

Shevardnadze seeks spiritual support for CIS

SYDNEY, Apr 2: Former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze pleaded today for spiritual and monetary support for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in a worldwide one-day advertising campaign, reports Reuter.

"In the name of the future of your own children, help the people who have overthrown the yoke of totalitarianism," Shevardnadze said in a full page advertisement in the Australian newspaper.

"Share a small part of your warmth, sympathy and wealth, in other words make a contribution to the cause of progress and prosperity."

The advertisement will run on April 2 in newspapers in more than nine countries, in-

cluding the United States, Germany, Tokyo, South Africa and Australia, according to advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi who organised the campaign.

The British Broadcasting Corporation will also broadcast Shevardnadze reading the advertisement, the agency said.

The publishers are donating the space. A full page advertisement in the Australian normally cost US dollars 13,700 (US dollars 10,400).

Saatchi and Saatchi Media Director in Australia Brigitte Beck said Shevardnadze decided to run the advertisement entitled "on this side of the wall" to try to correct the distorted image emerging of use in the former Soviet states.

Shevardnadze said mothers in his native Georgia could not buy milk for their children, the elderly are alone and children have learned to live in a world of fear and deprivation.

"One cannot ask them to tolerate this for much longer in the name of a radiant future which they may have to pay for with their own lives," he said.

Beck said Shevardnadze's main objective was not to raise money, although people can make donations at any CIS embassy, but to gain worldwide support and understanding in the hope of stabilising the CIS.

"There are walls that can be knocked down in a few days. These are walls made of brick and stone, which are collapsed easily by will and force," said Shevardnadze in the advertisement.

"But there are other walls which cannot be destroyed in just a few hours. These are the walls built up by the blocks of ideology and concepts, by mistrust and fear.



An Israeli soldier watches detained Palestinians suspected of throwing stones at an Israeli patrol during an anti-Israeli demonstration held at Ramallah in West Bank on March 31. — AFP/UNB photo.

Arabs agree to attend peace talks

BEIRUT, Apr 2: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinians agreed today to attend the fifth round of Middle East Peace Talks with Israel set to resume in Washington on April 27, reports Reuter.

A senior official of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the three Arab Foreign Ministers made the announcement after a one-day meeting in Beirut.

The four Arab parties confirm their commitment to the peace process and their acceptance to attend the next round of bilateral talks in Washington, Lebanon's Paris Bouez said, reading a joint statement.

The statement urged the sponsors of the peace talks — the United States and Russia — to use their influence to push

the peace process forward and exert pressure on Israel to halt its attacks on South Lebanon and inside the occupied territories.

Bouez, Syria's Farouq al-Shara, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's foreign affairs chief, Farouk Kaddoumi and Jordan's Kamel Abu Jaber said they would hold their next meeting in Jordan to coordinate strategy, the statement said. It did not set a date.

The Arab official agreed on a list of 10 European capitals acceptable as venues for further bilateral talks that would be given to the United States, official sources said.

They also reviewed strategy for peace talks with Israel, assessed results of the first rounds of bilateral talks and discussed the next round and

any subsequent negotiations.

Israel insists on moving the talks to the Middle East, an idea rejected by the Arab side as unacceptable until progress had been made on substantive issues.

The official sources said the ministers failed to reach a common stand on the multi-lateral talks with Israel, on regional issues such as arms control and water sharing, that opened in Moscow in January and are due to resume in May.

A team of European Community envoys met the Arab ministers and tried to persuade Syria and Lebanon not to boycott the next round of the regional talks as they did in January.

Beirut was the last leg of the Middle East tour for the EC envoys who already visited

PLO asks UN Council to condemn Israel

TUNIS, Apr 2: The PLO has asked the UN Security Council to condemn Israel for clashes between soldiers and Arabs at a refugee camp that left several people dead, reports AP.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation, claimed Wednesday that at least 10 Palestinians were killed and 50 wounded when Israeli troops fired on firebomb-hurling crowds in the Rafah refugee camp, in the Gaza Strip.

UN officials and Arab journalists in Jerusalem claimed that four Palestinians were killed.

