

News Digest

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Economists concerned despite budget surplus

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even as President Clinton triumphantly confirmed the first budget surplus in 29 years on Wednesday, economists began warning the ever-better news will fade along with the economy and the stock market.

"Today we learn, after decades of deficit, that this past year we had a surplus of exactly \$70 billion," Clinton said at the White House.

It's the first surplus since 1969 and represents a remarkable turnaround from the record \$290 billion deficit in 1992 and even from 1997's \$22 billion in red ink.

A booming stock market flooded the government with a 12 percent increase in income-tax receipts, which caused the greater-than-predicted surplus.

And strong job growth increased payroll-tax revenue and reduced the government's spending on welfare and unemployment benefits.

But now world financial turmoil is expected to cut in half the rate of U.S. economic growth to a lackluster 2 percent most of this year and next. And the stock market, after plunging from midsummer highs, doesn't appear likely to return to double-digit percentage gains anytime soon.

Britain, Argentina at peace over disputed Falklands

LONDON (AP) — With a handshake symbolizing reconciliation and the simple laying of a wreath, Britain and Argentina began Wednesday to heal the wounds left by their 1982 war over the still-disputed Falkland Islands.

Carlos Menem, the first Argentine president to visit Britain officially since the war, placed the wreath of blue and white flowers — the color of the Argentine flag — before a plaque at St. Paul's Cathedral listing the 255 British soldiers slain in the 74-day conflict.

He then clasped hands on the cathedral's steps with Prince Andrew, the son of Queen Elizabeth II who flew combat missions as a helicopter pilot during the war over

the windswept south Atlantic archipelago.

Menem's six-day visit has been billed by both governments as one for reconciliation, not recriminations, with the focus on booming trade and generally good relations with Argentina's democratically elected government.

"We can agree to disagree," Argentine Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella said before the wreath-laying ceremony, referring to the Falklands, which Argentina calls the Malvinas. "This idea of agreeing to disagree is a very British idea."

The ceremony was intended to deflect from the dispute over the Falklands, whose 2,200 populace is of British descent.

The Argentine president had lunch with the queen Wednesday and was scheduled to meet Thursday with Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Hurricane Mitch lingers in Honduras, killing 32

LA CEIBA, Honduras (AP) — Hurricane Mitch paused in its whirl through the western Caribbean on Wednesday to punish Honduras with 120 mph winds, sweeping away bridges, flooding neighborhoods and killing at least 32 people.

Mitch was drifting west at only 2 mph over the Bay Islands, a Honduras tourist area popular with American scuba divers and beachcombers.

The storm was only 30 miles off the coast, and hurricane-force winds stretched 105 miles from the storm's center. That meant the Honduran coast and a good portion of the interior was under hurricane conditions for more than a day.

"The hurricane has destroyed almost everything," said Mike Brown, a resident of Guanaja Island who was within miles of the eye of the hurricane. "Few houses have remained standing."

At its peak Tuesday, Mitch was classified as the fourth-strongest Caribbean hurricane this century with 180 mph winds. By Wednesday afternoon, the 350-mile-wide storm still packed a punch, but its sustained winds were down to 120 mph.

Immunity found for Pinochet

LONDON (AP) — The High Court ruled Wednesday that Augusto Pinochet is immune from prosecution in British courts and ordered the British government to pay the former Chilean dictator's legal costs of \$560,000.

The court threw out two Spanish arrest warrants, acted upon by British authorities. The warrants sought Pinochet's extradition to face charges of murder, kidnapping and torturing political opponents during his 17-year dictatorship.

In his ruling, Lord Chief Justice Thomas Bingham said it was "of course a matter for acute public concern that those who abuse sovereign power to commit crimes against humanity should not escape trial and appropriate punishment."

But nothing, including the charter that established the International War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg in 1945, invalidated the principle "that one sovereign state will not impugn another in relation to its sovereign acts," Bingham said.

In Madrid, lawyers trying to extradite Pinochet to Spain criticized the British court but said they remained hopeful that an appeals court would eventually overturn the ruling.

Virginia Diaz, an attorney who has worked closely on the case, argues that international law clearly rules out immunity in cases of crimes against humanity.

"We are not talking about a little bit of corruption, but the killing, torture and disappearance of thousands of people."

VIRGINIA DIAZ
attorney

"We are not talking about a little bit of corruption, but the killing, torture and disappearance of thousands of people," Diaz said.

To the joy of Chilean exiles, however, the court ordered that Pinochet remain in custody until an appeal by British prosecutors to the House of Lords.

The Crown Prosecution Service said it will file an urgent appeal on the immunity question Monday, the deadline given by the court.

Bingham said he was giving British prosecutors the opportunity to appeal because of the "obvious public importance and international interest ... as to the outcome" of the case.

