

Coconut oil possible cure for AIDS!

MANILA, Dec 28: A Philippine legislator asked the government today to allocate funds to boost research on the use of coconut oil as a possible cure for the virus that causes AIDS, reports Reuters.

Congressman Ramon Bagatsing urged the health and the science and technology departments to pursue the findings of US-based biochemist Mary Enig that the fatty acid monolaurin in coconut oil could kill the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

HIV causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). "We are duty bound to support more research into Dr Enig's discovery, not only because of the increasing number of Filipinos threatened by the HIV, but also because we are among the world's top producers of coconut oil," said Bagatsing, former chairman of the committee on science and technology in the house of representatives.

In October, Enig told a symposium of Southeast Asian coconut oil producers in Manila that studies had shown that lauric oils might be a suitable supplement in the diet regimens of HIV-infected individuals because of their high lauric acid concentration.

UK urges Zambia to charge or free Kaunda soon

LONDON, Dec 28: Britain on Saturday urged Zambia to quickly charge or release former president Kenneth Kaunda, held in a maximum security jail after his Christmas Day arrest, reports Reuters.

Foreign Office Minister Tony Lloyd added to international criticism levelled at Zambian President Frederick Chiluba for detaining his political rival Kaunda, 73, apparently in connection with an abortive coup attempt two months ago.

Lloyd said in a statement he was "extremely concerned" to hear of the arrest, adding that Britain would continue to "monitor the situation closely."

"The Zambian authorities must complete their investigations with all speed and either charge or release Dr Kaunda," the British minister said.



Santa Claus visits the Saddam Hospital for children in Baghdad to distribute gifts and medicine Saturday. A chartered plane from Iceland's Peace 2000 Institute arrived at Iraq's Habania airport Friday to bring Santa Claus with gifts and medicines. — AP/UNB photo

'Saddam may use holy month of Ramadan to conceal weapons'

PRINCE SULTAN AIR BASE, Saudi Arabia, Dec 28: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein could use the Islamic holy month of Ramadan to further conceal Iraq's chemical and biological weapons from UN inspectors, the general in charge of US forces in the Gulf said Saturday, reports AP.

Marine Corps Gen. Anthony Zinni, setting out on a four-day regional tour, predicted a quiet Ramadan militarily but warned that Iraq may use the holy month, which begins next week, against the international inspections by agents of the UN special commission, or UNSCOM.

"If they are hiding things and moving things, (Ramadan) could give them the time and the cover to do it," Zinni told reporters traveling with him to this sprawling air base, from which US warplanes conduct flights over Iraq.

"The longer we go without

inspections in places that UNSCOM really, truly expects something might be hidden, the better the chance is that something could be hidden to the point where we could get a cold trail and lose it."

The United States and UN allies have been pressing Iraq to open to weapons inspection scores of sensitive sights including some of Saddam's presidential palaces. Though Iraq has given ground to inspectors recently, it has declared many sites off-limits and denied it holds chemical or biological weapons.

Ramadan, marked by daytime fasting, is the most sacred month of Islam's lunar calendar. It begins next Wednesday at the latest.

During the holy period, when daytime activity in most Muslim countries tapers off significantly, Iraqi officials probably will be unavailable to escort inspection teams, Zinni

said. The Iraqi military probably will lie dormant, and the chance of US military action is remote.

"I doubt seriously that we would do anything during Ramadan," Zinni said. "Because of the way they do Ramadan, they virtually shut down... Militarily, it means we're probably going to be frozen in place for that period."

Zinni heads the US Central Command, which is responsible for an arc of countries stretching from Kenya and Somalia in East Africa, across the Middle East, to Iraq and Iran. His position was held by Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf during the Gulf War, and if tension with Iraq should rise to the point of conflict, Zinni would be the commander in charge.

A key priority for Zinni is to ensure that leaders in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries support the regional US military posture.

Benazir blasts Washington Post for clubbing her with Marcos, Mobutu

WASHINGTON, Dec 28: Former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto evidently resents being lumped in the same category with the likes of convicted corrupt politicians like Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire who stashed money in secret Swiss banks, reports India Abroad News Service.

In a letter to The Washington Post protesting a recent article, Benazir wrote that "the insinuation that I used 'secret' Swiss banks to hide ill-gotten monies supposedly obtained while Prime Minister of Pakistan is both unconscionable journalism and misleading to Post readers."

