

Janitorial firm snared in probe

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Body

WASHINGTON — More than 200 illegal immigrants were arrested and three officials at a nationwide janitorial service face federal fraud and tax charges after an investigation of cleaning crews at a northern Michigan resort, government officials said. The illegal immigrants were working as janitors for Nevada-based Rosenbaum-Cunningham International Inc., or RCI, a cleaning contractor for businesses. The workers were swept up early Thursday in 63 locations nationwide, including restaurants such as the House of Blues, Hard Rock Cafe, ESPN Zone, Planet Hollywood and others, according to a law enforcement official. RCI co-owners Richard M. Rosenbaum and Edward Scott Cunningham, and firm controller Christina Flocken, face various criminal fraud, immigration and tax charges in the 23-count indictment unsealed in U.S. District Court in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Space walkers fix

balky antenna

KOROLYOV, Russia — A U.S. astronaut and his Russian crewmate took their tools and stepped outside the international space station for an orbital repair job Thursday, fighting an overheated spacesuit with a fogged-up helmet to fix a faulty antenna. When a hammer didn't do the trick, cosmonaut Mikhail Tyurin cut a metal lock holding the antenna in place with a tool resembling garden shears — breathing heavily in the heat of a suit plagued by temperature control problems through much of the six-hour, 13-minute spacewalk. Tyurin and American astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria were dispatched to free up the stuck antenna on a Russian Progress cargo ship, to keep it from snagging when the vessel undocks from the station.

Egyptian blogger

convicted of slight

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt — An Egyptian blogger was convicted Thursday and sentenced to four years in prison for insulting Islam and Egypt's president, sending a chill through fellow Internet writers who fear a government crackdown. Abdel Kareem Nabil, a 22-year-old former student at Egypt's Al-Azhar University, had been a vocal secularist and sharp critic of conservative Muslims in his blog. He often lashed out at Al-Azhar — the most prominent religious center in Sunni Islam — calling it "the university of terrorism" and accusing it of encouraging extremism. Nabil's lawyer, Ahmed Seif el-Islam, said he would appeal the verdict, adding it will "terrify other bloggers."

Extremists threaten

peacekeeping forces

MOGADISHU, Somalia — Extremists in Somalia on Thursday threatened to carry out suicide attacks against African Union peacekeepers who are to begin deploying soon. A newly formed extremist group known as the Popular Resistance Movement in the Land of the Two Migrations posted a new warning against planned

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peacekeepers. Meanwhile, the capital's international airport came under mortar fire Thursday. At least two mortar rounds exploded near the runway but caused no damage, airport director Mohamed Ahmed Siyad said.

Bush touts non-corn

sources for ethanol

FRANKLINTON, N.C. — Trying to draw attention to his domestic agenda, President Bush on Thursday extolled the science of turning grasses and wood chips into ethanol to lessen the U.S. thirst for foreign oil. "If you really want to reduce the amount of oil that you consume, you have to reduce the amount of gasoline you use," Bush said on a road trip to push energy initiatives he announced last month in his State of the Union address. Bush has proposed ramping up the production of alternative fuels such as ethanol made from something other than corn. The call for sharp increases in ethanol use will get bipartisan support in Congress. But production of ethanol from corn is expected to fall far short of meeting such an increase. So Bush envisions a major speedup of research into production of "cellulosic" ethanol made from wood chips, switchgrass and other feedstocks.

Lawyers say Padilla

can't aid his defense

MIAMI — Alleged al-Qaida operative Jose Padilla suffers from intense stress and anxiety after being imprisoned in isolation for years and cannot adequately help his lawyers prepare for a criminal trial, a mental expert testified Thursday. Dr. Angela Hegarty, a forensic neuropsychiatrist, said she concluded after examining and testing Padilla for more than 22 hours last year that he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and is mentally incompetent for trial. Padilla's symptoms are most acute when he is asked about his 3½ years in custody at a Navy brig or to review evidence in the case such as transcripts of telephone conversations, she said. "He doesn't want to because it hurts so much, and because it hurts so much he shuts down," Hegarty said.

Cluster bombs

targeted for ban

OSLO, Norway — Representatives from 48 nations on Thursday launched a global effort to ban the use, production and stockpiling of cluster bombs by the end of next year, despite the opposition of several of the world's major military powers. A draft declaration, obtained by the Associated Press, said these weapons — which can linger on former battlefields for years — cause "unacceptable harm." It calls for a treaty banning them by 2008, despite concerns that some countries would not agree to act that quickly. Norway hopes the treaty would be similar to one outlawing anti-personnel mines, negotiated in Oslo in 1997.

Indonesian ferry

burns, killing 16

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Sixteen people died and scores were injured Thursday when fire engulfed an Indonesian ferry. The Levina 1 was carrying 300 passengers when a pre-dawn blaze broke out in a truck on the car deck hours after the ferry left the capital, Jakarta, for the northwestern island of Bangka. The cause of the fire was not known. Remarkably, 275 people were rescued from the Java Sea and the 2,000-ton vessel's charred hull by fishing boats, warships and helicopters, averting a second major maritime disaster in Indonesia the last several months. In late December, a ferry sank in the Java Sea, killing more than 400.

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