

BRIEFLY



Palestinian children look at the first election posters pinned up in the West Bank town of Hebron on Thursday. European observers began arriving in the West Bank to monitor the first Palestinian elections, as a massive campaign was launched calling on people to take part in the poll. — AFP/UNB photo

15 die in Kashmir bus plunge: At least 15 people were killed and 20 others injured when a bus in which they were travelling plunged into a gorge in the northern Indian state of Kashmir, police said in Jammu yesterday. AFP reports from Jammu.

The police said the victims were mostly Hindu devotees travelling to a temple in Kashmir's Sarthal village.

Zambian prisons face food crisis: Almost all prisons in Zambia are hit by acute food shortages, a government spokesman revealed Thursday. Xinhua reports from Lusaka.

Augustine Phiri, the spokesman of the prisons department, said in the city of Kabwe that this situation had not been improved since last December.

Yeltsin improving: Russian President Boris Yeltsin is feeling better and is expected to recover from his second recent heart attack. US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Washington.

Talbott said his information came in a telephone conversation earlier in the day with Thomas Pickering, US ambassador to Russia, who had been in contact with officials who have visited Yeltsin in hospital in recent days.

Fire claims 9 in Germany: Fire destroyed a shelter for homeless people in Detmold, Germany, Thursday, killing nine people and leaving 11 others seriously injured, police said. AFP reports from Detmold.

Jet makes emergency landing: A Jordanian airliner made an emergency landing at an Icelandic airport on Thursday after a bomb threat, police reported. Reuter says from Reykjavik.

The Royal Jordanian Airlines Lockheed, tri-star, en route from Amsterdam to Chicago with 224 passengers on board, landed at Keflavik Airport after the pilot was informed of the threat during the flight.

2 die as ferry sinks in Thailand: Two people died and some 50 people were missing after a ferry carrying 155 passengers, mainly foreign tourists, capsized and sank yesterday in the Gulf of Thailand, marine police said. AFP reports from Bangkok.

Two bodies were pulled out of the water during an operation in which about 100 passengers were rescued, police told AFP by telephone from Surat Thani, 750 kilometres (450 miles) south of Bangkok.

French nun shot dead in Algiers: A French nun was shot and killed and a second was seriously wounded and in a coma in Algiers yesterday, French church sources said in Paris. Reuter reports from Paris.

A spokeswoman for the French bishops conference said the attack took place as the two nuns took a walk through the capital's hilly Kouba district.

Lubbers won't run for NATO chief: The Netherlands withdrew yesterday the candidacy of former Dutch prime minister Ruud Lubbers for the post of NATO secretary-general after Washington failed to publicly endorse him. AFP reports from the Hague.

Ambassadors from the 16 members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation were scheduled to meet in Brussels later in the day to consider a successor to Willy Claes, who resigned last month to face possible corruption charges in his native Belgium.

Myanmar workers kill six Thais: Myanmar workers killed six Thai fishermen at sea on Sunday before escaping with their fishing trawler, Thai marine police sources said yesterday. Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Taiwan conducts joint army, navy exercise

TAIPEI, Nov 10: Taiwan's military today conducted a joint navy and army exercise involving amphibious landings on the southern coast of the island at Pingtung, defence officials said, reports AFP.

The exercise, dubbed "lien hsing" (united revival), was to practise troops' combat readiness, the officials said.

They denied any connection with a large-scale exercise China plans to launch later this month, saying today's exercise was "strictly routine" with "no political motive" and no live ammunition was used.

Taiwan's army and navy practise amphibious landings twice a year, the officials said.

According to press reports, Beijing is to carry out its own exercise in the east China Sea, which lies to the north of Taiwan.

Military exercises on both sides of the Taiwan strait have become sensitive in the past few months after cross strait relations deteriorated in June.

Relations were soured by a visit to the United States by Taiwanese President Lee Teng Hui that month. The trip enraged China which felt Lee tried to use his visit to promote independence for the island.

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province since the Chinese civil war ended in 1949 and has vowed to attack it, if it declares independence.

Taiwan last month scaled down a military exercise to avoid further provoking China, but has continued to hold small-scale exercises regularly.

Troops resume attack in Jaffna, 90 killed in fighting

COLOMBO, Nov 10: The Sri Lankan army said more than 90 Tamil Tiger guerrillas and soldiers were killed when the armed forces resumed their advance against the northern rebel stronghold of Jaffna Town today, reports Reuter.