At Pakistan's request, Swiss authorities have blocked around 20 million Swiss francs (\$13.6 million) in bank accounts held by Benazir, her jailed husband Asif Ali Zardari and her mother Nusrat. The move was the consequence of a petition from a department set up by present Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to investigate corruption among politicians.

Benazir said that "placing my name in the same paragraph with convicted corrupt politicians such as Ferdinand Marcos, Mobutu Sese Seko and Raul Salinas de Gortari leaves readers with a strong impression of guilt by association."

She said this "tends me to believe that the current regime in Pakistan has been all too successful in persuading venerable institutions to swallow part and parcel what are nothing more than politically motivated innuendo and slander about me."

Benazir wrote, "The fact remains that while the current regime governing Pakistan has publicly and with great fanfare accused me and my family of corrupt practices (the same accusations that were used as a tenuous excuse for dismissal of my previous government), more than 12 months later no evidence produced that in any way implicates me or my family in illegal activities."

She asserted that the "accusations are unfounded, unsubstantiated and baseless."

The Post article titled "Chastened Swiss Banks Search for Key to New Prosperity - and Respect," pointed out that account secrecy in Swiss banks over the decades had brought money flowing in, "most notably from controversial political figures salting away something for the future."

The article dated Zurich, which detailed recent controversies encountered by these banks, said, "The names of deceased or living corrupt or allegedly corrupt national leaders with money frozen in Swiss bank accounts is a sort of reverse honour roll."

It said, "Ferdinand Marcos (\$357 million), Raul Salinas de Gortari (\$71.4 million), Benazir Bhutto (\$14.2 million) and Mobutu Sese Seko (more than \$4.2 million) are among the po-



litical figures with deposits confirmed by Swiss police."

"But they are just the tip of the iceberg," the article said. "Corrupt dictators may roll in with millions, but their combined funds are small compared with the other contents of the bank vaults."

It noted that "proceeds from organised crime figures, drug lords and other shady characters also are a relatively small portion of total deposits." It said, "These days, as they are fighting to restore their reputation, Swiss banks frequently turn their backs on such clients."

Off the Record

Titanic's final hours

HALIFAX, Nova Scotia: Wireless operator Robert Hunston received the distress call late the night of April 14, 1912, reports AP.

But for 85 years, his two pages of handwritten notes — describing the minute-by-minute developments as he and two colleagues tried to get help for the doomed Titanic — were kept secret by his family.

A new multimedia display of Titanic artifacts at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax prompted his family to make his log public.

Dan Conlin, a curator at the museum said the log provides one of the most concise summaries about what happened to the ship that carried 2,200 passengers after the vessel hit an iceberg. Only some 700 people crowded into 20 lifeboats survived.

"I just think of three guys in a little radio hut in Newfoundland in the dark, listening to all this happen," Conlin said. "The chief operator at Cape Race, Walter Gray, was the best friend of the chief operator on the Titanic, who died."

Hunston's daughter, Molly Russell, said her father never spoke of the disaster.

"He was a quiet man, and wireless messages were confidential," she said. "When the newspapers tried to get information from Cape Race, they got a curt 'No.'"

Hunston, then 23, logged the first entry at 10:25 pm April 14, 1912, saying colleague James Goodwin heard a distress call from the Titanic. Ten minutes later, the Titanic revealed that it had hit an iceberg, saying, "We require immediate assistance."

At 10:43, Hunston wrote the Titanic sought help from the Californian, believed to have been in the vicinity. Marine historians have since debated why the Californian didn't respond. Consensus is the radio operator was probably asleep at the time.

Fifteen minutes later, Hunston's log reveals: "Titanic tells German steamer have struck iceberg and sinking."

At 11:36, the Olympic, a ship in the area, asked the Titanic where it was steering. Hunston recorded the Titanic's reply: "We are putting women off in boats."

At 12:50 am, April 15, the Virginian called Cape Race and said it had lost contact with the Titanic and that the last signals, 23 minutes earlier, were "blurred and ended abruptly."

"After daylight, news commences to arrive from ships stating Carpathia picked up 20 boats of people," Hunston wrote. "No word of any more being saved."

Dedicated smuggler

ROME: A Colombian drug smuggler who swallowed more than a kilogramme of cocaine died in Rome airport when a packet of the drugs burst in his stomach, police said Saturday, reports AFP.

The 27-year-old whose identity has not been published, took ill during the flight from Bogota to Rome and was declared dead on arrival in Italy, police said, adding that the incident occurred in recent days.

