

Steroid found in Chinese cream for babies

AFP, Beijing

A company in southwest China has recalled a skin cream after a potentially dangerous steroid hormone that should not be used for more than two weeks was found in it, state media said yesterday.

The Miaoling Medical Technology Group, based in Guizhou province, also said it had stopped production and sales of the cream, which was widely used to treat eczema in babies, the Beijing Youth Daily reported.

The hormone -- clobetasol propionate -- used to treat various skin disorders, should not be used by children under 12, according to drug information website drugs.com.

It can cause changes in blood sugar and can lead to Cushing's syndrome, a disorder characterised by a moon-shaped face, emotional disturbances, and in women, abnormal growth of facial and body hair.

Three dead in riots in India's Maharashtra

AFP, Mumbai

Three people were killed in overnight rioting in India's Maharashtra state after the arrest of a firebrand politician accused of inciting violence against migrant workers, police said yesterday.

State police chief AN Roy told AFP that the three died in clashes between supporters of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) leader Raj Thackeray and what he called "outsiders" near the town of Kalyan, northeast of Mumbai.

Roy told AFP that a "large" number of police officers had been deployed to maintain order and was confident they could contain the violence.

"We have made all preparations," he said.

Thackeray was arrested early Tuesday and later released on conditional bail in connection with

weekend attacks on northern Indians who had come to India's financial capital to seek work on the railways.

His party strongly supports jobs for local people and promotes the use of the Marathi language and culture, which frequently puts it at odds with wider efforts to encourage a stronger national identity and a mobile workforce.

MNS activists claimed Maharashtra were under-represented in the railways' recruitment process and attacked examination centres and candidates.

On Sunday one northern Indian man died after falling off a train, allegedly after being attacked by MNS supporters, and northern Indians were also among the dead in the Kalyan clashes, media reported.

Some 2,000 people have been arrested in connection with the disturbances and as a preventative

measure ahead of Thackeray's high-profile court appearance in central Mumbai on Tuesday.

But stone-throwing crowds still clashed with baton-wielding police outside the court and across the state. Taxis, auto-rickshaws, buses and shops were attacked while attempts were made to burn other vehicles and set up roadblocks.

Thackeray was given conditional bail but still faces questioning on a number of separate charges in connection with the weekend violence, including inciting rioting, destroying public property and murder for the railway deaths.

His MNS is an offshoot of his uncle Bal Thackeray's Shiv Sena party, which has pushed a similar "Maharashtra for Marathis" agenda since the mid-1960s. The party changed the former Bombay's name to Mumbai in 1995.



Indian Christian villagers collect food at a relief camp at Phulbani in Orissa's Kandhamal district, some 350 kms southwest of Bhubaneswar yesterday, 2008. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India said scores of Christians were continuing to flee their homes in Orissa and called for action to stem the religious violence in the coastal state's troubled Kandhamal district.

Sri Lanka navy foils suicide attack at sea

AP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's navy destroyed two explosive-laden Tamil Tiger rebel boats yesterday that attempted to crash into two cargo ships sailing to the country's troubled north, a spokesman said.

The sea battle came as ground troops faced stiff resistance from separatist guerrillas to their attempts to capture the rebels' de facto northern capital of Kilinochchi. The Tamil Tiger rebels have been fighting for 25 years to create an independent homeland for Sri Lanka's ethnic minority Tamils.

Navy spokesman DKP Dassanayake said sailors fired at the rebel boats Wednesday as they approached the cargo ships off the shores of Myliddi in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

The navy destroyed both boats and captured one of them, Dassanayake said. One rebel died in the battle, he said.

He said the navy suffered no casualties but that one navy ship was damaged when one of the rebel boats exploded. The Tamil Tigers have a sea wing known as the Sea Tigers.

Protesters throw shoes at Thai prime minister

AP, Bangkok

A crowd of angry protesters threw shoes and plastic bottles at the Thai prime minister's entourage after cornering him in an underground parking lot yesterday.

He escaped unhurt. Somchai Wongsawat's security agents and police shielded him from the objects and hustled him into a waiting car, which sped off in a motorcade.

The protest was staged by more than 100 employees of the state-owned telecom operator TOT during a visit by Somchai to their headquarters outside the capital, Bangkok.

"It was not a serious protest," Somchai later told reporters. He described the incident as a "colorful protest."

It marked the first time in Thailand's months of political crisis that state employees have come into direct confrontation with the prime minister.

It was not, however, the first time that Somchai has had to make a quick getaway.

On October 7, Somchai escaped a violent protest outside Parliament by climbing over a back fence to safety. Riot police outside the building fired tear gas to disperse rowdy protesters, leaving hundreds injured and two dead.

Yesterday's rally started outside the TOT headquar-

ters, on the grounds of the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology.

Somchai's motorcade detoured into an underground parking lot to avoid the crowd shouting "Somchai, Murderer!" in reference to the two fatalities at the Oct 7 protest.



PHOTO: AFP

Thai Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat is escorted by security personnel during an anti-government protest at the Communications Ministry in Bangkok yesterday after a group of angry anti-government protesters pelted Thai Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat with shoes.

Indonesia says bomb plot on fuel depot foiled

AFP, Jakarta

An Islamist terror cell discovered in Jakarta this week was planning to bomb the Indonesian capital's main fuel depot and had links to some of the region's most wanted extremists, police said yesterday.

