

International

BRIEFLY

Five of a family drown:

Police divers recovered the bodies of a young Japanese couple and their three children yesterday, the morning after their car plunged into a port outside Tokyo in a suspected murder-suicide, AFP reports from Tokyo.

"It may possibly be a case of suicides and forced suicides," a police official said. "The family was found to have owed three million yen (28,500 dollars) to a consumer loan firm."

Tribals abduct 9 in Tripura: Tribal insurgents have abducted nine people, including eight passengers from a state-run bus, in the eastern Indian state of Tripura, the Press Trust of India reported yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Armed insurgents intercepted the bus near the southern Tripura town of Takumbari on Thursday and abducted eight non-tribal passengers. Another person travelling on the bus was shot and wounded during the raid, police added.

Vote count begins in Maldives: Ballot boxes began arriving in the Maldivian capital of Male yesterday from far-flung islands as counting started in the country's parliamentary election, Reuters reports from Male.

Polling in the Indian Ocean archipelago ended late on Friday and officials said an estimated 80 per cent of the 128,000 eligible voters had cast their ballot, up from the 74 per cent in the last elections in 1994.

Quake rocks Taiwan: An earthquake measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale jolted central Taiwan yesterday, the country's Seismology Center said, but no casualties or damage were immediately reported, AFP says from Taipei.

The tremor struck at 11:29 am (9:29 am BST), with its epicenter 14.6 KM southwest of central Taichung city and 6.9 kilometers below the earth's surface. Central Taiwan was hit by a quake on September 21 which left more than 2,400 dead, 11,000 injured and 100,000 homeless.

Blast at fireworks factory in China: Twelve people were killed and ten seriously injured in an explosion at a fireworks factory in southeastern China, state press said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The blast Thursday near Nanchang in Jiangxi province destroyed major parts of the factory, China's biggest exporter of fireworks, causing losses worth 100,000 yuan (12,000 dollars), the Beijing Youth Daily said. Accidental explosions of fireworks are common in China ahead of the festival season. So far this year, 378 people have died and 727 injured across China in such incidents.

Bus accident claims 17 in China: A jam-packed bus overturned and plunged into a river in southwestern China's Guangxi region, killing 17 people and leaving 10 missing, the state-run newspaper Beijing Morning Post reported yesterday, AP reports from Beijing.

The accident occurred in the predawn hours of Thursday, when the bus traveling from neighbouring Guangdong province ran into guardrails along the site of the road and then rolled over and sank in the Gui river, the report said. It said that 24 people had been fished from the river and hospitalised.

Benazir terms military govt 'political orphans'

New admn trying to get rid of political class

ISLAMABAD, Nov 20: Calling Pakistan's military government "political orphans," former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's party accused the new administration Saturday of trying to get rid of Pakistan's political class, reports AP.

In a statement Benazir's party accused the new army-led government of using this week's crackdown on loan defaulters and the corrupt as a ploy to "obliterate the political class."

Fulfilling a promise he made when he took power on October 12 in a bloodless coup, Gen. Pervez Musharraf's government began arresting some of the country's wealthiest and most influential earlier this week accusing them of defaulting on bank loans and of being corrupt.

Benazir who was sentenced to five years in jail on corruption charges under ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif's government, was declared a "proclaimed offender" by the army-led government earlier this week.

Benazir has been living in Britain since her conviction earlier this year. She maintains her innocence and says the trial was unfair and politically motivated.

As well Musharraf's government enacted a new tough law that gives a National Accountability Bureau, headed by an army general, sweeping powers of investigation and arrest. It also bans anyone found guilty of corruption or defaulting on loans from holding office for 21 years and provides a jail sentence of up to 14 years. An earlier law banned the guilty from politics for seven years and imposed a maximum prison term of five years.

Sharif, who has been in cus-

tody since his ouster accused by the army of treason and hijacking, also faces charges of corruption.

An AFP report from Doha adds, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have launched a diplomatic effort in favour of ousted Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for "humanitarian" reasons. Doha's foreign minister said today.

Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jaber al-Thani said he met Sharif, who is being held in detention in Karachi, on Friday to "enquire after his health and try to find out how to resolve the problem."

The minister, quoted by the official QNA news agency, said he acted "under the directives of Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, following an accord with General Pervez Musharraf," Pakistan's new military ruler.

Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz "gave his blessing to the meeting" with Sharif, said Sheikh Hamad, adding that he found the former prime minister to be "in good health."

