

BRIEFLY

Tanaka's condition improves: The condition of ailing former Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, 75, has stabilised and he is now out of intensive care, a Japanese daily reported Tuesday. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

The Sankei Shimbun said Tanaka who dominated Japanese politics for a decade before suffering a debilitating stroke in 1985 had been moved from the intensive care unit at a Tokyo hospital to an ordinary ward.

Malaysia won't attend APEC meet: Malaysia will not attend the US-hosted summit of leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Seattle later this month but will take part in its ministerial-level talks officials said on Tuesday. AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Thursday reaffirmed his decision not to attend and rejected suggestions that Malaysia would lose out by not being there.

Roger Moore undergoes surgery: Actor Roger Moore was recuperating at home after undergoing surgery to have his enlarged prostate removed, his publicist said Monday. AP reports from Beverly Hills.

The 65-year-old actor did not suffer from prostate cancer, said publicist Jerry Pam.

Moore, who played British Secret Service agent James Bond, had the surgery on Monday at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Pam said. He was released from the hospital Sunday.

Moore took over the role of James Bond from Sean Connery playing the debonair, agent 007 in such 1970s and 80s films as "Live and Let Die," "The Man With the Golden Gun," "The Spy Who Loved Me," "Moonraker," "For Four Eyes Only," "Octopussy" and "A View to a Kill."

China executes 23 more: After a mass sentencing rally 23 criminals were executed in China's western Gansu Province for drug trafficking, corruption, theft and other offenses, the province's legal Herald reported. AFP says from Beijing.

The executions were carried out November 3 in Lanzhou and Linxia.

Nine of the condemned were convicted to trafficking large quantities of heroin from the southern provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan and then refining it in Gansu before selling it on the streets.

Jacques Diouf elected FAO DG: Jacques Diouf of Senegal was elected Director-General of the United Nations biggest agency, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) on Monday. Reuter reports from Rome.

Diouf beat runner-up Geoff Miller of Australia to succeed Lebanon's Edouard Saouma who has held the post since 1975.

France begins search for FIS activists

PARIS, Nov 9: French police launched a nationwide search and arrest operation against suspected Algerian Muslim fundamentalists today, the interior ministry said, reports Reuter.

A ministry spokesman said those targeted by the dawn raids were some 70 supporters of the banned Islamic Salvation Front. He said the operation was still under way.

Interior Minister Charles

UN seeks more aid for Angola

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 9: The United Nations appealed Monday for additional aid for Angola where 1,000 people are reported to be dying daily in a civil war, reports Reuter.

In a letter circulated to all UN members the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Eliasson said an appeal last May for 226 million dollars had so far raised only 60.5 million dollars.

The major obstacle to continuing and expanding emergency relief is the lack of resources," he said.

Fresh attempt to end violence Lankan Speaker to meet Prabhakaran in Jaffna

COLOMBO, Nov 9: Parliamentary speaker Haniffa Mohamed is to meet Shri Lankan Tamil rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in his northern stronghold in a fresh attempt to end the rebel campaign, official sources said today.

"It is correct. He (Mohamed) is planning to meet the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Leader in Jaffna," a spokesman for Mohamed told Reuters.

Newspaper reports today quoted Mohamed as saying at a meeting outside Colombo he would leave for Jaffna soon for talks with Prabhakaran.

The speaker called it regrettable no political party had presented a successful formula for ending the war.

Since 1983, when the Tigers stepped up their campaign for independence in the north and the east for the minority Tamils, the violence has killed more than 30,000 people and destroyed billions of rupees worth of property.

"You cannot solve problems by killing. Any problem can be solved through negotiation," Mohamed has said.

The spokesman said Mohamed met rebel representatives in Australia during a recent visit. He expressed willingness to mediate in the conflict but only on condition Prabhakaran was present at the discussion.

"The rebels have agreed to the request. We have had one communication from them from the north and are awaiting the second—the go-ahead to come," he said.

Mohamed a member of the minority Muslim community, "would function as the speaker of parliament and not as a ruling party official or government representative," the spokesman said.

