

BRIEFLY

Soviet FM talks ME security

Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh met with top Egyptian officials in Cairo Saturday, and later told reporters he had held "detailed" discussions on security in the Gulf region. AFP reports from Cairo.

However, Bessmertnykh, who had morning talks with President Hosni Mubarak and two sets of talks with Egyptian Foreign Minister Esmat Abdel Meguid, did not comment when asked about a decision by six countries to attend planned Middle East peace talks.

Iran to host oil confce

Iran will host a major international oil conference this month, drawing industry experts from throughout the world. Oil Minister Gholamreza Aqazadeh announced Saturday. AP reports from Nicosia.

The meeting, which is to include representatives of major US and Western oil companies, could signal a move for Iran away the isolation it has experienced for most of the 12 years since its 1979 Islamic revolution.

Aqazadeh said more than 100 people, including oil ministers from 10 countries, would take part in the May 27-29 meeting in Isfahan.

He said the meeting is to promote understanding between producers and consumers of oil so the interests of both can be guaranteed, according to the official Islamic Republic News Agency, monitored in Nicosia.

Pindi denies sending infiltrators to Kashmir

Pakistan on Saturday rejected an Indian charge that it was sending infiltrators into Kashmir and again proposed neutral monitoring of a military control line in the disputed state. Reuter reports from Islamabad.

Pakistan-based leaders of two rival Kashmiri militant groups also jointly urged their followers to keep peace between themselves while fighting Indian rule.

Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar warned Pakistan on Friday it would pay a heavy price unless it stopped sending infiltrators into the two-thirds of Kashmir ruled by India.

Bush thanks Fahd

US President George Bush called King Fahd of Saudi Arabia on Saturday to thank him for the Gulf Cooperation Council's decision to participate in a regional peace conference on the Middle East. Reuter reports from Washington.

The White House press office said Bush told the Saudi King he viewed the announcement as a positive step.

The Gulf Cooperation Council, comprising Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, announced earlier on Saturday its "readiness to participate — if invited — as an observer" in a forthcoming peace conference.

Soviet intelligence man defects to US

The Sunday Telegraph, a respected British newspaper, reported that a senior Soviet intelligence officer has defected to the United States. AP reports from London.

The Sunday Telegraph said that Alexandre Krapiva, 41, worked for years as a US double agent before defecting in February.

The newspaper said Krapiva is now being debriefed in the United States.

The Sunday Telegraph cited no sources in the report.

Bush talks arms control with Gorbachev

US President Bush called Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to discuss arms control and economic issues, but no date was set for a US-Soviet arms control summit, the White House said, AP reports from Washington.

Gorbachev accepted Bush's offer to send a team of experts to the Soviet Union to analyze the food distribution system in the economically pressed nation, said assistant press secretary Bill Harlow.

The team, led by Undersecretary of Agriculture Richard T. Crowder, will leave Friday. Crowder will report to Bush as he weighs a Soviet request for \$1.5 billion in grain credits.

BJP threat to secularism, says Rajiv

HUBLI (Madras), May 12: Congress-I President Rajiv Gandhi has warned the people against what he described as "majority communalism" and said it was far worse than "minority communalism," reports PTI.

Talking to reporters here yesterday Gandhi charged the BJP with triggering off a nation wide wave of communal unrest since September last and the BJP was the biggest threat to secularism.

Gandhi claimed that the Congress-I was the only party that could provide the backbone to the secularistic structure of the country and said even the communist parties had compromised secularism for political gains in 1977 and 1989 during the Lok Sabha polls.

Replying to a question

3 Chinese engineers kidnapped in Sind

HYDERABAD (Pakistan), May 12: Bandits kidnapped three Chinese engineers at gunpoint on Saturday from an electricity project in the southern Pakistani province of Sind, government officials and Chinese sources said, Reuter reports.

The gunmen released the Pakistani driver of a vehicle used by the Chinese and escaped into a forest with their hostages, the official AFP news agency said.

It was not immediately known whether the driver had been given any ransom message to pass on to authorities.

The Chinese were the second group of foreigners to be seized in Sind in eight weeks. Three Japanese students were kidnapped on March 17 while on a rowing expedition down the Indus river and held for up to six weeks.

The three engineers had just arrived for work at Bhan Saeedabad in the western district of Dadu when four bandits took over their vehicle

and drove them down a dirt road, officials in the central Sind town of Hyderabad said.