Qatar's emir and the Saudi crown prince "have sympathy for Sharif which comes from the fact that they know him. They want to know if he is well and how things are going for him," the foreign minister said.

"It's a humanitarian issue. Qatar is not interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs and respects the trial" launched against Sharif.

Sharif appeared before an anti-terrorism court Friday and insisted he was innocent of charges of treason, conspiracy to murder, kidnapping and hijacking a plane. He could face the death penalty if convicted.

QNA also quoted Musharraf

as denying that there was a deal between Islamabad, Doha and Riyadh and pledged that "the judicial process will run its course."

Musharraf visited Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait in November, following his October 12 coup. The Gulf Arab states provide huge financial backing to Pakistan.

Emirati President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahayan urged Musharraf to show "clemency" towards Sharif.

Benazir unlikely to return

An AFP report adds: Exiled former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto said yesterday she was unlikely to return to her country now, which was ruled by a military administration, reports AP.

"Is this about corruption or politics?" Benazir asked in an interview with private TV channel SkyNews, referring to the corruption crackdown launched Wednesday by General Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a coup last month.

The regime has charged ousted Premier Sharif with treason and arrested 25 people, many of them senior politicians in the crackdown.

"Is this for people who are former prime ministers and former Members of the Parliament or is this for people who are corrupt?" Benazir asked.

Benazir said Pakistanis did not want despots, but "bread and butter, they want jobs, they don't want innocent blood."

Benazir said the promised election did not "seem to be anywhere in sight" and she deplored the poor living conditions of many in Pakistan.



US President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton are greeted by Greek President Constantinos Stephanopoulos (C) for a state dinner Friday at the Presidential Palace in Athens. Clinton is in Athens for an official one-day visit.

— AFP photo

Violent anti-US protests mar Clinton's Greece visit

ATHENS, Nov 20: Hundreds of anti-American protesters battled baton-wielding riot police and set stores and banks ablaze as US President Bill Clinton rode through Athens in a tight security cocoon and proclaimed a "profound and enduring friendship" with Greece, reports AP.

The riots yesterday were the most violent in downtown Athens in several years — and the worst of any of Clinton's overseas trips. The president, asked about the protests early Saturday as he toured the Acropolis with his daughter, Chelsea, said simply, "I'm sorry about it."

Clinton, at an elegant dinner at the presidential palace a few blocks from the clashes, toasted Greece as an ally in every major international conflict of this

century.

"If some engage us in passionate debate," the president said, "it is well to remember how hard both our countries have fought to do just that."

The violence erupted from hands of leftists and anarchists among more than 10,000 demonstrators blocked from marching on the US Embassy in central Athens. Police hurled tear gas canisters at protesters who set up fiery roadblocks and hurled paving stones and cement flower pots.

Clinton saw none of the unrest — broadcast live on television. Warmly greeted at the airport, he rode into town on police-lined streets that had been cleared of all traffic hours before. Clusters of onlookers watched impassively as his entourage rode by.

Clinton's wife, Hillary, daughter Chelsea, and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright all were presented with bouquets of flowers as they walked down the red carpet from an air force one.

Clinton's primary objective here was to promote reconciliation between Greece and Turkey, particularly on Cyprus.

Jupiter moon Io's volcanoes look like young Earth

WASHINGTON, Nov 20: New images of monster volcanoes and lava lakes on Jupiter's moon Io could help scientists look back in time to Earth's younger, more volcanic days, astronomers said yesterday, reports Reuters.

There are uncanny similarities between the new pictures of Io made by NASA's Galileo space probe and photographs of the active Kilauea volcano on the island of Hawaii — but the volcanic features on Io are as much as 100 times bigger.

Io, which is about the same size as Earth's moon, is the most volcanic body in the solar system.

"This might be a glimpse at Earth's past," Alfred McEwen of the University of Arizona said at a briefing at NASA headquarters. He was referring to a picture of the Ionian volcano Pele, which is named for the Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes.

The last time Earth had volcanoes as big as Io's was about 15 million years ago, long before humans were able to record anything about them. The last

time volcanoes were as hot as Io's — some 2,700 degrees Fahrenheit (1,500 Celsius) — was 2 billion years ago.

Galileo's pictures of Io give humans a chance to see what Earth might have been like in those early days.

The Galileo images — which can be seen on the Internet at <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/pictures/lo/> — focused on Pele and two other active volcanoes, named Loki and Prometheus.

