

BRIEFLY

Kim signs amnesty bill: South Korean President Kim Young-Sam yesterday signed a general pardon bill amnestying a massive seven million people convicted of minor and petty offences, officials said. AFP reports from Seoul.

The bill which affects almost one-sixth of the population, covers 35 offences and cleans the records of scores of incumbent and former civil servants disciplined in the line of duty. Yonhap news agency said.

Beijing boundary confce ends: The 16th conference on the boundary issues between China and Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan and Tadzhikistan ended in Beijing on Thursday, according to a Friday's news release from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Xinhua reports from Beijing.

During the conference, which started November 21, the working group of the boundary negotiation delegation of the Chinese government discussed China's boundary issues with the above four nations with their joint negotiation group in a serious and practical manner.

25 killed in Indian bus plunge: At least 25 people died when a bus in which they were travelling rolled down a mountain side into a deep gorge yesterday in northern India, the Press Trust of India reported. AFP says from New Delhi.

The news agency said 22 passengers died on the spot when the bus hurtled into the 1,000-foot (300-metre) gorge early Saturday in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

Chinese army official off to Russia: Liu Huangting, Vice-Chief of China's powerful Central Military Commission, left Beijing yesterday for an official visit to Russia, Xinhua reported. AFP says from Beijing.

Liu, leading a governmental delegation on the week-long visit, was invited by the Russian government, the report said.

Blast kills 12 in Algeria: Twelve people died and 15 were injured when explosives being prepared for a film crew went off accidentally on Friday, tearing apart an apartment building in Algeria, local officials said. AFP reports from Algiers.

Several of the injured were in serious condition, state radio said. The blast occurred in an apartment in the town of Bouzguene in the northern Kabylia region.

US to cut aid to Sub-Saharan Africa: The United States will cut its assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa by some 20 per cent once the Congress approves the government's efforts to cut the budget deficit, an US official has revealed. Xinhua reports from Lusaka.

Deputy Administrator of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Carol Lancaster said in Lusaka on Thursday that the US government is now striving to reduce its budget deficit, which will result in cutting assistance to developing countries including Africa.

22 drown in Harare boat capsizes: Twenty-two school children drowned when their boat capsized in the middle of a lake on the outskirts of Harare. The Herald mass circulation daily reported yesterday. AFP reports from Harare.

The accident occurred late Friday afternoon in heavy storms that suddenly raised high winds and waves at Lake Chivero, the city's water supply.

TULF accuses Lankan govt of restricting Tamils' movement

COLOMBO, Dec 2: A Sri Lankan Tamil Party on Saturday accused the government of restricting the movement of Tamils fleeing the war-torn Jaffna in the Island's north and said this amounted to apartheid, reports PTI.

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) said in a statement here that thousands of Tamils pouring into government-held town of Vavuniya from rebel-held areas further north were living in unbearable conditions.

TULF president Murgesu Sivasithambaram said the Tamil refugees were being confined to special camps in Vavuniya, some 255 kilometers (160 miles) north of here, and refused permission to leave.

"Even if they wish, they cannot leave the Vavuniya refugee camp," the party said. "These refugees are not given the temporary pass that all residents of Vavuniya must possess... they cannot move out of the camp."

"These restrictions smack of some sort of apartheid," the TULF said.

Tens of thousands of Tamils have fled Jaffna in the Island's north in the wake of Sri Lanka's biggest military offensive launched October 17 to wrest the region from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Most refugees have moved to the LTTE-controlled Sri Lankan mainland in the north crossing the Jaffna lagoon in Tigers-operated boats. Aid workers say most are living without adequate food and shelter.

Reuter adds: Hundreds of thousands of war-weary refugees have fled Sri Lanka's north but what would be a crisis in any other country has not occurred mainly because most have been thought of before, aid officials said.

"I am simply amazed," one aid official working in this frontline town said on Friday night. "It is not as it would be in any other country with the same conditions and same number of people."

"The people have been displaced two or three times in the past. They have experience and they have prepared."

