

BRIEFLY

China denies plague epidemic:

China has firmly denied reports of a plague epidemic in many cities, saying that no more than 10 cases had been reported each year since the disease was brought under control in 1955, AFP reports from Beijing.

"As to the rumours that plague is spreading in more than 200 counties and cities in China, these do not conform with the true situation," said the Ministry of Public Health in a statement, dated Thursday, responding to numerous diplomatic and press enquiries.

Insurance for Indian newsmen:

A group insurance scheme, first of its kind for accredited journalists, was formally launched by Gujarat government at a function attended by Chief Minister Chhabildas Mehta, PTI reports from Gandhinagar.

A proposal form and rules were presented by the chief minister to the zonal manager of Life Insurance Corporation of India, N N Joshi.

Law for AIDS test in Russia:

Parliament's lower house voted overwhelmingly for a third and final time Friday to approve a draft law that would require foreigners visiting Russia to take AIDS tests, AP reports from Moscow.

The bill, which also would mandate testing for Russians in many occupations, still requires approval from the upper house and President Boris Yeltsin. The measure says foreigners refusing to be tested would be deported, as would foreigners found to have the AIDS virus.

Coup bid in Gambia:

An attempt to topple the Gambian military regime was foiled overnight. Vice President Sana Sabally announced yesterday, AFP reports from Banjul.

He told state radio that several soldiers were killed in the rebellion, which was led by high-ranking army officers. Sabally said the provisional council of the armed forces managed to foil the attempted coup but did not provide any further details. Overnight Thursday, heavy shooting could be heard in the Bakau neighbourhood where the military barracks are located but by morning the situation appeared to be normal although soldiers had set up a checkpoint at the entrance of the city.

Deng's works available:

The first three volumes of the selected works of China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping are now available on computer disc, the People's Daily reported yesterday, Reuter says from Beijing.

The newspaper said it was the first time the works of a Chinese leader had been transferred to computer software. It was a joint effort of the People's Publishing Company and Beijing University.

Clinton releases war records:

President Clinton, citing his promise to make more government documents public, signed an executive order on Thursday authorising the National Archives to release 43 million pages of war records, AP reports from Washington.

The documents represent nearly all the classified holdings dating before World War II. Nearly 23 million pages relating to the Vietnam War, Naval operating forces and records of the headquarters of the US Air Force also were declassified, according to a White House statement.

1 held near Babri Mosque:

A Hindu claiming to be a 'human bomb' was arrested on Thursday near the Babri Mosque — razed two years ago by Hindu zealots — in the northern town of Ayodhya, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Sankata Prasad Tiwari, 40, who said he had a bomb strapped to his body, was whisked away by police for interrogation, officials said in Ayodhya. No further details were available.

Plague claims 21 in Zimbabwe:

Bubonic plague has killed at least 21 people and infected more than 200 others since it broke out last month in southwest Zimbabwe, Health Minister Timothy Stamps said Thursday. Reuter reports from Harare.

Stamps said all the deaths took place in Matabeleland province. Zimbabwe's northern tourist resorts were not affected. "The epidemic is now under control, we are on top of the situation," he told the domestic news agency Ziana.

American fined in Nairobi:

A magistrate's court in Nairobi has fined a white American engineer 150 dollars for calling Kenyan immigration officials "stupid niggers," local newspapers reported yesterday. AFP says from Nairobi.

Spoon Steven Graig was charged with calling immigration officials at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta Airport "stupid niggers being colonised by Asians" when he arrived from London on Wednesday.

Fatah member killed in Sidon:

Gummen shot and killed a member of PLO chief Yasser Arafat's Fatah group early yesterday in south Lebanon, police said. AFP reports from Sidon.

Sam Farah, 35, was shot dead several hundred metres away from the main Palestinian camp of Ain Helweh on the eastern outskirts of the southern port of Sidon, they said. They linked his killing to inter-Palestinian disputes.

France, KSA to hold talks:

French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua will visit Saudi Arabia on Friday for talks on security which a Paris newspaper said would also cover arms sales, Reuter reports from Paris.

The official SPA Saudi Press Agency said that during the three-day visit, Pasqua and Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef Bin Abdul-Aziz would discuss "the developing and strengthening ties of security cooperation between the two ministries."

9 die in Indonesian landslide:

Nine volunteers repairing an irrigation channel died, and three others were injured in a landslide that struck a village in west Java, the media Indonesia Daily said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

The victims were participating in a village-volunteers' effort to repair an irrigation channel in the village of Cintanagara in the Garut regency when the side of a steep hill overlooking the irrigation channel fell on top of them.

