

BRIEFLY

Russian FM leaves for home:

Russian Foreign Minister Adrei Kozyrev left Tokyo for home Sunday, winding up a four-day visit to Japan that failed to resolve a dispute over the Kuril Islands, reports AFP from Tokyo.

Kozyrev had held three rounds of talks with Japanese counterpart Michio Watanabe which included the issue of four Kuril Islands, claimed by Japan, which the Soviet Union had occupied since the end of World War II.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union last year, the islands have been Russian held.

"It is not a question that can be solved in six months or a year," Watanabe said Saturday after the final meeting with his guest, the most senior Russian official to come to Japan since the Soviet demise.

4,200 held in Johannesburg:

Police said Saturday that 4,200 people were arrested on suspicion of crimes ranging from traffic offences to murder in a two-day nationwide sweep, AP reports from Johannesburg.

Rising crime throughout the country has been a major complaint against President F W de Klerk's government.

The sweep, codenamed "operation Swift Service," was part of Police Minister Hennis Kriel's attempt to curb the crime rate, a police statement said.

Several similar operations in the past year also have resulted in large numbers of arrests, but the crime rate has remained high.

Pak copter crashes:

A Pakistan Army helicopter crashed near the Indian border in the disputed Kashmir state on Saturday, killing two officers on board, the official AFP news agency said, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

The helicopter crashed in Shyok valley in Skardu sector during a routine logistical flight, it said. No cause of the crash was given. An inquiry has been ordered, APP said.

9 Kashmiris killed in clash:

Indian security troops on Saturday killed nine secessionist militants in a fierce clash in a border district of the Kashmir valley, police said, Reuter reports from Srinagar.

They said the militants of the Mujahideen group were killed after they tried to ambush a security patrol party at Handwara in the Kupwara district of the valley.

A spokesman for the Mujahideen, one of several groups fighting to end Indian rule in the Himalayan valley, told journalists by telephone that its members had inflicted heavy casualties on Indian security troops.

Police in Srinagar, summer capital of India's Jammu and Kashmir state and centre of the secessionist revolt, denied the militant group's claim.

US N-experts in Israel:

A team of US experts arrived in Israel over the weekend to investigate reports that Israel sold American-made Patriot missiles or missile technology to China, Israel television said Saturday, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The US embassy confirmed that the team was coming but declined to give any further information. A spokesman said he did not expect the team to give any press interviews.

The team is headed by State Department officials and includes investigators from the Defence Department and the US military. They will examine the two Patriot anti-missile missile batteries in Israel, the television said.

Israel has denied any transfer of Patriot technology to China.

PLO seeks int'l protection for occupied territories

TUNIS, Mar 22: The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has protested to the United Nations over an Israeli decision to ban Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip from travelling to Israel proper, reports AFP.

The PLO sent a complaint Friday to Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali only days after it protested in a letter to the UN chief over what it described as a surge in "Israeli repression" against residents of the occupied territories, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported Saturday.

In the latest protest, the PLO said Israeli troops had shot and killed six Palestinians and wounded several others in recent days and called once

more for "international protection" for the occupied territories, Wafa said.

Israeli authorities slapped an indefinite travel ban on Gaza Palestinians from Friday, prohibiting them from travelling to Israel proper in a bid to "avoid friction between Palestinian workers and the Israeli population."

The decision came two days after a Palestinian from Gaza killed two Israelis in Jaffa and wounded 20, most of them students.

Between 30,000 to 35,000 Palestinians from Gaza, a hotbed of anti-Israeli resistance since the start of the 1987 uprising, travel daily to Israel for work.

The Israeli authorities often issue travel bans on residents

of the occupied territories after major anti-Israeli attacks. The latest measure is the first since a curfew was imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Gulf war amid pro-Iraqi sentiment in the territories.

Xinhua reports: A senior official of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) said here yesterday that the Palestinians have secured some political gains in the Arab Israeli Peace Talks despite the lack of substantial progress.

Suleiman Al Najjab member of the PLO executive committee, said in an interview with Xinhua that the Palestinians have convinced the world that they are serious about reaching a peaceful settlement of the

Arab Israeli conflict.

The Palestinian demand for a halt to the Jewish settlement building in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip has also gained worldwide understanding and support, he added.

