

BRIEFLY

Mother Teresa
improving

Mother Teresa's condition had greatly improved a day after she was admitted to hospital following heart failure, a doctor attending her told AFP Saturday in Calcutta.

"There was a crisis on Thursday night when we went to see her," Dinamani Banerjee, one of five experts attending the 86-year-old missionary told AFP over telephone.

"But she has fully recovered from the episode," he said. "She has overcome the crisis."

2 Russian border
guards killed in
Dushanbe

Unidentified gunmen opened fire with grenade launchers and automatic rifles on a bus carrying Russian border guards in the Tajik capital Dushanbe on Friday, killing two servicemen and wounding six. Reuter reports from Dushanbe.

"They've done this to scare us," said a Russian officer at the scene who declined to be identified. Shattered glass covered the site of the attack which was cordoned off by Tajik and Russian security forces.

10 die in Nigeria
road mishap

Ten people died and 17 others were seriously injured in a four-vehicle crash in Agbala, in Nigeria's eastern Imo state, the official News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported Friday. AFP reports from Lagos.

The accident happened Monday when a bus collided with a lorry. Another bus which tried to avoid the accident, hit a parked vehicle at the scene of the accident, witnesses told NAN.

Top adviser to
Danish PM
removed

The top adviser to Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen was removed from his position Friday. No reason was given for the departure of Ulrik Federspiel, but it was widely believed to be connected to embarrassment over the handling of a visit by Salman Rusdie. AP reports from Copenhagen.

"Ulrik Federspiel and I have agreed that Ulrik Federspiel leaves his position today as department chief in Denmark's State Ministry," Nyrup Rasmussen said in a statement.

Rains kill 20 in
C America

Driving rains that have been lashing Central America and the western Caribbean for days have left a total of at least 20 people dead, authorities said Friday. AFP reports from San Jose.

In Central America, 19 people have been killed and some 80,000 people have been made homeless by the flooding and storm damage. Honduras was hardest hit there with seven deaths reported and 60,000 homeless and material damage worth millions of dollars.

UNSCOM chief
arrives in Kuwait

The chief of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) for the disarmament of Iraq arrived in Kuwait City Friday at the start of a Gulf tour. Kuwait's official news agency KUNA reported. AFP reports from Kuwait City.

"UNSCOM is not yet satisfied with the progress achieved in its operations in Iraq," Rolf Ekeus told KUNA on arrival, accusing Baghdad of failing to meet its obligations under UN resolution which ended the 1991 Gulf War.

Landslide claims
7 in Brazil

Seven people died and another eight injured Friday when six homes were crushed under a landslide in the city of Aracruz, civil defence officials said. AFP reports from Rio de Janeiro.

Some 200 people were evacuated from their homes in Aracruz some 400 kilometers (248 miles) north of Rio for fear that the torrential rains that pounded the area could cause further landslides officials said.

FBI director off
to KSA

FBI Director Louis Freeh left Friday for Saudi Arabia for talks on the investigation into the June 25 bombing at a US military housing complex that killed 19 Americans the FBI said. AFP reports from Washington.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation gave few details on the trip. Freeh's third to Saudi Arabia except to say that it was at the invitation of the Saudi government and "part of an ongoing effort to solve this crime."

Blast claims 23
in Puerto Rico

At least 23 people were killed and some 39 more were feared buried Friday beneath the rubble of a six story building fell by an explosion believed to have been caused by a gas leak. AFP reports from San Juan.

Police aided by search dogs uncovered the body of one woman amid shattered glass and mangled wreckage of wood and concrete.

Donors, Rwandan officials meet
to coordinate relief efforts

GENEVA, Nov 23: Western aid chiefs, donors and Rwandan government officials met in Geneva today to coordinate relief efforts for more than half a million Rwandan Hutu refugees who poured back home from eastern Zaire, reports Reuter.

"We all worked very hard to get the refugees back to Rwanda and we'll help Rwanda rebuild a country with all its people," United Nations refugee agency UNHCR chief Sadako Agata told reporters at the start of the one-day talks, also attended by senior West European and US aid officials.

The meeting is chaired by Canada's International Cooperation Minister Don Boudria and attended by high-level representatives from European donor countries, including French State Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs Xavier Emmanuelli.

Also participating are US agency for International Development (USAID) chief Brian Atwood and International Committee of the Red Cross president Cornelio Sommaruga.

The closed-door talks started as an international meeting of military commanders in Stuttgart, Germany, to discuss a possible armed intervention force to bring aid to Rwandan and Burundian refugees in Zaire had to be extended to Saturday amidst confusion over how many people

need help, and where they are.

Lieutenant-General Maurice Baril of Canada, which is co-ordinating the UN authorised mission, told a news conference in Stuttgart that estimates varied between 100,000 and 500,000. These figures are below UNHCR estimates of more than 700,000 refugees.