The three men, Project Deputy Manager Zhu Zheng Qing, 52, Li Gang, 28, and Tai Shi You, 45, worked for the Chinese International Water and Power Company, a company sources said.

The company is laying an electricity transmission line in the area for Pakistan's state-run water and power development authority.

APP said the Chinese had expressed apprehension about their safety five days ago and had indicated that they would quit work if protection was not provided.

But a Chinese company official said 16 Chinese workers in the area for about a year had never received any threats.

A police official in the provincial capital, Karachi, said police were pursuing the bandits, known locally as dacoits, and had a clash with them. No further details were immediately known.

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Longest W.Bengal leftist govt to seek another term

Polls not a referendum on Khalistan: Shekhar

NEW DELHI, May 12: The Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar, has warned the Punjab militants of stern action by the central government if they had "any thoughts" of using the elections in the state as a referendum on Khalistan, according to a video news magazine, reports PTI.



magazine claims.

In a report on a "series of secret meetings" between the Prime Minister and the militants, "Eyewitness" magazine says Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the state are the result of secret meetings between the Prime Minister and the militants, culminating in an arrangement between them.

The Prime Minister told the magazine that he was not talking to "killers and murderers" but to people who had been alienated and because of that, "they are killing."

Suppose one member of my family goes on a wrong path, what do I do? Do I discard him on the very first day? I try to persuade him," he said, adding "if he is not persuaded by me, I take the help of relatives and friends."

Chandra Shekhar said "if it is good and true for a family, it is true for the family of the great nation of India."

In a press release issued here yesterday, the video magazine said the secret meetings had been confirmed to it by Mohan Guruswamy, whom it described as Prime Minister's political confidante and his go-between with the militants. The first such meeting was held on January 11 and the most recent on April 18, the

Thousands of party cadres are busy painting the eastern border state red, and with hammers and sickles, exhibiting a confidence that has made the coastal province of 67 million an impenetrable Marxist bastion.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), the country's dominant leftist group which heads the nine-party Left Front coalition, is confident of an easy win, and cites its 14-year track record as the main reason.

"We rate our chances of keeping power [in West Bengal] very high," said Sitaram Yechury a politburo member of the independent CPI (M), which also rules Kerala, another of India's 25 states.

"People of West Bengal know it [Left Front] is the only stable political formation which can guard their interests and preserve democracy," he said in an interview here.

News reports from Calcutta, the overpowered West Bengal capital, back Yechury's claim, although the main opposition in the state is determined to take on the communists headlong.

"I am not promising anyone the moon, but I wish to put up a strong fight against the Marxists in West Bengal," said Siddhartha Shankar Ray, President of the state unit of ex-Premier Rajiv Gandhi's Congress (I) Party.

"It is the Marxist dadas (goons) who are ruling everywhere in Bengal, be it the illustrated Weekly of India, adding: 'There is suffocation everywhere. People want to breathe freely.'

Few in India doubt the ruling Left Front's ability to secure a favourable verdict in the May 20 battle for West Bengal's 294-seat legislature, controlled since June 1977 by an orthodox Stalinist group.

The vote coincides with the start of a three-day national election for India's central parliament.



HALLE (Germany): German Chancellor Helmut Kohl is the target of egg — throwers as he arrives at the Town Hall during a visit May 10. A group of young demonstrators pelted him with eggs and with small bags filled with paint and chanted 'lier! lier!' — AFP photo

Accord on Kurdish autonomy soon

BAGHDAD, May 12: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein met Kurdish rebel leader Masoud Barzani on Saturday for the second time since Baghdad began talks with heads of the country's restive Kurdish people, reports Reuter.

A state-run Kurdish newspaper said talks between Baghdad and the Kurds on a new autonomy pact could end with an agreement within two days.

The Iraqi news agency said Saddam met Barzani at noon (0800 GMT) but gave no other details about the talks, which have been shrouded in secrecy since they began last Tuesday.

Saddam and Barzani, head of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and leader of a four-man Kurdish delegation, held their first meeting last Wednesday.

The Al-Iraq newspaper, breaking days of official silence on the talks, said negotiations were going ahead in an objective spirit and the discussions were full and frank.

The result of the negotiations is expected to be announced in a couple of days in the framework of a mutual agreement on how to implement the March (1970) declaration which will strengthen national unity, it said in a front page commentary.