Twelve soldiers and one officer were killed and 77 wounded, the military said in a statement. "Seventy-eight terrorists were confirmed killed and a minimum of 200 terrorists are estimated to have been injured," it said.

The LTTE is fighting for a homeland called Eelam in Sri Lanka's northeast.

AFP adds: Government troops today resumed a massive campaign in the Tamil rebel stronghold of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka after a one-week break, military officials said.

"We started advancing at

first light," a military spokesman said here. "So far we have not heard anything further from the front." The spokesman gave no further details.

Sri Lankan forces launched a major offensive on October 17 in a bid to wrest Jaffna from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has governed the sprawling peninsula like a *de-facto* independent state since 1990.

The military captured the LTTE stronghold of Neerveli on October 30 and continued its drive for nearly three more days before calling a temporary halt, barely 4.5 kilometers (three miles) from Jaffna town, amid heavy rains.

Since then, military officials have been saying that the troops were consolidating their positions for an

eventual push towards the Tigers' bastion of Jaffna town.

The offensive resumed a day after President Chandrika Kumaratunga announced she was cancelling her trip to the Commonwealth summit at Auckland, and instead asked Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar to represent Sri Lanka.

Her office said late Thursday that the president, who is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, took the decision "due to the exigencies of the evolving situation in Sri Lanka and the need for her continuing presence."

The October 17 offensive, condemned Rivirasa (Sunshine), triggered an unprecedented exodus of civilians from Jaffna, and Tamil sources say up to half a million people have become refugees.

The refugee crisis has

sparked international concern, forcing the Sri Lankan government to step up relief for the tens of thousands of displaced civilians massing in Jaffna and the neighbouring district of Kilinchchi.

Sri Lankan troops resumed their march towards Jaffna town at first light today, a senior military source told Reuters.

"How long it takes to get into Jaffna town depends on the resistance" by the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, he said.

"The axis is towards Jaffna town so you can say we are heading for Jaffna," he said.

The northern Jaffna peninsula is being hit by monsoon rains but the weather has been clear for the last two days, the source said.

PLO police to take over Jenin Monday 74 pc Israelis want govt to continue peace bid

JERUSALEM, Nov 10: Seventy-four per cent of Israelis want the government to continue implementing its peace agreements with the Palestinians, a poll published today said, reports Reuter.

The poll in the Yedioth Ahronoth daily newspaper was held on Tuesday and Wednesday, a few days after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated at a peace rally by a Jewish law student opposed to handing land to Palestinians under a peace deal.

Commenting on the survey by Minah Zemach's Dahaf Institute, Rival Pollster Hanoch Smith said: "It is a reflection of the national mood and a desire to back the new leader."

Before the assassination the polls showed Rabin and Netanyahu tied with 42 per cent of the vote each.

Meanwhile, more than

300 Palestinian policemen travelled from Gaza to the West Bank on Thursday in preparation for their deployment in the city of Jenin, due to be handed over to the PLO next week, a police commander said, reports Reuter.

A total of 1,000 Palestinian police will be deployed in Jenin and surrounding villages, Majajayda told Reuters.

"About 40 military vehicles and 344 policemen left Gaza for Jericho and on the 13th of November they will go to Jenin," said Major-General Abdel Razeq al-Majajayda, commander of the Palestinian police in Gaza.