A man who accompanied him on the flight was arrested on suspicion of drug smuggling.

Tit for tat!

LONDON: A speeding motorist caught by a roadside camera tried to play a little joke when police sent a penalty notice, reports AP.

The notice included a photograph of the car, the date and the speed, and demanded payment of a 40 pounds (£165) fine. The motorist sent a photograph of a check. Superintendent Deryck Farmer said in a holiday message to a newspaper in Crewe, in northwest England.

Police sent back a photograph of a pair of handcuffs, and the motorist got the message. He mailed a check, Farmer said. The motorist was not identified.

BRIEFLY

OIC officials to meet in Feb:

Top officials from the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) will meet in Luxor in February to discuss counter-terrorism action, an Egyptian official said on Saturday, AFP reports from Cairo.

"The officials will examine implementation of the decision by the OIC summit in Tehran for cooperation between member countries on the battle against terrorism," said Foreign Ministry official Sayed Al Masri.

Tornado hits central Florida:

A tornado tore through two central Florida communities early Saturday, demolishing about 60 homes and injuring eight people, AP reports from Tampa.

Christmas tree ornaments were strewn across the ground along with personal belongings and twisted aluminum siding. The twister that struck Winter Haven and Haines was part of a group of severe thunderstorms that swamped Florida's Gulf Coast with heavy rain, flooding low-lying areas around Tampa Bay. It destroyed 53 mobile homes in Haines City, and severely damaged 10 others in three mobile home parks in Winter Haven, local officials said. Dozens more had lesser damage.

Gunmen kill cop in Pakistan:

Unidentified assailants opened fire on a police patrol van Saturday, killing a constable in a violence-plagued area of Pakistan's largest city Karachi, police said, reports AFP.

The attack occurred in the eastern Liaquatabad district, where a political activist belonging to Muthadda Qaumi Movement (MQM) was gunned down by unknown people on Thursday, they said. Police said there was no apparent link between the two incidents.

Road mishap claims 27 in Peru:

A bus packed with holiday travelers struck a rock that had rolled on to the highway and then tumbled down a mountainside, killing 27 and wounding 36, firefighters said Saturday, AP reports from Lima.

The accident happened Friday night near the town of Huacrapuquio, 120 miles (195 kms) east of Lima, in Peru's central Andes mountains, said the head of the local fire station, Crisanto Shirashi. The bus was on its way from the city of Huancayo to Ayacucho when it struck the large rock that had been washed on to the road by rains, Shirashi said.

Farrakhan arrives in Liberia:

US Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan arrived in Liberia on Saturday as part of a marathon "world friendship tour," of more than 50 countries, AFP says from Monrovia.

Farrakhan at the head of a 24-member delegation, is to meet Liberian President Charles Taylor during the two-day visit, he last visited the country in 1995 during its Civil War. Farrakhan's 54-nation tour has aroused the anger of the United States for taking him to countries such as Libya and Iraq.

Car-train collision claims 2 in Belgium:

Two people were killed and around 30 were injured when a train crashed into a car at a level crossing in southern Belgium on Saturday, state radio quoted railway officials as saying, AFP reports from Brussels.

The train, on the line between Liege and Mouscron, slammed into the car, instantly killing its two occupants, near Andenne, 50 kilometres (30 miles) from Liege. Two of the train's carriages derailed in the impact, slightly injuring around 30 passengers.

Ostrich kills woman in SA:

A 63-year-old South African woman has died in hospital after being attacked by an enraged ostrich, police said yesterday, Reuters says from Cape Town.

A statement said Anna Hendricks and her husband were both attacked by the ostrich two weeks ago while crossing a field outside Cape Town. They were admitted to hospital and Mrs Hendricks died of her injuries on Friday. Her husband has been discharged.

Bomb damages bridge in Albanian town:

A powerful bomb damaged a bridge near the centre of the southern Albanian town of Gjirokastra Saturday, the official Ata news agency reported, AFP report from Tirana.

The blast, the tenth in the area in less than a month, also damaged a number of buildings near the bridge over the river Drino, which links the city to the eastern suburb of Lunxheria.

Sudanese bomber shot down:

A Sudanese air force Mig 21 fighter bomber was shot down over an area held by southern Sudan rebels, a newspaper reported Saturday, AP reports from Kampala.

The plane was downed near the border town of Nimule, which is held by the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the government-owned New Vision said.