It gave no other details. The four-member Kurdish delegation has been in Baghdad since early this week to work out a new autonomy deal for the Iraqi Kurds, who make up about one fifth of Iraq's 18 million people.

An agreement satisfactory to the Kurds could help persuade hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees to come home from the mountains on Iraq's borders with Turkey and Iran.

They fled fearing reprisals by the Iraqi army which crushed their post-Gulf war revolt in March.

A pact could also undermine the justification for a western military presence in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq.



CANNES (France): Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida waves to the crowd after she made an imprint of her hands here May 11. The imprint will be put on the celebrated Croisette along with those of other stars. — AFP photo

Iraq to join Arab League FMs meet

NICOSIA, May 12: Iraq will take part in the Arab League Foreign Ministers' meeting Wednesday in Cairo, an Iraqi Foreign Ministry official said Saturday, reports AFP.

Saad Qassem Hammoudi, head of the ministry's Arab desk, did not specify whether Foreign Minister Ahmed Hussein Al-Khodir would represent Iraq at the session.

The official, quoted by the Iraqi news agency monitored here, said the meeting would review the Palestinian question, the Israeli-Arab conflict and Soviet Jewish emigration to Israel.

In late March, Hammoudi represented his country in Cairo at the first Arab League meetings since the Gulf War, in which Egypt and several other Arab countries formed part of the anti-Iraqi alliance.

Arab diplomatic sources said Wednesday's meeting was being covered to elect a new Arab League Secretary General, to replace Chaddi Klibi who resigned in September.

Egypt's Foreign Minister Esmat Abdel Meguid is so far the only candidate for the post.

Fire causes damage to part of Philippine palace

MANILA, May 12: A fire broke out at the Philippine presidential palace early today, causing severe damage to the ground floor but injuring no one and leaving Imelda Marcos' world-famous show collection intact, security officials said, reports AFP.

President Corazon Aquino, who resides in a separate housing across the street, turned part of Malacanang palace into a public museum when she took power in 1986, as a monument to the profligacy of the late Ferdinand Marcos.

The fire caused severe damage to the public entrance to the Marcos family's living quarters and the souvenir section of the museum, but did not reach into the exhibit areas or those used for official government business, palace security said.

They ruled out sabotage as a possible cause and said they were investigating whether faulty wiring was at fault.

UN envoy in Iraq for talks on aid to refugees

BAGHDAD, May 12: UN envoy Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan arrived in Baghdad on Saturday for talks on relief aid to refugees, the Iraqi News Agency (INA) reported, says Reuter.

Prince Sadruddin's visit was aimed at following up contacts and exchanging views with the Iraqi government on aid and relief operations within the framework of a note of understanding signed between Iraq and the UN on April 18, INA said.

It was the Prince's second visit to Baghdad in less than a month to discuss arrangements for providing humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled their homes following abortive uprisings against President Saddam Hussein's government in the Kurdish north and mainly Shi'ite south.

"We inform our compatriots with the greatest pleasure that the operation ... was undertaken with complete success," the medical team that treated him said in a statement broadcast on Tehran radio.

"His eminence's general condition after the operation is totally satisfactory," the team added in the statement, which was monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Iran's IRNA news agency reported earlier that Khamenei had "some problems in his gall bladder."

IRNA said the had complained of chronic stomach pains for some time and doctors diagnosed gall stones which needed to be removed.

US, Iraqi Generals hold talks

Allies yet to take decision on entry into Dahuk

INCIRLIK (Turkey), May 12: Top US and senior Iraqi Generals held talks Thursday night in the northern Iraqi city of Dahuk, still occupied by Baghdad's troops, but Allied Forces have made no decision yet to enter Dahuk, and official allied statement said here Saturday, reports AFP.

A massive refugees return hinges on the city's fate.

Most of Dahuk's 380,000 residents fled north to the border with Turkey after Iraqi troops crushed the Kurdish uprising in late March. They have told aid workers they are afraid to return home until Iraqi forces leave and the Allies move in.

A US spokesman, Lieutenant Commander Tom Burgess at the combined task force headquarters here, said the talks Thursday were "positive, open and other meetings will be scheduled regarding Dahuk."

They were held in the Iraqi city of Zakhko, which like Dahuk lies north of the 36th parallel within the Kurdish security zone where Allies have restricted Iraqi military operations following the Gulf war.