But he noted that the Arab Israeli peace negotiations are heading for a deadlock because of Israel's obstinacy. He warned of possible grave consequences from the deadlock.

Should the Arab Israeli peace negotiations fail, we would have no other option but to bring the issue back to the UN Security Council, Al Najjab said.

Najjab expressed the hope that China will play a greater role in the peace process.

US last battle group leaves Subic

SUBIC BAY NAVAL BASE, Philippines, Mar 22: Sailors spelled out "Farewell Subic" on the deck of the USS Independence on Saturday as the last US battle group left this base, which closes this year after 94 years of US control, reports AP.

A few reporters, photographers and Filipino base workers watched as the 7,000 sailors and Marines aboard the aircraft carrier and its six support ships left.

It marked the last time a US battle group is scheduled to make a call at this base, the largest American naval installation in Asia.

Last September, the Philippine Senate rejected a new 10-year lease for the 62,000-acre (25,000-hectare) base, 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Manila. President Corazon Aquino ordered Americans to leave Subic by the end of the year.

Standing in formation on deck, the sailors spelled out with their bodies "Farewell Subic," which was visible from the air.

"I have nothing but best memories all through the past years," said Richard Gordon, mayor of the adjacent city of Olongapo. "The Filipinos and Americans had worked together. Surely we will miss them and their assistance in the near future."

On the night before the vessels sailed, US service members and Filipino girlfriends embraced and wept as they



US sailors of the aircraft carrier USS Independence form human letters on the flight deck bidding farewell to the Subic Naval Base during the departure of the seven ship battle group after a four-day rest and recreation stop here. —AFP/UNB photo

said goodbye at the main gate to the base.

Troops and their girlfriends also parted in the garish bars along Olongapo's Magsaysay Avenue. Sailors clutching beer bottles sang in the street.

Most of the more than 300,000 residents rely directly or indirectly on the Navy for their livelihood. In recent years, up to 7,000 troops have been stationed permanently at

Subic.

But business was especially good when carrier groups and other warships called at the port for repairs, supplies and relaxation. More than 5,000 troops remain at Subic but will leave by December, US officials say.

The government has drafted plans to convert Subic into a commercial port and ship repair facility once the Ame-

ricans leave.

Anti-nuclear activists in Manila have protested the visit of the Independence, saying it "intimidates our country's true independence" and violates a ban on nuclear weapons.

The US government refuses to confirm or deny whether any of its ships carry nuclear weapons, but activists maintain that they do.

Arabs to ignore any UN sanctions on Libya

CAIRO, Mar 22: Arab states will ignore any UN sanctions against Libya, including a ban on air traffic, unless Israel is forced to withdraw from occupied land, the Libyan news agency Jana said yesterday, reports AFP.

"Arab countries will refuse to apply any (UN) Security Council resolution based on Chapter VII of the UN charter, unless the Israelis are forced to implement Resolution 242," Jana said in a dispatch from Cairo monitored in Cyprus.

The resolution calls for Israel to pull out of Arab land it occupied in 1967 in exchange for peace.

Chapter VII of the UN charter authorises the United Nations to use any action it considers necessary — using air, naval or ground forces — to maintain or restore peace and security.

Many Arab countries, including Egypt and Syria, have announced their opposition to a proposed UN air traffic and arms embargo against Libya for its alleged involvement in the mid-air bombings of American and French airliners.

The Arab league at Libya's request plans to hold a special

meeting today about the threat of sanctions at the organisation's headquarters here.

As part of a diplomatic campaign to drum up Arab support, Libyan Prime Minister Abu Zeid Omar Dourdah arrived Saturday in Jordan after visits to Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt where he met the heads of state.

Fourteen of the 21 Arab

Four held for bombing on Israeli embassy

BUENOS AIRES, Mar 22: Argentine police arrested four people on Saturday in connection with the bombing that levelled the Israeli embassy, killing 28 people, police sources said, reports Reuter.

People who witnessed the arrests said they believed the four, all men, were of Arab descent.

Police made no official comment on the arrests and it was not known whether any charges had been brought against them.

The bombing on Tuesday destroyed the embassy and injured 225 people.

league members have agreed so far to send their foreign ministers to the emergency meeting here today, ahead of a Security Council meeting to debate sanctions, sources close to the League said.