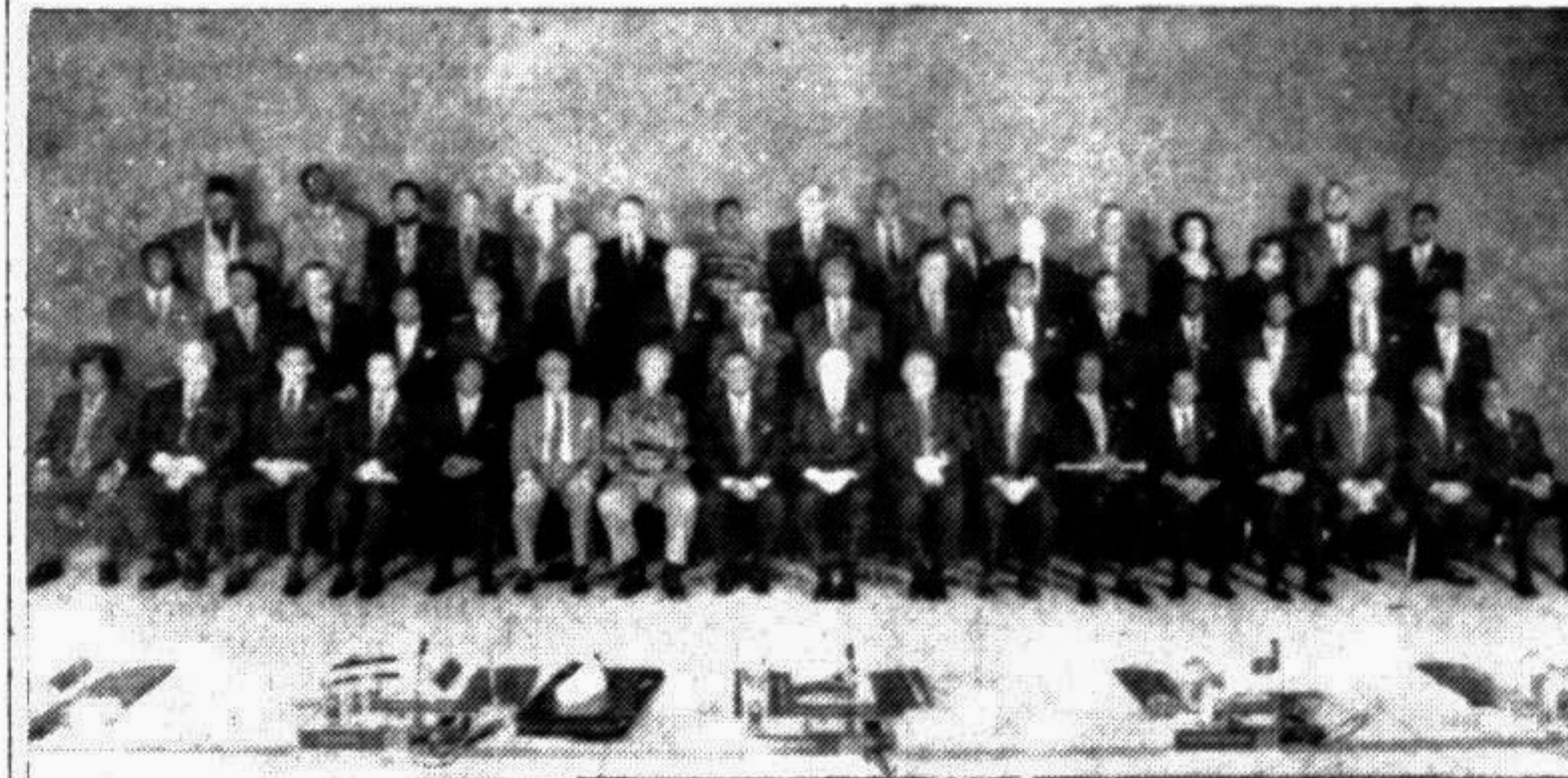
Jenin will be the first Palestinian city Israeli troops will leave under a deal signed by Israel and the PLO in Washington on September 28 to widen self-rule beyond the Gaza Strip and West Bank enclave of Jericho.

4 Indian soldiers killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, Nov 10: At least four Indian soldiers instantly died after Muslim militants blew up their truck in Kashmir with a powerful landmine today, officials said in the state's winter capital, reports AFP.

An army spokesman here said two civilians and two soldiers were also critically injured in the ambush which occurred in the forward Kashmiri district of Jhalas, 300 kilometres (180 miles) from Jammu.

The truck was completely destroyed in the massive explosion, staged by Muslim separatist guerrillas spearheading an anti-Indian rebellion in Kashmir, he said.



Official "family" portrait of the 50 heads of delegations after the opening ceremony of the annual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Auckland Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

Murayama wins key vote in House

TOKYO, Nov 10: Japan's Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama won a key vote today when a parliamentary committee approved a bill tightening control on religious groups, reports Reuter.

The committee vote eased pressure on Murayama to call early general elections.

The bill to tighten government controls on religious groups and cults will be voted on by the full lower house of parliament on Monday where Murayama's three-party coalition commands a solid majority.

The bill was prompted by March's Tokyo subway gas attack which has been blamed on the doomsday cult Aum Shinri Kyo (Supreme Truth).

Some opposition groups, with strong links to religious organisations, had wanted the bill watered down because they felt it threatened freedom of religious expression.

