

BRIEFLY

Chirac arrives in Tokyo: French President Jacques Chirac arrived in Tokyo yesterday for a state visit aimed at giving a 'new impetus' to bilateral ties. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The official part of his visit is to begin Monday with a welcoming ceremony attended by Emperor Akihito and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto. This is the first state visit in 14 years by a French president to Japan.

Czech PM keeps options open: Czech Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus kept his options open on whether the domination of his Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in this weekend's first round of Senate elections might encourage a quest for a larger mandate. Reuters reports from Prague.

As results for the new upper house came in late on Saturday, Klaus reserved comment on possibly using his party's strength in the Senate races as a signal to seek new elections to the lower house in order to win back a majority government.

Amiens film award declared: Japanese director Yoichi Higashi's film 'The Village of My Dreams' won the best-picture prize at the Amiens International Film Festival on Saturday, organisers said. AFP reports from Amiens, France.

Some 37,000 film buffs attended the 16th edition of the festival in the north of France, which this year honoured the work of another Japanese film-maker, Shohei Imamura.

Russian bldg blast toll may rise: As many as 100 people were dead or presumed dead yesterday in an apartment block bombing in Kaspysk, the head doctor at the scene of the catastrophe told AFP.

In addition to 10 confirmed dead, a further 90 were estimated to be lying under the rubble of the building which was destroyed by a bomb Saturday, Doctor Kazanfar Kurbanov said. 'We have no hope for them now, he added.

Russia lost contact with space module: Monitors tracking the Russian Mars probe launched Saturday said they had lost contact with the module, which was still trapped in earth orbit. AFP reports from Evpatoryia, Ukraine.

Scientists at the centre for long distance space communication here told AFP Sunday that they were unsure of the exact orbit or its trajectory.

Voting begins in Thailand: Thai voters began trickling into voting stations as the polls opened at 8:00am (0200 GMT) yesterday amid claims of record vote-buying and threats against the lives of political canvassers. AFP reports from Bangkok.

A total of 2,310 candidates from 13 parties were contending for 393 seats, from the previous elections in July 1995. Some 60 per cent of 38.4 million eligible voters were expected to take part.

'Hutus setting up bases': Burundian strongman Pierre Buyoya Saturday charged that Hutu rebels displaced by fighting in eastern Zaire were travelling cross-country and setting up bases in Tanzania. AFP reports from Bujumbura.

'I asked for a meeting between the Tanzanian government and a Burundian delegation to ensure that the border is not troubled, he told journalists in Bujumbura after meeting former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere in the northern Tanzanian town of Musoma.

Quake shakes Philippine island: A mild earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 3.2 shook a sparsely populated southern Philippine island Sunday, but no damage or casualties were reported. AP says from Manila.

The quake was centred in the Philippine Sea, 140 kilometres (88 miles) northeast of Surigao City, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said.

Lee renews offer to visit China

TAIPEI, Nov 17: President Lee Teng-hui on Sunday made another offer to visit China on a 'mission of peace', but said not getting a response from Beijing was preventing improved ties, reports AP.

Lee told a visiting US Senate delegation he was willing to meet the leaders in Beijing, and Chinese leaders would be 'welcome at any time' if they wished to visit Taiwan.

However, the Chinese Communists' lack of any response whatsoever to this friendly suggestion, even after half a year, is truly regretful," Lee was quoted in a release from the Presidential Office.

An exchange of visits was first proposed by Lee in early 1995, and reaffirmed in his May 20 inaugural address.

Lee told the American senators he was the 'actual promoter' of exchanges between the two sides.

After years of hard work, the two sides had created a channel for semi-official talks laid out

the historic 1993 meeting between Taiwan's top negotiator Koo Chen-fun and his mainland counterpart Wang Daohan, Lee said.

Beijing unilaterally suspended further talks after Lee made a private visit to the United States in June 1995, a move China saw as evidence that Taiwan was moving away from eventual renunciation with the mainland.

Beginning last year, the Chinese Communists have regrettably completely terminated the Koo-Wang talks, and closed the door of negotiations," Lee was quoted as saying.

Lee also thanked the delegation for the US government's decision to dispatch two aircraft carriers to the Taiwan Strait during threatening Chinese military maneuvers near the island in March.

Staged during Taiwan's first ever direct presidential election, the Chinese maneuvers were seen as aiming to intimidate support for formal independence on the island.

