

Asia

**NKorean defector arrested:** A North Korean defector allegedly armed with poison needles has been arrested on suspicion of plotting to attack a leading anti-Pyongyang activist, South Korean officials said Friday.

A prosecution official and an intelligence official said that a North Korean defector surnamed Ahn planned to target **Park Sang-hak**, another North Korean defector who leads a campaign that sends leaflets attacking Pyongyang's leaders to the North. Authorities said they foiled the attack.



Park

Another National Intelligence Service official said Ahn was carrying poison needles when he was arrested. The officials refused to be named because of the continuing investigation.

The investigators refrained from immediately linking the latest case to North Korea and would not comment on local media speculation that Ahn might be an infiltrator similar to one jailed earlier this year.

In the previous case, a South Korean court sentenced a North Korean agent to 10 years in prison for plotting to assassinate Hwang Jang-yop, a high-profile defector and former senior member of the North's ruling party. The agent had come south posing as a defector, but his identity was discovered during an interrogation. (AP)

**Presidential official quits:** A senior South Korean presidential official has resigned over a probe by state prosecutors into corruption involving a troubled savings bank, the president's office said Friday.

Senior presidential spokesman Kim Du-Woo submitted his resignation to President Lee Myung-Bak, Lee's office said.

The move came after prosecutors decided to summon Kim over allegations that he was lobbied by Park Tae-Gyu.

The lobbyist is suspected of taking more than one billion won (US\$900,000) from Busan Savings Bank with promises that he would lobby senior officials and politicians so that the lender could avoid a suspension of operations.

However the bank was suspended in February after runs developed as customers rushed to withdraw their money.

Kim denied involvement in the scandal, according to a presidential spokesman.

Eight savings banks have been suspended so far this year because of inadequate liquidity after financing on soured real-estate projects swelled their bad debts. (AFP)

**Deal near on US military access:** An emerging defense agreement would let the US expand its military presence in Australia as the Obama administration and its allies maneuver to counter an increasingly assertive China.

It would include positioning US equipment in Australia, increasing access to bases and conducting more joint exercises and training.

The arrangement, somewhat controversial in Australia, is expected to be a centerpiece of President Barack Obama's visit to the country in November. Australian Defense Minister Stephen Smith said the broader cooperation will mean "more ships in, ships out; more planes in, planes out; more troops in, troops out."

The US and Australia expect to finalize the plan later this year, according to a senior defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the arrangement was not complete. (AP)

**Huge cocaine bust from Brazil:** Australian police said Friday they had made one of their largest cocaine seizures, intercepting a AU\$200 million (\$206 million) shipment from Brazil hidden among a cargo of lawnmowers.

Three people were charged with importing commercial quantities of a controlled drug after raids in Melbourne Thursday evening — an Australian, 20, and two Chinese nationals, aged 33 and 35. The Australian Federal Police said the 271 kilograms (596 pounds) found was the fifth largest seizure of cocaine ever in Australia and the biggest haul in Victorian state history.

"Australian law enforcement is more united and better equipped than ever in the fight against organised crime," said federal police spokesman Ramzi Jabbour.

"This seizure and subsequent arrests are another example of our commitment to combating these criminal groups that jeopardise the health and safety of the Australian community." (AFP)

**General's son held for assault:** China has detained the 15-year-old son of a well-known general for beating a couple while their young child looked on in an incident that sparked public outrage, the state Xinhua news agency said.

The move came after hundreds of thousands of people went online to express their outrage at the actions of Li Tianyi, the latest in a series of scandals involving the children of high-ranking Chinese officials.

Li, the son of General Li Shuangjiang who is a popular singer and a household name in China, was "found to have phys-



A pillar of black smoke rises from a fire at a chemical plant in the Canberra industrial area of Mitchel Sept 16. (AFP)

Big chemical fire brought under control in Canberra

Firefighters on Friday brought under control a huge chemical fire in the Australian capital Canberra that sparked fears of toxic smoke plumes affecting nearby residents.

