

BRIEFLY

Release of 4 Tibetans hailed: The Dalai Lama's office in India on Wednesday welcomed China's release of four prominent Tibetan activists but said it had more to do with Beijing's global economic ambitions than respect for human rights. Reuter reports from New Delhi.

It said in a statement that China had released Yulo Dawa Tsering, Thupten Namdrol, Chungdak and Tsewang Palden.

India to free 72 Thais: India has agreed in principle to free 72 jailed Thai fishermen following talks in New Delhi with Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Surin Pittsuwan. Indian officials said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

They said the Thai fishermen, detained last year for illegally fishing in India's territorial waters off the eastern state of Orissa, would be released as soon as procedural formalities are completed.

Japan may hold polls in '95: Japanese opposition leader Tsutomu Hata said on Thursday a general election in January or February 1995 was a "possibility," reports Reuter.

Hata, leader of the Renewal Party which is the biggest single opposition group in parliament, said recent actions by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's coalition government increasingly pointed to an early 1995 poll.

Rockets kill 5 in Kabul: Rockets killed at least five people and wounded 17 in Kabul on Wednesday and jets from President Burhanuddin Rabbani's forces bombed opposition positions, government controlled Kabul Radio said. Reuter reports from Islamabad.

There was no word on casualties in southern parts of the Afghan capital held by the combined opposition forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and General Abdul Rashid Dostum.

Kim in Philippines: South Korean President Kim Young-Sam arrived in the Philippines yesterday on the first stop of a tour of Southeast Asia that will include next week's APEC Summit in Indonesia. Reuter reports from Manila.

Kim will stay for three days before flying to Indonesia for a gathering of leaders from the 17-member Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in the city of Bogor. During his stay in Manila Kim will hold talks with President Fidel Ramos, who is hoping the visit will spur further Korean investment.

Elephants kill 4 in India: A herd of wild elephants desperate for home-brewed liquor trampled at least four people to death during a two-day rampage in eastern India, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported on Wednesday. Reuter says from New Delhi.

Police told the news agency that the herd of 74 pachyderms, which is still on the loose, were looking for breweries where their favourite country concoction made from wild plants is prepared by tribespeople.

Christopher leaves for Indonesia: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher left from this US air force base for Indonesia yesterday after a two-day visit during which he reaffirmed Washington's strong commitment to the defence of South Korea, AFP reports from Osan Air Base.

Christopher, who was on his first visit to Seoul since the signing of the Geneva accord to halt North Korea's nuclear programme, on Wednesday held intensive talks with South Korean leaders and with President Kim Young Sam.

Ireland to free 9 IRA men: The Irish government has named nine Irish Republican Army (IRA) prisoners it intends to release, including two murderers, a news service and a British government spokesman said on Wednesday. AP reports from London.

Two convicted murderers on the list published by the Press Association news agency quoting Irish government sources were model prisoners, and had served 12 and 15 years of life sentences. One had formally quit the IRA.

3 soldiers killed in Peru: Three soldiers were slain on Wednesday and seven wounded in a fire fight with Maoist guerrillas in a remote valley in Peru's southeastern Andes, sources said. Reuter reports from Lima.

Sources linked to security forces in highland Ayacucho department said the army troops were attacked by Shining Path rebels trying to retake lost terrain in the Apurimac river valley, some 160 miles (250 kms) southeast of Lima.



Senator Bob Dole likely the next Senate majority leader, speaks to the press in Washington on Wednesday. Dole called the election "an historic 24 hours" but acknowledged the anti-incumbent anger directed this year at Democrats could in later years be turned on Republicans. — AFP photo

Frosts claim 3 in Russia: Bitter frosts have killed three fishermen, left one hospitalised and several others missing in Russia's Far East in the past week, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported on Thursday. AP says from Khabarovsk.

A rescue team on Thursday saved 19 others who had been on a speed boat stuck in ice 15 kilometres (nine miles) off Russia's Pacific coast.

4 die in Chinese boat capsizes: A sampan carrying illegal immigrants from southern China capsized in a storm off northern Taiwan, killing four men and leaving at least 16 others missing, police said on Wednesday. AP reports from Taipei.

Ten Chinese were rescued after the accident Monday night 300 metres (330 yards) off Wanli, 15 kilometres (9 miles) north of Taipei, officers added. The dead included two Chinese, one Taiwanese man who steered the boat and an unidentified man, they said.

NATO lacks technology: NATO lacks the technology to detect plastic landmines increasingly used in conflicts worldwide, including in Bosnia, the alliance's arms procurement directors said on Wednesday. AFP reports from Brussels.

Admiral Leighton Smith, the head of NATO forces for Southern Europe, told the weapons experts meeting in Brussels since Monday the mines have become a major challenge.

