

BRIEFLY

Order to arrest ex-Ukraine PM:

Ukraine President Leonid Kuchma ordered the arrest of the former Prime Minister Yefim Zviagilsky on charges of embezzling government funds up to 25 million US dollars. Xinhua reports from Kiev.

State prosecutors accuse Zviagilsky of pocketing part of the proceeds from the state sale of aviation fuel to a Greek company. They also say he transferred 20 million US dollars in public funds to a Swiss bank account for personal use.

Asia-Pacific forum from Dec 1:

Former South Korean opposition leader Kim Dae-Jung has announced the launching in Seoul next month of a forum of democratic leaders of the Asia-Pacific (FDL-AP), but has excluded participants from North Korea on the grounds they are socialist. AFP reports from Seoul.

Kim, who plans to launch the forum here December 1 and 2 along with former President Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, also told a press conference late Thursday that China and Vietnam had not been invited to send delegates for the same reason.

Khmers warn Australians:

Cambodia's Khmer Rouge guerrillas yesterday warned Australians that they faced retaliation if they continued to provide military assistance to Phnom Penh. AFP reports from Bangkok.

In a broadcast monitored in Bangkok, Khmer Rouge radio said that if Australians "come to Cambodia to kill Khmers, then the Khmers have a right to self-defence and can kill you, too."

Japan denies asylum to 11:

Japan's Justice Ministry has refused to grant asylum to 11 Myanmar people fleeing from persecution in their military-run country. Japanese lawyers said on Friday. AP reports from Tokyo.

Shogo Watanabe, one of lawyers for the asylum seekers, said the rejection for "reasons of formality represents Japan's closed-door policy toward refugees."

Bridge collapses in China:

Two persons were killed and three others injured when a century-old bridge leading to a popular beach resort in southern China's Guangdong province collapsed, it was reported yesterday. AFP says from Hong Kong.

The 80-metre (264-foot) long bridge in Taishan, built in 1890 and later expanded, fell apart early Thursday, plunging a tractor and its driver, several cyclists and pedestrians into a river below, the Wen Wei Po said.

UK to work for global security:

British Prime Minister John Major said Britain would cooperate closely with France to boost the two countries' contribution to global security and to the defence of Europe. AFP reports from Paris.

"We both have the proven will and capability to mount operations when problems arise in different parts of the world," Major said in an interview with the Paris newspaper Le Figaro.

UN HR mission in Guatemala:

A United Nations mission will begin work next week to monitor a recently signed human rights accord between the government and leftist guerrillas, the mission leader said on Thursday. AP reports from Guatemala City.

"The Guatemala UN mission will open its doors on Monday," said mission leader Leonardo Franco of Argentina, who arrived on Thursday. UN observers will monitor the agreement for at least six months, Franco said.

Israeli woman slain near WB:

An elderly Israeli woman was found clubbed and stabbed to death on Friday in an orchard bordering on the West Bank, police sources said. AP reports from Jerusalem.

Police said they suspected the woman, 82, was slain by Palestinians because of a note scribbled on a paper bag in Arabic that was left on her body. The message was signed "Hamas," the militant Islamic group that has staged numerous attacks against Israelis. But police were also investigating a criminal motive, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Anti-US rally in Athens:

Thousands of demonstrators marched peacefully through central Athens on Thursday, waving banners and chanting anti-American slogans to mark a 1973 student uprising which led to the fall of Greece's military junta. Reuter reports from Athens.

"Remember the disgrace of the Americans," chanted a large crowd of black-clad students. They held aloft a giant red banner with anti-American slogans in central Constitution Square.



This undated file picture shows Lithuanian mafia boss Boris Dekanidze, who is, according to Lithuanian judicial authorities, responsible for the murder of journalist Vitas Lagnys Dekanidze was sentenced to death November 10. — AFP photo

Mir orbits earth 50,000 times:

The Mir space station completed its 50,000th orbit of earth on Thursday as two of the three cosmonauts on board continued their bids for new endurance records. AP reports from Moscow.

The 100-ton Mir was launched in 1986 and showed signs of its age recently when power supply problems plagued a mission to the space station last month. But it remains the showcase of manned space research, and two more modules are expected to dock with Mir next year.

German court frees terrorist:

A German court has ordered freedom for a leftist terrorist who blew up three US servicemen in a car bombing 22 years ago and has never repented for the deed. AP reports from Bonn.

A prosecutor said on Friday he was seeking a way to block the Dec 1 release of Irmgard Moeller, a founder of the Baader Meinhof gang and its successor group, the Red Army Faction. The 47-year old is Germany's longest serving woman prisoner.