The spokesman did not say when the future meetings would take place, and refused any other comment on the talks.

They involved the US General John Shalikashvili, Commander-in-Chief of "Operation Provide Comfort," and Jay Garner, the Commander of Allied Forces in northern Iraq. Allied Forces entered northern Iraq on April 21 under the "operation" to set up safe zones to help the return of Kurdish refugees.

They met with Iraqi Generals Abu Srias Saber and Naswan Tahoun, a spokesman here said.

The Iraqi Generals reportedly asked the Allies to help them avoid "losing face" in response to an Allied request that they evacuate Dahuk, a US Colonel, Dick Naab, at the command base in Slopil, Turkey, said Saturday.

Col Naab said one possibility under study was the creation of a joint security force with both Iraqis and Allies to ensure Kurds they could return home safely.

"Combined task forces have made no decision to enter Dahuk," according to the military communique issued here Saturday.

It stressed that the United Nations had what it called an important role to play. One of the questions under discussion between the UN and Iraq is the transfer of power in the northern security zones from the Allied forces to the UN.

Off the Record

Kennedy Smith fingerprinted

PALM BEACH (Florida): US Senator Edward Kennedy's nephew, William Kennedy Smith, who surrendered to Palm Beach police on Saturday was fingerprinted and formally charged with rape and battery, police said, reports Reuter.

Smith, 30, walked into the building accompanied by his mother, Jean Kennedy Smith, the sister of former President John F. Kennedy, and a lawyer.

Smith did not comment on the charges to reporters who surrounded him as he walked from his car. He has denied any wrongdoing in the alleged March 30 rape, legally termed sexual battery in Florida, at the Kennedy Family Estate.

William Kennedy Smith was officially charged with sexual battery and battery by Palm Beach police early this afternoon, a statement issued by police said.

After posing for a mug shot and being fingerprinted, Smith drove to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's office where he was expected post bail and be released.

The alleged victim, a 29-year-old woman, told police she met Smith at a posh Palm Beach bar, then went to the Kennedy Seaside Estate with him for a walk on the beach.

The woman, who is the step-daughter of a millionaire Midwest industrialist, claims that Smith tackled her, held her down and raped her when she tried to leave the estate.

If convicted on the charge of second degree sexual battery, Smith could face up to 15 years in prison. He also faces a battery charge which carries a maximum penalty of six months in jail.

Secrecy guarantees in Noriega case sought

MIAMI: The US attorney general's office asked for broad secrecy guarantees Thursday in the Manuel Noriega case, bringing protests from the defense and the media, reports AP.

US District Judge William Hoeveler granted a closed hearing on requests for certain classified documents, but said court records with secret information deleted — could be released publicly later.

Noriega's defense has charged that US intelligence agencies condoned his dealings with drug traffickers in exchange for information and strategic help in Central America.

Noriega attorney Jon May strenuously protested the secret hearing Thursday, saying the defense had no intention of disclosing anything protected under the Classified Information Procedures Act.

"We want to guarantee General Noriega his Sixth Amendment, constitutionally mandated right to a public trial," May said.

Noriega sat quietly during the hearing wearing his four-star general's uniform, and did not address the court. His trial on charges of accepting 4.6 million dollars in bribes from Colombia's Medellin drug cartel is scheduled for July 22.

It's crime wave in eastern Germany

LEIPZIG (Germany): Thomas Mueller drove his squad car slowly through the grubby outskirts, past a row of camping trailers set up by warring pimps from eastern and western Germany, reports AP.

It is one of the most dangerous spots in Leipzig, a major city in former East Germany.

Western pimps hire right-wing skinhead toughs as bodyguards. Eastern pimps protect their prostitutes with vicious dogs.

"We've never had problems like this before," said Mueller's partner, Guenther Kaethner, a 9mm pistol strapped to his side. "My wife is starting to worry about me at night."

When Communist East Germany still existed, the people's biggest fear was of the secret police, known as the Stasi. Now it's crime that spreads like pestilence.

Nearly 300,000 crimes were committed in the region last year, up by 30 per cent from 1989, according to official figures, and even higher numbers are expected in 1991. Most of the crimes were thefts.

Before the Communists fell in 1989, Leipzig had not had a bank robbery in at least seven years. Since unification in October, there have been 12.

The number of purse snatchings soared from about 60 in 1989 to more than 2,200 last year.