

Move to keep Soviet republics in an economic union

MOSCOW, Aug 31: Economic ministers from all 15 Soviet Republics, including the Baltic, met on Friday to discuss ways to prevent the political breakup of the Soviet Union from demolishing their economies as well, reports Reuter.

The meeting resurrected hopes that the Republics, nine of which have declared independence, would be able to salvage at least an economic union to save their industries from disaster.

Tass news agency said the ministers were discussing a common approach to an economic agreement, coordinating reforms and creating a joint economic space.

Until now, the six republics that had been pushing hardest for independence before the failure of last week's coup had not taken part in efforts to forge economic links on a union-wide basis.

The independence of three — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — has been recognised by some 30 western nations. The other three are Georgia, Armenia and Moldavia.

The nine other republics agreed in April under the Chairmanship of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to draft a new union treaty devolving power from the centre

Four Japanese allegedly export missile parts

TOKYO, Aug 31: Four executives of a major Japanese aviation manufacturer were charged Friday with violating foreign trade and customs law by allegedly exporting US-made missile parts illegally to Iran, reports AP.

The men were taken to the Tokyo District Prosecutors Office for further investigation before prosecutors decide whether to bring IBM to court, according to an official in the Tokyo Police Department.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Japan Aviation Electronics Industry allegedly shipped 1,357 flywheels to Singapore without obtaining permission from the government.

The official said the alleged illegal shipments were made on 13 occasions and were worth about 35 million Yen (255,000 Dollars) over a one-year period starting from May 1988.

A local news report has said the company might have shipped as many as 3,000 stabilizers, but the statute of limitations for the export law had passed for about half of them.

The four executives of Tokyo-base company included the company's ex-president, Yukio Kaito, 63, and senior executives Keiichi Fukuzumi, 63, Yoshiharu Fukunaga, 58, and Hironori Takahashi, 52.

If indicted, the four face a maximum penalty of five years in prison and fines of up to 2 million Yen (14,500 Dollars)

\$168m USAID grant for research on AIDS prevention

NEW YORK, Aug 31: The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has awarded a grant of 168 million Dollars to Family Health International (FHI) to help countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean expand prevention and control of the AIDS virus, reports Reuter.

Dr Theodore King, President of FHI, a North Carolina-based non-profit organisation doing research in contraceptive development and reproductive health, told a news conference on Thursday that the five-year grant was the largest provided by any government for international work to slow the spread of the killer disease, which destroys the body's immune system.

King said the funds would be used for long-term control of the disease by helping the developing world to launch AIDS prevention programmes encouraging changes in sexual behaviour.

Dr Peter Lamprey, who will direct the project, said that by the end of the decade 80 per cent of all HIV AIDS virus infections worldwide are expected to result from heterosexual transmission through sex.

He said the project would concentrate on reducing numbers of sexual partners, increasing the demand for and access to condoms, and training health personnel in diagnosis and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.

According to estimates by the World Health Organisation (WHO) eight to 10 million people are infected with the AIDS virus by the end of the decade 30 to 40 million people may be infected at least 75 per cent of these are expected to be in the developing world.

to the republics. The economic future of republics that refused to sign the new treaty was left uncertain.

The first signatures should have gone on the treaty last week, but the hardline coup attempt in Moscow prevented it.

If the treaty survives, it is likely to give signatory republics much more power than originally envisaged.

Of the nine republics that originally promised to sign a union treaty, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Azerbaijan have declared independence since the coup and Uzbekistan has announced preparations to do so.

The Ukraine and Kazakhstan, next in order of influence after Russia, have also expressed fears of Russian domination.

These were aroused not only by Russia's suggestions that it could make territorial claims but also because Russian ministers have been appointed to run the economy temporarily.

Russian Prime Minister Ivan Silayev, who heads the Interim Committee, attended Friday's meeting together with radical economist Grigory Yavlinsky, who has been given special responsibility for for-

mulating economic policy.

In an interview in the Daily Rossiskaya Gazeta Silayev said he was open to various approaches to an economic treaty. "It can be an economic federation or a confederation uniting several republics," he said.

His committee has not yet unveiled specific plans to tackle the country's monumental economic crisis. But a further reminder of the need to act fast came in comments from Deputy Energy Minister in an interview with Tass.

He said a shortage of coal as a result of a miners' strike this spring would almost certainly mean the closure of some power stations and reduced supplies to industry and households this winter.

But he said he did not think the nationwide power network would collapse as a result of the secession of republics, because the regions were too interdependent.

"It's interesting that not one republic has mentioned leaving the Soviet Energy System," he said.

"Judge for yourself. The Omsk region, for example, gets its electricity from Kazakhstan, which in turn gets power from the Urals. The Urals get it from the Volga."

France to return Baltic gold to its owners

PARIS, Aug 31: France is ready to return some three tons of gold deposited here by Latvia and Lithuania more than 50 years ago to its rightful owners, Foreign Minister Roland Dumas said here yesterday, reports AFP.

If France agreed to hold, protect and guard the Baltic countries' gold since 1940 it was clearly with the intention of returning it to these countries," Dumas said after a Senate Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee hearing.

Today the Baltic states are recovering their full sovereignty, and sovereignty implied control over monetary assets and the right to dispose of gold reserves.

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Steps to stop food smuggling in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Aug 31: The Nepali government is taking steps to stop food being hoarded inside the country and smuggled outside by businessmen seeking "unreasonable profits," an official said Friday, reports AFP.

People who inform on those attempting to smuggle food out of Nepal will receive as a reward 25 per cent of the value of the food, the official said.

His comments followed criticism in the country's Parliament Thursday that the government of Prime Minister GP Koirala had failed to stop the smuggling.

The Food and Agriculture Ministry did not say how much grain had been illegally hoarded.

South Africa sells oil reserves

PRETORIA, Aug 31: The South African government is to sell strategic oil reserves of the value of one billion Rands (347 million Dollars) in order to create jobs and promote social upliftment, Economic Co-ordination Minister Dawie de Villiers said yesterday, reports AFP.

The self-off was made possible by the "considerable improvement" in recent months in South Africa's economic relations with the rest of the world, De Villiers told a press conference here.

The cash would be spent on projects "which promote socio-economic stability and order" and enhance investor confidence, he said.

These included building

their rightful owners," he added.

French officials said Monday that Paris would return the gold to the authorities of Latvia and Lithuania if they requested it, once France had recognised the two Baltic states and certain legal conditions were fulfilled.

Central bank officials in Latvia and Lithuania, which were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 along with Estonia, shipped the gold to France between 1929 and 1932, 2.2 tons from Lithuania and a tonne from Latvia.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania also deposited 14 tons of gold with the bank of England ahead of World War II, but it was sold by Britain in 1967 and the money used to compensate Britons for gold reserves.

"We will make the necessary arrangements to have these gold stocks sent back to

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