Blast claims 5 in Philippines:

Five people were killed in an explosion at a Philippine fireworks factory yesterday, police said. Reuter reports from Camp Olivas.

They said the explosion occurred around 7.30 am (1130 GMT) at the factory in the town of Santa Maria in Bulacan province just north of Manila. Camp Olivas is the regional military headquarters there.

Haiti storm toll now 531:

The death toll rose to 531 on Thursday from Tropical Storm Gordon, which drenched Haiti with heavy rains on Sunday night and Monday. AP reports from Port au Prince.

Culture Minister Jean Claude Bajeux said the figure came from an internal government memo. He said he believed the actual number of dead was much higher but will never be known because many bodies were covered by mud and debris.

North Korea takes steps to freeze nuclear facilities

TOKYO, Nov 18: North Korea said today it has taken steps to totally freeze its nuclear reactors and related facilities in line with an accord with the United States, reports Reuter.

"We have taken steps for totally freezing the graphite-moderated reactors and their related facilities according to the agreement," a Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted by the official news agency KCNA, monitored in Tokyo, as saying.

Pyongyang pledged in its October 21 accord with Washington to halt activities at its nuclear sites and stop construction of two new nuclear reactors in return for modern Western nuclear technology.

Indian schoolkids march to promote safe sex

NEW DELHI, Nov 18: Thousands of school students joined a silent march preaching safe sex here on Friday in an anti AIDS campaign organised by the administration of the Indian capital, reports AFP.

"Use condoms," read slogans on banners carried by the marchers, who walked about six kilometres (3.6 miles) from a government office complex to a hospital in the city centre. "Beware of AIDS," warned a placard. "AIDS is a killer."

More than 10,000 school students, ranging from tiny tots to teenagers, took part in the march which caused traffic jams along their route, witnesses said. Office-goers stopped and residents leaned out of their windows to watch.

Medical experts have warned that India, with a population of 900 million, is one of the countries most at risk of an AIDS epidemic.

The Indian government has confirmed the presence in the country of about 14,000 carriers of the HIV virus.

The ministry spokesman said North Korea would safely preserve spent nuclear fuel without reprocessing it, for complete disposal after a certain period of time.

The nuclear complex at Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang, will be sealed and put under inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for dismantlement when the planned light-water nuclear reactors are completed, he said.

The spokesman said: "This is a broad-minded concession on our part."

Under the accord, North Korea pledged to dismantle its current nuclear programme, which the West suspects is being used to make atomic

bombs. In return for freezing and eventually dismantling the reactors, the United States vowed to set up a consortium to pay for the building of two Light-Water Reactors (LWRs) and provide energy resources to plug North Korea's power needs until the new plants are built.

LWRs produce less of the plutonium that can be made into a nuclear bomb.

On Wednesday UN atomic safeguards officials in Vienna proposed sending a team of experts to Pyongyang as soon as possible to discuss details of the bilateral nuclear freeze agreement.

The IAEA said the same team, which would include in-

spectors, should also start putting in place some of the measures aimed at ensuring North Korea had halted its nuclear programme.

IAEA safeguards department chief Bruno Pellaud made the request at talks with North Korea's ambassador to Vienna Kim Gwang-Sop at the agency's headquarters in the Austrian capital.

It was the first official meeting between North Korea and the agency since Pyongyang pulled out of the IAEA organisation in June.

US, Japanese and South Korean officials meet in Washington today to set up the consortium, the Korean Energy Development Organisation, to underwrite the operation.



School students demonstrate in New Delhi yesterday during a march organised by the city government to spread AIDS awareness in the Indian capital. — AFP photo

E Timorese clash with Indonesians in Dili

DILI, East Timor, Nov 18: Several hundred East Timorese chanting pro-independence slogans clashed with Indonesian civilians and security forces in the capital Dili today, witnesses said, reports Reuter.

They said about 500 East Timorese gathered at the city's cathedral carrying banners reading "Long Live East Timor." They later attacked two Indonesian men, kicking them to the ground, and clashed with about 30 more.

Several truckloads of police intervened, firing several canisters of tear gas.

Junta bars Abiola from signing bail bond

LAGOS, Nov 18: Nigeria's military authorities prevented opposition politician Mashood Abiola from signing a bail bond needed for his release from detention, newspapers reported today, says Reuter.

His lawyer, Godwin Ajayi, was quoted as telling the Court of Appeal in the northern city of Kaduna on Thursday that Abiola was not allowed to sign the bond when it was taken to his place of detention.