HR body for improved diets to Indian detainees

NEW DELHI, Nov 17: India's apex human rights body has asked provincial governments to improve meals dished out to people in police detention, terming current fare as 'woefully inadequate', the Press Trust of India said today, reports AFP.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in a directive to 25 provincial administrations, called for a 'rational diet allowance' for suspects lodged in police stations.

"As the diet allowance is very meagre, the police... have to resort to other methods to feed the prisoners," NHRC chairman and former Chief Justice Ranganath Mishra said.

Mishra said the money spent on an individual meal now

varied from a paltry two rupees (0.05 cents) — or the price of a single king sized cigarette — to 10 rupees (28 cents).

An NHRC team, made up of nutritional and legal experts, recommended vegetarian meals for prisoners, costing a minimum of 16 rupees (45 cents). It said fuel and cooks' salaries were not included in the figure. Mishra said diet costs had to be periodically reviewed to match inflation.

"This measure is necessary not only from the perspective of observance of human rights of the prisoners in police lock-ups but also to curb a long standing malpractice in police stations," he said.

Deaths in police custody are reported quite frequently.

Iran to stage major naval exercise in Gulf

TEHRAN, Nov 17: The Iranian navy is to stage major maneuvers in the Gulf and Oman sea Thursday as the country prepares to take delivery of its third submarine from Russia, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

The papers, citing navy commander Admiral Ali Shamkhani, said the 10-day exercise would involve around 10,000 members of the regular navy, the Elite Revolutionary Guards and the Islamic volunteer militia.

Around 100 vessels and 40 planes and helicopters will be deployed in the maneuvers, code-named 'Victory,' he said.

Rwandans welcome tide of returning refugees from Zaire

GISENYI, Rwanda, Nov 17: About 400,000 Rwandan Hutus on the Zairian side of the border waited for daybreak Sunday to resume their arduous trek back into their homeland and leave behind 2 and a half years of exile and misery, reports AP.

More than 200,000 refugees had streamed into this border town by late Saturday at a rate of about 10,000 an hour, the United Nations estimated.

A downpour Saturday drenched the 25-mile (40 kilometres) line of men, women and children making their way through green, winding hills from a now deserted refugee camp in Zaire and over the border into Gisenyi.

The refugees' unexpected return has overtaken a ponderous international effort to assem-

International

'Washington needs to shift policies for improving ties with Beijing'

BEIJING, Nov 17: China said today the United States was trying to contain it and that Washington needed to shift policies to improve ties, reports Reuters.

In an attack aimed just days before the arrival of US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, China also accused the United States of being 'self-righteous' and 'alienating' in its foreign policy.

"Only when the United States drops the idea of containing China, removes ideological bias against China and stops basing its foreign policies purely on its own economic interests can we expect significant progress in bilateral ties," said the business weekly.

Contrary to Washington's stated policy of maintaining contact with China, the United States was employing a strategy of containment based on a security defence chain linking South Korea, Japan, the Philip-

pines and Thailand, said the newspaper, published by the official China Daily.

The newspaper was quoting 'Chen Bingcai, an economist at a think-tank linked to the state planning commission.

The US secretary of state is scheduled to arrive in China on Tuesday in the first senior-level contact between the two nations since the re-election of US President Bill Clinton.

It is part of an effort aimed at repairing relations strained by a series of disputes ranging from Taiwan to human rights to trade and arms proliferation.

The most serious damage to ties was inflicted when China held war games and unarmed missile tests off Taiwan early this year, prompting the US to send two aircraft carrier groups near the island in a show of force.

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The newspaper also made the same policy connection, saying that although there had been fewer conflicts with Japan of late, Tokyo still needed to abandon this path.

China and Japan have been at loggerheads most recently over disputed east China sea islands known in Chinese as the

Diaoyus and in Japanese as the Senkakus.

An expanded US-Japan security pact signed this year was in fact a cover for a resurgence of Japanese militarism, according to the newspaper.

Diplomats in Beijing said this was a theme heard most frequently from China's armed forces.

The newspaper quoted Chen as saying the United States, relying on its economic and military might, was becoming increasingly high handed in international affairs, and its own foreign policy has become extremely self-righteous and alienating.

Without a policy shift, the United States could be expected to continue blocking China's long-stalled entry into the world trade organisation and further turbulence was likely in trade and economic relations.