The proposed meeting with Prabhakaran will be a rare one, since the rebel leader is hardly seen in public. He was not involved in previous talks between the rebels and government negotiators, leaving the task to his deputies.

Those talks, which ended in 1990, failed. Since then both sides have sunned further approaches for a resumption of negotiations, expressing suspicion of each other's moves.

Prabhakaran's last high profile appearance was in January, when he met Colombo-based Anglican Bishop Kenneth Fernando in Jaffna on a similar peace mission.

Lankan troops kill 5 Tigers

COLOMBO, Nov 9: Government troops killed at least five Tamil guerillas in eastern Sri Lanka and seized arms and communications equipment, military officials said today, reports AFP.

An army patrol Monday shot dead the guerillas from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in coastal Batticaloa district, a military official said.

Troops seized seven automatic weapons, two communication sets, two hand grenades and an medical items from the rebels, the official said, adding there were no casualties among government soldiers.

The LTTE is waging a violent campaign to carve out a separate state in Sri Lanka's northeast, which is home to the island's minority Tamils. Thousands have died in the LTTE-led independence campaign.

200 civilians killed in 8 days War in Afghanistan continues

KABUL, Nov 9: During eight days of fighting in Afghanistan between the forces of Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and troops loyal to the ex-defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood more than 200 civilians were killed by air force jets in Tagab and nearby areas, witnesses said, reports AFP.

By a 40-barrel rocket truck launcher stood Zahadad, one of the Hezb-I-Islami's commanders and the man responsible for the most recent fighting in Sarubi.

"We lost only 12 fighters while the Defence Ministry forces, lost 15 safe tanks 20

POWS high qualified radio communication equipment and a lot of killed and wounded," said Zahadad.

He added that his forces recaptured the contested area around 11.30 a.m. Monday, after losing it Sunday under heavy jet bombardment.

"We will continue to fight and we will not accept any ceasefire until we liberate Tagab and Nejrab," he said. Tagab is about six hours north of here.

"And after that we will negotiate a ceasefire."

These areas are ours and they took them by force and bribery," said Zahadad who anticipated that within four days he would finish the mission.

During the eight days, Kabul was deprived of electricity which comes from Naghola dam about 70 kilometres (40 miles) from the capital, which is close to the frontline and under Hezb control.

"We signed a protocol with Ahmad Shah Masood, the ex-defence minister in which he promised not to use the jets against our civilians and villagers, but he didn't honour his word and that was the reason why we cut the electricity."

He added that "whenever the jets stop bombarding we will supply Kabul with electricity".

Close explosions testify that the fighting was nearby to Naghola dam six kilometres (four miles) from Sarubi and to the fact that Zahadad is far from fulfilling his mission.

While an AFP correspondent was there, three air raids took place and caused large casualties among the farmers, the easiest targets to the high-altitude jets.

Iran urges all Afghan groups to halt war

NICOSIA, Nov 9: Iran urged all Afghan groups on Monday to halt fighting around the capital Kabul and seek a peaceful settlement of their disputes, its Iran news agency reported, says Reuter.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman, quoted by Iran, expressed concern about fighting near Kabul and said Iran urgently recommended all parties halt clashes as soon as possible.

Forces loyal to Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are fighting supporters of President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Residents said at least 200 people, mainly civilians had been killed or injured since Hekmatyar's hardline Hezb-I-Islami forces began a drive northward up the Tagab valley last Monday.



PLO leader Yasser Arafat (R) speaks with Hanan Ashrawi, spokeswoman of the Palestinian delegation to Middle East peace talks during a press conference in Brussels Monday. AFP photo

China eases grip on Tibet

LHASA, Nov 9: China is discreetly changing its 43-year-old grip on Tibet, shifting its military posture and permitting a small show of religious freedom as the United States hikes pressure on the Chinese human rights record, Tibetan sources and western analysts say, reports AFP.

On the outskirts of Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, Chinese engineers have just completed an enormous military complex comprising dozens of two-storey barracks and a major communications block.

Sources say that the vast complex was inaugurated only last month by top military brass who flew in from Beijing, and is believed to be the new headquarters for a command moved forward from Chengdu, in Sichuan Province.

The facility, which will be backed by a new military airport, is the headquarters of a rapid-response unit, they said.