Kristina Krasovskaya smiles after she won the Miss Kiev '97 contest in Kiev, Ukraine, Friday night. Kristina, 18, is a student of Kiev's University. — AP/UNB photo

Congress (I) seeks ban on publication of opinion polls

NEW DELHI, Dec 28: Indian's Congress (I) Party, struggling in an election campaign, today sought a ban on publication of opinion polls, alleging they were biased in favour of Hindu nationalists, reports AFP.

Congress official H. Hanumanthappa said many surveys of voters suggesting a possible Hindu nationalist victory were based on an insignificant action of India's 600 million voters.

The Congress demand came a day after an opinion poll here said the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) would get more seats in the fresh polls,

but fell short of a majority in Parliament.

It said the BJP and its allies would win 234 to 249 seats in the 545-seat parliament, up from 194 in the previous House.

The survey added the Congress Party could also gain in the polls, the Congress said this survey was based on just 17,000 voters across 70 polling stations.

"Almost all surveys conducted in the past elections have favoured the BJP and were later found wide off the mark," it said. "This gives the impression the surveys were organised, managed and tutored."

US executes more prisoners in '97 than any yr since '52

WASHINGTON, Dec 28: More murderers were executed in US prisons in 1997 than at any time in the past 42 years, and the pace of executions is expected to rise as the 20th century ends and the 21st begins, reports AP.

Seventy-four of the nation's more than 3,200 death row inmates were executed this year, the most since 76 were put to death in 1955. No state has additional executions scheduled for the rest of this year.

"The execution train is still speeding down the track, and it's very hard to stop, or even slow it," said Richard Dieter of the Death Penalty Information Centre, a Washington-based group critical of how capital

punishment is administered.

This year, 17 of the 38 states with death-penalty laws imposed what courts call the ultimate punishment. Texas was far and away the leader with 37 executions.

"We had a larger number partly due to a backlog of cases from 1996," said Ward Tisdale of the Texas attorney general's office.

"It's hard to predict the number of executions we'll see in 1998, but it's unlikely it will rise to the level of 1997."

Executions were virtually halted in Texas in 1996 by a court challenge over a new state law aimed at speeding up appeals. The law eventually was upheld.

'97 not a very good year for ME peace process: Albright

WASHINGTON, Dec 28: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright summed up the Israel's Palestinian impasse, and America's own floundering Mideast diplomacy in just 10 words 1997 she said has "not been a very good year for the peace process."

Nor did December's Paris talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu brighten this bleak landscape. Palestinian officials later said they doubted any progress had been made.

Previous rounds of talks between the two leaders organised by Albright have also failed to resolve the dispute over Israeli settlement building that has stymied progress between the two sides since spring.

This summer's anti-Israeli attacks added to a brew of mutual dislike and mistrust between Arafat and Netanyahu, negotiations lurched forward under orders from Washington but neither side was really lis-

tening. Albright's style starkly contrasted with that of her predecessor Warren Christopher, who traipsed to the Middle East 24 times in four years.

Instead Albright waited until July to meet with the major peace players. Then, with little achieved, she announced, "I will not come back just to tread water."

She invited the two camps to "take the tough decisions." Washington could not take for them. Translation call me when you're ready, she added.

Nonetheless Albright, and her infatigable sidekick Dennis Ross, continued to prod both sides to renew talks, at September's UN General Assembly meeting in New York Albright coaxed promises from Israeli counterpart David Levy and Palestinian number two Mahmud Abbas to negotiate in Washington.

Once there, the US urged the Palestinians to fill out their delegation. The talks went nowhere.

For his part, Netanyahu turned a deaf ear to US requests to halt settlement building in the West Bank. In fact, settlement construction has jumped 23 per cent during the second quarter of the year, an Israeli peace group announced.

America's failure to sway the Israeli government over the months has alienated the Arab world. The Middle East economic conference in Doha, Qatar, was a case in point. Israel's attendance caused even close allies like Egypt and Saudi Arabia to ignore US pleas and stay at home.

Even worse, former Gulf War allies gave a cold shoulder to Washington's latest efforts to mobilise force against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

Instead, President Bill Clinton was forced to play his diplomatic cards to the bitter end to keep the coalition from splitting, and then was forced to offer Baghdad a few "little carrots" to defuse the crisis as Albright described it at the time.



Afghanistan refugees board a truck trying to escape from front-line villages north of Kabul on Saturday. As a result of the continuation of fighting in the area between Taliban and their opposition, thousands of people had moved from their homes in the north of Kabul. — AP/UNB photo