DPRK minister in Cambodia:

North Korea's acting defence minister has arrived in Cambodia for a five-day official visit to strengthen military ties between the two traditionally friendly states, a senior Cambodian military official said yesterday. AFP reports from Phnom Penh.

General Choi Kwang was accompanied by 14 other high ranking military officials and was to meet Minister of Defence Tea Banh, Interior Minister Sar Kheng and the deputy chief of staff, General Nhek Bunchay.

Shenzhen to allow visa-free tour:

China's Shenzhen special economic zone will start visa-free tours for foreigners starting December in a move to attract more tourists across the border from Hong Kong, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Shenzhen Vice Mayor Li Guangzhen told reporters in Shenzhen on Thursday that the new arrangement would allow foreign tourists to stay in the zone for 72 hours without a visa.

US team to visit Malaysia:

The largest delegation of US senators to visit Malaysia will attend a Pacific dialogue conference that begins this weekend in Penang, the US embassy said yesterday. Reuter reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The delegation is led by senators Christopher Bond (Republican-Missouri), Sam Nunn (Democrat-Georgia) and William Cohen (Republican-Maine). Other members include: John Glenn (Democrat-Ohio), David Pryor (Democrat-Arkansas), Christopher Dodd (Democrat-Connecticut) and Barbara Mikulski (Democrat-Maryland).

International

Pak opposition blasts govt for shelving resolution on Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, Nov 11: Pakistani opposition leaders condemned Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government for withdrawing a resolution on Kashmir at the UN General Assembly, terming the move a foreign policy disaster, news reports said today, reports AFP.

"This is nothing short of humiliation. It is a foreign policy disaster with no parallel in the history of Pakistan," Chaudhry Nisar Ali, a senior leader of former premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML), told reporters here Thursday.

He added that the government should ask Foreign Minister Assef Ahmed Ali to resign over the debacle.

Sharif also expressed shock over the "retreat."

Bhutto had vowed to raise

Pakistan's decades-old dispute over Kashmir with India within all appropriate international forums.

Having secured the 51-nation Organisation of Islamic Conference's (OIC) support at an emergency session here in September, Islamabad decided to submit a formal resolution at the current UN General Assembly session.

The OIC set up a contact group as a first step to internationalise the Indo-Pakistani dispute, with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Niger, Pakistan and OIC Secretary General Hamid Al Ghadib as its members.

However, under pressure from the European Community and other major powers, the group abandoned its plans to ask the UN General Assembly to review the issue, local me-

dia said.

India and Pakistan, since becoming independent in 1947, have fought two of their three wars for control of Kashmir. A militant Muslim separatist movement in Kashmir has claimed some 10,000 lives.

Pakistan, which has demanded implementation of a 1948 UN Resolution that called for a plebiscite in the valley, has accused New Delhi of "grave human rights violations" in its suppression of Kashmiri unrest.

India rejects the UN resolution as obsolete and blames Pakistan for the insurgency.

Reuter adds: A 30-truck convoy sent by Pakistan to blaze a trail to central Asia across Afghanistan reached the western Afghan city of Herat today, officials said.

The convoy ran into trou-

bles early on, when it was hijacked by Afghan guerrillas on November 2. A militia of Afghan religious students known as Taleban secured its release.

An official of Pakistan's national highway authority said four truck-loads of medicines, X-ray machines and surgical instruments were donated to Herat authorities on arrival.

The goodwill caravan left Quetta, capital of Pakistan's southwestern province of Baluchistan on October 29 with goods to be donated to Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Pakistan hopes the convoy will open up a regular route for trade with former Soviet central Asian republics.

The convoy control large areas of the north.

The rebels' action has em-

brassed Kumaratunga, who

initiated peace talks with

the LTTE in August to help pave

the way for a resolution of the island's ethnic conflict.

Kumaratunga suspended the talks after a suicide-bomber, believed to be from the LTTE, assassinated the main opposition candidate Gamini Dissanayake at an election rally last month.

Despite the attacks and reports of sporadic clashes between supporters of rival parties, the military further eased an island wide curfew Friday ahead of Kumaratunga's swearing-in on Saturday.

The curfew, first enforced after the election, was lifted two hours ahead of schedule today and was due to be reimposed 12 hours later, a military spokesman said.

LTTE rebels stepped up attacks on security forces on the eve of the polls that swept Kumaratunga into power with an historic margin. They made an unsuccessful attempt to blowup a navy landing craft off the northern coast. The rebels control large areas of the north.

Depending on the security situation the curfew hours could be progressively reduced nationwide or restricted to only certain parts of the country, the spokesman said.

