

BRIEFLY

Japan hails ROK-DPRK accord:

The Japanese government hailed the signing in Seoul Friday of an agreement on reconciliation and non-aggression by the prime ministers of North and South Korea, reports AFP from Tokyo.

"It's epoch-making for North-South dialogue and will help ease tension on the Korean peninsula," Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe told a news conference.

Watanabe, also Deputy Prime Minister, said he strongly hoped that the signing of the document in Seoul would expedite a summit between the two Koreas.

The Foreign Minister said he believed the accord would also have a favourable impact on Japanese-North Korean negotiations to normalize diplomatic ties.

Lithuania, Ukraine set up ties:

Lithuania and Ukraine, two former Soviet republics, on Thursday established diplomatic relations, Tass news agency reported, says AFP from Moscow.

Charge d'Affaires will be sent to the respective capitals of Vilnius and Kiev, pending the opening of embassies there, the agency added.

Explosion kills 6 in Lanka:

Five Tamil guerrillas and a civilian were killed when their vehicle ran over a mine in northwest Sri Lanka, military sources said Friday, reports Reuter.

The vehicle exploded on Thursday when it went over pressure mines laid by security forces at Potkerny in Mannar district.

The rebels are fighting for a separate state for minority Tamils.

Earthquake hits Soviet islands:

A strong earthquake struck a string of Soviet islands between northern Japan and the Soviet Union on Thursday, the US Geological Survey said, reports AP from Washington.

There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. The area is remote and sparsely populated, said spokeswoman Rebecca Phipps.

The quake, measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale, struck the Kuril Islands, about 900 miles (1,450 kilometres) northeast of Tokyo between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean.

Phipps said the quake was the largest in the that area since June 30, 1982, when a temblor struck measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale.

Envoys in Belgrade call for peace:

The ambassadors in Belgrade of the United States, the Soviet Union and the Netherlands — the latter country representing the European Community — on Thursday made an "urgent appeal" for peace in Yugoslavia, Tanjug news agency said, reports AFP from Belgrade.

The agency, quoting the US Embassy here, said the three envoys made their appeal in a meeting with Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic and one of his aides, Deputy Defence Minister Stane Brovet.

The document called on Serbia, Croatia and the Yugoslav federal army to apply "totally and without delay," a cease-fire agreement that was signed under United Nations auspices on November 23 in Geneva.

Blast wounds 16 in N Ireland:

A huge bomb packed in a coal truck exploded Thursday night, wounding 16 people, wrecking a police station and damaging a Catholic church filled with worshippers, police said. The IRA claimed responsibility, reports AP from Belfast.

The one-ton (900-kilogram) bomb exploded in back of the Royal Ulster Constabulary station in Cradigavan, 25 miles (40 kilometres) southwest of Belfast, a Constabulary spokesman said.

A caller admitted responsibility on behalf of the outlawed Irish Republican Army in a telephoned message to the British Broadcasting Corp's Belfast office.

The blast left a 40-foot (12-metre-) wide crater and was heard more than 30 miles (50 kilometres) away. It blew out windows more than a mile away and sliced power cables, blacking out much of the town, the police spokesman said.

Six officers and 10 civilians were slightly hurt, he said, mostly suffering cuts from flying debris and glass splinters.

Major changes in NATO structure in offing

BRUSSELS, Dec 13: NATO agreed major changes on Thursday that will slim down the alliance's command structure and lay the ground for smaller, multinational units as the key to the West's defences in the post-cold war era, reports Reuter.

Alliance defence ministers meeting in Brussels agreed that the crisis in the Soviet Union did not affect the plans because the threat of a massive attack from the East no longer existed.

"The strategic concept remains as valid as ever. It remains the correct basis on which to proceed," British Defence Secretary Tom King told reporters.

NATO commands in Central and northern Europe — the front line during decades of confrontation with the now-dissolved Warsaw pact — will be reorganised and slimmed down.

A US general will remain in overall charge of alliance forces on the continent.

The ministers also approved secret military guidelines for implementing an overall strategy that was approved by NATO leaders at a summit in Rome last month.

That strategy says NATO will have to rely on smaller, more mobile forces to defend against possible new threats to the West from any direction, including new "rapid reaction" forces that can be deployed

from the arctic to the Mediterranean.

The idea is to save money in an era of shrinking defence budgets while still maintaining strong enough forces to deter any would-be aggressor.