PLO headquarters in Tunis asked UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to send observers to the area "to halt the massacre of Palestinians", according to a communique distributed by the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Off the Record

Females to use more tobacco than male by '20

GENEVA: The use of tobacco is increasing among women, whose numbers as smokers will pass that of men in coming decades if the trend continues, the World Health Organization (WHO) says, reports AFP.

A study said mortality rates among women from use of tobacco would double by 2020. The report, is the first to present a global view of tobacco use among women and was submitted to a world conference on tobacco and health being held in Buenos Aires.

The WHO has called on governments to take urgent measures to discourage smoking among women.

If the trend holds, more than one million adult women will die each year from problems linked to use of tobacco, smoking and other uses of tobacco can also lead to fertility problems for women, premature births, spontaneous abortions and stillborn babies, the report said.

Use of tobacco kills some three million people annually, including 500,000 women. Half the deaths are in developed countries.

Blue Whale is not the biggest lining thing

NEW YORK: The biggest living thing in the world may be neither the blue whale nor California's giant sequoia, but a fibrous white glob that lives underground in Michigan, reports AP.

The malodorous but magnificent being is armillaria bulbosa, a fungus. Some 38 acres of soil in a northern oak forest have been colonized by a single armillaria plant at least 1,500 years old, according to a report being published Thursday in the Journal Nature.

Scientists confirmed the existence of the subterranean behemoth by testing its progeny, the edible fungi known as honey mushrooms that pop up in the woods by the hundreds after rains in the summer and fall.

All the armillaria bulbosa mushrooms growing in a triangular area more than a quarter mile across had the same genetic fingerprint, identifying them as coming from a single plant.

The main part of a mushroom plant is the underground mass of cells called the mycelium. The mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of the plant.

The authors, professors Myron L. Smith and James B. Anderson of the University of L. Toronto and Johann M. Bruhn of Michigan Technological University, said a conservative estimate of the weight of the plant would be 100 tons, about the same as an adult blue whale.

She denies sex with Clinton

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas: A former Miss America whose nude picture appears in the May issue of Playboy Magazine, denied allegations on Wednesday that she had sex with Democratic Presidential contender Bill Clinton, reports Reuter.

At a new conference timed to coincide with the news stand release of Playboy's May issue, she said, "I did not have sex with Bill Clinton."

Ward was among five women alleged to have had extramarital affairs with Clinton in a suit filed against the Arkansas governor by a disgruntled state employee. The suit has since been dropped.

The Clinton campaign released a written statement from Ward saying, "Although I have met Bill Clinton and his family, at no time did any romantic relationship exist between the governor and myself."

Ward, who won the Miss America contest in 1982, said Wednesday's news conference was timed to promote the magazine, not a political calendar.

I won't ban drink like Gorbys

TOKYO: North Korean President Kim Il-Sung says he will avoid the mistake of former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev who tried to curb excessive drinking and saw his ruling party collapse, reports Reuter.

"I don't need to prohibit drinking like Gorbachev did," Kim was quoted as saying on Thursday.

Gorbachev imposed the ban on drinking, but his party collapsed, Kim said in an interview with the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun.

"I was told by my doctor not to drink more than three glasses [of wine], said North Korea's 'great leader', who marks his 80th birthday on April 15. 'I liked drinking when I was young, but I don't drink much now.'

The North Korean President said that if people wanted to live a long life they should be optimistic.

The secret of longevity is optimism. There is a hole from which you can stand up even if the heavens collapse. And the heavens have not yet collapsed", Kim said during lunch with an Asahi delegation in Pyongyang.

Kim may delay N-inspections

TOKYO, Apr 2: North Korean President Kim Il-Sung says he has no intentions of stalling on his country's commitment to open secret nuclear facilities to outside inspection, the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun reported on Thursday, says Reuter.

Kim, interviewed in Pyongyang on Tuesday was asked when North Korea would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect the plants — a key demand of the United States, South Korean and Japanese governments which fear the North is covertly working on

producing nuclear weapons.