Pinochet's lawyers immediately applied for the release on bail of the 82-year-old former leader, who has been held under arrest since Oct. 16 and is recuperating from spinal surgery performed Oct. 9. A hearing was scheduled for Friday.

Lawyers for the Spanish magistrate had alleged that Pinochet was responsible for up to 4,000 murders, including at least one in the United States, and had sent agents to Spain to kill opponents there.

Pinochet, who came to power in 1973, stepped down in 1990, but remained commander-in-chief of the army until March.

In Washington, D.C., human rights groups called on the U.S. government Wednesday to give Spanish investigators any materials it has that link Pinochet directly to acts of international terrorism.

The U.S. administration has taken no position on the Pinochet case. Many months ago, the Justice Department began providing documents to the Spanish government.

The British government, which has defended its handling of the case, refused comment because the matter is still before the courts.

Glenn readies for orbit

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The stakes are higher than ever for NASA as it counts down the final hours to John Glenn's heralded return to orbit today, and the man in charge of space flight knows it.

"As a person responsible for this mission, I feel an awesome responsibility and apprehension that everything goes well. This is special," said Joe Rothenberg, director of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

As always, Rothenberg said, NASA has done everything possible to ensure the safety of space shuttle Discovery and its seven-member crew. But the fact that one of them is the 77-year-old Glenn, the first American to orbit the Earth and a senator for the past 24 years, has upped the ante if anything goes wrong.

"Would it be any different from any mission? Sure," Rothenberg said. "Because like having a teacher on board, it really has got very high visibility and an awful lot of people would look at it as something happening to an American hero and we were part of the process. There's no question about that."

Glenn was so beloved by

America after his 1962 flight, in fact, that President Kennedy reportedly instructed NASA not to fly him again — he didn't want to risk the astronaut's life. Glenn never got to ask Kennedy if this was true; the president was dead by the time Glenn heard about it.

Schoolchildren around the country will be watching Glenn's return to space, just as youngsters watched on Jan. 28, 1986, when schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe was aboard Challenger. She and the six others on board were killed when the shuttle blew up 73 seconds into flight.

Up to a quarter-million people are expected to converge on the area for a glimpse of the launch. That doesn't count the 3,800 reporters expected for liftoff, or the 70 members of Congress, or President Clinton and his entourage.

Everything seemed to be in NASA's favor heading into the final hours — the countdown was humming along and perfect launch weather was forecast.

Glenn spent Wednesday, his last day on Earth for the next 1½ weeks, reviewing flight plans and greeting well-wishers.

Global population expected to rise

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The world's population is expected to increase nearly everywhere on the globe next year — even in Africa, where AIDS is cutting life expectancies dramatically, according to U.N. figures released Wednesday.

Even though fertility continues to decline as the 21st century approaches, the number of people on Earth is expected to hit 6 billion in 1999, the U.N. Population Division said.

Last year, AIDS killed 2.3 million people worldwide, while 30 million were left infected by HIV, the virus that causes the disease. According to the U.N. figures, 91 percent of AIDS deaths occurred in 34 countries, 29 of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

But in the 29 African countries hit hardest by AIDS, the population will remain the same or keep climbing because fertility in these countries is high, according to the U.N. estimates.

The spread of AIDS is having population repercussions: Children born today in those 29 African countries will have an average life expectancy of 47 years rather than 54 years, the United Nations said.

The estimates are prepared every two years by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

According to the estimates, world population was 5.9 billion in mid-1998 and was growing by 1.33 percent per year, an average of 78 million people.

Deodorant kills British 16-year-old

MANCHESTER, England (AP) — A 16-year-old boy obsessed with smelling nice died after months of repeatedly spraying his entire body with deodorant, a coroner ruled Wednesday.

Jonathan Capewell had 10 times the lethal dosage of propane and butane in his blood when he suffered a heart attack and died July 29, coroner Barrie Williams said.

It is believed the fumes built up in his body following months of "high" deodorant use, Williams said.

"His personal hygiene led him to use more than was normal in a confined space, which limits ventilation," said the coroner, who recorded the death as accidental.

Jonathan's father, Keith Capewell, said his son would cover his entire body with deodorant at least twice a day.

"When we told him he was using too much, he said he just wanted to smell good," Capewell said.

"Even when we were in a room downstairs we couldn't just smell it, we could taste it," the father said. "You wouldn't have thought that could have been the cause for someone to die. What a price to pay for smelling nice."

Sue Rogers of the British Aerosol Manufacturing Association said she had never heard of a similar incident.

"It is extraordinarily unusual and terribly tragic," she said. "The aerosols have warnings about spraying in confined areas and well-ventilated places, but these are for flammability risks, not about accidental inhalation."

The boy's mother, Louise, called for better warnings on deodorant cans.

"You just get up in the morning and spray it on, but who expects it to kill you?" she said.

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