

# BRIEFLY

**Kissinger's Thailand visit begins:** Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger yesterday began a three-day official visit to Thailand during which he will meet the country's leadership to discuss the country's economic turmoil. AFP reports from Bangkok.

Kissinger arrived in Bangkok ahead of a planned meeting with Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan at the start of the visit at the invitation of the Thai Foreign Ministry. Thai officials reportedly want to lobby Kissinger, an elder statesman and secretary of state during a key period of US foreign policy in the 1970s, to lobby US leaders to lend their support to Bangkok during its crisis.

**ROK officer killed in chopper crash:** A South Korean army warrant officer was killed and another injured Wednesday when their helicopter crashed in a Seoul residential area, police said. AP reports from Seoul.

The four-seat 500-MD helicopter was on a routine training mission when it crashed onto the roof of a four-story building on the capital city's southside, they said. There were no casualties on the ground, police said.

**Nationwide power outage in Lanka:** An unexplained nationwide power failure brought work to a standstill in Sri Lanka on Wednesday afternoon. AP reports from Colombo.

An hour into the outage, engineers were still struggling to find what was wrong, said Neil Perera, vice chairman of the Ceylon Electricity Board. But there was no immediate evidence of sabotage, and the cause was likely to be a mechanical fault, said Perera.

**Algeria rejects UN probe into massacre:** Algeria has rejected a United Nations probe into the massacres in the country even as two powerful bombs exploded in the country killing six, taking the toll to 45 slaughtered in the last two days. PTI reports from Paris.

We had hoped that the Algerian government would agree to issue an invitation to the UN special rapporteurs in Geneva to visit, but they were not ready to do so. We regret this, Britain's Derek Farchett, one of the three UN foreign ministers of the European Union mission, told a news conference in Algiers last night.

**New Qatari DPM named:** The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, issued a decree Tuesday naming Sheikh Mohammad bin Khalifa al Thani as deputy prime minister. AFP says from Doha.

Sheikh Mohammad had occupied the position of minister of finances, economy and commerce. According to the decree, the portfolios for finances, economy and commerce will be taken by Yussef Hussein Kamal.

**4 Indians killed in Mexico:** Four members of a leftist Indian peasant group were killed and 10 others were injured in a shootout near Oaxaca, official sources said Tuesday. AFP reports from Oaxaca.

The victims reportedly belonged to Ubiort — the union for the social well being of the Triqui region, spokesmen for the group said the were attacked by a rival organisation, the Movement for Unity of the Triqui Struggle (MULI). Last year some 30 people were killed in clashes between the two groups in the Oaxaca area, one of the poorest in Mexico.

**Quake strikes Taiwan:** An earthquake measuring 5.3 on the Richter Scale rattled southeast Taiwan yesterday but no casualties were reported, the Central Weather Bureau said. AFP reports from Taipei.

The tremor, the fifth this month, struck at 7:29 AM (2329 GMT Tuesday) with its epicentre 12.5 kilometres west of Taitung and 7.8 kilometres under the earth's surface. An earthquake measuring 5.0 on the Richter Scale can cause moderate damage in a built up area.

**12 killed in India road mishap:** Twelve occupants of a jeep were killed on the spot when their vehicle and a truck collided near Basavakalyan in Bidar district of Karnataka yesterday night, according to police. PTI reports from Bangalore.

The victims, including five women, were returning to Maharashtra from Hyderabad after visiting a pilgrimage spot, the truck was on its way to Hyderabad when the mishap occurred on national highway nine, police said.

**Iraq frees 68 Jordanian prisoners:** Iraq on Wednesday freed 68 Jordanian prisoners, including two women handing them over to a Jordanian opposition leader who will take most of them back home. AFP reports from Baghdad.

The prisoners returned with joy and carrying Iraqi flags and pictures of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, arrived at the Rashid Hotel in Baghdad to meet pro-Iraqi opposition leader Layth Shbeilat. Fifty of them will return to Amman in a convoy led by Shbeilat, a high-profile Islamist leader in Jordan while 18 have decided to stay in Iraq.

