April 27 and May 21, refusing a ruling party request to delay the vote.

"It is a setback to us," said a source in the Congress (I) Party of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, who faces an acid test in the polls which are widely expected to end in a

Tigers attack

army post:

25 killed

rebels attacked a military base

on an island off northern Sri

Lanka early Wednesday, killing

seven soldiers, military offi-

attack by the rebels, who ar-

rived in boats on the Kayts is-

land, killing at least 18 gueril-

las, said Maj. Tilak Dunuwille, a

jured in the attack on the is-

land off the northern Jaffna

Peninsula, 300 kilometers

(190 miles) north of the capi-

fighting for a homeland since

1983. They accuse the Sin-

halese majority of discrimina-

tion against the Tamil minor-

ity. More than 40,000 people

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

partment spokesman again

reported no decline in the size

of a mainly Iranian and Afghan

foreign fighting contingent in

to train and equip the army

shelved until the fighters are

expelled, Iran stepped forward

with an Islamic offer to take on

the Washington Times. Iran's

ambassador to Bosnia-Herze-

govina, Mohamed Taherian,

said members of the Organisa-

tion of Islamic Conference dis-

cussed details of a multilateral

and package at a meeting last

Wednesday in Islamabad. Pak-

Turkey 2 million dollars at a

doors conference in Ankara

last Friday, but other countries

Louis Farrakhan

criticised for his

remarks on US

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 at-

tended by an overflow crowd of

his supporters, reports Reuter.

was not asked to testify before

the House of Representatives

Subcommittee, but scores of

supporter's jammed the hear-

Leonard Muhammed, inter-

rupted the hearing to try to

ask a question but was ruled

out of order. In another inci-

dent, a woman, who shouted

out during the hearing was

removed from the room by

ing room and the corridors

Farrakhan's chief of staff

International

capitol police.

outside.

The Nation of Islam leader

Relations

WASHINGTON, Mar 20:

there were skeptical.

The United States pledged

million dollars and

istan.

In a Sarajevo interview with

And with a US programme

the former Yugoslav republic.

At the same time, a de-

Tamil separatists have been

Five soldier were also in-

The soldiers repulsed the

cials said, reports AP.

military spokesman.

tal, Colombo.

have been killed.

COLOMBO, Mar 20: Tamil

hung parliament. The opposition had pressed President Sharma not to sign the two ordinances, and had been simultaneously urging the Election Commission to come out with the election dates.

Opposition leaders accused the Congress of trying to appease Christian, who form less than three per cent of India's 930 million population, before the vote in a bid to beef up the party's dwindling support base.

"The President has upheld the highest traditions of democracy." spokeswoman Suhma Swarja of the Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party), the main opposition

The President "has thwarted the ruling party's maneuver to gain electoral mileage at the expense of the democratic process and constitutional norms," the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

The opposition wants wide ranging electoral reforms, but is opposed to the idea of piecemeal legislation, including the proposal to reduce the campaign period, ostensibly to reduce poll expenditure.

Congress sources said the Election Commission's refusal to delay the polls and go for parliamentary elections in Kashmir might upset the peace talks initiated by Rao with Muslim separatists in the troubled state this month.

"Naturally there will be a hardening of positions in Kashmir which won't be good for the government," a party officials said.

"We would have wanted these talks to go on for some time and then possibly the government could have announced the election dates," the official said. "Now things

may not work out the way we wanted them to."

Four former Muslim militants from Kashmir, where a separatist campaign has left more than 12,000 people dead since 1989, opened negotiations with the government in New Delhi last week.

The announcement of dates for the first general election since 1991 could have other ramifications.

Rao, who heads the Congress, was to travel to the northern state of Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday to open a factory but the trip could now be struck down by election officials as a poll-eve gimmick.

An estimated 600 million

Indians are eligible to take part in the April-May election of a new Lok Sabha, the 545 seat lower house of parliament.

The balloting will take place on April 27, May 2, May 7 and

- AFP/UNB photo

into a laboratory where i

keeps on experimenting," he

independence leader in the

Hurriyat Conference went even

Shabir Shah, another pro-

### 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 deci-sion, 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, counternarcotics and peacekeeping efforts, the Post quoted US officials as saying.