HIV cases in E Asia, Pacific will rise to 473,190 by 2000: WHO

MANILA, Nov 17: More than a quarter of a million people in East Asia and the Pacific are estimated to have contracted with the HIV virus which leads to AIDS, and the total will rise to nearly half a million by 2000, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said today, reports AFP.

The UN agency, citing a "high level of under-reporting and under-diagnosis," said in a report that 278,000 people are thought to have been infected with the Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV), which 7,000 cases developing into full-blown Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in 1996.

In four years the numbers are projected to rise to 473,190 HIV cases and 26,578 AIDS infections, the WHO statement said.

The region only reported cumulative totals of 59,926 HIV cases and 11,067 AIDS infections as of August 31, 1996.

The worldwide estimates as of mid-1996 are more than 22 million HIV cases and more than seven million AIDS cases.

The WHO Western Pacific Office here warned of "increasing epidemics of heterosexual

transmission" in Papua New Guinea and Cambodia, with the latter now having "one of the highest estimated number of people with HIV per capita in Asia and the Pacific."

Injecting drug users continued to dominate the mode of HIV transmission in China, Malaysia and Vietnam.

The incidence in Australia is seen to "continue to drop in 1996," while those of New

Hotel fire claims 17 in Istanbul

ISTANBUL, NOV 17: At least 17 people died in a fire that broke out at a hotel in central Istanbul early today, the state-run Anatolian news agency reported, reports Reuters.

According to initial reports, 41 people were hurt in the blaze which began around 4:00 am (0200 GMT) in a seven-storey, three star hotel in Istanbul's Laleli district.

Anatolian said mostly Ukrainian tourists were staying in the hotel at the time.

The agency quoted unnamed officials as saying the fire may have been caused by a gas leak

Zealand are on a general down trend despite a slight increase in the first half of 1996, the statement said.

A limited indication of HIV epidemics were seen in Brunei, Hong Kong, Laos, Macau, Mongolia, Singapore, the Pacific islands countries, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea.

The WHO's geographic division does not include other Asian countries with high levels of reported HIV and AIDS cases such as Thailand, Myanmar and India.

WHO regional director Han Sang Tae said in a statement that the majority of HIV infections in the Western Pacific are now acquired through heterosexual contact, with injecting drug use a "growing problem."

He said some countries seem to be succeeding in slowing down the epidemic "after the WHO began lobbying governments to develop national prevention and control programmes in 1988."

The WHO report said the "very high level of HIV incidence experienced by people with hemophilia in Japan was effectively eliminated by the introduction of mandatory screening of blood products."

Lankan air strike on suspected LTTE targets

COLOMBO, Nov 17: The Sri Lanka airforce carried out booming raids over suspected Tamil Tiger guerrilla targets in eastern Sri Lanka as ground troops maintained a red alert for rebel attacks, officials said today, reports AFP.

Airforce bombers devastated a building of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) near the small town of Chenkaladi on Saturday, officials said adding that rebel casualties were not immediately known.

The air strikes came as army troops relocated one of their elite fighting units in the adjoining district of Ampara in a bid to seek and destroy suspected Tiger positions in the area, officials said.

Ground troops in the islands embattled northern and eastern regions have been placed on red alert for possible bomb attacks by the Tigers to mark the 42nd birthday of rebel Supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran on November 26.

The Tigers also mark a "hero's week" in November to commemorate their dead fighters.

Hashish worth \$15m seized at Karachi Port

ISLAMABAD, Nov 16: Drug enforcement authorities have seized 12 tonnes of hashish from a container at the Karachi Port, the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) news agency reported Saturday, says AFP.

The container was brought to the southern port from the city of Faisalabad in eastern Pakistan for shipment to the Netherlands, the agency said.

The report, which did not give details, said the authorities acted on a tip-off about the attempt to smuggle the consignment with the help of fictitious documents.

The drug enforcement officials estimated the value of the hashish at around 15 million dollars on the clandestine international drug market.

Israel to ease closure on WB, Gaza Strip

JERUSALEM, Nov 17: Israel promised Saturday to ease a closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip and allow thousands of Palestinian labourers to reach jobs in Israel, reports AP.

The order, which applies to Palestinians who are married and over the age of 30, will allow 8,250 workers and merchants from the West Bank and another 7,250 from the Gaza Strip. They are expected to be allowed to enter Israel on Sunday, the Israeli army spokesman's office said.

Last week Israel issued permits to some 35,000 Palestinians to enter Israel.