**US to stick with embargo on Cuba:** The United States will stick with its three decade-old embargo on Cuba until the Caribbean nation moves toward democracy. President Bill Clinton said Tuesday. AFP reports from Washington.

"We want Cuba to move toward freedom and openness, and if they do we'll respond," Clinton said. That's always been our position, and I believe in the end it will prevail. The president said after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

**Congolese opposition leader held:** The leader of one of the main opposition parties in Congo was arrested Tuesday for the second time in three months. AP reports from Kinshasa.

Soldiers seized Joseph Olenghankoy, head of the Innovative Forces for Union and Solidarity, at his Kinshasa office, a party official said on condition of anonymity. Government officials could not be reached for comment Tuesday night. Olenghankoy was seized by eight soldiers who burst into his office as two vehicles of uniformed men waited outside the building, party officials added, condemning his seizure.

**Czech president re-elected:** Vaclav Havel, 61, was re-elected Tuesday to a new five-year term as Czech president in the second round of voting, the Czech news agency CTK reported. AFP says from Prague.

The former dissident playwright won 99 votes from the 197 deputies present, and 47 out of the 81 Senators, giving him the majority needed in the two houses of parliament. Earlier Havel, who led the 1989 Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, had failed to Garner the majority required in a first round of voting, winning 91 votes in the 200-member lower house and 39 in the 80-seat Senate.



American actress Linda Gray, left, talks with Dr. Nafis Sadik, executive director of the United Nations Population Fund, after a UN news conference, Tuesday. Gray will lead an international advocacy campaign for reproductive health care, gender equality and the empowerment of women throughout the world. In her capacity as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund, she will direct the "Face to Face" campaign. — AP/UNB photo

## International

Clinton, Netanyahu hold second meeting

# Israel rejects US proposal for military withdrawal from WB

WASHINGTON, Jan 21: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected US President Bill Clinton's proposals for Israeli military withdrawal from the West Bank, a senior US official said early today. reports AFP.

"I think we have a lot of work to do still to revive the stalled Middle East peace process," the official said after the two leaders ended 90 minutes of unscheduled late night talks that followed formal talks earlier Tuesday.

The President outlined a suggestion as to what he thought was necessary and Prime Minister Netanyahu felt that was not something he could do, said the official, who asked not to be identified.

Clinton put forth his plan for an Israeli pullout during the first session with Netanyahu. Netanyahu explained why and we tried to explain possible solutions to his concerns, but they were not enough," the official added, without providing details on Clinton's proposal, which he said did not involve any maps.

Before the late night meeting began, however, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said that the two leaders would focus

on "appropriate elements for a further (Israeli) redeployment that is timing, the quality, quantity and of course, security aspects involved in that."

Israeli Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh, who attended the White House meetings said today on Israeli radio that the talks "went off in a good atmosphere... and enabled some progress to be made."

President Clinton expressed a desire to cooperate with Netanyahu to move forward in the peace process and both agreed that the Palestinians have to keep to their share of the commitments made in the Hebron agreement of January 15, 1997. Naveh added.

Under that accord, Israel handed over control of Hebron to the Palestinians and the latter pledged to crack down on anti-Israeli militants and reduce the size of the Palestinian security forces.

He said Clinton and Netanyahu had not scheduled any new meeting in the near future. Speculation continued that Albright might travel to Europe in upcoming weeks to continue the dialogue with Netanyahu.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is scheduled to meet here with Clinton on Thursday.

Arafat and French President Jacques Chirac on Tuesday issued a joint plea for peace and support for Clinton's efforts to revive the stalled Middle East peace process. Arafat visited Paris after a stopover in Cairo.

The senior US officials stressed that Clinton and Netanyahu had a very intensive discussion of a full range of issues, including the question of further redeployment, security steps by the Palestinians and what the Israelis require, what would be the timetable (of the military withdrawal). On some issues, he added, "We're closer to an agreement than on others."

"I think there is a very clear understanding by Prime Minister Netanyahu of what the President believes is necessary to get these negotiations resumed," the officials said.

"I think we have a good understanding from the Prime Minister of what he believes he can and can't do," he added.