Meanwhile a meeting of military commanders to discuss an armed intervention force to bring aid to Rwandan and Burundian refugees in Zaire has had to be extended to Saturday, amidst confusion over how many people need help and where they are.

But efforts to find refugees lost in Zaire were hampered further when rebels stopped UN agencies entering a large area in the east of the country on Friday.

Ray Wilkison told reporters that UNHCR staff were being prevented by Zairean rebels from leaving Goma, near the border with Rwanda, to seek the refugees and that rebel commander Andre Kassesse had declared the area a military zone.

He said in Ottawa it was obvious that there is still a need for humanitarian aid, but he could not say when political leaders would meet to decide, if armed intervention was necessary to get food to the refugees.

Another report says the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said on Friday it was

sending an advance team of experts to Rwanda to help co-ordinate emergency agricultural help for refugees and displaced people in Central Africa.

FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf will lead the team whose brief is to assess the needs of people in Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Zaire.

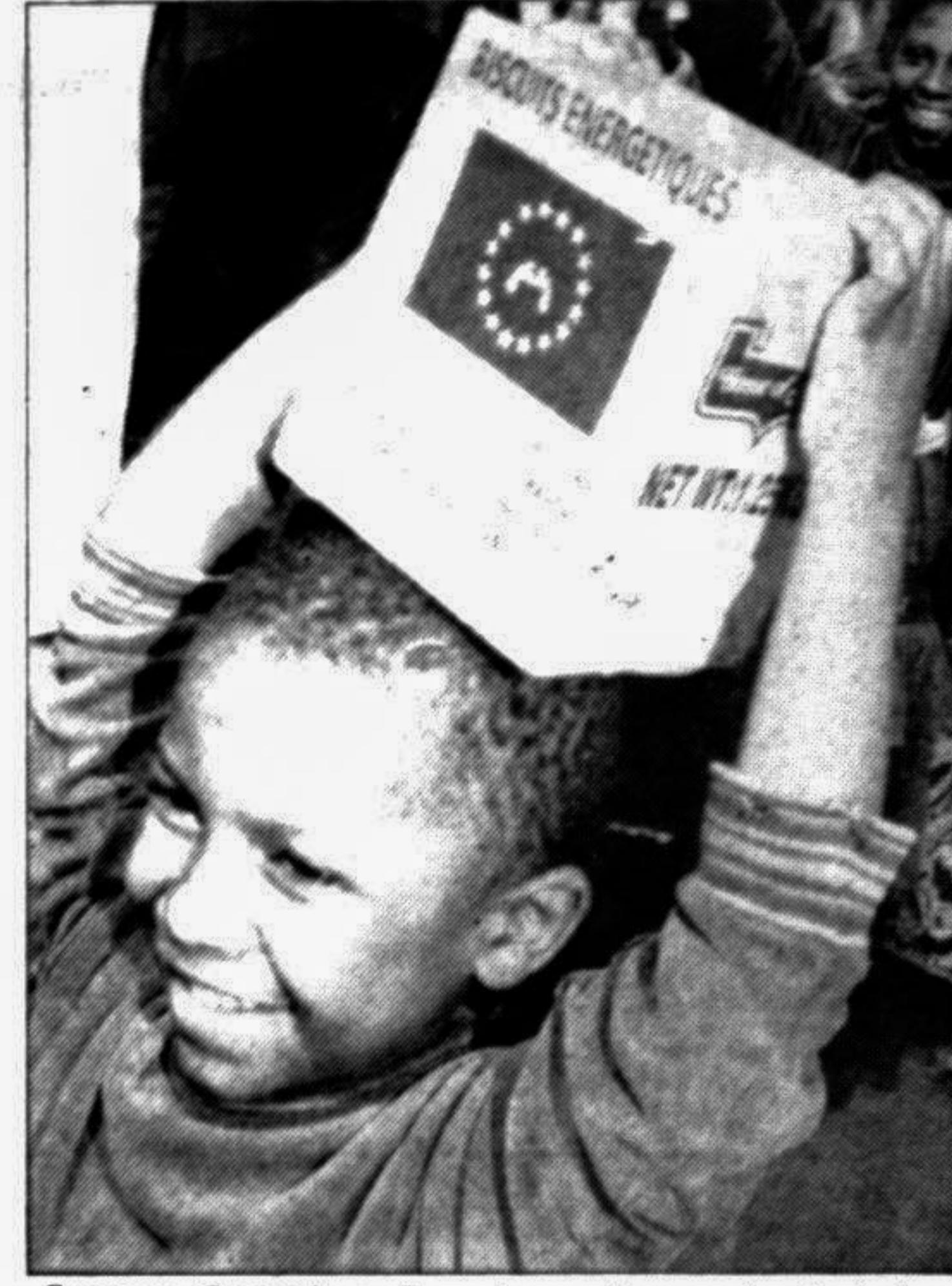
The team will coordinate aid for more than a million people in the three countries.