The President, who will celebrate his 80th birthday amid great pomp on April 15, told Asahi he had no intention of delaying the promised inspection.

"It will be smoothly resolved under defined procedures," the daily quoted Kim as saying.

He was asked whether the IAEA could carry out its inspection by June. South Korean news reports have said North and South have agreed in principle to mutual inspection trips on June 10.

Russia to form own force: US informed

WASHINGTON, Apr 2: Russia has told the United States it will form its own armed forces of about 1.3 million troops but will not threaten neighbouring states, a senior Bush administration official said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The official, who asked not to be identified, said Defence Secretary Dick Cheney was told by Russian officials in Brussels this week that the defensive force would be spread evenly around the republic without heavy attack weapons massed on its borders.

Russia now shares some 3 million former Soviet troops with other republics of the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

BRIEFLY

10 killed in Moldova violence: At least 10 people have died in ethnic violence in Moldova over the past 24 hours, dimming hopes of a peaceful end to the conflict, Reuter says from Kishinyov.

Seven people were killed in a dawn raid on Wednesday when Moldovan paramilitary police attacked the breakaway Dnestr region's town of Bendery, a Russian separatist stronghold, Deputy Mayor Vladimír Kharchenko told Reuter.

Three Moldovan policemen were also killed in rocket attacks by separatists in the community of Koshnitsa on the east bank of the river on Tuesday night, police said.

The Russian minority declared their own state east of the Dnestr river to avoid incorporation into neighbouring Romania, which once ruled most of its territory.

Serbs trade fire with Muslims: Serb and Muslim gunmen exchanged gunfire from barricades in a Bosnian town on Wednesday night, making a mockery of a truce which their leaders had signed just hours earlier, Reuter says from Belgrade.

Dead bodies lay around the town hall and in a park in Bjeljina, northeast Bosnia-Herzegovina, police in the region said.

Belgrade Television said mortar barrages which shook the town when fighting erupted on Tuesday resumed the next afternoon.

Sarajevo Radio reported late on Wednesday that an agreement had been reached in Bjeljina on the immediate removal of barricades and the formation of mixed militia and army patrols with a balanced ethnic composition.

UN envoy to visit Libya: A senior UN envoy plans to go to Libya this weekend to give Colonel Muammar Gaddafi a Security Council resolution clamping an air and arms embargo on Libya diplomats said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from United Nations.

In a parallel move, they said India had been asked to convey to Libya exactly what the United States, Britain and France expect Tripoli to do in meeting the resolution's demands that Libya take concrete actions against terrorism.

These include the closing of foreign guerrilla training camps, information of alleged weapons delivered to the Irish Republican Army and possible extradition of a Palestinian suspected of attacks on a Greek tourist ship two years ago.

The UN official, Undersecretary General Vladimir Petrovsky, in charge of political affairs, was asked to go to Tripoli by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Kinnock confident of victory: Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock, hardened by past failure and now honed to a statesmanlike profile, is now confident he will be Britain's Prime Minister in a week's time, Reuter reports from Sheffield.

With fresh opinion polls showing no party with a clear lead going into the April 9 general election, then a long detested as Labour's biggest liability stands a fighting chance of unseating a popular Conservative Prime Minister, John Major.

Kinnock, a 50-year-old Welsh orator, was confident enough to laugh off questions about his fitness for office at a Labour news conference on Wednesday on the theme of health.

India to go ahead with probe into Bofors scandal

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao assured Parliament his government will pursue a 5-year-old investigation into an arms deal scandal that led to the resignation of his foreign minister, reports AP.

"I do not want this government to function under a shadow," newspapers quoted Rao as saying Wednesday night during a 6-hour debate in Lok Sabha, the decision-making lower house of Parliament.

"We shall take all steps to get at the truth," he was quoted as saying by the Indian Express newspaper.

Rao's statement came a day after Foreign Minister Madhavsinh Solanki resigned over allegations he tried to cover up the investigation into the 1.4 billion dollar purchase of Howitzer artillery from the Swedish firm, Bofors AB.

Newspaper exposes had alleged that Bofors paid 50 million dollars as bribes to secure the contract and that most of the money was received by then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and top officials in his Congress Party government.