In addition to Egypt, Iraq, Libya and Syria, these members are Algeria, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, they said.

So far Egypt, Syria and Iraq and other Arab countries, except those in the Gulf, have to one degree or another expressed opposition to any UN sanctions on Libya.

Diplomatic sources in New York said Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, and Tunisia would try to force Libya into concession a separate meeting over the weekend of North African states in Rabat.

They would try to convince Libya to hand over to the United Nations two suspects in the bombings of Pan American airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, the sources said.

Bush now in tie with Clinton

NEW YORK, Mar 22: President George Bush's approval rating has dropped to an all-time low of 39 per cent and he is now in a virtual tie with Democratic front-runner Bill Clinton, according to an opinion poll in News Week, reports Reuter.

When asked who they would vote for if the 1992 presidential election were held today, Americans were almost evenly divided, with 48 per cent for Bush and 44 per cent, for Clinton.

Chile wants Honecker to leave embassy

SANTIAGO, Mar 22: Chile wants former East German leader Erich Honecker to leave the Chilean embassy in Moscow, where he took refuge in December, Foreign Minister Enrique Sil Va said Saturday, reports AFP.

Honecker, 79, has to "understand that he must leave our embassy voluntarily," Sil Va told journalists during a visit to Uruguay, his comments were released here.

They marked the first time the Chilean government has suggested that the guest status Honecker has had since he sought refuge at the embassy December 11 might be ending.

Off the Record

Father turns her beloved into a wimp

LONDON: A coloured beauty queen who was engaged to the son of South African President FW De Klerk has accused the father of breaking up the relationship by turning her lover into a "wimp", reports Reuter.

Erica Adams, 25, said in an interview today that her 30-month relationship with Willem De Klerk cracked under the constant strain of family disapproval.

"I hate to say it but he was a weakling and my friends started to tease me for going out with a 'wimp' Adams said in an interview, with Britain's Mail today.

"We were in love and we did not part as enemies. But he could never take decisions like a man," she said.

The love affair between the reformist President's youngest son and the coloured beauty, who met as students in 1989, caused a furore in racially divided South Africa.

Adams said she was summoned by the President and told that it was not in anyone's interest for them to stay together.

She said she broke off the engagement with Willem, a public relations executive, earlier this month after he admitted he could not continue without the blessing of his parents.

"The truth is that the strain the De Klerks put on me and Willem to end it became very painful," said Adams. "It was more like walking on thorns than floating on clouds."

Duke & Duchess equally to blame for split

LONDON: An opinion poll released Saturday night shows that 38 per cent of those asked believe the Duke and Duchess of York are equally to blame for their marital problems, reports AP.

The Gallup poll commissioned by the Sunday Telegraph found that 26 per cent believe the former Sarah Ferguson is responsible for their breakup and 12 per cent believe Prince Andrew is to blame.

Buckingham Palace on Thursday ended intense media speculation about the union with a statement that the Duchess seeks a separation after more than five years of marriage. There was no mention of divorce.

Andrew and Sarah, both 32, were married July 23, 1986, and the queen made them the Duke and Duchess of York. They have two daughters Princess Beatrice, 3, and Princess Eugenie, who turns 2 on Monday.

Although Queen Elizabeth II topped the sympathy rating with 56 per cent, the duchess scored higher than the Duke with 24 per cent saying they felt sorry for her and only 4 per cent for him.

Of the 458 people surveyed 55 per cent said the young royals' behavior would not damage the monarchy.

The Sunday Telegraph said the poll was conducted on Friday and Saturday and had a margin of error of 3 per cent.

Oscar nominated actor died of leukemia

SANTA BARBARA, California: John Ireland, whose acting career included 200 films, died here Saturday of leukemia at 78, a hospital official said, reports AFP.

Born in Canada, Ireland started out as a professional swimmer and played classical repertory roles in the theater before moving to films, where he specialized in supporting roles.

He played beside Henry Fonda in the classic western "My Darling Clementine," Ingrid Bergman in "Joan of Arc," Kirk Douglas and Lawrence Olivier in "Spartacus" and was nominated for best supporting actor Oscar in 1949 for a role in "All The King's Men."