The officials described the discussions as good and useful, but, he added, "We have a considerable distance to go."

The second, unscheduled, Clinton-Netanyahu meeting took place at Clinton's living quarters in the East Wing of the White House. It ended shortly

after midnight.

Also attending the talks were Albright, Clinton's National Security Adviser Sandy Berer and Naveh.

The administration has been pressing Netanyahu to carry out a "credible and significant" West Bank troop withdrawal, but the US has not publicly quantified the percentage of the territory it thinks should be placed under the control of the Palestinian authority.

Israeli radio said Clinton had persuaded the Palestinians to be content for the time being with an Israeli withdrawal from 15 per cent of the West Bank.

The Israeli daily Haaretz, meanwhile, quoted an Israeli official as saying "the Americans are trying to convince Israel to withdraw from between 11 and 14 per cent of the West Bank."

Netanyahu has now held seven hours of practically non-stop discussion in Washington with Clinton. Vice President Al Gore and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

The senior US official said Netanyahu's programme in Washington remained unchanged with the departure scheduled for later Wednesday.

## 19 Congressmen held for burning effigy of Shiv Sena chief

MUMBAI, Jan 21: At least 19 Congressmen, including a corporator were arrested in Thane city today after they burnt an effigy of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray there protesting his alleged anti Sonia Gandhi remarks at an election meeting in Kolhapur on Sunday last, reports PTI.

Police sources told PTI that the effigy was torched near the Thane state transport bus stand this afternoon. corporator Balkishna Puranik and 18 Congress activists were taken into custody but released later.

Thackeray in his speech at Kolhapur had said that leadership of an Italian woman would not be acceptable to the Indian people.

The Sena supremo is also alleged to have made several personal remarks against Sonia and the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) has sent a letter to the election commission alleging it was a violation of the model code of conduct.

## Priyanka won't contest in upcoming polls

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: The daughter of slain former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi has said she will not run for Parliament in India's upcoming general election, newspapers reported Wednesday. reports AP.

Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra, along with her mother, Sonia Gandhi, have been offered constituencies in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh where the Congress Party is desperately trying to regain some control.

On Tuesday during Priyanka 25, a election rally in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, Priyanka 25, said no when asked if she intended to run. The Times of India reported.

## Clinton calls for negotiating ban on landmines

GENEVA, Jan 21: President Clinton has urged the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament (CD) to begin negotiating a global ban on anti-personnel landmines, reports USIS.

Clinton's message was read to the conference's 1998 opening session by Robert T. Grey, the new United States representative to the CD.

"As you resume your critical efforts to strengthen global security, I pledge the full support of the United States Delegation in taking the next steps in the nuclear disarmament process and banning anti-personnel landmines from the face of the earth," Clinton said in the message.

The president also urged the conference to begin negotiating a cutoff of production of the fissile material used for nuclear explosives.

## Cuba denies visas to foreign journalists

NEW YORK, Jan 21: Cuba has denied visas to dozens of foreign journalists wishing to cover the pope's visit this week because they have written stories critical of Fidel Castro's government, the Committee to Protect Journalists charged Tuesday. reports AP.

"A policy of denying journalists visas to travel to Cuba in reprisal for carrying out their professional responsibilities constitutes an attack on the press and a violation of international law," the New York-based rights group wrote in a letter to the Cuban president.

It also cited persecution of Cuban journalists over the past several months, saying Cuba sentenced one writer to six years in prison for showing a "lack of respect" toward Castro and another government official.



Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, left, joins former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, right, and World Bank President James Wolfensohn, centre, into a group handshake after signing the West Bank and Gaza Investment Fund agreement. — AP/UNB photo

## UN weapons inspection in Iraq US still favours diplomatic solution to crisis

TOKYO, Jan 21: US Defence Secretary William Cohen said today that the United States still wanted a diplomatic rather than a military solution to the crisis over inspection of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, reports Reuters.

Cohen, who is in Tokyo on an Asian tour, said the next step in the saga depended on a report to the UN Security Council on Friday by the UN's chief weapons inspector Richard Butler on his talks this week with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and other officials.