Most Palestinian workers have been barred from entering Israeli territory since a series of suicide bombing attacks killed 63 people in February and March. Before then, 60,000 Palestinians had permits to work in Israel.

Palestinians say that the restrictions cost their fledgling economy \$6 million a day in lost wages and exports.



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat looks at a dove during a peace rally held in Rafah City in the Gaza Strip, Saturday, to celebrate the eighth anniversary of the declaration of the Palestinian Independence. Palestinians appealed Saturday to the United States and Russia to use their influence to get Israel to conclude an accord on the long delayed Israeli troops withdrawal from the West Bank town of Hebron. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Exotic world of Internet!

WASHINGTON: Those running the multi-billion-dollar sex industry in the United States are now exploring new ways to expand their markets abroad, reports IPS.

"Welcome to the exotic world of Asia" says an internet web site provided by the US-based ultra internet company click on the advisory page, and you will see dozens of pictures of nude teenage Asian girls.

"Asian girls from Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines want to know American's western men," says an ad at another site.

The trend to place advertisements like these on the internet that specifically target sex markets in poor Asian countries is growing fast.

More than 100 web sites are used exclusively to promote teenage commercial sex in Asia the internet sex site owners charge from 100 to 150 dollars for membership and detailed information about sex workers.

Turning last into dollars, the sex industry earns about eight billion dollars year from pornography telephone sex and internet sex tours says US author James Ridgeway in this recent work. Red light inside the sex industry.

Jackson's new bride shown topless on tabloid

NEW YORK: First the secret pregnancy. Then the private, private wedding. Now — ta dah! Michael Jackson's new bride shows up topless on the pages of a tabloid newspaper, reports AP.

The New York Post on Saturday published a photo of Debbie Rowe that it said was taken three years ago in the office of a Beverly Hills dermatologist where she worked.

The picture, altered to obscure Rowe's bare breasts, shows her reclining in a chair, with a foot propped on the edge of a desk and her dress down to her waist.

Jackson announced November 4 that Rowe was pregnant with his child, denying reports that they used artificial insemination and that Rowe was paid \$28,000 dollars to carry the baby, due in February.

They were married Thursday in a private ceremony in Sydney, Australia, where Jackson is on tour.

The Post said the picture was taken by a photographer assigned to take pictures for a magazine profile of Rowe's employer, dermatologist Arnold Klein.

Rowe joked that it would be funny to have her picture taken topless in Klein's examining chair, then unbuttoned her dress and smiled, the Post reported, citing an anonymous source.

"Check these out," she reportedly told the surprised photographer.

"Klein's office manager, Barbara Frank, refused to confirm Saturday that the photograph was taken in the doctor's office."

For protection from electronic pirating

LOS ANGELES: Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks and Madonna have added their names to a campaign asking the US government to protect performers from electronic pirating of their work on the international market, reports AP.

They're among the stars signing a statement backing the Screen Actors Guild on the issue, said union president Richard Masur.

Digital technology permits any recorded audio or audiovisual performance to be manipulated, reproduced and disseminated worldwide, nearly instantaneously, Masur said. He said the union wants the United States to support its position at the World Intellectual Property Organisation talks which begin December 2 in Geneva, and to reject any treaty that doesn't protect artists.

Gold in the garbage dump!

TOKYO: A Japanese woman has found four kilograms (8.8 pounds) of gold bars at a garbage dump in a residential area near Tokyo, a police spokesman said Sunday.

The 63-year-old woman, whose name was withheld, found 54 bars worth a total of some five million yen (45,000 dollars) in a plastic bag at a dumping site in Matsudo, east of Tokyo, Saturday, the spokesman said.

"Why the bars were there is unclear. The owner might have thrown them away by mistake, or deliberately left them for some reason," he said.

A woman in Tokyo called police today to say her "acquaintance" might be the owner, but the report had "little credibility," the spokesman said, adding there had been no reports of gold stolen.

If the owner is not found in the coming six months, the bars will go to the finder.

Russian FM in China

SHANGHAI, Nov 17: Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov arrived in Shanghai today at the start of a three-day visit to China, Russian consular officials said, reports Reuters.

He arrived at Shanghai's Hongqiao Airport from Tokyo after securing a major improvement in relations with Japan.

Primakov was due to spend a day in the city before going to Beijing on Monday morning to meet Chinese leaders. He was scheduled to meet his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen on Monday and President Jiang Zemin at the Great Hall of the People on Tuesday afternoon.