Off the Record**Newborn saved from garbage compactor**

NEW YORK: An abandoned newborn infant was seconds away from being crushed in a garbage compactor in New York city on Thursday when a building superintendent heard its cry, police said, reports Reuter.

The superintendent switched on the compactor and then switched it off again when he heard the baby crying, police spokeswoman Bernadette Rainey said.

She said the baby boy, estimated to be one to eight hours old, was found in the basement compactor of a five-storey residential building in the Bronx borough, wrapped in a towel and a plastic bag.

Hillary slights criticisms

LONDON: Hillary Clinton says deep personal losses she and President Clinton have suffered in the past two years have diminished the significance of bad publicity and criticism, the BBC said on Friday, reports AP.

In an interview conducted before this week's elections for broadcast on Saturday, Hillary speaks of mistakes made in the administration's health-care plan and of the Clintons' efforts to preserve their privacy, the BBC said.

A BBC news release issued before the broadcast quoted her as saying: "In the last 20 months we have suffered the loss of my father and mother-in-law and the tragic death of our friend Vince Foster. That puts things into somewhat of a perspective."

"Those were very deep personal losses to the president and me and stacked against those the adverse publicity, the partisanship, the name-calling that seems, unfortunately, to be a part of American politics today. It seems somewhat insignificant. It is, on occasion, hurtful."

She is quoted as saying she did not feel angry when the health-care plan ran into trouble.

"I couldn't get angry because that takes too much energy what I wanted to understand is why it happened, what we did wrong. I mean I think we made mistakes and we learned a lot about how to present this issue and what the American people were ready for and what they were not ready for ..."

Rat-catchers' contest

BUCHAREST: Romanian doctors have enlisted a cat and a hedgehog in a contest to find out which is best at catching the rats which chemicals cannot kill, reports Reuter.

Doctors at Bucharest's Floreasca Emergency Hospital have locked a cat and a hedgehog -- a traditional peasant rat catcher -- in separate hospital storerooms, the national news agency Rompress reported on Thursday.

The animals' relative abilities will be assessed until December when the more efficient will be taken on for full-time rat-catching duty.

Supernatural assistance

SEOUL: The boys are stealing cushions from the girls and the girls are wearing silver rings as young South Koreans seek supernatural assistance for this month's intensely competitive university entrance exams, reports Reuter.

Fortune tellers in one Seoul university district were doing a roaring trade from students and parents seeking good-luck amulets, which were selling for 100 dollars instead of the usual 35 dollars.

Some students buried personal effects on the grounds of the university they want to enter, the report said.

Cushions used by female students are particularly prized by boys, who allegedly break into classrooms at night to collect them, The Times said.



Bosnian Serb soldiers tie up Muslim prisoners of war near the front line, around the small village of Dubovac, some 5 km south of Bihać on Wednesday.

— AFP photo

Serb command entitled to declare state of war

PALE, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nov 11: The self-proclaimed Bosnian Serb parliament has authorised the Serb Republic's "supreme command" to declare a temporary state of war wherever it deems necessary in areas under its control, Speaker Momico Krajisnik announced here today early.

Meanwhile: The Croatian Serb military command late Thursday denied that its forces had shelled the Muslim-held town of Bihać in northwestern Bosnia.

United Nations military officials had said an Orao fighter-bomber from the self-styled Serb Republic of Krajina, located in the Republic of Croatia, fired two missiles on

Wednesday at Bihać, damaging an ammunition dump and wounding 14 people.

In Sarajevo, UN protection force (Uhrprofor) spokesman Koos Sal added that the missile attack had been preceded by intensive shelling of Bihać town by secessionist Serbs stationed across the border in Croatia.

But in a brief statement carried here by the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug, the Croatian Serb command declared "the army of Krajina neither needs nor wants to launch artillery attacks against zones monitored by Unprofor and has never done so."

Zhirinovsky told reporters that it was one of many actions taken to undermine the former Soviet Union and to make its technology look inferior.

It was a subversive action. Russian scientists who were aware of the act and were about to expose it, were extinguished, he said through a translator at the Overseas Press Club in New York.

In April 1986, a fire at the number four nuclear reactor at Chernobyl near Kiev in Ukraine, killed or injured hundreds of people and leaked

radiation into parts of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

While he did not specify what group was behind the alleged sabotage at Chernobyl, Zhirinovsky said that the KGB was behind a campaign to undermine the nation.

Zhirinovsky, travelling in the United States to improve his image, also said that a 1988 conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis was also artificially created by subversive acts.

Zhirinovsky, who has a reputation for being anti-Semitic, began his US trip in San Francisco on Sunday. He goes to Washington next but admitted he was yet to arrange any meetings with key Clinton administration or congressional officials.

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