Butler has been negotiating to end Iraqi restrictions on inspections of Iraqi weapons that have threatened to spark a new show on between Iraq and the West.

Asked at a news conference if the United States was closer to a military attack on Iraq in view of latest developments in the crisis, Cohen replied: "We are still seeking a diplomatic solution."

In comments in Baghdad on Tuesday, Butler said the dispute over access for arms monitors could not drag on indefinitely and "I don't think this play has got many acts left."

Iraq has said that the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) should have completed its work years ago, and Butler said Aziz

had also told him that Iraq had no fresh fields to give him on its weapons of mass destruction.

The latest crisis erupted last week when Baghdad barred an UNSCOM inspection team led by former US marine officer Scott Ritter, accusing him of being a spy.

Cohen said United States involvement in the UNSCOM teams was vital for the credibility and unity of the inspection work.

"The US is part of the inspection teams and to the extent that the US is precluded from conducting its inspection efforts it would certainly have an impact upon the unity that UNSCOM has maintained and undercut its credibility as far as I'm concerned," he said.

But Cohen said that while the final decision on the position of the UNSCOM teams was up to Butler, he anticipated there would be no change in US involvement.

Another reports from Washington says: The United States has expressed confidence that it would receive support from other government if military action against Iraq was ever required.

State Department spokesman James Rubin reiterated the long-held US view that military action against Iraq in a weapons dispute is not ruled out.

And when and if the time comes, we are confident that those, whose assistance we need and whose support we have seen in the past will be with us, he added.

Rubin was speaking at a news briefing yesterday after US arms inspector Richard Butler ended talks in Baghdad and said that he was dispirited by what he had heard in them.

## Clash leaves 7 dead in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, Jan 21: Six Indian border guards and a Muslim separatist guerrilla died in a gunbattle in the Indian state of Kashmir, an official said today. reports AFP.

The guards, part of a 10-man patrol, were shot in an ambush by around a dozen Muslim militants in a village some 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of Jammu late Tuesday.

A spokesman for the border security force said a "foreign" militant died in the gunbattle but did not reveal his nationality.

## Lankan refugees seeking new life in India face despair

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI, India, Jan 21: Every week, dozens of Tamils from war-torn Sri Lanka take secret boat rides to India, seeking a life of hope but generally finding one of despair, reports Reuters.

Only 65 kilometres from their traditional island homeland is the state of Tamil Nadu, whose people speak their language and where officials hand out money to live on.

Help from Indian relief authorities spells hope for more than 60,000 Tamils who have fled a bloody separatist war.

But many of the refugees also feel a sense of despair, as they long for their homes and their relative prosperity they once enjoyed in Sri Lanka.

In rickety shacks, the refugees wait for a political miracle to take them back to their palm-fringed homeland.

Some 60,000 of the more than 100,000 Tamils who have fled Sri Lanka for India live in 32 camps scattered across Tamil Nadu, around 2,000 of them live in two camps in this city, some 320 km from the state capital Madras.

Sitting near a single-storeyed building that houses rows of refugee tenements, SV Sivaguru, a 48-year old Tamil journalist from Colombo, mulls about his children's career prospects.

"While the Indian government and the Tamil people in India have done a lot to make us feel at home here, we are very worried about the future as our children's education is suffering," he said.

Fearing for his family's safety, Sivaguru fled Colombo in 1990, seven years after the liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched their guerrilla war.

More than 50,000 people have died in the war for a separate state called Tamil Eelam in the north and east of the island.

"Neither side can ensure a permanent peace on its own and you need the intervention of India," said SC Chandrasekaran of the Madras-based organisation for Eelam refugee rehabilitation.

Many refugees say they owned a boat, a truck, a piece of land or a shop in Sri Lanka before the war caused havoc.

Now, they live in hard conditions, and work in stone quarries or automobile workshops to supplement a monthly dole of 200 rupees (dollar 5) handed out by Indian authorities, who spend 150 million rupees (dollar 3.8 million) a year on the refugees.