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Tiwari lashes out at liberalisation policy of Rao

BAREILLY, Dec 2: The president of the breakaway Congress, N D Tiwari, yesterday lashed out at the liberalisation policy of the Narasimha Rao government, saying that his faction would take the issue of "increasing poverty and unemployment" to the people, reports PTI.

Speaking to reporters here yesterday, Tiwari said the country's politics had taken a turn for the worse, and no one seems to be bothered about relevant issues.

Former SA defence minister indicted for murder

DURBAN, Dec 2: Former Defence Minister Magnus Malan and 19 other people, including five apartheid-era generals and a vice-admiral, were formally indicted on 13 counts of murder in the regional court here Friday, reports AFP.

The charges stem from a 1987 massacre of 13 people, mostly women and children, in Kwamakhutha black township south of this Kwazulu-Natal province port city.

The accused were ushered into the court through a secret tunnel connected to the nearby police headquarters and were thus able to evade a through of waiting journalists.



Cuban President Fidel Castro (C) with an unidentified school official enjoys the company of young students during his afternoon visit to a school in the Fang Zhuang section of Beijing on Friday. The children sang songs and presented gifts to the Cuban leader during his brief stay at the school. — AFP/UNB photo

Al-Faran urges Hurriyat Confce to talk with Delhi on their behalf

SRINAGAR, Dec 2: A hardline separatist guerrilla group holding four western hostages for almost five months in Kashmir called on Muslim leaders today to negotiate on their behalf with the Indian government, reports AFP.

The Al-Faran group urged the All Party Hurriyat Conference, a forum of 30 political and separatist groups, to negotiate with New Delhi on their demands for the release of 15 jailed comrades in a swap for the four western tourists.

The Al-Faran offer was sent to the AFP office in Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital.

Villagers have sighted the four Western hostages of Muslim separatist guerrillas in southern Kashmir, ending

First heavy snowfall in parts of Kashmir on Wednesday increased concern for the safety of the four Western tourists held by the hardline Muslim separatist Al-Faran group for almost five months.

The snowfall had ushered in sub-zero night temperatures and frozen a river near the resort town of Pahalgam where the two Britons, an American and a German were seized by Al-Faran.

The officials have also expressed concern over the failure of Al-Faran to contact the authorities for the past six days and an apparent hardening of their position.

Official sources said the movements of the militants and the four hostages were being tracked. Indian authorities have ruled out a rescue operation.

feared that two of the captives were too ill to walk, police sources said today.

Witnesses in the village of Wailyu told police that on Monday they saw the four hostages escorted by some 80 Muslim guerrillas trekking in the southern Kashmir district of Kokarnag, 75 kilometres (45 miles) from Srinagar.

"After staying the night in the outskirts of the village they went towards the higher mountain ranges of Kokarnag," police sources quoted witnesses as saying in Wailyu.

Indian troops scattered in the countryside made no attempt to intercept the Muslim guerrillas to avoid a shootout in the open, the sources said in Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital.

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Defiant former South Korean president Chun Doo-Hwan reads a prepared statement in the street outside his Seoul home on Saturday saying he would not obey a court summons for questioning on the 1980 Kwangju massacre. Chun, a former general, then drove from Seoul to his hometown in the south of the country. — AFP/UNB photo

Prosecutors may seek court order to seize Chun

SEOUL, Dec 2: South Korean prosecutors are considering whether to seek court approval to seize Chun Doo Hwan and bring him in for questioning or issue an arrest warrant for the ex-president, an official at the prosecutors office said today, reports Reuter.

Prosecutors were meeting to discuss these options after Chun snubbed a summons to appear today over a 1979 coup that propelled him to office and a military massacre that followed in 1980, the official said in a telephone interview.

"When a suspect refuses to answer a summons prosecutors normally seek court approval to take the suspect to the prosecution office for questioning or issue an arrest warrant," the official said.

"This is the normal procedure. But nothing has yet been decided," he added.

Yonhap news agency and state television both reported prosecutors have decided to issue an arrest warrant.

Chun left Seoul today for his home town of Hapchon after telling reporters he would not cooperate in the prosecution enquiry.

US urges Myanmar junta to stop threatening Suu Kyi's NLD

DUBLIN, Dec 2: The United States on Friday called on Myanmar's ruling military junta to stop threatening the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) and engaged in a peaceful dialogue, reports AFP.