Swiss Red Cross staff ordered to leave Iran

TEHRAN, Mar 22: Iran on Saturday suspended the activities of the Swiss-based International Committee of the Red Cross and ordered its staff to leave the country within a week, accusing the ICRC of stepping beyond its bounds, reports AFP.

In Geneva, ICRC spokesman Thomas Dudin confirmed the measures but said the organisation was awaiting formal notification before it would make any comment. He added, however, that the ICRC would attempt to make "immediate" contact with the Iranian government to discuss their motivations and dismissed allegations last week by the Iranian Daily Jomhoori Islami that ICRC delegates had been spying.

"It does not seem that espionage charges were invoked this time" Rudin said.

Nixon urges Buchanan to drop out

WOODCLIFF LAKE, New Jersey, Mar 22: Former President Richard Nixon urged Patrick Buchanan to drop out of the Republican Presidential primary race Saturday, Buchanan said after a meeting with his former boss, reports AFP.

Buchanan said he had no plans to bow out of the race but would "seriously consider" Nixon's advice to target likely Democratic nominee Bill Clinton for verbal attacks rather than President George Bush.

Buchanan, who was a speech writer in the Nixon White House, met for more than an hour with the ex-president at his office here. He said Nixon urged him to drop out before the California primary on June 2.

Analysts have said a tough primary fight with Buchanan could damage the President's re-election bid.

"I agree with him on some things and disagree on others, as was the case when we worked together," Nixon said in a brief news conference following their meeting.

"There's only one thing worse in politics than being wrong and that's being dull, and Pat Buchanan is far from dull," he added.

Buchanan has recently told reporters that his fund raising efforts are falling off, usually a sign of dwindling support in an election campaign.

The Iranian measure followed speculation by the press here that measures would be taken against Swiss nationals if Bern extradited to France an Iranian suspected of involvement in the murder of a former Iranian Prime Minister.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Saturday accused the ICRC of "frequent violation of its limits of authorities and duties envisaged in the Geneva convention," the official IRNA news agency reported.

Deputy Foreign Minister Manusher Mottaki summoned Bernard Pfefferle, Chief ICRC official here, to inform him that Red Cross staff, most of whom are Swiss, should pack their bags and leave Iran within a week, IRNA said.

Mottaki said the decision was taken because of "violations committed by ICRC officers in contradiction with the normal expectations and declared goals of the ICRC."

In Geneva Rudin said the summons was "unofficial" adding that an "official version" of the reasons for the Iranian orders would be made available to Pfefferle today.

Iran's Chief Justice Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi on Monday raised doubts over the "competence" of ICRC delegates.

Iran has denied that the suspect Zia Sarhadi was responsible for the assassination.

Failure of Kiev summit can spell end of Commonwealth

MOSCOW, Mar 22: The failure of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to resolve key military and economic problems last week left a gaping rift between Russian and Ukraine and could spell the end of the 11-member alliance, analysts predicted, reports Reuter.

Leaders put on a brave face after Friday's Kiev Summit, but their comments asserting faith in the Commonwealth's survival served only to underline its fragility after three months marked by major differences, notably over setting up national armies.

As Ukraine looked increasingly likely to break away from the grouping, Russia President Boris Yeltsin and Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev met in Moscow on Saturday to discuss how to develop relations between their states.

"They reaffirmed allegiance to the principles and prospects for the development of the Commonwealth and solidarity with the course of radical economic reforms," Itar-Tass News Agency said.

The two leaders called for an inter-govern-

mental meeting to be held on Monday in the Kazakh city of Uralak.

"It is expected to discuss urgent problems of cooperation in political, economic and military spheres," Itar-Tass said.

CIS opponents were delighted with the outcome of the summit. Ukrainian Nationalist opposition leader Vyacheslav Chornovil said the lack of major economic and military agreements showed people that the Commonwealth had no future.

"It was an utter failure. Thank goodness they signed no stily documents damaging to Ukraine's interests", Chornovil said in an interview at the headquarters of his Rukh movement.

Belarus's Acting Defence Minister Pyotr Chaus expressed concern that the summit failed to work out a common approach to military issues. Several Commonwealth, members are now actively forming their own national armies.

Russia and Ukraine are at odds over who controls the Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine has also stopped sending tactical nuclear weapons to

Russia for destruction, saying it had no guarantee that they would actually be destroyed.