The refugees, who get roughly 65 rupees (dollar 2) a day for their back-breaking work, are worried that their children sometimes skip classes at local government run schools or drop out altogether.

And although they complain about their miserable conditions, their ranks keep swelling.

At the port town of Dhanushkodi, Indian authorities routinely frisk boatloads of 30 to 40 Tamils every week, looking for separatist guerrillas among the refugees from across the Palk Strait, which separates India and Sri Lanka.

In 1987 New Delhi sent in troops to police a fragile peace accord it brokered between Colombo and the Tamil Tigers. Four years later, former



A model sports a long periwinkle blue and blueberry organza Maharanees sheath dress with all-over embroidery designed by Christian Lacroix during the 1998 Spring-Summer high fashion show in Paris Tuesday. — AP/UNB photo

## Off the Record

### Fast unto death for love!

NEW DELHI: For five days, Ashraf Jamal has perched on a communications tower high above bustling downtown New Delhi, tossing plaintiff pleas written on stiff sheets of paper to a curious crowd gathered below, reports AP.

Jamal says love has prompted his unusual protest, which he called in a missive Tuesday a "fast unto death." He refuses to come down until he can be reunited with the woman he claims to have married several years ago.

According to local newspapers, Jamal claims his Hindu wife, whom he met at university, was abducted by her parents because they would not accept her marriage to a Muslim. Inter-religious marriages are uncommon in India, where most unions are arranged by families.

### At last he realised

ABU DHABI: A United Arab Emirates (UAE) man with 49 children has abandoned his bid to set a local record of 60 because it will mean an additional financial burden, a newspaper reported on Tuesday. report AFP.

Salim Juma Mubarak has 22 sons and 27 daughters from six wives, three of whom he has divorced, the Khaleef Times said. "Salim has finally decided not to marry any more. He says he is now convinced that more marriages mean more children and consequently more financial burden," the paper said.

The 52-year-old man from the northern port of Ras Al-Khaimah said five years ago he wanted to set a record in the UAE by having at least 60 children.

## Britain praises China for keeping promises over HK

HONG KONG, Jan 21: Six months after he left Hong Kong to a new future under Chinese rule, Britain's foreign secretary awarded the former colony's Chinese rulers high marks Wednesday for keeping Hong Kong "genuinely free and prosperous," reports AP.

In his first visit since Britain handed Hong Kong back to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, Robin Cook said Beijing appeared to be keeping its promises that the territory would get a high degree of autonomy as a Special Administrative Region of China.

Hong Kong "has retained its character as a genuinely free and prosperous society," Cook said in a speech to the British Chamber of Commerce.

But Cook also qualified his praise, saying China did not have "a uniformly positive scoreboard."

He noted that Britain had protested when China replaced Hong Kong's elected legislature with an unelected body last July 1. London also has "real concerns" with the Hong Kong government's decision to shelve voting franchises in elections scheduled for May.

He urged the government to broaden the number of voters in affected constituencies and said it was "vital" that Hong Kong elections "are free and fair and seen to be so."

"We shall be watching closely to ensure that that is the case," he said.

But Democrat Martin Lee, a leading Hong Kong politician who was among the legislators thrown out of office when China took over, accused Britain of softening its criticism of the electoral changes.

"I'm disappointed that the British government is not standing firm to its original demands," he said after meeting Cook. The new election rules, Lee said, "are clearly unfair."

Cook, who arrived Tuesday from meeting Chinese leaders in Beijing, said that while the relationship between Britain and the territory it ruled for 156 years has changed in "a fundamental way," London's interest in Hong Kong "will endure and will grow."

Detractors who assumed that Hong Kong's commitment to Britain would end on July 1 "were wrong," he said.

"The friendships and trust that have built up are strong enough to survive," he said. "It is a relationship that is still flourishing. The potential is enormous."

More than 25,000 Britons live in Hong Kong. Britain is Hong Kong's largest foreign investor and Britain receives 80 per cent of Hong Kong's investment in Europe.

Cook urged British companies to take "full advantage" of the economic crisis buffeting Asia by strengthening their presence in Hong Kong.