Mandela thanks C'wealth to help end apartheid

AUCKLAND, Nov 10: President Nelson Mandela thanked the Commonwealth today for helping to end the "long night" of apartheid as the group opened its first summit since South Africa returned to its ranks last year, reports Reuter.

Mandela took centre stage at the summit's opening session as tributes flowed to his own crusade to bring multi-racial democracy to South Africa.

"We stand here today to extend the sincere thanks of the people of South Africa for the outstanding role this organisation... played to end the long night's of colonial and apartheid domination in

our country," Mandela said.

Looming large as the summit opened, however, were divisions between Britain and fellow-members on French nuclear testing, government over human rights.

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien was the first leader publicly to raise the light of Nigerian minority rights activists Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others who have been sentenced to hang.

"We owe it to the world, to ourselves as an organisation, and above all to the people who love in difficult situations, to speak out in one voice in the face of flagrant violations of democratic principles and basic tenets of

justice," he said.

"The death sentence of Ken Saro-Wiwa is an example of the type of behaviour we all want to see abolished," Chretien added, to applause from some of the leaders.

On Thursday, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe urged a tough line on Nigeria and realised the possibility of suspending it from the 52-member Commonwealth if the hangings went ahead.

But Mandela and the leaders of Malaysia and New Zealand, among others, urged continued dialogue with the government of General Sani Abacha, represented at the summit by Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi.

Idi Amin denies link with rebels

KAMPALA, Nov 10: Former Ugandan dictator Idi Amin has denied any connection with a rebel group claiming to be fighting for his return to power 16 years after he has been banished, the official New Vision newspaper reported here on Thursday, says AFP.

In an interview with the paper from his sanctuary in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where he has been living since his overthrow by a combined force of Tanzanian troops and Ugandan exiles in 1979, Amin said he had "better things to do now than leading a rebel group."

Amin said the West Nile Bank Front (WBNBF), claiming to be led by his former foreign minister Juma Oris, had never approached him on the issue.



A man puts up pictures of Filipina Sarah Balabagan on Thursday on the Human Rights Plaza near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The images were part of a demonstration by several women's organisations in favour of the young woman, who is on trial in the United Arab Emirates for the murder of her employer, who allegedly raped her. — AFP/UNB photo

Washington erred in key '64 decision to escalate Vietnam War, says McNamara

HANOI, Nov 10: Former US Defence Secretary Robert McNamara in a major revision of US military history, said today Washington had erred in a key 1964 decision to escalate the Vietnam War, reports Reuter.

McNamara who was speaking at a news conference in the Vietnamese capital, said talks today between himself and Vietnam's top military tactician, General Vo Nguyen Giap had revealed President Johnson had acted on wrong information when he used an alleged North Vietnamese torpedo attack to justify the first air strikes against North Vietnam.

"We were wrong, General Giap made absolutely clear, and I don't think we need any further documentation, he made absolutely clear it

hadn't occurred. Had we known that at the time we wouldn't have carried out the subsequent military attack," he said.

On August 2, 1964 North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the destroyer USS Maddox in waters off Northern Vietnam.

Two days later the Maddox reported a second attack promoting President Johnson to forward the Gulf of Tonkin resolution to Congress justifying US retaliatory air strikes and marking a turning point in the war.

But McNamara said General Giap had revealed the second attack on the Maddox never took place.

Had we known that we wouldn't at that time have sent up to the Congress the resolution that ultimately was

used as the authority for the expansion of military operations in Southeast Asia.

"Would that have changed the course of the war? you can't say for sure I think that resolution would have gone up later... but clearly there was a major event on which we were in error."

McNamara, 79, resigned as Defence Secretary in 1968 after overseeing the US military buildup in Indo-China. In memoirs published in August this year he sparked heated debate in the United States by saying Washington had been terribly wrong to continue the war beyond 1963.

His return to Vietnam two decades after the war ended, is ostensibly to set up a joint US-Vietnamese seminar aimed at re-examining the events of a war which cost

more than 58,000 American lives and left more than four million Vietnamese dead or injured.

McNamara said he had received support for the conference from Vietnamese officials and was hoping the event could be held in Hanoi in late 1996.

However, he denied his return mission to Vietnam was connected to personal feelings of guilt, hinted at in his memoirs for a conflict which became known in the 1960s as McNamara's war.

"We all make mistakes in life and I am not trying to atone for mine. This isn't the only error of judgement I have made it's not atonement he said.

McNamara's three-day visit to Vietnam was due to end later today.