The statement, issued in Dublin where US President Bill Clinton was on an official visit, followed Thursday's expulsion of the NLD, headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, from a constitutional convention by the junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

The party's delegates had walked out of the convention in Yangon two days earlier on

the grounds that the conference was "unacceptable" in its present form.

The US statement, expressing concern at recent events in Myanmar, said, "we and other governments have noted that under current circumstances, the national convention convened by the Myanmar authorities does not offer the opposition a meaningful opportunity to participate in the crucial decisions that will determine Myanmar's political future."

"We understand that the National League for Democracy (NLD) withdrew from the convention after its repeated requests for dialogue with the authorities were re-

jected, triggering a harsh and threatening response by the authorities.

"We urge the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to recognise that public discussion in an environment free of intimidation is critical to the healthy functioning of any political system.

We further urge the authorities to avoid threats or other measures against those who seek freely to express their views, we continue to believe that it is only through peaceful dialogue between the SLORC and recognised democratic leaders that national reconciliation will take place in Myanmar.

Off the Record

Homeopathy to prevent malaria

MEDINAPORE: Homeopathy could hold an answer for curing malaria and malignant malaria, reports PTI.

Five drops of 'arista indica' mother tincture taken twice a day for a month could prevent the disease from striking, the honorary homeopathy physician to the president of India, Dr Bholanath Chakroborty told a press conference Saturday.

Another drug, 'malaria officinalis' 200 could be use both for prevention and cure.

Dr Chakroborty said he had discovered that the first drug was effective in resisting malaria — he had used it in some areas. No case of malaria was reported from these areas.

Rare Tanzanian birds smuggling out

DAR ES SALAAM: Rare birds in Tanzania have decreased drastically, with some neighbouring countries collecting rare species in Tanzania and then smuggling them out, reports Xinhua.

Local newspapers Friday quoted Nail Baker, of the Tanzania Wildlife Conservation Society, as saying that countries like South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe are exporting live birds including flamingo, ibises and cranes.

These birds are not native to those countries, he said. There are about 26 bird species endemic to Tanzania. Some areas of the country have very rare birds but they are not protected, Baker said.

According to Ben Mushi, the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Natural Resources and Environment, Tanzania is recognised as the most important country in Africa for threatened and endangered bird species and is the only country to have attracted major external funding.

Stolen lunar rock on auction!

NEW YORK: A rock that a Manhattan auction house was planning to sell as a piece of the moon has been seized by the FBI, newspapers reported Saturday, says Reuter.

The New York Times quoted National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) spokeswoman Eileen Hawley as saying the rock advertised was from the same mission and of the same general weight as a moon rock that vanished in 1970.

"Let me stress... we don't know if this is a true lunar rock. We don't know if these two incidents have anything to do with each other," she told the newspaper.