Israel, Jordan open new border crossing

SHEIKH HUSSEIN BRIDGE, Israel-Jordan Border, Nov 10: Israel and Jordan inaugurated a new border crossing today, playing songs of peace and releasing white doves, reports AP.

The ceremony at the narrow green bridge over the Jordan River came shortly before King Hussein's planned arrival in Israel, only the second Arab leader to publicly visit the Jewish state.

Broadcast live on Israel and Jordan television, the celebration began with a delegation of Jordanian officials led by Transportation Minister Samir Kawwar. Israeli and Jordanian school girls presented bouquets of flowers.

Kawwar said the event marked a turning point after 46 years of war and hostility. "The chapter of our sad past is giving way to a new age of peace, tranquility and prosperity," he said.

He added that it marked the start to 'real regional co-operation'. Hussein, who has made many secret trips, planned to exchange ratified copies of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the Beit Gaviel cultural center, 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Jerusalem, near the Sea of Galilee.

The treaty was signed October 26 in the presence of President Clinton at the Arava border crossing, but Hussein stayed on his side of the border and did not enter Israel during that ceremony.

The bridge opening came after the Jordanian parliament's upper house ratified the peace treaty despite opposition by some legislators normally loyal to the throne.

Thirty-three of 40 members voted in favour of the treaty Wednesday. One member quit the session in protest, and six lawmakers were absent.

King Hussein issued a royal decree endorsing the treaty and making it law. Israel's parliament gave overwhelming approval to the treaty last month.

Bouquets were placed at the entrance to the Sheikh Hussein Bridge along with a black-and-white sign in Hebrew, English and Arabic greeted Cabinet ministers, journalists and guests with the words: "Blessed be the peacemakers."

Over a loud speaker, peace music was played including the Hebrew song 'He Shall Make Peace'.

About 100 blue-and-white Israeli flags fluttered in the breeze at the Israeli terminal on the bridge spanning the Jordan River.



Once bitter foes, former first lady Imelda Marcos (L) sings a duet with former army colonel Gregorio Honasan (R) during a press night at the National Press Club in Manila on Wednesday. Honasan was one of the key figures in the civilian-backed military revolt that ousted the late president Ferdinand Marcos from power in 1986. — AFP photo

Rabin and Hussein were not expected to attend the inauguration ceremony.

Three huge black, white, green and red Jordanian flags hung down from a rope tied to street lamps on the Jordanian side of the bridge.

A white banner hung across the bridge proclaimed 'Peace, Shalom, Salaam,' in black letters.

Shiekh Hussein Bridge is the fourth Israeli-Jordanian crossing. The Allenby Bridge links the West Bank and the PLO-run Jericho area with Jordan while the Arava crossing opened in August serves as a tie between the southern Israeli town of Eilat with the Aqaba port in Jordan.

The Adam Bridge in the Jordan Valley is for commercial traffic only.

Italy scraps tax break for MPs

ROME, Nov 10: Members of Italy's parliament, seeking a clean image after nationwide corruption scandals, voted on Wednesday to scrap their most envied privilege: The tax break, reports Reuter.

The chamber of deputies (lower house) voted overwhelmingly in favour of a provision obliging members of the national and European parliaments, members of the constitutional court and local government officials to pay taxes on their entire income.

They had previously paid taxes on 82 per cent of income.

Some members of the parliament, most of whose members were elected for the first time last March on a wave of popular disgust at scandal stained traditional parties, said the measure was an obvious attempt to placate an unhappy electorate.

Chinese jailed for leaking state secrets

BEIJING, Nov 10: An official of the State Council, China's cabinet, has been sentenced to three years in prison for leaking state secrets to a journalist, Chinese sources said today, reports Reuter.

The sources said the Beijing Intermediate People's Court sentenced Yu Meisun, 41, formerly a director of the State Council General Office, in early August. They quoted an official document on the case.

"We have records of such a case," said a court spokeswoman but she declined to provide more details.

"The Beijing Intermediate People's Court sentenced Yu Meisun to three years on charges of leaking important state secrets," one source quoted the document as saying.

Copenhagen apologises to Muslim girl

COPENHAGEN, Nov 10: Copenhagen authorities apologised yesterday to a girl barred from working at a social centre for wearing an Islamic headscarf, reports Reuter.

In a case that has added to a national debate about religious headwear, the centre turned away trainee worker Radia Boujlida, a 16-year-old Muslim who speaks fluent Danish. It said her headscarf would be offensive to pensioners.

"It was wrong of the centre to demand that the girl remove her headscarf. I have offered her a trainee job in my office in the town hall instead," said the head of the city's Social Affairs Department.

UN needs \$ 106 m for Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Nov 10: The United Nations said Thursday it needs 106 million dollar in emergency aid for Afghanistan, but conceded there's no guarantee that food and medicine will be allowed to reach the war-torn capital of Kabul, reports AP.