The reports, which have never been proved, had alleged that most of the money may be stashed away in secret Swiss accounts.

Solanki resigned after he confirmed an Indian Express report that he had given a letter to Swiss Foreign Minister Rene Felder from an unnamed attorney early February.

The daily had reported that the letter requested Swiss authorities to go slow into the investigation. Solanki identified the lawyer as an Indian, saying he did not remember his name.

The Swiss government has

confirmed receiving the letter.

Rao said his government would inform Swiss authorities to "ignore" the contents of the letter. "What has happened during the last two-three days has caused embarrassment to the government. The embarrassment would have to be removed," Rao was quoted as saying by The Times of India newspaper.

The bribery charges have plagued Indian politics since they cropped up in 1987, making "Bofors" a byword for corruption. The scandal was held responsible for the ouster of Gandhi's Congress Party in the 1989 elections.

The scandal was revived earlier this year when a Swedish newspaper published an interview with an unidentified former Bofors official who claimed Gandhi received kickbacks from the deal.

Libya issuing exit visas to foreigners

CAIRO, Apr 2: Libya took positive steps on Wednesday by granting hundreds of foreigners exit visas after the UN voted to impose sanctions on it for refusing to hand over two suspected bombers, diplomats said.

"We have received positive information today," a western ambassador in Tripoli told Reuter by telephone. He said 250 South Koreans and a considerable number of European Community (EC) nationals were granted exit visas on Wednesday.

European envoys in Tripoli are still waiting to see Libya's number two Abdel-Salaam Jalloud or any other senior official to present a written complaint after many foreigners were either denied exit visas or their permits to leave were being delayed on purpose.

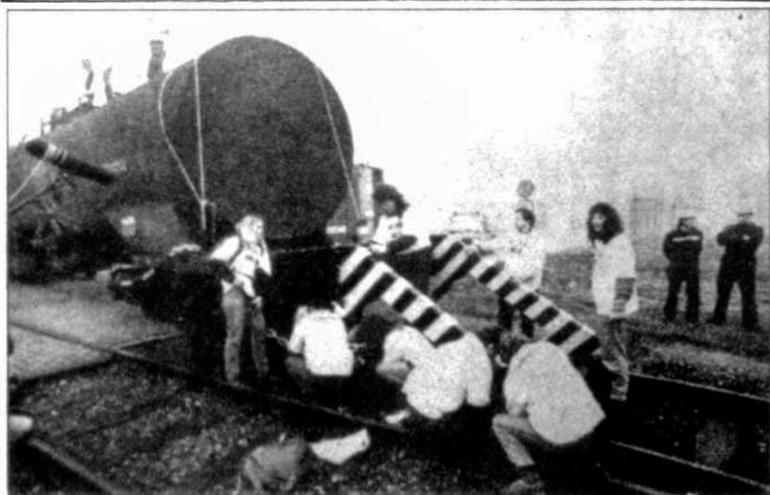
Myanmar people urged not to use festival as political forum

YANGON, Apr 2: Minister for Religious Affairs Myo Nyunt urged Myanmar's ten political parties not to use the water festival or the new year festival as political forum, according to an official report here today, says Xinhua.

Myo Nyunt, who is also chairman of Yangon Division Law and Order Restoration Council and commander of Yangon command, made the remarks at a Wednesday meeting held to coordinate measures for observing traditional water festival which falls on April 13-15.

The minister said, "The government would not accept the water festival or Myanmar new year festival to be used by political parties/organisations as a political forum."

The authorities have implemented martial law in the country since the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) took over power in September, 1988.



Members of Greenpeace chain themselves to a train which transports a load of chlorine for the chemical plant of the Dupont company in the Dutch town Dordrecht in Netherlands on April 1. Some 40 demonstrators from the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and USA stopped the train before it could enter the grounds of this concern. Dupont's the biggest producer of CFC's chemicals, which attacks the earth Ozone layer. — AFP/UNB photo

CIS launches new satellite

MOSCOW, Apr 2: The Commonwealth of Independent States has launched a new satellite equipped with a radio-telemetry system for carrying out space research, Itar-Tass news agency reported today, says AFP.