Capable of calling in "firemen" forces from elsewhere in China, the unit will enable the People's Liberation Army to cut back on fixed local garrisons, which house between 180,000 and 250,000 men and are increasingly an economic

strain and source for discipline problems, they say.

At the same time, the Chinese authorities are allowing a veneer of religious liberty, helping to restore the shrines, monasteries and palaces that are also the beating heart of Tibetan nationalism, the sources say.

In Lhasa, several million yuan have been spent in a five-year programme, scheduled to end next year, to restore the Potala Palace of the exiled Dalai Lama that was shelled during the 1959 uprising by Tibetans against Chinese rule.

The Jokhang, the ancient and most revered temple in the 1,500-year history of Tibetan Buddhism, is also being restored to its former glory.

Its statues and paintings were destroyed by teenaged red guards during the cultural revolution, its walls besmirched by Maoist slogans and transformed, for a time, into a cinema for political films the Jokhang is now re-emerging as a shimmering vision of red, white and gold under the efforts of a hundred Tibetan craftsmen.

But Tibetans are deeply skeptical, viewing these moves as purely cosmetic.

Many say China wants to build a colourful religious facade while quietly pursuing its long-standing programme to strangle religious fervour and to settle ethnic Chinese in Tibet.

"It is good that we are being able to restore our buildings," a monk said. "But the only reason why we are being allowed to restore the monasteries is to give something for the tourists."

33 militants held in Egypt

CAIRO, Nov 9: Egyptian authorities have arrested 33 Islamic militants and seized 2,000 fire arms this month, a top interior ministry official reported, says AFP.

They also seized 4,000 kilograms (8,800 pounds) of explosives in 10 days of raids, according to the assistant interior minister for general security, General Nassar Zaher.

The raids were aimed "at seizing weapons and explosives held illegally and which could be used in criminal acts", he said in a press statement. The raids will continue in the next few days in order to "liquidate bases" of armed Islamic fundamentalists and to reduce crimes.

Charles arrives in Kuwait

KUWAIT, Nov 9: Prince Charles arrived in Kuwait today to pay tribute to British servicemen who died in the Gulf War and to strengthen Britain's relations with the Emirate, reports Reuter.