UNSC asks Serbs to allow probe into killings

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 10: The Security Council late on Thursday demanded that the Bosnian Serbs allow investigations into reported killings and widespread ethnic cleansing and that Croatia stop human rights abuses, reports Reuter.

Adopted by a unanimous 15-0 vote, the resolution demands "immediate unimpeded access" to international agencies investigating sites of alleged abuses. They have not been able to go near Srebrenica and Zepa, months after Bosnian Serbs overran these Muslim enclaves.

It also demands access to all prisoners and displaced persons anywhere in Bosnia, condemns ethnic cleansing in the Banja Luka and Sanski Most regions and says all detention camps should be closed.

Council members said the resolution was meant to underline the need to stop hu-

man rights violations and punish war criminals despite current Balkan peace talks in Dayton, Ohio.

Edward Gnehm said, the deputy US representative: "We owe the dead and missing of Bosnia everything we can do to ensure that the guilty are brought to justice."

British Ambassador Sir John Weston said "this resolution is a timely reminder to those parties that they cannot expect to talk peace while at the same time promoting or actively conducting such activities as murder or ethnic cleansing."

Western diplomats say the document also lays the basis for a UN humanitarian role in the Balkans should there be a peace treaty and NATO takes over from UN peacekeepers.

The resolution was initiated by the United States nearly two weeks ago following new disclosures that thousands may have been machine-gunned by Serbs

HIV strain discovery may help lead to AIDS vaccine

WASHINGTON, Nov 10: Australian researchers said on Thursday they have found a rare strain of HIV that does not appear to cause AIDS and may eventually help lead to new drugs or a vaccine, reports Reuter.

The research by Dr Nick Deacon, head of AIDS molecular biology, and his colleagues at the MacFarlane Burnet Centre for Medical Research in Fairfield, Australia, appears on Friday in the Journal Science.

Co-author John Mills, director of the centre, called it "one of the most important" discoveries about AIDS but cautioned, "this discovery by itself is neither a cure for AIDS nor a way of preventing infection with HIV."

He said the finding does point the way "to new treatments and prevention

strategies for HIV infection."

The research focuses on a gene in the HIV virus known as "NEF", which has been associated with one experimental vaccine in the past — one that led to some disappointing results in follow-up tests on baby monkeys last year.

Such an approach would build a vaccine out of weakened or "attenuated" form of the virus. But there are fears that even a weak version of HIV could lead to illness in humans, as it did in the baby monkeys.

Other scientists studying "long-term nonprogressors" people who have HIV but do not get sick — have not necessarily found NeF mutations in cases they have examined.

But the Australian team believes their findings verify the importance of NeF.

Off the Record

Eighteen years with a transplanted kidney

BEIJING: China has performed at least 1,200 kidney transplant operations with the longest surviving patient living for 18 years, Xinhua news agency said, reports Reuter.

Most organ transplant operations performed in China have been kidney transplants, Xinhua said late on Thursday. It gave no figures.

Expert told an organ transplant seminar in the southern city of Guanzhou that about 1,000 kidney transplant patients survived for about five years and 200 lived for 10 years. The longest surviving patient lived for 18 years, Xinhua said, without giving details of the patient.

Chinese dissidents living in exile abroad have accused China of timing executions of death row convicts to coincide with the need for transplants of kidneys and other organs, often for sale to foreign patients. China vehemently denies the charge.

Brain cell to boost intelligence

BEIJING: An implant of brain cells has boosted the intelligence of an 18-year-old retarded Chinese girl, enabling her to learn to walk normally, the China Daily said Friday, reports Reuter.

Doctors at the Heilongjiang Chinese Medicine Academy in northeastern China gave Wang Shuang the brain cell transplant last July, it said. Within 23 days the cells began functioning and the girl who had been unable to walk properly since birth began to display improved motor and cognitive abilities.

2-cent fetches \$660,000

NEW YORK: An uncanceled two-cent stamp issued in 1851 by the Kingdom of Hawaii was sold Wednesday for 660,000 dollars at an auction in New York, the buyer said, reports AFP.

"We were prepared to pay well in excess of one million dollars for this historic stamp," said Greg Manning of Greg Manning Auctions, which purchased the stamp.

The famous stamp of Hawaii (now a US state) was featured in the film "charade," in which Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn try to track the postage issue down.

Twelve cancelled versions of the stamp exist each valued at 375,000 dollars.