The United States, NATO's senior member and the backbone of the West's defences, is planning to cut its forces in Europe by half to around 150,000 by 1995. Total NATO forces in Central Europe will be reduced by around half by the same date.

The military guidelines approved on Thursday, the first day of the two-day Brussels meeting, detail how the new strategy would work in practice. Final arrangements on the new forces will not be agreed until next year.

The document sets out the forces NATO needs in peacetime and puts a high premium on mobility, stressing the need for transport and logistics as well as high-quality intelligence.

It includes a reinforcement plan that no longer puts the onus on the United States to rush so many troops across the Atlantic in time of crisis.

It also lays out guidance for the use of nuclear weapons.

Although NATO plans to cut its nuclear stockpile in Europe by 80 per cent and sees the chance of ever having to use the weapons as remote, it says some are needed to guarantee peace.

Manila to file claims for loss during Gulf War

MANILA, Dec 13: The Philippines is preparing to file claims for millions of dollars against Iraq for losses during the Gulf war, it said today, reports Reuter.

The claims would cover remittances lost by Filipinos working in Kuwait and higher oil bills resulting from Iraq's invasion of the Emirate in August 1990. Foreign Secretary Real Manglapus told reporters.

They would also include losses by state-owned Philippine airlines due to higher insurance premiums.

those incurred by Filipino companies doing business in the area and those to be filed by Filipino workers allegedly raped by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait.

"We hope to accomplish the processing in six months so that when they open the window for processing in Geneva in June, we will be ready with all of our claims," he said.

Manglapus said each Filipino worker displaced by the fighting in the Gulf would ask for 4,000 dollars and that claims for personal damages could reach 100,000 dollars.

I'll resign if unified state is abolished: Gorbachev

PARIS, Dec 13: Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said he will resign if the Soviet Union is dissolved as a state, in an interview shown on television here late Thursday, reports AFP.

Asked whether he intended resigning, Gorbachev said: "I'll go, resign, resign," but only "if the unified state is abandoned."

In the interview, carried out by reporters from the non-official Interfax news agency and aired on French television, Gorbachev warned of the risk of "disintegration" in his country in the face of "disintegration" which is affecting the whole of society, including executive power.

Gorbachev said he was a "convinced democrat," and would respect desires of the parliaments in the republics.

"I will not allow anything else," he said.

The interview came as several other republics appeared to be planning to join the recently-announced commonwealth, which so far groups the Slavic republics of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (formerly Belorussia).

Creation of the new structure, which effectively signs the death warrant of the Soviet Union and the end of Gorbachev's attempts to form a new union, has accelerated the ebbing-away of the President's remaining power.

Few observers now believe that Gorbachev has any hope of restoring the Soviet Union in anything resembling its previous form.

Gorbachev was not even invited to the meeting at which it was set and it is planned to set up the capital of the commonwealth in the Belarus capital of Minsk rather than in Moscow.

The Soviet leader nevertheless

made a strong pitch for his own plans for a union treaty during the interview, and warned that the new commonwealth could well lead to "an explosion."

"I am convinced that we are

"I fear that we are putting a bomb under society, which is going to explode," he said, referring to the so-called Minsk accord that set up the commonwealth.

"That worries me. We

"The most important thing is to know how the commonwealth will be able to ensure the indispensable interaction needed to solve the problems of the economy, finance, and social problems," he went on.

"I fear that that will be very difficult to do."

"We are beginning to share out everything we have built up over 10 centuries. I don't believe I have the right to do that," Gorbachev said.

He also noted that the Minsk accord did not provide for a president or even a parliament, "there is nothing," he said. However he also said he was closely following the commonwealth process, and in particular a meeting currently underway between leaders of central Asian republics in the Turkmenistan capital of Ashkhabad.

"I'm talking to everyone. People are thinking, I'm not going to hustle them but I'm going to put over my point of view," he said.