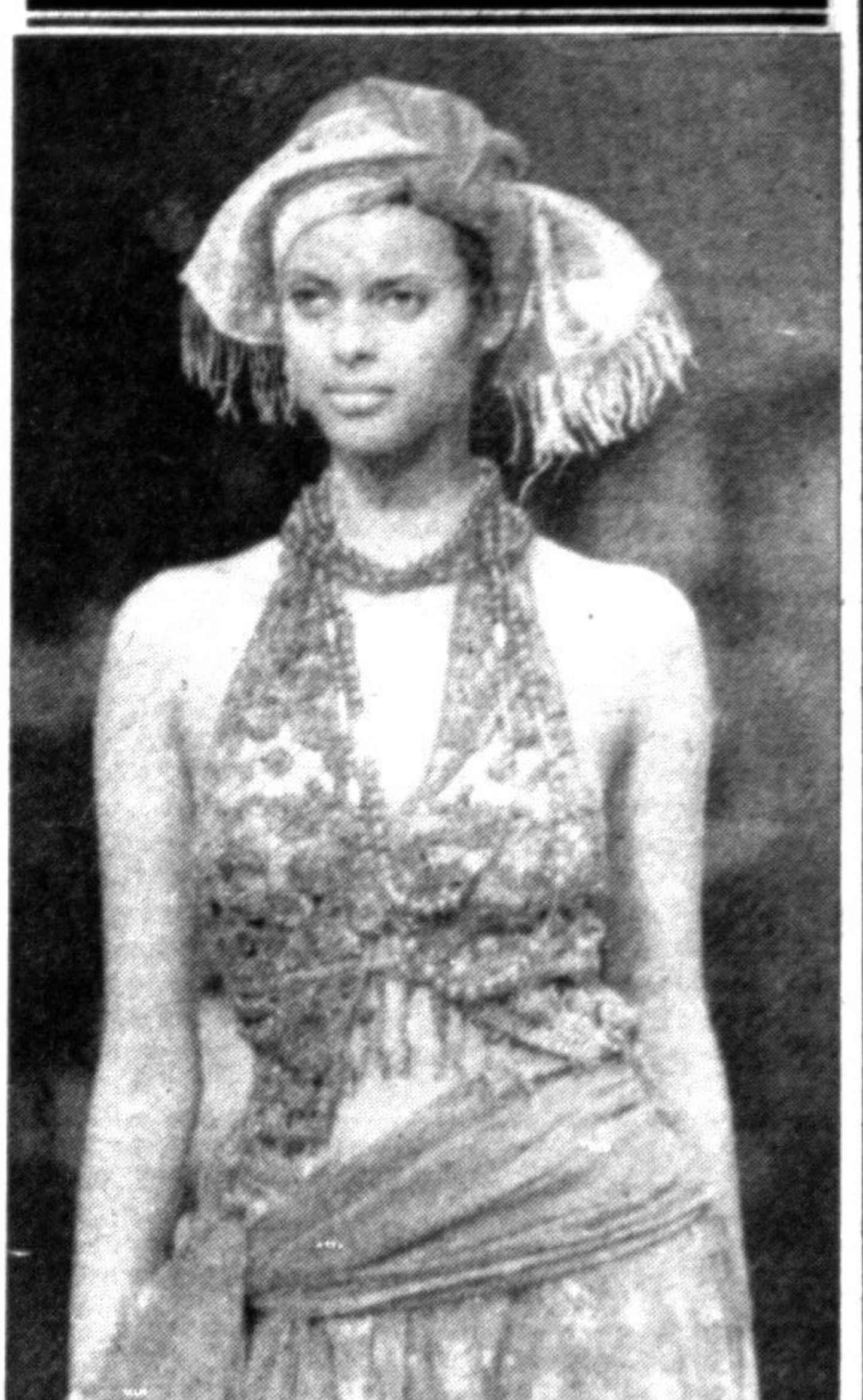
The heir to the British throne, on the second leg of a Gulf tour, was welcomed at Kuwait airport by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al-Abdulla Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

The Prince's five-day tour of the Gulf to promote trade and friendship between Britain and some of the world's richest countries, is his first since the Gulf War in 1991.

He last came to the Gulf in December 1990, when he visited British troops sent to Saudi Arabia as part of the US-led military alliance that later drove Iraqi troops out of Kuwait.

Prince Charles is due to have lunch with the Emir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, visit a house in the suburb of Al-Qurain where a battle took place between Iraqi troops and Kuwaiti resistance guerillas tour a Kuwaiti naval base and attend a banquet hosted in his honour by Sheikh Saad.

Off the Record



A model, topped with a turban-like hat, shows off a see-through halter-top and a printed wrapped skirt during Yoshiyuki Konishi's '94 spring and summer collection in Tokyo on Monday. — AFP photo

Gays shower church service with condoms

COLORADO SPRINGS: Gay activists interrupted a church service and showered the congregation with condoms in a protest aimed at a church member who is a leader of group that opposes homosexual rights, reports AP.

Village Seven Presbyterian Church received no warning that it would be the site of a demonstration Sunday, said the senior pastor, the Rev A Bernhard Kulper.

When someone blew a loud whistle, a dozen or so people in black leather jackets stood up removed their coats and chanted in unison: Gays and lesbians under attack in Colorado Springs. We act up. This is for Will Perkins. Enjoy your Sunday.

The group then pelted the congregation with condoms before leaving, Kulper said.

Police were not called, and no organisation claimed responsibility.

Theft of ashes shatters burial wishes

TORONTO: An airport thief stole a bag containing the ashes of a Hong Kong woman, dashing her family's dreams of burying her remains in Canada alongside her husband, reports AP.

Yem Lee, 50, said the bag holding a marble urn containing the ashes of his mother, Poon Sau, was stolen Friday as he was making a telephone call at Pearson Airport.

"It's really senseless," Lee said. "The person who picked up the parcel didn't know what he was taking, but he should return it to us."

"Hopefully he will read about what problems he has caused and have a good heart and reach us. It's difficult for us."