Another report from Goma adds: Great confusion still surrounds the whereabouts of an estimated 700,000 refugees missing in eastern Zaire despite satellite pictures, a senior UN refugee agency (UNHCR) official said on Friday.

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Snsenga Samuel, a Rwandan refugee who fled the Kahindo refugee camp in Zaire with his mother three weeks ago, leaves the UNHCR food distribution centre with a box of cookies Friday at the Akkar transit camp, near Ruhengeri, 70 km from Gisenyi. — AFP/UNB photo

Yeltsin signs decree ordering
troop withdrawal from Chechnya

MOSCOW, Nov 23: Ending a dispute between Moscow and Chechen separatists, President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree Saturday ordering the two remaining Russian brigades be withdrawn from Chechnya, reports AP.

Under a peace agreement reached between the two sides in August, all Russian troops were to be pulled out by the end of the year. But until now Russian officials have insisted that the two brigades were permanently based in the separatist republic and would remain there.

Separatist leaders have demanded that the brigades be

withdrawn, saying their presence would obstruct plans to hold elections in Chechnya in January.

Yeltsin's decree, released by his press service to Russian news agencies, said the brigades will be withdrawn "to guarantee the further peaceful settlement in the Chechen republic, the demilitarisation of the Chechen republic" and to create conditions for democratic elections.

The president ordered the Interior Ministry's 101st brigade and the Defense Ministry's 205th motorized brigade to be re-deployed elsewhere in the north Caucasus region and told

Russian national security chief Ivan Rybkin met on Friday with Chechen separatist leaders to fine-tune the wording of the new agreement. And Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's office announced Saturday morning that he and Aslan Maskhadov, the Chechen government head, planned to meet later in the day in Moscow.

The Palestinian people are called upon to defend their land from the settlers who are encouraged by the Netanyahu government, the authority's Cabinet Secretary Ahmed Abdel Rahman told journalists in Gaza City.

The Palestinian farmer will not stand alone in this confrontation. We will provide all possible financial, moral and political support to Palestinians in all villages and cities

PA calls on Palestinians
to 'defend their lands'

GAZA CITY, Nov 23: The Palestinian Authority called on Palestinians Friday to defend their lands against Jewish settlers in a campaign against Israeli expansion of settlements in the West Bank, reports AFP.

The Palestinian people are called upon to defend their land from the settlers who are encouraged by the Netanyahu government, the authority's Cabinet Secretary Ahmed Abdel Rahman told journalists in Gaza City.

The Palestinian farmer will not stand alone in this confrontation. We will provide all possible financial, moral and political support to Palestinians in all villages and cities

and in Jerusalem he said.

He warned that Israel's policy of expanding Jewish settlements will close the door to peace and open the door to more tension and confrontation between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Abdel Rahman spoke following a weekly cabinet meeting with President Yasser Arafat in which new Israeli settlement plans topped the agenda.

Israel plans to spend 300 million dollars to expand Jewish settlements and build road in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem in 1997, a 50 per cent jump over the 1996 budget according to the Israeli group peace now.

Thatcher warns against
revival of socialism

LONDON, Nov 23: Former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher burst back on the political stage on Friday to warn against a revival of socialism in Britain, Europe and the world, reports Reuter.

In a characteristically forthright speech she attacked Britain's opposition Labour Party as closest socialists and said the European Union's core members seemed bent on creating a bureaucratic socialist superstate.

We have to appreciate that socialism is not dead, it is not even asleep, it is visibly stirring, she said.

Thatcher's aides billed her speech as important and her intervention will stroke fires in the British political scene, already hotting up ahead of an election that must be held by

next May and driven by disputes over Europe.

We may well be approaching one of those rare occasions in our affairs when a small deviation to right or left brings huge rewards or the gravest dangers, Thatcher, Prime Minister from 1979-1990, said in a lecture in London.

Thatcher was polite but not effusive about her successor John Major saying he showed persistence, imagination and skill in pushing the free market strategy for transforming Britain she pursued for 11 years until ousted in a party coup.

She warned that while Labour appears to have borrowed from Conservative policies to move to the political centre it would fail to nurture the free market if elected.

The protest was headed by key opposition figure Luk Draskovic, the Democratic Party leader Zoran Djindjic and Vesna Petic, head of the Civic Alliance.

Police kept a discreet watch on the proceedings, and armed guards were posted around the Serbian Parliament and the television building.

Police-Maoist
clashes leave
60 dead in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Nov 23: More than 60 people were killed in Nepal in clashes between police and Maoists, who launched an insurgency in February against the present democratic set up, a Home Ministry spokesman said today, reports AFP.