Like Kilauea, Pele has a red-hot centre of lava when viewed from overhead. But unlike its earthly cousin, Pele's hot spot is remarkable stable, and does not erupt in pulses and spread out in large lava flows.

The Galileo images were made in October at the end of the space probe's productive life, and more pictures are expected following another pass by next week.

But every Galileo glimpse of Io carries a risk: The radiation that bathes Io's orbit also can damage the spacecraft, and in fact hurt several of the craft's systems when it flew by last month.

Pele also has a reddish ring



Miss Romania Ana-Maria Tudorache, 18, (C) who was crowned Miss Friendship of the World, and the two runners up Miss South Africa Burlette Bonblerk, 21, (L) and Miss France Celia Jourdeh, 21, pose at the end of the international beauty contest "Miss Friendship of the World" held on Friday in Hanoi. Women from some 30 countries took part in the contest, the first of its kind to be held in Vietnam.

— AFP photo

Arafat's Cabinet insists Agreement must outline Palestinian capital in Jerusalem

one of the thorniest issues of the peace process that the sides have saved for the last phase of negotiations.

Israel insist that it will not agree to surrender control over any part of Jerusalem, which it calls the state's "eternal" capital.

The Palestinian Cabinet said in the release that, since east Jerusalem is captured land, it is included in United Nations resolutions that call on Israel to return occupied territories.

The dispute over the sector of the city, which Israel captured in 1967 and later annexed, is

which they are to iron out an agreement on the borders between them, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements and Jerusalem.

During the meeting of the Palestinian leadership, Arafat expressed his "surprise and bewilderment" at the Israeli stance in the final status talks.

The international community had demonstrated its opposition in the past to several of the Israeli positions through guarantees to the Palestinians and UN resolutions, Arafat said, according to the statement.

Fighting claims 100 on both sides in Lanka Residents fear fresh LTTE attacks

In a similar shell attack in the village of Kovil Pulyankulam on Thursday.

The defence ministry in a statement issued in Colombo, 260 km south of here, said 87 LTTE cadres were killed by government forces in the latest fighting since Thursday.

The ministry placed its own losses at 10 killed and 106 wounded, while the rebels said they lost only 10 of their cadres.

The government made no comment on rebel claims they captured five key bases but said troops were continuing "offensive operations in general areas in Wanni western sector."

Travellers said hundreds of troops were moving towards Vavuniya from military outposts in Mannar where the army lost at least five key bases in heavy fighting Thursday, according to the rebels.

The local hospital and Tamil sources here said another three villagers had been killed

Military sources said the LTTE had added to the army's disastrous losses of earlier this month, when an initial 10 towns fell in a matter of five days.

Tiger radio said they had captured the military-held towns of Periyamadu, Pallamadu, Palampiddi, Thatchanamaradam and Madhu — all in the northwest district of Mannar.

The tiger guerrillas made no reference to the shelling.

The fall of Madhu in the district of Mannar as its western flank in the northern battle zone, now poses a direct threat to a strategic road linking this town with the coastal town of Mannar.

The latest military defeats are seen as a further blow to the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

— AFP photo

Hurricane Lenny lashes northern Caribbean, kills nine

PHILIPSBURG, St Maarten, Nov 20: Hurricane Lenny lashed the eastern Caribbean with heavy rain for a second day, killing at least nine people and causing millions in damage to islands just entering the high tourist season, reports AP.

The storm ravaged homes and boats, stripped beaches of sand, flooded hotels and roads, downed utility lines and disrupted communications before drifting eastward into the Atlantic to die.