Pakistan purchased these arms in the late 1980s but was barred by US law from receiving them because of its alleged

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

Some lawmakers in both parties had asked the administration to hold up the ship-ment 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 unpublicised 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.

### 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

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

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 Commi-

· 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.

"What we have in Iraq is a downsized force significantly

upgraded, "Peay said, "weak in air, strong in army, that is significantly more capable than the other neighbouring states are able to handle." Before the Gulf War,

Saddam Hussein's military consisted of 51 divisions. Today the Iraqi leaders has 23 divisions, but they may be much more capable than those of six years ago. Many of the top Iraqi mili-

tary 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 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: a draft copy Tuesday. Despite an end to the fightingthe "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

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.

He also said that life was "slowly returning to normality" throughout the country. "We must regrettably con-

clude that the forces of ethnic separation are still far stronger than the forces of ethnic reintegration," Bildt said. He questioned "the will of the parties themselves" to achieve reconciliation, without which "there will be distinct limits to what the international community can do."

# 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. Head Constable Anil Kumar was taken into custody on

Tuesday after he stole the passenger's purse containing 150 rupees (4.50 dollars), said a police spokesman. On Monday, four policemen were arrested after they tried

to steal gold worth 285,000 dollars from four Indians returning from Dubai. Ocean-going bottle

threw it into the sea was astounded to receive a reply three years later from half way round the world, reports Reuter.

The question is difficult to answer — the Guinness Book of

#### as message carrier LONDON: A British girl who put a message in a bottle and

· The bottle launched by Vicki Thomas, now 11, at Bognor Regis. southern England travelled 16,000 km (9,900 miles) to Geraldton, western Australia where it was picked up by 29year-old Andrew Fitch. The Sun newspaper reported. Her wrote back to Vicki, saying: "that bottle travelled a long way — I wonder if it's a record."

Records does not have an entry for ocean-going bottles.

#### Police sent to reinforce troops in Cambodia

PHONM 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 guerillas 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 Khimer Rouge

The police will secure and patrol captured areas as the army advances toward the town a field officer who requested anonymity told the Associated Press by telephone

# The spoils of war for Afghans — ruins and refugees KABUL, Mar 20: To the vic-

tors 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

> tion 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 Famidullah Tarzi, economic affairs minis ter in Afghanistan's nominal

nation will be haunted for

decades by a legacy of devasta-

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. The debris is all that is left of the street's once fashionable shops and a popular movie theatre

Once a bustling Central Asian trade hub. Kabul has no formal industry and only the scant remnants of infrastructure

Huddled around fires burning in old oil drums, the few merchants try to ward off the cold of Aighanistan's unforgiving winter Heating fuel is scarce and the city's electricity has been off more than two

The little trade that does go on slows to a trickle during the winter when supply routes are cut off by snow and the usual lighting.

Ten years ago, Afghanistan was the conduit for more than

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

A million deaths later. Alghanistan's trade partners are gone. The country is a pariha in the international business community

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund won't even consider longterm loans to us," Tarzi said. They say we lack the political stability. I say. "How are we supposed to get a political stability until we get economic

Afghans must rely on the few viable exports they have including opium. A recent UN survey estimated Afghanistan produced about 2.400 tons of opium last year, the revenue divided among the country's

many warlords and the government. Other than opium, Afghan-

. istan'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

Before Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Kabul used to export more than 160 million dollars a year worth of natural gas to the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union

"The first thing we need is peace," said Mohammad Moshani, a senior economic analyst in Kabul. "From there we must focus on rebuilding so the people have hope." But the country's economic

indicators - or those that are

when a Marxist regime began to crumble from a long rebellion. The economy plummeted after the communists lost and rival rebel groups began fight-

still recorded - leave the

the World Banks and

Afghanistan's Ministry of

Commerce, the country's de-

cline began in the late 1980s

According to figures from

Afghans with little to go on.

ing each other in the early 1990s. In 1985, at the height of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the country exported 670.5 million dollars worth of goods. Six years later,

with the communist regime

nearing collapse, exports had

dropped to 236 million dol-Today, after three years of warfare in and around Kabul, exports have all but yanished.