The ultra-leftists, who swear by the "people's war" idea of late Chinese leader Mao Zedong, are opposed to Nepal's current multi-party system with a constitutional monarchy. They seek to replace it with a government of the working class.

"Over 40 people were killed in police crossfire, some 15 innocent people and 4 policemen were shot dead, among many others injured by the Maoist militia," spokesman Gopendra Bahadur Pandey said.

He said, "Adequate and effective security measures have been taken to deal with the heightened Maoist activity and added that 'constant vigilance' would be maintained.

Iraq yet to give
acceptable account
of missiles: Ekeus

KUWAIT, Nov 23: The UN official in charge of destroying Iraq's deadliest weapons has expressed concern that Baghdad has not given an acceptable account of its missiles or biological and chemical arms capabilities, reports Reuter.

What we have not achieved is to have a satisfactory account of missiles which Iraq may be keeping or an account biological and chemical weapon capabilities, so we are still concerned, the official Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) quoted Rolf Ekeus as saying upon arrival in Kuwait on Friday night.

Ekeus will brief the UN Security Council on Iraq's refusal to allow its arms experts to transport missile parts for inspection, KUNA reported.

Democratic Party to
return donations
from Asian sources

WASHINGTON, Nov 23: The Democratic Party of US President Bill Clinton announced Friday it would return a further 450,000 dollars in questionable campaign donations from Asian sources, reports AP.

The Democratic National Committee, at the centre of widening allegations of questionable fundraising during the campaign season which ended with Clinton's reelection on November 5 admitted no wrongdoing in accepting the vast sum from Indonesian couple Arief and Soraya Wiraditama in 1985 and 1996.

"When questions were raised about the legality of the contributions were checked the law and confirmed that the contributions were legal," DNC spokesman Amy Weiss Tobe said.

In a statement Thursday night, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority said Mrs Blood's lawyers had been told that the ban had been upheld and she would not be allowed to take the sperm abroad for treatment in another country.

Protest against
govt continues
in Belgrade

BELGRADE, Nov 23: Around 10,000 people braved heavy rain to march through Belgrade Friday, in a sixth consecutive day of anti-government protests, after the authorities cancelled election results which showed opposition gains, reports AP.

The protest was headed by key opposition figure Luk Draskovic, the Democratic Party leader Zoran Djindjic and Vesna Petic, head of the Civic Alliance.

The show carefully entitled "Master Drawings Revisited: Treasures from Prewar German Collections," includes works by such master as Paul Cezanne, Vincent van Gogh, Francisco Goya and Eugene Delacroix.

A handful of works were to be unveiled Friday at a news conference at the Hermitage. In New York, publisher Harry F. Abrams Inc. unveiled the glossy catalog.

Paul Gottlieb, president and publisher of Abrams, vividly recalls the first time he saw the works, in the spring of 1995. It was in a huge room at the top of the Hermitage.

Many of the watercolours, drawings and gouaches in the new show come from the same collections.

Off the Record

Handwork of a
genius, or Van
Gogh?

PARIS: It isn't a typical Van Gogh. The colours are right, blues, spring greens and golden yellows. But the abstract perspective and brush strokes have none of the artist's usual realistic touches — a fence, a rooftop or a church spire, reports AP.

The "Jardin d'Avignon", which goes on the auction block December 9, has some experts at odds. Is it an elaborate fake? Or is it the handwork of a genius?

For the second time in four years the painting is up for sale, but it's the first time authenticity has been a question. The Paris art world has been abuzz with speculation since the summer, when a respected French critic noted discrepancies concerning the painting's original owner.

The world's leading Van Gogh scholars have insisted — repeatedly — that Van Gogh made the small landscape in the creative frenzy leading up to his suicide in 1890. It also widely held that Van Gogh's sister-in-law was the painting's first owner.

But critic Jean-Marie Tasset cited research showing that "Jardin" belonged to the brother of Claude-Emile Schuffenecker and Schuffenecker had a reputation as a second-rate artist with a talent for copying successful artists — including Van Gogh.

The curator at Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum declares the painting is "absolutely" the real thing. "We are aware of the controversy," Sjaar van Heugten says. "We reviewed all the material and have concluded that there's been mix-up of facts."

Widow barred
from using
husband's sperm!

LONDON: Regulators have again barred a widow from using her late husband's sperm to become pregnant, but she says she will continue the fight to have his child, reports AP.

Late last month, regulators agreed to reconsider their 1995 ruling banning Diane Blood from using the sperm of her dead husband. This followed a High Court decision on October 17 upholding the regulators' ruling that under British law, the sperm could not be used because Stephen Blood had not given his written consent.

Blood died in March 1995 after contracting bacterial meningitis and falling into a coma. While he was comatose and on a life-support machine, Mrs Blood asked doctors to take samples of his sperm, which now are stored at a hospital in Sheffield, 160 miles (250 kms) north of London.