Police announced five suspects had been arrested in the Jakarta area as well as weapons and explosives seized after a raid on a house.

"It would have been very dangerous if the police had failed to find the explosives," police deputy spokesman Sulistyono Ishak said.

He said the men were believed to have studied bomb making under Malaysian extremist Azahari Husin, a notoriously callous explosives expert who was tracked down and shot at a house in Java in November, 2005.

Azahari was a close associate of fellow Malaysian Noordin Mohammed Top, the region's most wanted terror suspect who allegedly masterminded attacks including the deadly Bali bombings of 2002.

US army kills 9 Afghan soldiers by mistake

Afghan police kill 35 Taliban in southern region

AP, AFP, Kabul, Kandahar

A US-led coalition airstrike mistakenly hit an Afghan army checkpoint yesterday, killing nine soldiers and wounding three, Afghan officials said.

The strike hit a checkpoint in the Sayed Khel area of Khost province in eastern Afghanistan, said Arsallah Jamal, the province's governor.

The US said its forces "may have mistakenly killed and injured" Afghan soldiers in what may have been a case of mistaken identity "on both sides."

"As a Coalition forces convoy was returning from a previous operation, they were involved in multiple engagements," a U.S. military statement said. "As a result of the engagements, ANA (Afghan army) soldiers were killed and injured."

Apparent friendly fire incidents have happened before. In June 2007, Afghan police mistook US troops on a nighttime mission for Taliban fighters and opened fire on them, prompting US forces to return fire and call in attack aircraft. Seven Afghan police were killed.

Meanwhile about 35 Taliban militants and three police were killed after about 100 insurgents attacked a district centre in southern Afghanistan, a provincial police chief said yesterday.

Heavy fighting started late Tuesday and lasted into early Wednesday after the rebels launched the attack in troubled Uruzgan province, police chief Juma Gul Hemat told AFP.

"More than 100 Taliban launched an attack to capture the district of Dih Rahwud. Our police

bravely resisted and killed 35 Taliban whose bodies are left in the area," Hemat said.

"Three of our policemen were also martyred and nine others were injured in the fighting," he said.

International military warplanes were called in to help the Afghan forces, he said. US and NATO forces in Afghanistan could not immediately confirm their involvement.

The Taliban were in government between 1996 and 2001 and are fighting to take back power from the US-backed government of President Hamid Karzai.

The insurgency has picked up pace in the past three years, despite the presence of about 60,000 international troops helping Afghan forces to face a rebellion that Afghan officials say is now supported by militants arriving from Iraq.

India worried over Lanka conflict

AFP, New Delhi

India voiced concern yesterday over the conflict in Sri Lanka as Tamil MPs in parliament clashed over charges of "genocidal attacks" on the Tamil minority in the troubled island nation.

Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee told parliament that New Delhi had conveyed its worries to Colombo over the safety of civilians caught in the cross-fire between government troops and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"The situation in Sri Lanka is of serious concern to the government, in particular the deteriorating humanitarian situation in north of Sri Lanka," Mukherjee said.

"We are concerned about the plight of the civilians caught in the hostilities and the growing number of internally-displaced persons," he said as Indian MPs prodded New Delhi to intervene and stem the fighting.

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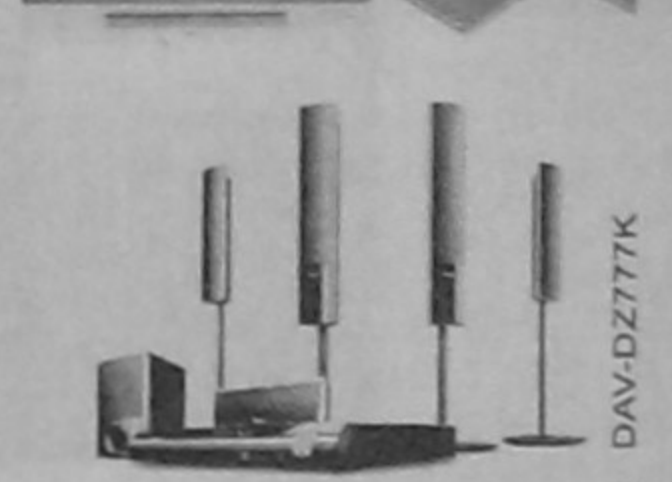
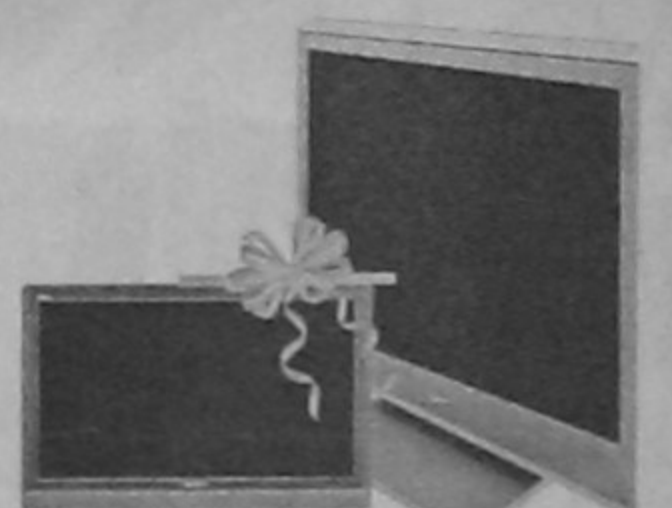
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