"We don't even keep an exact measure anymore." Tarzi said. "It's a trickle, under a hundred million dollars a

Annual imports, however, still hover around 1 billion doltars, he said.

For the government, the heavy tariffs imposed on imports are an important source of revenue to pay the day-today bills, including salaries.

More than 20,000 jobs linked to the city's factories have been lost in less than three years. Moshani said.

The few remaining skilled labourers in Kabul - those who have not been killed, recruited for fighting or fled - rely on the city's open markets for a livelthood.

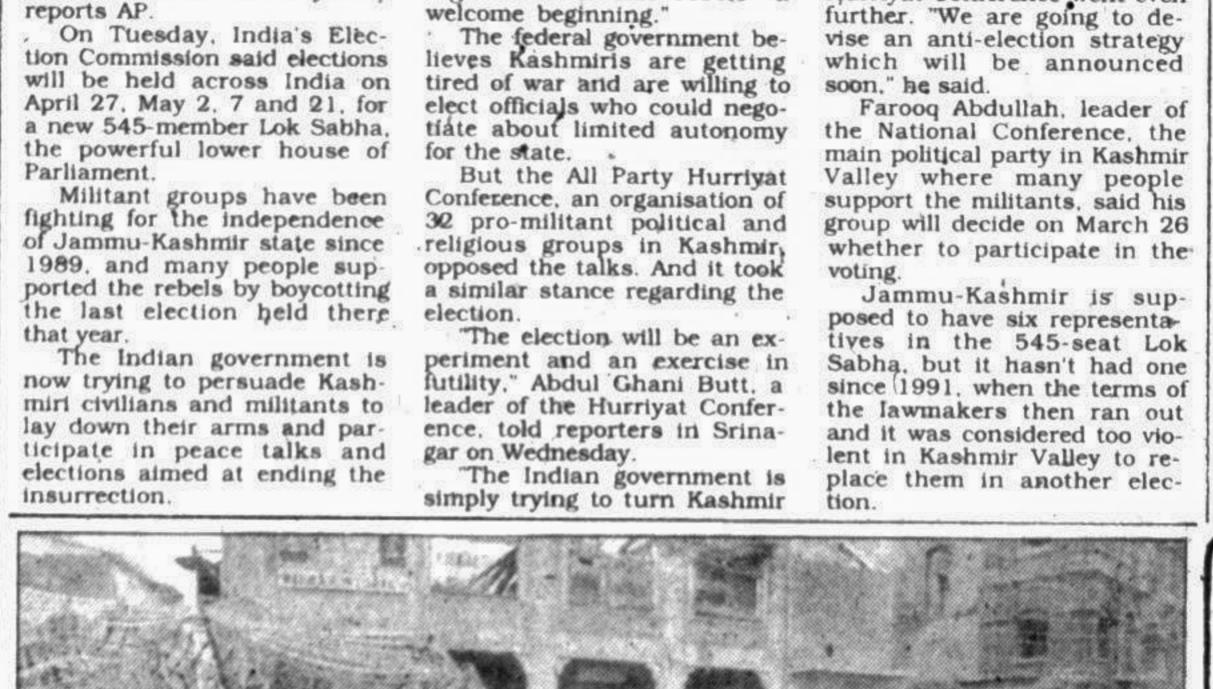
#### GCC leaders keen to enhance unity of member states

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

During his one-day visit here Al-Hojeilan held talks with Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah soon after his arrival. Al-Hojeilan said after the

meeting that there were no differences but divergence in views with Qatar and his naming as new GCC Secretary Gen-It is the right of Qatar to

express its opinion and "I will be at the service of all GCC. member states," he said.



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

Kashmiris oppose polls in Apr

ter in New Delhi held India's

first top-level negotiations

with a group of Kashmiri mili-

tants, and he called the meet-

ing with the nine rebels "a

Last week, a Cabinet minis-

the Dayton peace agreement signed last year.

NEW DELHI, Mar 20: Kas-

hmir's pro-militant politicians

sharply criticised the federal

government on Wednesday for

scheduling the first election in

war-torn state in six years.



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 tresspass security positions which were previously avoided. - AFP/UNB photo