The launch of the Cosmos 2182 satellite atop a Soyuz rocket took place Wednesday, the report said, without specifying if it had been launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

The satellite will orbit the Earth once every 89.5 minutes, its apogee is 350 kilometres (194 miles) and its perigee 179 kilometres (100 miles). Its orbital inclination is 67.2 degrees, Itar-Tass said.

Clinton slates Bush for browbeating Israel, softness toward China

WASHINGTON, Apr 2: Foreign policy issues leapt to center stage, as President Bush presented his plan to help the former Soviet republics and Democratic challenger Bill Clinton criticized Bush for "browbeating Israel", reports AP.

For months, Bush's rhetoric about the urgency to help democracy take root in the republics has been far-ahead of his willingness to act. And that was still the case at a news conference Wednesday.

The \$12.4 billion figure Bush mentioned represented a commitment from major industrial nations — Germany, France, Italy, Britain, Canada and Japan, as well as the United States.

In New York, Clinton's

speech was a broad statement of his foreign policy views that went far beyond the issue of Soviet aid. Clinton sharply criticized Bush for attempting to "browbeat Israel while nurturing ties to Syria's despotic regime."

He also blasted Bush's softness toward China and his failure to prevent Saddam Hussein's crackdown on Kurdish and Shiite opposition forces in Iraq.

But on the issue of Soviet aid, the Bush-Clinton statements offered more similarities than differences.

"We have an enormous stake, a personal stake for every American, in the success of these democracies," the president declared.

"The stakes are high," said

the Arkansas governor.

Most importantly, both candidates strongly supported helping the former republics, calling such aid an important investment toward a more peaceful future for the United States and the world.

"A victory for democracy and freedom in the former USSR creates the possibility of a new world of peace for our children and grandchildren", said Bush.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet empire pose an unprecedented opportunity to make our future more prosperous and more secure," said Clinton.

They proposed identical levels of US support — \$12 billion. But they differed on the timing. Clinton suggested Bush

had held back for political gains at home.

"The present administration has been overly cautious on the issue of aid to Russia, not for policy considerations, but out of political calculations," Clinton said.

Foreign aid is not a popular proposal in many areas of America where economically hard-hit voters think the money would be better spent at home.

In New York, Clinton's lone Democratic rival, Jerry Brown, said he was more interested in hearing what Clinton would do on the home front.

"The reason we have bombed-out buildings is that you have the mentality of Bush and Clinton that are more interested in a new world order

10,000 miles away than they are in a full-employment economy," Brown, the former governor of California, said.

AFP from New York reports: Democratic Presidential candidate Bill Clinton said Wednesday that both Japan and Germany should be made permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Clinton also said that Japan should pay a larger share toward the cost of the UN peacekeeping operation in Cambodia.

The Arkansas governor in a wide-ranging foreign policy address ahead of the New York Presidential primary next Tuesday said that fundamental changes in the world had made it essential to make

some alternations to the United Nations.

"Japan and Germany should be made permanent members of the Security Council and we should seek larger contributions from those with the greater interest in particular efforts, Clinton told the foreign policy association.

Both countries, the losers in World War II, have made increased efforts to join the exclusive club of permanent members of the Security Council since the demise of the Soviet Union late last year.

Russia took the Soviet Union's seat to join the United States, Britain, France, and China as permanent members in the 15-member Security Council, which also has non-permanent members.

Mujahid leader shot dead in Peshawar

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Apr 2: Unidentified gunmen shot dead a leading Afghan intellectual near the Pakistani city of Peshawar on Thursday, Afghan guerrilla sources said, reports Reuter.

Mohammad Jan Ahmadzai, 45, was ambushed and killed while on his way to a mosque for early morning prayers at Pabbi refugee camp, about 20 km (12 miles) from Peshawar.

Ahmadzai, a leading member of the Jamiat-i-Islami guerrilla group and adviser on education to the rebel government in exile, was the latest of a series of intellectuals killed in Afghan faction fighting in recent years.