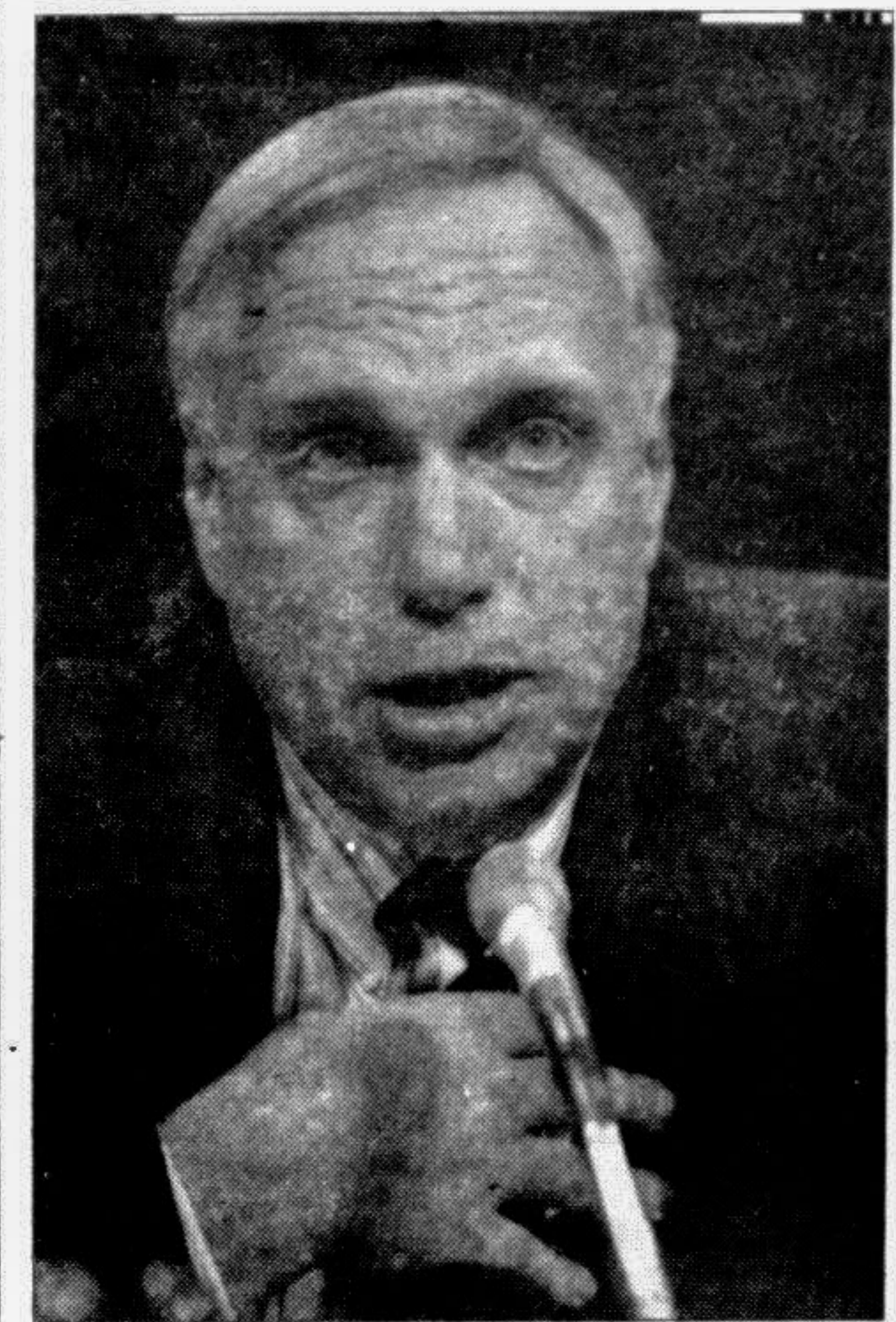
Hawley told the Washington Post if the rock turned out to be a stolen sample than "it's US government property."

The rock disappeared when a shipment of registered and certified mail containing a sample from the Apollo 12 mission of November 1969 was stolen en route to a researcher at the University of California in Los Angeles.

FBI agents with a subpoena removed the rock on Friday afternoon from the New York headquarters of Phillips Fine Art auctioneers and appraisers.

In a statement published by the Times, the auctions house said, "following the FBI inquiry into the rightful title to a lunar specimen that Phillips was about to put up for auction, Phillips has decided to withdraw it from the auction and has turned it over to the FBI."

The auction house had been forced to change its description of the rock after an astronaut complained that it could not have been given away privately.



Webster Hubbell, Attorney, and former partner of US First Lady Hillary Clinton, testifies before the US Senate Whitewater Committee on Friday on Capitol Hill. The committee is now focusing on the role that Mrs. Clinton and her law firm played in the failure of a savings and loan association that cost US taxpayers more than 600 million USD. — AFP/UNB photo

Dispute over place of worship VHP offers to honour claim of Muslims conditionally

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) yesterday offered to honour any legitimate claim of Muslims to a Hindu place of worship if they gave up claims to disputed places of worship in Kashi and Mathura, reports PTI.

The VHP joint general secretary, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, told reporters that "we will try to give it back to them if they make a justified claim to any place of worship illegally occupied by us (Hindus)."