"We are 100 percent confident that we have it contained," Australian Capital Territory Fire Brigade chief officer Paul Swain told reporters, but

said it could take until Saturday to put the blaze out altogether.

Residents were woken by loud explosions and fireballs as flames leapt hundreds of metres into the air when the inferno broke out at a factory overnight.

About 100 people were evacuated from nearby areas while those within

a 10 kms (6 miles) radius of the industrial suburb of Mitchell were told to stay indoors and keep windows closed.

Witnesses said homes shook and windows rattled with some residents thinking the city was being bombed. Reports said 20 to 30 blasts were heard.

"I woke up because the house was shaking," Lucy Brown, 19, told the Canberra Times.

"At first I thought it was an earthquake and then I thought it was a bombing."

Two people were reportedly injured.

The Emergency Services

Authority (ESA) said the fire was producing acrid black smoke plumes that could contain phosphene, which can cause irritation to skin and eyes, nausea, dizziness, vomiting and chest pain.

But ESA Commissioner Mark Crossweller said initial readings of air quality were encouraging. (AP)

Taiwan

China consistently warns against arms sales

US to announce F-16 upgrade

WASHINGTON, Sept 16, (RTRS): The Obama administration was to tell the US Congress on Friday it plans to upgrade Taiwan's existing fleet of F-16 fighter jets, stopping short of selling the island more advanced versions of the warplanes, the head of the US-Taiwan Business Council said.

Council President Rupert Hammond-Chambers, whose group lobbied for the sale of more advanced F-16 planes, said notification of the upgrade was "imminent." Congressional sources also confirmed that notification was expected soon.

US arms sales to Taiwan are a major sore spot with China, which regards the self-ruled island as its own.

"It's a bad decision. It undermines Taiwan's ability to modernize its fighter fleet," said Hammond-Chambers.

Requested

Taiwan had requested to buy 66 late-model F-16 fighter planes built by Lockheed Martin Corp. Taiwan wants the newer F-16s to bolster its early-model F-16 A/Bs sold by

President George H. W. Bush in 1992.

Since 2006, the United States has balked at providing the F-16 C/D models, potentially valued at more than \$8 billion, apparently for fear of angering Beijing.

Friday's decision "appeases China on US arms sales to Taiwan and ignores Congress's view on this matter," said Hammond-Chambers.

The United States is committed under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) to supply Taiwan with the weapons it needs to maintain a "sufficient self-defense capability."

Tommy Vietor, spokesman for the White House National Security Council, said the government does not comment on foreign military sales "unless formal congressional notification has taken place."

He added: "Meeting Taiwan's defense needs is a deep and enduring commitment of the United States and this administration is committed to doing so under the terms of the TRA."

Earlier on Friday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry repeated its opposition to US arms sales to Taiwan. Washington should "avoid any

unnecessary disturbance and damage to bilateral ties," the ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu told reporters.

Last week, an official newspaper warned that "madmen" on Capitol Hill pushing the F-16 sale were playing with fire and could pay a "disastrous price" if the Obama administration went ahead with any sale.

Obama administration's impending decision on arms sales to Taiwan is likely to strain the diplomatic truce between the United States and China, which faces rising domestic demands to wield its growing power against debt-saddled Washington.

Throughout this year, Washington and Beijing have sought to stabilise ties before both enter attention-sapping political seasons in 2012, when President Barack Obama faces reelection and China's Communist Party leadership changes hands.

But Sino-American quarrelling is likely to resume for a while if, as seems likely, the US government announces before Oct. 1 that it will offer to sell more weapons to Taiwan, the self-ruled island that Beijing deems a breakaway province.

The deal could sour the mood

between the world's two biggest economies at a jittery time for global markets, even if China confines its response to angry words and largely symbolic recriminations, said several experts.

"China will oppose in principle any decision to sell weapons to Taiwan, but how China expresses its opposition and how strongly will depend on the substance of the decision," said Wu Xinbo, deputy director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai.