Ajayi was speaking at a hearing on the government's application for a stay on the appeal court's November 4 ruling granting Abiola unconditional bail. The government has sought leave to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Abdel-Rahman hospitalised

NEW YORK, Nov 18: Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, the Egyptian cleric charged with plotting to bomb the United Nations and other landmarks, was resting comfortably at a hospital after suffering complications from pneumonia, his lawyer said on Thursday.

"The doctors don't know whether he has a viral or bacterial pneumonia," the lawyer, Lynne Stewart, told Reuters.

World Commission on Culture meet begins Nov 21

PARIS, Nov 18: The World Commission on Culture and Development (WCCD) will meet later this month in Manila to focus on Asia and the Pacific and will hear an address from Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, says Unesco press.

During the commission's meeting November 21-25, Corazon Aquino, former president of the Philippines, will read an address written by Suu Kyi, entitled "Empowerment for a culture of peace and development."

Benazir asks US to deliver F-16s or return money

WASHINGTON, Nov 18: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, in a US television interview, said the United States should either deliver the 38 F-16 jets Islamabad bought or return the 650 million dollar Pakistan paid for them, reports Reuter.

"We've paid for them, we'd like either the planes or our money back" Benazir said in an interview with David Frost to be broadcast on Friday on the Public Broadcasting Service. A transcript of the interview was made public on Thursday.

Delivery of the warplanes has been blocked because the United States suspects that Pakistan has developed nuclear weapons, Benazir said that was

not true. "We have neither detonated one, nor have we got nuclear weapons," she said. "We have the capability and the capacity to do it, but since we believe in non-proliferation we would rather not do so unless there was a threat that was so severe that left us no other option," she said.

Despite the dispute over the F-16s, Benazir said relations with the United States were improving. Benazir said Kashmir remained a flash point between India and Pakistan with 40 to 50 people being killed there everyday. She said granting independence to Kashmir would mean the Balkanisation of both

India and Pakistan and called for third party mediation to help resolve the situation.

Meanwhile AP adds: Benazir says Pakistan hopes to join by January in preparations for a conference to ban production of nuclear material for weapons.

She said there were still questions of a cut-off date and of stockpiles of nuclear material.

"Pakistan is concerned about stockpiles... stockpiles everywhere but since we live in this region, the Indian stockpiles are more worrying," she said.

She added that she hoped the question would be resolved by January.

Lanka ignores LTTE truce

COLOMBO, Nov 18: Sri Lankan troops continued to ignore a week-long unilateral truce declared by Tamil guerrillas by killing another rebel in an ambush in the northeast, a military spokesman said today, reports AFP.

Troops on Thursday ambushed and killed a rebel from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in northeast Well Oya region and recovered an automatic weapon from the dead militant, the spokesman said.

The killing of the Tiger gunman was the latest military response to a unilateral ceasefire declared by the LTTE to mark the inauguration of President Chandrika Kumaratunga as Sri Lanka's fourth executive president.

The military has not reciprocated to the LTTE truce and

retaliate only if attacked.

Information Minister Dhamasiri Senanayake said on Wednesday the government had not been informed by the rebels of the cessation of hostilities. "We are trying to find out whether it is true," he told reporters.

Rebels said three Tamil fishermen were killed on Wednesday by gunboats at Arripukadal 230 kilometers (142 miles) north of Colombo. Another was killed by the navy at Vadamarachchi 320 kilometers (198 miles) north of the capital.

On Tuesday, during cordon and search operations by the military in eastern Batticaloa district, troops shot dead two rebels in separate confrontations. The rebels did not retaliate.



Sarajevoans run for cover after the Bosnian presidency building in the centre of the city was hit by four shells on Thursday. — AFP photo

Bid to influence voters by offering sops Indian EC for dismissal of two ministers

NEW DELHI, Nov 18: India's election commission has censured and urged the dismissal of two members of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's cabinet for trying to influence voters by offering sops ahead of crucial state polls, reports AFP.

Welfare Minister Sitaram Kesri had voiced his support for job quotas for the Muslim minority and Food Minister Kalpana Rai doubled the sugar allocation for two southern states going to the polls amid a shortage of sugar.

In two separate statements late Thursday, the commission said the two were guilty of violating a model code of conduct it had drawn up to prevent politicians holding office from trying to influence voters.

The commission said it hoped the ruling Congress (I) Party would "severely discipline Kesri and ensure his immediate absence from the cabinet."

In the case of Rai, the commission said: "It can only be hoped that the party in power will purge itself of elements which bring such disrepute to the system."