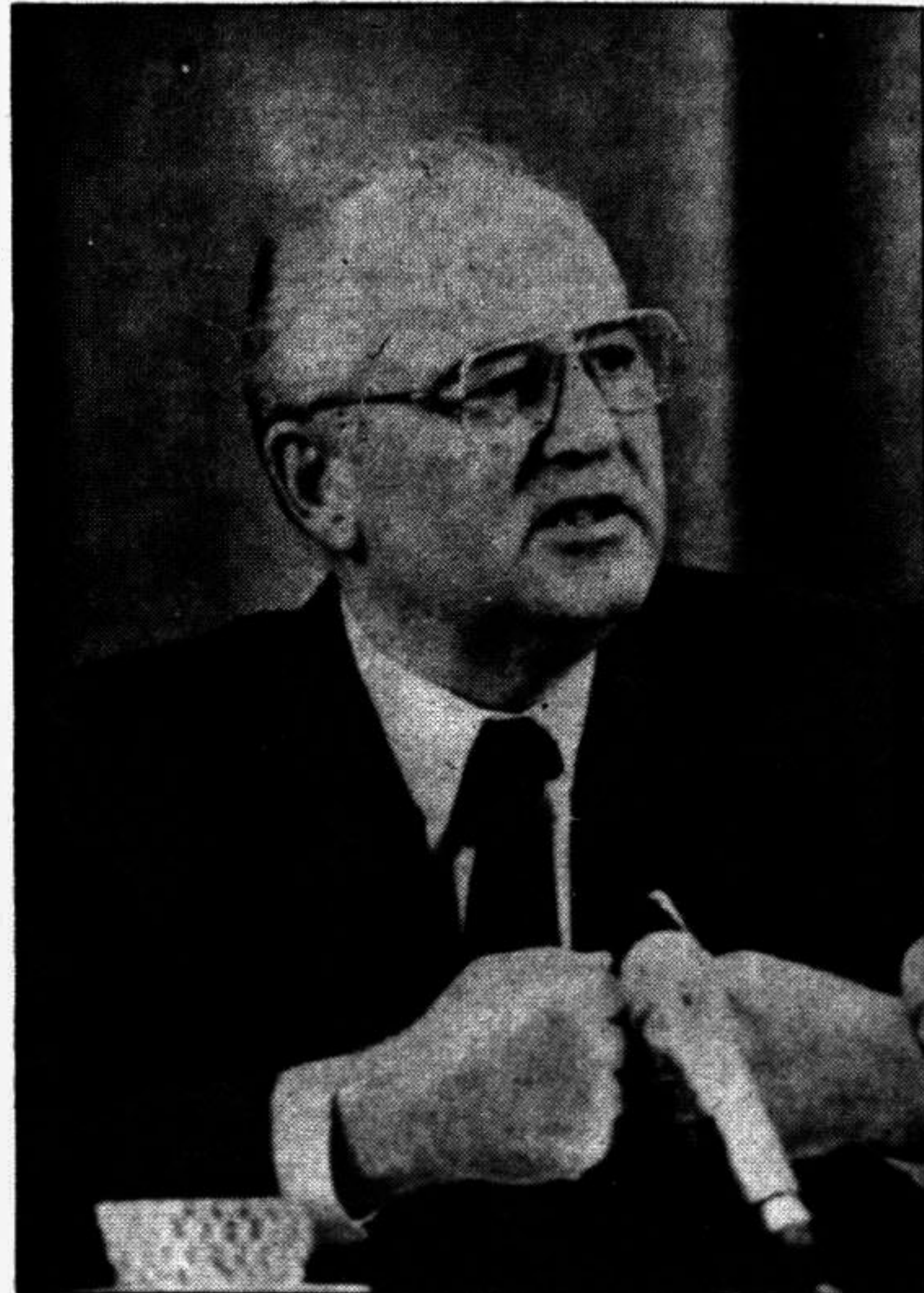
"There is something in this document, but there is no state," he said, referring to the Minsk agreement.

"A lot of things flow from that there is not even a union citizenship," he noted.

Gorbachev also bitterly attacked the leadership of the Russian federation, saying it had "played the Ukraine card" by pushing the republic to seek independence, when it should have been "looking for ways to get Ukraine out of its dead end."

Gorbachev also said that when the commonwealth plan was announced earlier this week, Russian leader Boris Yeltsin telephoned to US President George Bush to tell him of it, but did not call him in the Kremlin.

"How shameful! That's not very correct," he commented.



making the biggest mistake of all the years of Prestroika," Gorbachev said, referring to his former policy of "restructuring" the Soviet system.

should have looked for cooperation within the framework of the reformed union, so as not to encourage this process of disintegration within our society."

Fighting rages in Croatia

ZAGREB (Yugoslavia), Dec 13: Heavy fighting raged Friday on Croatia's central front, where Croat defenders reportedly have made badly needed gains in recent days, reports AP.

Fighting was reported around the towns of Sisak and Nova Gradiska southeast of Zagreb as well as around Pakrac and Lipik just to the north.