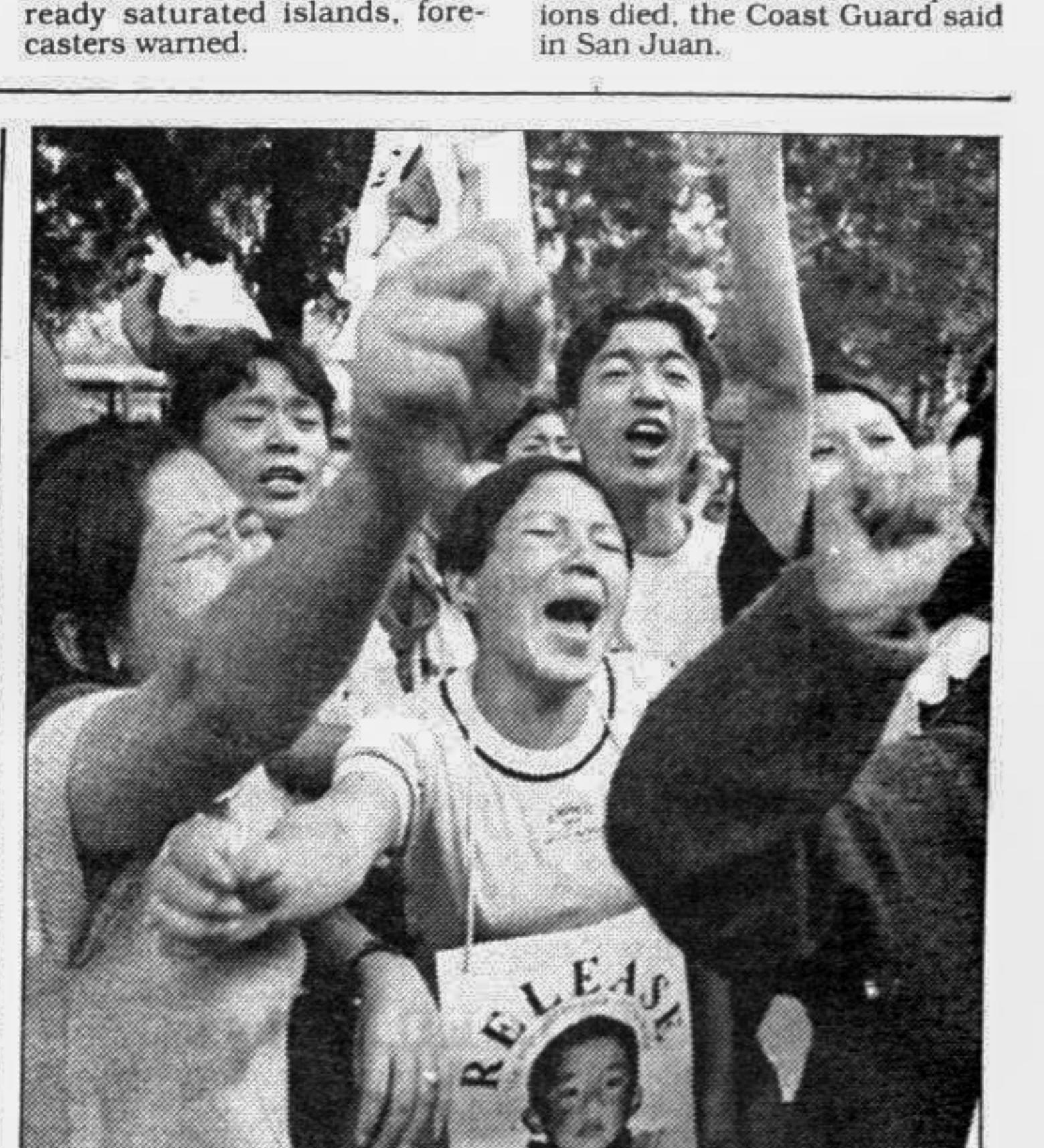
"Its destructiveness was immense and unforgiving," declared St Lucia Prime Minister Kenny Anthony. At least 70 homes were destroyed on St Lucia.

Though diminishing in power, Lenny could bring up to 38 centimeters more rain on already saturated islands, forecasters warned.

Three people were killed in Dutch St Maarten — two struck by flying debris late Thursday and a motorist who died when the hillside road he was on collapsed.

Lenny's winds, rain, flooding and storm surges also were blamed for one death in Puerto Rico, two in Columbia and one in Martinique. One person was missing in Dominica.

The US Coast Guard said it rescued a St Maarten man on Thursday who survived two days in a life raft, buffeted by more than 160 kph (100 mph) winds and up to 9-meter (30 foot) waves. But the man's companions died, the Coast Guard said in San Juan.



Tibetan exiles shout anti-Chinese slogans in front of the venue of an ongoing conference being attended by a seven-member Chinese delegation.

— AFP photo



An unidentified Maldivian woman casts her vote on Friday in the Maldives capital island of Male. The tiny Indian Ocean island nation of some 250,000 Sunni Muslims went to the polls to elect a 52-member parliament in a country where there is no party system. The country is governed by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who won a fifth five-year term last year.

— AFP photo