Lee had just returned from Hong Kong, where his mother's remains were cremated.

"The whole purpose of my visit was to get my mother's ashes home so we can bury her with our father," he said.

The family has reserved two burial spots at the Toronto cemetery where their father, Shui Lee, is already buried.

"It's very important for us to have both our parents buried together," Yem Lee said.



Eight major works of art by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque were stolen from the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm on Sunday including the pictures shown: (top L to R) "Le Paiktre" by Picasso (1930), "Le Chateau de Roche-Guyron" by Braque (1928) and (bottom) "La Source" by Picasso (1921). — AFP photo

Art heist in Sweden

STOCKHOLM, Nov 9: Without tripping any alarms, thieves working in darkness bored holes in the roof of the Museum of Modern Art, lowered themselves to the galleries and pulled off one of the largest art heists ever, reports AP.

Their haul, valued at 52 million dollars included paintings by Picasso and Georges Braque, museum officials said Monday.

The theft occurred sometime during the night and went undetected until a security guard discovered the break-in Monday morning, police said. There was no explanation of why alarms did not go off or were not heard.

Boats were quickly dispatched to ply the waters around the small island where the museum is located, and helicopters hovered overhead, looking for thieves whose trail had gone cold.

The paintings, which were part of the museum's permanent exhibition, were eight of the museum's most important works five paintings and a statue by Picasso and two paintings by Georges Braque, museum spokeswoman Evalena Lidman said.

Curator Olle Granath said the works are well-known and would be impossible to sell on the open market.

Even so, as the price of masterpieces has soared, the black market demand has kept pace, inspiring a series of thefts that has forced galleries and museums to beef up security.

In the largest art theft on record, on March 18, 1990, two robbers dressed as police officers stole works estimated to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston.

China to build N-waste disposal centre

BEIJING, Nov 9: China will start building its first radioactive waste disposal centre in the arid western province of Gansu and plans three more under its ambitious schemes to boost nuclear power, reports Reuter.

Construction work is expected to begin in the mid-1990s. You Deliang spokesman for the China National Nuclear Corp (CNNC), told the official China Daily today that Beijing was also researching a "deep geological disposal programme," to bury waste far below the earth's surface.

China wants to build more nuclear power plants to deal with the rapidly rising energy demand brought by economic growth.

You said the four centres, to be spread around the country would be designed to store and treat low — and intermediate — level radioactive wastes produced by nuclear power plants.

The first centre in Gansu will have an initial disposal capacity of 60,000 cubic metres of radioactive waste, which will later be expanded to 200,000 cubic metres, you said. Costs are estimated to be at least 100 million yuan (17.24 million) US dollar.

The China Daily did not say precisely how the centres would store and treat radioactive waste.

It said the country's two existing nuclear power stations, the 300,000 kilowatt Qinshan plant in Zhejiang Province and the much larger Daya Bay plant near Hong Kong, were both only in partial operation and have so far not produced any radioactive waste.

CNNC officials contacted by telephone today said they did not expect the two plants to produce any radioactive waste for at least another two years.

China this month said it would push ahead with plans to build more nuclear power stations despite what the official media called "public dread" over the possibilities of nuclear mishaps.

Chinese official estimate the country will experience an energy shortage equivalent to 1.2 billion tonnes of standard coal by 2050 and would therefore need to build several more 300,000 kilowatt nuclear plants in coming years.

Feasibility studies are under way in northern Liaoning Province and in Hainan Jaingsu and Shandong Provinces.

Qinshan itself is due to be expanded to include two new 600,000 kilowatt generating units which will come on line in 2000 and 2001.

Elephants kill 10, damage houses in Assam

GUWAHATI (India), Nov 9: A herd of elephants killed 10 people and damaged hundreds of houses in a rampage through two villages in India's northeastern state of Assam, officials said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Forestry officials said they feared more trouble to come in the same district of Sonitpur where a rogue elephant killed 44 people in August.

"This herd may damage more settlements in the area. They look dangerous," forestry official told Reuters.

He said the herd killed eight people outright and two more died in hospital after the elephants stomped through the villages of Panitua and Rangapara on Sunday.