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The Associated Press

---------- Philippine president, Muslim rebel chief meet secretly in Japan

MANILA - Philippine President Benigno Aquino and Philippine Muslim rebel leader Al Haj Ebrahim Murad held a secret meeting outside Tokyo on Thursday night and agreed to speed up the on-and-off talks to end the Muslim insurgency plaguing the southern Philippines since the 1970s, the government said.

A statement released by the Philippine government said Aquino met with Murad, leader of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, for two hours in what was described as an "informal meeting."

---------- Japan says will continue exporting nuclear power technology

TOKYO - The Japanese government decided Friday to continue with its policy of exporting nuclear power generation technology for now after reviewing the policy in the wake of the disaster-triggered crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The Cabinet approved a document that said it believes Japan should provide nuclear energy technology to countries that wish to have it while ensuring that the technology's safety is of the highest global standards.

---------- Olympus posts 2.15 bil. yen group net loss in April-June qtr

TOKYO - Olympus Corp. said Friday it posted a 2.15 billion yen group net loss in the April to June quarter against a profit of 1.50 billion yen a year earlier on a sales fall attributable to the March 11 earthquake-tsunami disaster.

The maker of optics and reprography products said its group sales in the first quarter of fiscal 2011 dropped 3.6 percent to 198.57 billion yen, adding that the yen's appreciation against the dollar also contributed to the sales decline.

---------- Dollar drops to mid-78 yen level, Tokyo's intervention effects fading

TOKYO - The U.S. dollar dropped to the mid-78 yen range Friday in Tokyo amid concerns over the U.S. economy, wiping out some of the previous day's gains triggered by Japan's first yen-selling intervention in four-and-a-half months.

At 5 p.m., the U.S. currency traded at 78.53-55 yen against 78.83-93 yen in New York and 79.88-90 yen in Tokyo at 5 p.m. Thursday. It moved between 78.31 yen and 79.41 yen during the day, changing hands most frequently at 79.30 yen.

---------- Crown Prince and Princess visit disaster-hit Iwate

TOKYO - Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako traveled on Friday to the coastal city of Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, to offer encouragement to survivors of the devastating March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

The couple talked with some of the 192 evacuees living in temporary housing nearly five months after the massive earthquake and tsunami. The crown prince and princess also offered silent prayers at a tsunami-ravaged site in the city, where buildings including a supermarket were completely washed away.

---------- Kirin's group operating profit rises 21.7% in Jan.-June 1st half

TOKYO - Kirin Holdings Co. said Friday it logged a group operating profit of 72.81 billion yen in the January-June first half of the current business year, up 21.7 percent from a year earlier, on double-digit profit gains in the domestic alcoholic beverage as well as medical and biochemical segments.

Net profit jumped more than 2.5-fold to 17.94 billion yen after booking sharp profit gains on sales of fixed assets and shares in affiliated companies, Kirin said.

---------- 2 artistic bodies swindle state out of more than 200 mil. yen

TOKYO - Two artistic bodies swindled the government out of more than 200 million yen in subsidies between fiscal 2007 and 2010, mainly by false accounting and producing bogus receipts, the Agency for Cultural Affairs said Friday.

The Tokyo Chamber Opera Center received 213.93 million yen and Nihon Rokyoku Kyokai, a promotional body for "rokyoku" traditional narrative singing, took 11.81 million yen over the four-year period through March 2011, according to the agency under the education ministry.

---------- Gov't to import additional 2,000 tons of butter to avert shortage

TOKYO - Japan will import an additional 2,000 tons of butter as an emergency measure to avert a shortage and make up for a decline in domestic butter production in the wake of the March earthquake, tsunami and the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture, the farm ministry said Friday.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries also wants to prevent butter prices from climbing further after rising from summer last year when temperatures rose to record-high levels.

---------- Japan hails meeting between Philippine president, Muslim rebel chief

TOKYO - Japan on Friday hailed a meeting between Philippine President Benigno Aquino and Muslim rebel leader Al Haj Ebrahim Murad near Tokyo on Thursday night as "a significant step in facilitating a peace process" between the two sides.

Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto said in a statement that Japan is "glad to have

contributed to the realization" of the secret informal meeting between Aquino and Murad, the central committee chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, following a request by the Philippines.

---------- Softbank stays on top in net subscription rise for 16th month

TOKYO - Softbank Mobile Corp. stayed on top of the rankings of cellphone carriers' net increases in service subscriptions in July for the 16th straight month due to brisk sales of Apple Inc.'s iPhone 4, according to data released by carriers Friday.

Softbank Mobile landed 245,000 contracts on a net basis for the reporting month. NTT Docomo Inc. stayed in second place for the second month in a row with a rise of 195,500 subscriptions as it expanded the summer lineup of smartphones.

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