Taiwan has been a perennial source of discord between the United States and China. But nowadays China also faces growing expectations at home that it will use its growing strength to press demands abroad, especially when the United States and other Western nations are beset by economic woes.

"I think that whether it's the (Chinese) government or the public, there's a deepening feeling that US arms sales are increasingly unacceptable to China — that this problem should not keep dragging on," Wu of Fudan University said in a telephone interview.



In this Sept 15, photo provided by the US Navy, Petty Officer Jon Moore stands on the beach at Pacific Missile Range Facility, Hawaii while removing a message from a bottle sent from Kagoshima, Japan more than five years ago. Moore found the bottle while personnel at the Kauai military base and local school students picked up trash from the beach as part of International Coastal Cleanup Day. (AP)



Gillard



Mathieson

'Stop bullying Julia'

The boyfriend of Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard has hit out at people bullying his partner, saying women are among the worst culprits.

Gillard is Australia's first female leader and is under huge pressure with her ratings in opinion polls at record lows.

In some recent protests she has been called a "witch" and Tim Mathieson, a former hairdresser who is known as Australia's 'First Bloke', said he could not understand why women were among Gillard's biggest critics.

"Being a woman, I think she gets targeted quite a bit by the big boys in town," he told the Sydney Daily Telegraph.

"I also think she gets as big a hard time from women as well. I just think they should probably think, would they like it to happen to them?"

"Would they like being called some nasty names? Bullying women just doesn't work for me... calling females names does not get you anywhere," he added. (AFP)

ically assaulted a couple and damaged their car" on September 6, Xinhua said late Thursday, citing police.

Beijing police declined to comment when contacted by AFP. (AFP)

**China arrests thousands:** China said

Friday it had arrested 2,182 people and broken up hundreds of gangs in an operation against organised crime, as a senior official pledged to crack down on police collusion with criminals.

The operation began on Sept 1 and has already shut down 270 gangs, the Ministry of Public Security said on its website, urging China's security forces to "encourage the public to offer clues to



Hundreds of Japanese people have protested Friday in front of the headquarters of the cosmetic group Kao, which they accuse of spreading "foreign propaganda" by sponsoring south-Korean TV series. (AFP)

combat organised crime".

Liao Jinrong, the ministry's deputy director of criminal investigation, said some law enforcement officials were colluding with organised criminals and

said such actions would no longer be tolerated. (AFP)

'Falungong'

Repatriation feared

SEOUL, Sept 16, (AFP): About 60 Chinese members of the Falungong spiritual sect in South Korea are in danger of being repatriated to their homeland where the movement is banned as a "evil cult", a follower said Friday.

In recent years, more than 100 Chinese Falungong members have applied for refugee status in South Korea but almost all their petitions have been rejected, Zhu Hongrong, a practitioner living here, said in a statement.

Instead, South Korea has repatriated 10 practitioners, although they could be imprisoned, persecuted and even tortured to death back home, she said.

"Now almost 60 practitioners in South Korea are facing the same dangerous situation," Zhu said.

**Crash probe blames signals:** An investigation into a deadly bullet train crash in China has found that faulty signaling systems and mismanagement were mainly to blame, reports said Friday, though the accident was triggered by a lightning strike.

China's State Council, or Cabinet, is reviewing the findings from the probe into the July disaster, which killed 40 people, injured 177 and prompted checks for the entire bullet train program, the Caijing financial magazine and other reports said.

The lightning strike caused one bullet train to stall and a sensor failure allowed a second train to keep moving on the same track and slam into it. The Daily News newspaper cited experts warning that the faulty signaling systems are still in use at dozens of stations along high-speed rail lines.

The draft report for the investigation was due to be finished by Thursday. Caijing cited one of the experts participating in the probe, Wei Zhen, as confirming that it had been completed. But it said Wei, a professor at the Hefei University of Technology, did not reveal details of its findings. (AP)