The embattled eastern Croatian stronghold of Osijek came under heavy attack overnight, local defense officials said. The Adriatic port of Zadar also came under fire.

Meanwhile in New York, UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar warned European nations that recognizing the independence of Croatia and neighboring Slovenia could widen the war in Yugoslavia. Both republics declared their independence on June 25.

Croatia and Slovenia reportedly plan to establish diplomatic relations next week, the Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency reported Thursday.

Germany and Austria have indicated they may recognize the two republics by the end of the year. The United States

opposes recognition.

"I am worried that any early, selective recognition could widen the present conflict and fuel an explosive situation, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina and also Macedonia," Perez de Cuellar said in a letter Wednesday to European Community leaders. It was released at the United Nations on Thursday.

The rump Serbian-dominated

presidency, in a statement issued to the federal Tanjug news agency, welcomed Perez de Cuellar's statement. It said recognizing the independence of any part of Yugoslavia would open the way to secessionism on European soil.

The statement reiterated that a solution to the Yugoslav crisis should be the "result of a democratic procedure, with all the nations of Yugoslavia participating."

It said "prejudging the outcome of this democratic way by other states" would violate international law.

Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and ethnically mixed Bosnia-Herzegovina have refused to attend sessions of the eight-man collective federal presidency for months, leaving what was Yugoslavia's top federal body truncated by half and comprising only Serbia and its allies.

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher also has campaigned for recognition of Croatia, which would allow EC countries to supply it with weapons to fight off the advance of the Serbian-led federal army.

Provincial radio monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation in London said the punishments were part of a crackdown on crime.

China executes nine criminals

BEIJING, Dec 13: Nine people have been executed in western China's Xinjiang province for crimes including gang rape and robbery, a local journalist said today, reports Reuter.

The executions in the capital, Urumqi, took place on Thursday immediately after the nine had been sentenced at a public rally, the Urumqi evening news journalist said by telephone.

Provincial radio monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation in London said the punishments were part of a crackdown on crime.

China recognizes Soviet Union's break-up

BEIJING, Dec 13: China, in a clear sign that it is moving to recognize the Soviet Union's breakup, has agreed in principle to establish ties with the Russian parliament, reports AP.

A "verbal understanding" was reached Thursday between a visiting delegation of Russian parliamentarians and Wan Li, the Speaker of China's parliament, Soviet embassy spokesman Konstantin Vnukov said here today.

Accord a great leap toward unity: Roh

SEOUL, Dec 13: South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo called today for an early meeting with North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung to set the stage for eventual reunification of the divided peninsula, state television said, reports Reuter.

Roh met North Korean Prime Minister Yon Hyong-Muk at the presidential blue house after the two Koreans signed a non-aggression accord aimed at ending four decades of cold war enmity.

During the talks, the president described the accord as a great leap towards Korean unity and asked You to work for an early summit between Roh and Kim, the Korea broadcasting system said.

Five drug traffickers held in HK

HONG KONG, Dec 13: Five foreign men were held here for questioning in connection with cannabis smuggling from Nepal via China, a police spokesman said today, reports AP.

The two Britons, one Canadian, one Dutchman and one Nepalese were taken in after several operations carried out during the week when police posing as buyers uncovered the case, he said.

Honecker to avoid extradition to Germany

MOSCOW, Dec 13: East German former leader Erich Honecker was holed up Thursday in the Chilean embassy here, determined to avoid extradition to Germany after Russia gave him until midnight Friday to leave the country, reports AFP.

The Russian delegation, which left Friday after an eight-day official visit, also met officials of China's cabinet-level state commission for restructuring the economy and proposed forming a joint economic commission with Beijing.

He stressed that no concrete pact had been reached, but said a formal agreement on parliamentary relations between China and its huge northern neighbour was possible.

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The United Nations would create demilitarised zones, containing some 600,000 residents of Serbian enclaves within Croatia, in Eastern and Western Slovenia and Krajina.

All armed forces in the enclaves would have to withdraw and all Yugoslav national army troops in Croatia would have to leave the republic, according to the UN plan.

The UN chief said the plan was backed by Serbia's president Slobodan Milosevic, Croatia's President Franjo Tudjman and the Yugoslav Defence Minister, General Valjko Kadjevic.

Off the Record

Christianity arrived with Columbus?

GAINESVILLE, Fla.: A tiny crucifix unearthed at the first settlement founded by Christopher Columbus may be the oldest symbol of Christianity in the Western Hemisphere, an archaeologist said, reports AP.

