

NEWS IN BRIEF

INTERNATIONAL

Rising women's party a Russian election front-runner

MOSCOW (AP) — The notion of a women's political party still draws snickers and smirks in Russia, even after its credible performance in parliament the last two years. Just wait till Sunday, the Women of Russia reply. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy ridicules the party as "Spinsters of Russia." Another prominent politician, eye surgeon Svyatoslav Fyodorov, mockingly presented its chairwoman with roses after a debate this week in which he reminded her that a Russian woman's place is in the home, not the Duma. Sunday's elections may temporarily silence the skeptics and male chauvinists. Women of Russia is in position to get the last laugh and a far bigger role in the next parliament. Recent polls show the bloc stands as high as second among 43 parties competing, trailing only the Communists. "Men have already exhausted their (political) potential," leading party candidate Alevtina Fedulova declared recently.

Plane reported down in Verona, 49 believed killed

VILLAFRANCA, Italy (AP) — A Romanian turboprop airliner crashed in a snowy vineyard in northern Italy moments after takeoff Wednesday, apparently killing all 49 aboard. Romania's transport minister, Aural Novak, told the Romanian state news agency, Rompress, that the charter plane exploded three minutes into the flight. Rompress gave no details, and Italian authorities did not confirm the explosion. The Soviet-built Antonov 24, bound for Timisoara, Romania, went down about 8 p.m. (2 p.m. EST) less than a mile from the runway at the Villafraanca airport, just outside Verona. The plane carried 41 passengers and its crew, said Vincenzo Canfarelli, the airport director. He said there appeared to be no survivors.

NATIONAL

Rev. Billy Graham falls in hotel; breaks rib

NEW YORK (AP) — The Rev. Billy Graham fell in his hotel room Tuesday, fracturing his right seventh rib and severely bruising his right shoulder, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association said. The 77-year-old evangelist was in New York to receive the American Bible Society Award. Doctors at a Manhattan hospital said the fall was not related to Graham's Parkinson's disease, and that they expect him to fully recover.

Wildlife group cites return of rare rhino

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nepal's one-horned rhinoceros, one of the world's rarest mammals, is making a striking comeback. The heavily armored rhinos viewed by first lady Hillary Clinton during a trip last year carry giant horns that can sell for up to \$25,000 each on the black market. From a population of about 40 two decades ago, rhinos in Nepal's Chitwan National Park have multiplied to 450, and a new population of about 50 is thriving in another Nepal nature reserve, officials of the World Wildlife Fund said Wednesday. "Nepal deserves a lot of credit for pulling off a conservation success story where in the rest of the world rhinos are being decimated," said Bruce Bunting, vice president for the nonprofit fund's work in Asia.



Rhinos returning

Vaccine blocks cocaine 'high' in lab animals

NEW YORK (AP) — Scientists have developed an experimental cocaine vaccine that blocks the drug's powerfully seductive "high" by spawning antibodies that mop up drug particles in the bloodstream before they reach the brain. The vaccine, if it proves effective, could be used to treat overdoses, ease addicts' cravings and maybe even reduce addiction, said Alan Leshner, a neuroscientist and director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Psychological and behavioral techniques are used now to treat cocaine addiction. Various experimental drugs are being studied, but none have shown more than very modest results, said Frank Vocci, a pharmacologist with the national institute.

Hospital settles with women who alleged rape

INVERNESS, Fla. (AP) — A hospital has agreed to pay \$5 million to 40 women who claimed a former nurse raped or molested them in the recovery room after they had surgery. The settlement covers 34 women who sued and six who had been considering legal action against Citrus Memorial Hospital. The nurse, Bruce Alan Young, pleaded guilty in February to raping seven women after giving them extra doses of drugs. He is serving 17 years in prison. The settlement, announced Tuesday, works out to an average of \$125,000 for each woman, before legal fees and taxes.

Smart-alecky bank robbers toy with the FBI

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A pair of holdup men who have hit at least 18 Midwestern banks are playing head games with the FBI. They are wearing FBI logos during their holdups, using agents' names when they buy getaway cars, and writing letters to newspapers making fun of the bureau. "They think it's amusing. We do not," said Robert Hawk, FBI spokesman in Cleveland. "We consider this to be a very serious matter. Bank robbery is not funny." The "Mid-Western Bank Bandits," as they call themselves, are believed to have committed smartly executed bank robberies over the past couple of years in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Ohio and Kentucky. They are approaching the record of Jesse James, who led about 25 robberies of banks, stage coaches and trains in and around Missouri.