He also said we will take up the construction of temples at Kashi and Mathura only when the Ram Temple at Ayodhya is built. He said history is replete with instances of temples having existed in places disputed by Muslims.

Criticising the Union Home Minister, S B Chavan for his reported statement that the center would not allow destruction of any mosques anywhere in the country, he said "Hindu society had never attempted to destroy any religious place of Muslims."

An important meeting of the Governing Council and the Board of Trustees of the VHP would be held in Bombay from December 17 to 20 to discuss the issues concerning them, he said.

Besides, the Governing Council of the VHP would also be reconstituted during the meeting. The work of VHP and progress concerning construction of Ram Temple would also be reviewed during the meeting, he added.

IPCC blames human activity for greenhouse effect

MADRID, Dec 2: Global warming for which man is that least partly responsible will cause floods, droughts and a drastic rise in sea levels over the next century, a UN organisation will be told later this month, reports AFP.

The conclusions emerged Thursday from a four-day meeting here of 200 meteorologists of the UN-created Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which for the first time blamed human activity for the so-called greenhouse effect.

"There are still many uncertainties" in the predictions, despite considerable progress since the group's previous report five years ago, the IPCC experts said.

But, they warned, "the balance of evidence suggests that there is a discernible human influence on global climate," adding that the scale of warming would probably be greater than any seen in the last 10,000 years.

The experts said they based their conclusions on "more convincing recent evidence," a phrase which upset major oil producers Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They stressed in the report that they preferred the word "preliminary" to "recent."

The report, to be discussed at a meeting of the IPCC in Rome, predicted an average rise in world temperatures of up to 3.5 degrees Celsius by the year 2100 though it could be as low as one degree, depending on the data fed into the various models used.

A "mid range scenario" would be a rise of two degrees, the report said, warn-

ing that after a slowdown at the beginning of the decade concentrations of gases responsible for the greenhouse effect, including carbon dioxide and methane, were on the rise again.

The presence of these gases showed a link to human industry, as since 1750, just before the industrial revolution, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere had risen 30 per cent while that of methane had soared by 145 per cent.

The effect of the warming would be a rise in sea levels of at least 15 centimetres (six inches) and possibly up to 95 centimetres (three feet), with a mid range scenario showing around 50 centimetres.

The rise would be caused principally by the melting of glaciers, the report said. Sea levels so far this century have

risen between ten and 25 centimetres, partly because warmer water expands in volume, causing alarm especially in low lying island countries of the Pacific.

Other effects of global warming would include "a more vigorous hydrological cycle," of more severe flooding and drought, and an increase in the intensity of rainfall, the experts said.

The report was welcomed by the ecological organisation Greenpeace, which accused oil producing countries and major industrial pressure groups involved in the burning of fossil fuels of trying to sabotage the proceedings.

The conclusions that there was definitely a human influence on climate change made it a historic document and a step of major importance, Greenpeace said.

Spacecraft Galileo enters Jupiter's environment

PASADENA, California, Dec 2: More than six years after blasting off from earth on the Shuttle Atlantis, the Galileo Craft has entered Jupiter's environment where it will soon begin a close-up study of the solar system's largest planet, US space scientists said on Friday, reports Reuter.

The spacecraft, which is nearly 600 million miles (960 million kms) from earth, this week crossed the boundary from interplanetary space into the giant magnetic cocoon around Jupiter called the magnetosphere, they said.

Since leaving the earth of Atlantis in August, 1989, Galileo has survived a series of technical glitches and an interplanetary dust storm.

"With the spacecraft now in the magnetosphere, we begin our first direct measurements of the Jupiter system," said Galileo project

manager William O'Neil at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) here.

Data from Galileo confirmed the craft passed the milestone on November 26 at a distance of about six million miles (9.6 million-km) from Jupiter's cloud tops, the JPL said in a statement.

Galileo, named after the Italian astronomer who discovered Jupiter's four largest moons in 1610, is less than a week away from taking up permanent residence around Jupiter to carry out 16 separate experiments in the Jovian system.

On December 7, Galileo will fire its main engines to put it into orbit around the huge planet for almost two years. Galileo will then receive data from a probe that will plunge down through Jupiter's clouds to send back information.