"The numerous and complicated problems that have accumulated in the CIS member states cannot be resolved hastily and at one go", Itar-Tass quoted Chaus as saying.

The summit agreed to set up a force of "military observers" to maintain peace in troubled parts of the former Soviet Union, including the Transcaucasian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. But an Azeri delegate told a local news agency his country did not sign this.

Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who discussed the conflict with US President George Bush on Saturday, welcomed the Commonwealth proposal to send an observer force to Nagorno-Karabakh if the warring parties invite them.

At least 11,500 people have been killed in four years of fighting between Armenians and Azeris over the enclave, populated mainly by Armenians but administered by Azerbaijan.

A day-old ceasefire appeared to be holding in the mountains territory, but clashes elsewhere in Armenian and Azerbaijan raised

doubts about prospects for peace.

Elsewhere in Commonwealth, people in Tatarstan, Russia's biggest ethnic enclave, defied Moscow and voted heavily in a referendum on self-rule.

The result was likely to reflect the ethnic make up of the autonomous republic, with Muslim Tatars who comprise 48 per cent of the population mostly voting in favour and ethnic Russians who make up 40 per cent voting against.

AFP from Camp David adds: President George Bush on Saturday described as "very interesting and quite positive" the just-ended summit of Commonwealth of Independent States leaders in Kiev.

Welcoming German Chancellor Helmut Kohl at his presidential retreat here, Bush told reporters that he had spoken by telephone with Presidents Leonid Kravchuk of the Ukraine and Levon Terpetrossian of Armenia.

Bush said the Ukrainian and Armenian leaders had asked him to brief Kohl on their phone conversations, which focused on the ethnic conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Hero's welcome to Kinnock

RISCA, Wales, Mar 22: Neil Kinnock was given a hero's welcome in his native South Wales at the weekend, buoyed by opinion polls showing the local boy could be Prime Minister within the month, reports Reuter.

The opposition Labour Party leader was swamped by well-wishers during a campaign tour to the villages near where he was born, the son of a blast furnace worker and a nurse.

And clearly many Welsh electors in this Labour stronghold are hoping to see Kinnock elevated to the office of Prime Minister after Britain's April 9 general election.

Opinion polls suggest his party has a slight edge over the ruling Conservatives, who have ruled for the last 13 years, going into the second week of the election campaign.

"I don't think he's got what it takes. But I'd like to see him get in this time," said 32-year-old Kay Utting before the Kinnock election entourage stormed into her bakery for a photo-session in the town of Risca. "He tries hard."

Less than whole hearted support, perhaps, but with a majority of more than 23,000, Kinnock is secure in this Welsh seat of Islwyn which he has held since 1970.

But it is not the steel workers, miners, and the unemployed of his native Wales he needs to convince. It is voters in dozens of seats across the

rest of Britain who must endorse his "democratic socialist" after years of what Labour calls selfish Conservative government.

A clutch of polls in the first week of the campaign for next month's elections suggest Labour is now within reach of power after three successive defeats at the hands of the formidable Margaret Thatcher.

Kinnock's reputation, among his critics at least, as a windbag who has changed his policies more often than his suits leaves him trailing Prime Minister John Major in personal popularity.

But Labour has a narrow lead in the opinion polls after abandoning the hard-left policies which have denied it power since 1979.

Bad weather may delay Atlantis' launch

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, Mar 22: The space shuttle Atlantis is scheduled for lift-off at Cape Canaveral early Monday, but unfavourable weather conditions may delay the launch, NASA officials said here Saturday, reports AFP.

"Monday will be a very tough day to get off the ground," said Ed Priselac, a US air force meteorologist here. "It will be very wet."

A weather front moving in from the West has lowered the probability of a launch at 8:01 am (13:01 GMT) Monday to 30 per cent, Priselac said. That likelihood would rise only to 40 per cent by the time the launch window expires two and a half hours later, he said.

He added that the weather was not expected to improve before Thursday.

Officials at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration began the countdown Friday and test director Eric Redding said no apparent technical problems had developed.

The shuttle flight, slated to end March 31 or April 1, is to be the first in a series of 10 scientific missions that will cover an entire 11-year solar cycle, giving scientists a better understanding of the greenhouse effect that is threatening earth's environment, with global warming.