Cleanup begins on coast; many still without power

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses remained in the dark Wednesday, long after powerful storms released their grip on the West Coast. "Not much we can do about it," said Dick Bagley, a realtor in Redwood City, who had been without power since late Monday. "We're going out to dinner, going to bed early, trying to take it in stride. But we're staying away from the refrigerator and freezer. I'm afraid of what we'll find." Moments later, Bagley brightened. "I'll be darned. The lights just flickered," he said. "Yep, they're on. I think they're staying on." The storms that began Sunday night peaked late Monday and early Tuesday, blasting the region with winds topping 100 mph and torrential rain. Five deaths were attributed to the storm. Up to 1.8 million people lost power along the West Coast. By Wednesday afternoon, 250,000 homes and businesses in Northern California — most of them in the San Francisco Bay Area — 190,000 in Washington and 80,000 in Oregon were still waiting for the lights to come back on.



Storm cleanup

FBI searches house in Amtrak sabotage case

VAL VERDE, Calif. (AP) — FBI agents hunting for the Arizona Amtrak saboteur raided the mountain home of a railroad contractor Wednesday and took him away for questioning along with bags of evidence. John Ernest Olin, 32, has been questioned several times previously, said his lawyer, Allan Sarkin. A private contractor who worked for the railroads, he rented the house about 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles where he lives with his girlfriend and her child. "He's a suspect, as is anybody who worked on the railroads," Sarkin said outside the house. A railroad crossing sign adorned the front gate, and a pickup truck in the driveway bore Arizona plates. The sealed search warrant was believed to be the first issued in the case. The Sunset Limited hurtled into a dry gulch before dawn on Oct. 20 in the desert near Hyder, Ariz., about 55 miles southwest of Phoenix. One person was killed and 78 were injured.

Chretien assailed over Quebec crisis

By DAVID CRARY
Associated Press Writer

TORONTO (AP) — After a two-year honeymoon, Prime Minister Jean Chretien is coming under heavy fire for his fumbling efforts to appease restless Quebec.



Jean Chretien

In an unusually strident declaration, the leader of the opposition Reform Party said Chretien should resign or be ousted because of his "utterly irrational" handling of Canada's national unity crisis.

Preston Manning, whose western-based party holds 52 of 295 seats in the House of Commons, said Canada should adopt some sort of impeachment procedure to remove a prime minister who cannot keep the nation whole.

Chretien retorted that Manning's remarks resulted from "too much rum in his egg nog." But the prime minister also was targeted

by a stinging editorial in The Globe and Mail, one of Canada's top newspapers.

"Given the historic crossroads at which Canada stands, Mr. Chretien is an inconvenient prime minister," the editorial said. "The demands of the times are too often beyond him."

Since his election in October 1993, Chretien has enjoyed remarkably high approval ratings. He was — and still is — perceived as honest and unpretentious.

Chretien's current troubles began in mid-October, when Quebec separatists surged in the polls as they campaigned for an independence referendum in the French-speaking province.

The separatists lost the Oct. 30 vote by a very narrow margin, and Chretien was criticized for underestimating their strength. Now he is being haunted by promises he made just before the referendum, aimed at persuading his fellow Quebecers to remain in Canada.

His promises, which were debated in Parliament this week, included recognizing Quebec as a "distinct society" and giving the province a veto over constitutional changes.

Quebec separatists, who plan another secession attempt within a few years, have dismissed the proposals as empty symbolism. Canadians in other provinces, meanwhile, feel the proposals go too far in giving Quebec special privileges.

Manning said Chretien's worst move was introducing legislation that would give Quebec's separatist government a veto over constitutional change.

"That is an utterly irrational act, constitutionally and politically," Manning said.

The veto proposal created a huge headache for Chretien. He initially offered vetos to Quebec and Ontario, as well as regional vetos for the four Atlantic provinces and four Western provinces.

British Columbia was furious at not getting its own veto, so Chretien backpedaled to offer it one. But the move heightened the perception that the whole unity package was ill-considered.

"In the constitutional dossier, the prime minister is like a poor duck caught in an oil slick," said Michel Gautier, a parliamentary leader of the separatist Bloc Quebecois. "The more he moves, the deeper he gets in."

Sarajevo, Belgrade build diplomatic ties

By BARRY SCHWEID
AP Diplomatic Writer

PARIS (AP) — Bosnia and Serbia's capitals, Sarajevo and Belgrade, will establish diplomatic ties even as Balkan leaders sign a peace treaty aimed at ending Bosnia's nearly 4-year-old ethnic war, chief U.S. mediator Richard Holbrooke said Wednesday.

The foreign ministers of the two former Yugoslav republics will exchange letters of recognition before the agreement to end the war is signed Thursday at Elysee Palace.

President Clinton, flying to Paris to witness the settlement worked out largely by Holbrooke, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and other U.S. mediators, will meet with the presi-

dents of Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia before the ceremony.

Holbrooke told reporters, however, that Serbia and Croatia were not yet ready to take a similar step. He declined to provide any details. "This is a matter of time," Holbrooke said. "They will recognize each other."

Serbia had played a leading role in the war against Muslim-led Bosnia.



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