The election commission's order is not binding on the ruling party or the government.

The Congress (I), busy in its campaign for elections in the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, had no immediate comment on the unprecedented action by the commission.

Off the Record

'Feminine boys'—the latest teen fad!

TOKYO: Japan's latest fad, for boys to dress up as girls — wearing make-up, jewellery, nail polish, skin-tight tops and sometimes even skirts — has caused an uproar here, reports AFP.

The "feminine boys" are generally younger than 20, with the youngest barely 14. On sunny weekends and afternoons, after classes, they are to be found in the streets of fashionable districts in Tokyo and other large cities.

These androgynous students deny that they are homosexuals in a country where there is still discrimination against gays. Besides, many of them are to be seen walking hand in hand with their girlfriends. Sometimes, one must look twice to tell the boy from the girl.

The "fem boys" have their own stores — "Milk Boys" and "Super Lovers" — which carry speciality clothing ranging from white felt jackets with panther-style prints to small, feminine handbags and skin-tight bell-bottom pants.

"I don't care if people say that I look like a girl. I love it, and I'm expressing myself that way. Those who understand, understand," said Kotaro Inaba, 19, in a "fem boys" survey published by the weekly Asahi Shukan.

"I frequently wear girls' clothing. I don't want to differentiate between girls' and boys' clothing. I often read girls' magazines," said Yoshihiro Shimizu, 17.

Condom machine thief caught

WATERFORD, Michigan: A man who wrapped up a night's beer drinking by allegedly stealing a condom machine from the men's bathroom of an Irish-style pub could face four years in prison, reports AFP.

"It didn't take our officers long to solve the great condom caper," said police spokesman John Grimm. "There were lots of witnesses and he went straight home."

Keith Bradford, 34, drank three beers before going into the bathroom, according to the Irish tavern's bartender, who said moments later she saw him walking down the street with the machine.

"All we can figure is that he was anticipating a big weekend," said Grimm.

A police search turned up the 279-dollar machine. 48 condoms and 31 dollars in quarters behind Bradford's garage. He was charged on Wednesday.

'Hash taxi' driver held

OSS, Netherlands: Police have arrested a "taxi" driver for taking his customers to the wrong state — the state of altered consciousness, reports AP.

The driver operated a "hash taxi," the nickname for services that deliver marijuana and hashish to customers at their homes. Although the Netherlands has one of the world's most relaxed drug policies, police decided the service was outside the law.

Hundreds of "coffee shops" in the country are licensed to sell up to 30 grams of marijuana or hashish. The law also allows people to cultivate small cannabis crops for their personal use.

Police said on Thursday that the delivery service was unlicensed and that the proprietor was growing amounts that exceeded the regulations.

The 28-year-old man, identified only by the initials RP, had only been in business two weeks before police got on his trail.

'Dead' woman lives again

NEW YORK: An elderly woman whom hospital officials declared dead, was discovered alive in the cold storage room of an Albany hospital, officials said on Thursday, reports AFP.

Mildred Clark, 86, arrived at the hospital after being discovered in her home. Her cold, lifeless body led medical personnel to believe she had suffered a fatal heart attack.

Both a nurse and a coroner declared her dead before she was transferred to the hospital's morgue.

An hour and a half later, the morgue director who was in the cold-storage room to transfer the body to a chapel discovered Clark was breathing despite the fact that temperatures were around three degrees Centigrade (37 degrees Fahrenheit).

The hospital immediately rushed her to the emergency room for treatment, the hospital source said.

"It was an act of God" the coroner said, unable to hide his astonishment. The hospital said it could not explain the incident.

US to soften policy toward Myanmar

BANGKOK, Nov 18: The United States is easing its 5-year-old hard-line policy toward military-run Myanmar, with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher saying that Yangon has taken some modest steps toward reforms, reports AP.

Although still highly critical of Myanmar's human rights record, Washington is edging toward a policy — dubbed "constructive engagement" — which it not long ago sharply criticised.

Myanmar's Southeast Asian neighbours have maintained that dialogue with Myanmar, rather than American attempts to isolate it, will more effectively lead to reforms.

Speaking at a news conference Thursday, Christopher said the results of a high-level

US visit to Myanmar earlier this month were "somewhat promising."

Thomas C Hubbard, deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, and several other officials travelled to Yangon to meet with the country's ruling junta.

It was the first high level contact between the two countries since Myanmar's military brutally put down pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988.

Christopher noted that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had been granted permission to visit hospitals in Myanmar.

Christopher said such moves were being studied to determine whether Washington should join other Asian nations in improving relations with Myanmar.