After 15 years of war, Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis is growing ever more desperate and the onset of winter will make life even more miserable in the central Asian nation.

"The Afghan people are very, very tired of war," Sotirios Mousouris, the UN coordinator of Afghan aid told a news conference in neighbouring Pakistan. "Our wish is that this will be the last humanitarian appeal."

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Although food is available in Kabul, the scene of the heaviest fighting, prices have skyrocketed. The war has destroyed the economy and many people are selling off family possessions to buy food. Many are jobless, and even government officials make only about 10 dollar to 15 dollar a month.

An estimated 5,000 people have been killed and 40,000 wounded in fighting this year, according to the UN.

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He also denied he had ever been a KGB agent — although he would have liked to have been one or that he was either anti-Semitic or half Jewish. But he said he would be happy to amorce a Jewish parent if one could be found for him.

"I must say that I don't particularly like the policy pursued in the United Nations in recent years. That policy was more positive in it consequences 15 to 20 years ago," he told a news conference of the UN Correspondents Association.

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Despite voter fatigue, some analysts believe Wednesday's landslide may prompt the president-elect to call another parliamentary election to broaden her narrow base and give her the two-thirds majority she needs for constitutional changes.

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But she also swept traditional strongholds of the United National Party (UNP), which has become identified with the headline Sinhalese majority that is heavily influenced by the conservative Buddhist clergy.

The unequivocal victory consolidated Kumaratunga's hold on power, after she led the People's Alliance (PA) to victory in parliamentary elections last August, ending 17

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Girl sacrificed for aunt's marriage

NEW DELHI: An Indian woman strangled her seven-year old granddaughter after a Hindu shaman said her mentally retarded daughter would only get married if she made a human sacrifice, police said on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Bhagwanti, 65, was arrested after killing her grandchild Deepika and setting her body afloat on the Yamuna River on Monday, police said. She told police that a local 'tantric' — a Hindu priest dabbling in sorcery — had told her a human sacrifice would guarantee the marriage of her 28-year-old daughter.

The mother of the victim, who lived with Bhagwanti and her extended family in a Delhi shantytown near the river, was not on good terms with her, police said.

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Because she was a vampire ...

AKRON, Ohio: A man who told police he beat his mother to death and cut out her organs because "she was a vampire devil" has been arrested on a charge of aggravated murder, reports AP.

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Heepe is accused of beating his mother to death, stabbing her repeatedly, then removing her organs and possibly eating some of them. Police said their search of the house did not locate all her organs.

"I killed my mother," Heepe said, according to a police report. "She was a vampire devil. I cut out both of her hearts. It took her five hours to die."

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Heepe remained hospitalised for treatment of his diabetes Wednesday morning, police said.

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\$ 30,900 tip for taxi driver!

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The driver took the money to a Tokyo police station after the incident occurred on Sunday, a police spokesman said.

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'Indian police kill 11 Sikhs for rewards'

NEW DELHI, Nov 10: An elite commando has alleged in court that police in the Indian state of Punjab killed 11 suspected Sikh militants in cold blood to earn cash rewards and promotions, a newspaper reported on Thursday, says AFP.

Satwant Singh Manak, a member of the "Blackcat" commando force, urged the state High Court in the Punjab capital of Chandigarh on Wednesday to punish the officers responsible for the alleged killings, The Tribune said.

Police in the northern state have been frequently accused by human rights groups of murdering suspected Sikh separatists in staged gunbattles, but it was the first instance of an officer publicly corroborating such accusations.

Manak named the 11 suspects who, he said, were killed in his presence by police after being tortured both "physically and mentally."

"Some of the bodies were cremated without following legal formalities," The Tribune quoted him as saying in a petition to the court.

"The police officers resorted to this modus operandi to earn cash awards and out-of-turn promotions," he alleged, adding that he was helpless to stop the killings because "everything was being done at the behest of his superiors."

Counsel for Manak urged the court to order the Central Bureau of Investigation or a sitting judge to probe the killings, arrest guilty officers and compensate the families of the victims.

They also requested security cover for the petitioner, saying he feared for his life.

Judges R P Sethi and Sat Pal issued notices to the state government and the police department to respond to the allegations. The Tribune said.

Off the Record

Charles — model of modern king?

LONDON: Prince Charles is the very model of a modern king, his biographer said on Wednesday — adulterous escapades notwithstanding, reports AP.

"He has a degree of commitment to this nation that is quite remarkable," Jonathan Dimbleby said of Charles. "He has flaws of character and personality. But I would say with absolute conviction that when the time comes (for him to be king), God bless Charles III."

Dimbleby has come under fire in the British media for revealing in his biography, "The Prince of Wales," that Charles has maintained a long-term extramarital affair with a married woman, and that he went into his marriage with Princess Diana not loving her.

Some commentators suggested, that Charles give up his ambitions to the throne because of the revelations.

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