The 1.5-inch (3.5-centimetre) tall cross, which includes a representation of Jesus Christ, was found at La Isabela, where Columbus established the first European colony in the Americas nearly 500 years ago.

The cross is made of pewter and iron. A copper alloy was used for Christ's body.

"It is a direct expression of the Catholicism brought to the Americas by the Spanish," said Kathleen Deagan, an archaeologist from the University of Florida, who spent the past three years working on the excavation.

She and others worked with Venezuelan archaeologist Jose F. Cruxent in the excavation at the site in the Dominican Republic. They discovered a previously unknown settlement and evidence that wheel-thrown pottery was introduced 50 years earlier than previously thought.

Human hoover caught red handed

BANGKOK: A Brazilian who used his surgically-modified finger to such up diamonds with a tube and a pump has been arrested with his partner at a jewellery shop here, police said Friday, reports AFP.

Julio Cesar de Moraes Barros, described as a "human hoover" in local press reports, and Paulo Maripins dos Santos, also from Brazil, were caught at the shop on Thursday after police found diamonds worth 300,000 baht (12,000 dollars) under Barros' armpit, police said.

According to police, Barros had a small tube inserted to run from the tip of his left little finger to the forearm, where it exited then continued up to his armpit. A small pump, operated when the arm was flexed, sucked up the diamonds through the hole in his little finger.

The two, who arrived here on December 1, posed as customers and asked to see a box of diamonds at the shop, police said, adding that Barros allegedly started stealing the stones while Santos was holding the shopkeeper's attention.

Troops still surround Rangoon varsity campus

BANGKOK, Dec 13: Rangoon was quiet today as security forces maintained a high profile presence on the capital's streets in the wake of pro-democracy student protests earlier this week, foreign residents in the city said, reports AFP.

Thousands of students left the city to return to their homes in the provinces on Thursday, the day after all institutes of higher education in the country were closed indefinitely, the residents and Burma's official state radio said.

The university is quiet, most of the students have gone, but troops are still surrounding the campus, one resident said.

"They packed them on buses and escorted them out of the city Thursday," he added.

More students would be sent home today, officials Rangoon Radio said.

Scores of students were seen being shuttled out of Rangoon University campus in

prison vans during the two days of protests Tuesday and Wednesday, when up to 1,000 students staged rallies demanding democracy and the release of detained opposition leader and Nobel Peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Troops and riot police entered the campus Wednesday and ordered the students out at gunpoint. Hours later the junta officially shut down all colleges.

The house near Rangoon university campus where Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained for two and a half years, remained tightly sealed off by combat-ready troops and barbed wire barricades today.

Chile has said Honecker will not be granted political asylum, but the Chilean Foreign Ministry said Thursday Honecker would be allowed to remain in the embassy, where he sought refuge Wednesday, as a "guest."

Chile and the Soviet Union have no bilateral treaty on granting political asylum.

Bandaranaike hospitalised

COLOMBO, Dec 13: Former Sri Lankan Prime Minister Srimavo Bandaranaike was admitted to a Colombo hospital on Friday after complaining of leg pains and is undergoing a general check-up, her family and doctors said, reports Reuter.

"She has been admitted for a general check-up. She is out of danger," said Dr. J. B. Peiris, consultant neurologist at the Colombo General Hospital. Her condition is stable, he added.

Hospital sources said earlier that Bandaranaike, 75, was rushed to the hospital's Neurology Ward and may have suffered a stroke.

Pakistan to recognise Azerbaijan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: Pakistan is to recognise Azerbaijan, the Muslim majority former Soviet Republic, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said, reports Reuter.

Azerbaijan had asked Pakistan to recognise it and he was happy to do so. Sharif told reporters on Thursday as he returned from an Islamic summit in Dakar.

The decision would not harm Pakistan's relations with the Soviet Union, the official APP New Agency quoted him as saying.

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Imitations harm reputation

PARIS: The disciplinary council which oversees the Paris art market ordered the cancellation of an auction Thursday night featuring one-of-a-kind copies of eight well-known paintings, reports AP.

The copies of masterpieces by Van Gogh, Cezanne, Gauguin and others were to be offered for sale at the prestigious Drouot auction house. Organisers said advance bids as high as \$25,000 had been received.

However, the disciplinary council of the Parisian art dealers' association ordered the auction cancelled because it might harm "the reputation of the Paris market."