

BOFORS CASE CBI wants Italian trader be freed of charges

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA,
New Delhi

Central Bureau of Investigation of India yesterday pleaded for withdrawal of proceedings against Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi in Bofors bribery case, saying it has got no fresh instructions from the government.

Challenging the CBI move, Supreme Court advocate Ajay Agarwal contended that the matter be re-looked into in view of a recent order by the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal.

The ITAT on Monday made an assertion that Quattrocchi and another alleged middleman were paid Rs 41 crore as bribe for Bofors deal.



PHOTO: AFP

Sudanese supporters of secession dance upon the arrival of Sudan's President Omar al-Beshir at Juba airport yesterday. Southerners are set to vote in a referendum on January 9 on whether to remain united with the north or break away and form their own country and Beshir told them in a speech in the southern capital that he would celebrate the result of this week's referendum "even if you choose secession."

Iran to open nuke sites to diplomats US snubbed from the list

BBC ONLINE

Iran has invited foreign diplomats to tour its nuclear facilities, ahead of fresh talks with key world powers over its controversial nuclear programme.

The offer was reportedly extended to Russia, China and several EU countries, but not the US.

US State Department spokesman, Philip J Crowley, has dismissed the offer as a "clever ploy".

Many Western countries suspect Iran is developing nuclear weapons, but Tehran says its programme is peaceful.

"The representatives of some European Union countries, NAM [Non-Aligned Movement], and some representatives of the five-plus-one [world powers] have been invited to visit our nuclear sites," foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told reporters.

US envoy in Seoul on peace mission

AFP, Seoul

The United States' point man on North Korea arrived in Seoul yesterday, calling for "serious negotiations" to ease tensions over Pyongyang's nuclear programme and deadly attack on a South Korean island.

Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, the US special representative for North Korea policy, said he would closely coordinate with South Korea and China on how to deal with Pyongyang.

"We believe that serious negotiations must be at the heart of any strategy for dealing with North Korea and we look forward to being able to launch those at a reasonably early time," he told reporters at the airport.

China has proposed bringing together the envoys of long-stalled six-nation disarmament talks on the nuclear-armed North to defuse tensions.

IVORY COAST CRISIS

Africa mediation fails to end stalemate

BBC ONLINE

Ivory Coast's political crisis remains deadlocked despite a mediation attempt by African leaders, President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria has said.

"There is still a stalemate," Mr Jonathan, who heads the West African bloc Ecowas, told reporters after talks with envoys who on Monday met the two men claiming Ivory Coast's presidency.

The UN regards Alassane Ouattara as the winner of November's poll but incumbent Laurent Gbagbo refuses to cede power.

Ecowas has threatened to force him out.

The envoys who travelled to Ivory Coast were Presidents Boni Yayi of Benin, Pedro Pires of Cape Verde and Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone - representing the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas).

It was their second trip to Abidjan in less than a week. On Monday they were joined by Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga, representing the African Union (AU).

During their latest talks, they were reported to have offered Mr Gbagbo a legal amnesty as well as a guarantee that his financial assets would be secure, if he left office.

Policemen, dozen rebels killed in Afghan unrest

AFP, Kabul

One policeman was killed and three people wounded when a bomb exploded in the Afghan capital Kabul yesterday, authorities said, also reporting a dozen militant deaths elsewhere in Afghanistan.

The blast took place close to the defence ministry, about 200 metres (yards) from a police post, as an officer said.

Snakes, crocodiles threaten flood-hit Australia town

AFP, Rockhampton

Australian residents fled their homes and sandbagged properties yesterday as a major town was threatened by a worsening flood disaster which unleashed a plague of snakes and crocodiles.

Tens of thousands of people in Rockhampton braced for complete isolation as waters which have inundated an area bigger than France and Germany, and closed the town's airport and railway, lapped at the last remaining road link.

Rumours of crocodile sightings swept the besieged cattle-farming centre northeast of Brisbane, population 75,000, while snakes up to two metres (6.5 feet) long were spotted around the town centre.

Delhi seeks Indian Ocean supremacy

AFP New Delhi

India launched a new naval research centre for warships yesterday, part of efforts by the South Asian giant to build its sea defences and counter the perceived threat of China in the Indian Ocean.

Defence Minister A.K. Antony laid the foundation stone for the National Institute for Research and Development in Shipbuilding (NIRDESH) in the southern state of Kerala, which will be built at a cost of six billion rupees (133 million dollars).

The facility, which will be up and running in two years, will help develop technology for "drawing board to delivery" of warships for the 136-vessel Indian navy, a naval official said in New Delhi.

The Kerala unit will work independently of the national Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), with the aim of reducing India's dependence on military imports, which mostly come from Russia.

NEWS IN brief

Sarkozy rules out French military intervention in I. Coast

AFP, Paris

President Nicolas Sarkozy yesterday said French troops had no reason to get involved in "the internal affairs of Ivory Coast," where strongman Laurent Gbagbo is refusing to step down as president.

Sarkozy also repeated his support for Alassane Ouattara, the internationally recognised winner of November's Ivorian presidential elections.

French Defence Minister Alain Juppe said earlier yesterday that France's troops in Ivory Coast would not "take the initiative" to launch an armed intervention to resolve the country's leadership dispute but would defend its nationals there.

France has 900 troops supporting a UN peace-keeping mission in Ivory Coast, its west African former colony which has seen bloodshed in recent weeks in the tense standoff after the dis-

Israel arrests UK consulate staff over 'stadium plot'

BBC ONLINE

Two Palestinian employees of the UK consulate general in East Jerusalem have been arrested over an alleged weapons plot, Israeli officials say.

The UK Foreign Office confirmed the arrests, allegedly linked to plans to fire a rocket at a football stadium.

The men, who had maintenance jobs and did not have sensitive security clearance, allegedly helped obtain weapons for two others behind the plot.

No rockets were found and the plot was in its preliminary stages, police said.

A Foreign Office spokeswoman told the BBC that the arrests of their employees, which happened several weeks ago but were subject to a gagging order, were unconnected with their work.

However, the BBC's Wyre Davies says the incident will raise concern about vetting procedures at the consulate, which is situated in one of the

Three found of dozens feared drowned off Yemen

AFP, Aden

Yemeni coast guards have retrieved the bodies of three of dozens of African migrants feared drowned off south Yemen, a Red Crescent official told AFP yesterday.

"Three bodies were found Tuesday morning in the coastal region of Zubab" in Yemen's southern province of Taz, said Abdul Wahab al-Gharbani, secretary general of the Red Crescent in Taz.

Gharbani, who said he was "surprised" at the number of victims the ministry of interior announced Monday, insisted that 46 people, mostly Ethiopians, were on board the boat that capsized near the Bab al-Mandab strait which links the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Five migrants who survived have been giving accounts of the accident to security officials at Bab al-Mandab, he said.

A protection officer at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Aden, Hala Horani, said that five Africans -- two Somalis and three Ethiopians -- have survived, while 41



PHOTO: AFP

This picture taken yesterday shows the world's first partial solar eclipse of 2011 behind a cross on a dome of the Alexander Nevski cathedral in Sofia. Europe was given a front-row seat to the first solar eclipse of 2011 only to find that in many places a thick curtain of cloud marred the spectacle.

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