

BRIEFLY

Kuwaiti Amir arrives in Mexico:

The Amir of Kuwait, Sheik Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, arrived in Mexico Tuesday night for talks on oil policy and other affairs, AP reports from Mexico City.

The Kuwaiti leader and his delegation were met by the Foreign Ministry undersecretary, Andres Rosental, at Mexico City International Airport.

The Amir is due to have private talks on Wednesday with President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

The Foreign Ministry said the talks would cover scientific, economic and cultural cooperation. Among Kuwaiti officials making the visit are oil and financial advisers.

Mexico like Kuwait, is a major oil producer. Unlike Kuwait, it is not a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Israel shuts varsity in Nablus:

Israeli occupation authorities ordered a Palestinian university in the West Bank town of Nablus to close for a week, a university spokesman said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

"We were summoned and received a notice that we will be closed for a week. An Najiah University's vice president for cultural affairs and university relations Adib Khatib said.

Defence Minister Moshe Arens approved the closure because of riots and violence, Israel radio said.

Khatib criticised the closure, saying it would only throw the university's 5,500 students into the streets.

An Najiah had been allowed to reopen only last September, Khatib said. Its latest closure follows a rise in Israeli-Arab violence and tougher Israeli action against Palestinians.

Russia may fire ex-KGB officers:

The Russian Security Minister Victor Barnanikov has prepared a decree to sack several senior military officers who are former members of the KGB, the Interfax news agency said, quoting official ministry sources, AFP reports from Moscow.

The agency said Victor Klishin, former deputy head of the second central division in charge of counter-espionage, was one of those who would lose his job.

Meanwhile central CIS television said several senior officials of the ministry, which was created at the end of last year, would be sacked for abuse of power.

Fire kills 10 in Detroit:

A fire roared through a boarding house early Tuesday, killing 10 people, many of them handicapped, and seriously injuring two others, authorities said, AP reports from Detroit.

The blaze broke out about 2.30 am and gutted the three-story brick and frame building. It was extinguished about three hours later, fire officials said.

Sixteen people were believed to have been inside the house, called the New Way Development, Fire Chief Harold Watkins said. Four of them escaped without injury and two others, a man and a woman, were hospitalized in serious condition, he said.

"I had been asleep when they said 'It's a fire, it's a fire,'" said Willis Darnell, one of the residents who escaped. "I couldn't walk. I fell down the stairs."

16 killed in Indian bridge collapse:

A bridge under construction in the hills of northern India collapsed after a gas cylinder exploded, crushing 16 labourers to death, newspapers reported Wednesday, AFP says from New Delhi.

The accident occurred 85 kilometers (53 miles) from the tourist town of Debradun Sunday and rescue workers reached the site only the next morning, the Hindustan Times and other dailies quoted local officials as saying.

The gas cylinder which burst was being used for welding.



RIO de JANEIRO: Brazilian soldiers guard one of Rio de Janeiro's main avenues Tuesday as part of the security measure taken for Earth Summit. Some of 185 heads of state from around the world are participating in the summit.

Move to overthrow Saddam
US intelligence steps up contacts with Iraqi army

WASHINGTON, June 3: US intelligence is stepping up clandestine contacts with Iraqi military officials as part of an intensified campaign to undermine Saddam Hussein, but there are few prospects for immediate success, government sources said Tuesday, Reports AP.

The increased contacts with those inside the Iraqi armed forces are designed more to position the United States to take advantage of any misstep by the Iraqi president, or of some unforeseeable development that could create an opening for a military coup, said the sources, who spoke only on condition of anonymity.

As part of the effort, President Bush has signaled Congress that he intends to more than double the Central Intelligence Agency's budget for covert operations in Iraq over the coming year, increasing spending from the current \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion.

The money for covert operations comes out of the spy agency's contingency fund and

does not require direct approval by Congress. The House Intelligence Committee already has signaled it has no strong objections to the stepped-up programme, and there has been no major dissent from its Senate counterpart.

But some congressional officials doubt whether the programme which includes stepped-up satellite surveillance of Iraq, increased aid to Kurdish and Muslim opposition groups and propaganda broadcasts — will change anything.

The bottom line is, "we have to get lucky", for Saddam to be deposed or assassinated, said one source.

There continue to be intelligence reports about dissonance within Saddam's tight inner circle, primarily made up of family members from his hometown of Tikrit. The assessments also mention jealousy among military units over the allocation of scarce resources.

Meanwhile, the US House of Representatives Tuesday called

US to sell \$ 1.88b arms to S Arabia

WASHINGTON, June 3: Despite its stated international push to slow down the Middle East arms race, the Bush administration on Tuesday announced plans to sell an additional \$1.88 billion dollar in weapons and military support to Saudi Arabia, reports Reuter.

The Defence Department said congress had been notified of the latest package, which ranges from helicopter-borne missiles to medical-evacuation helicopters and maintenance of F-15 fighter jets.

Congress has 30 days to vote against or allow completion of the sale. Some lawmakers have criticised US military transfers to the volatile region

even as President George Bush presses for a slowdown of the Middle East arms race.

The world's five largest arms exporting nations — the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China — held talks here on the issue last week without setting meaningful controls on conventional arms sales to the Middle East.

This equipment is essentially defensive in nature", said a senior defence official of Tuesday's announcement.

"We have said before that we intend to meet the defensive needs of moderate nations in the Persian Gulf and the rest of the area", added the official, who asked not to be identified.

But experts told Reuters



TORIDE, JAPAN: Local authorities investigate the wreckage of a train that slammed into a store in the terminal station building Tuesday after overrunning the tracks, in Toride, Ibaraki prefecture. One passenger was killed and 158 other commuters were injured in the early morning accident.

Ecologists open Rio summit festivities

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 3: Social and ecological activists came together at a seaside park Tuesday, in the Global Forum, a non-official response to the Earth Summit, reports AP.

Coloured balloons and kites floating overhead provided a circus atmosphere to the gathering of more than 12,000 people that opened a day before the official summit was to begin.

The forum participants intend to be the conscience of the high-powered indoor conference that will be attended by leaders of more than 100 nations.

"For the first time in history, society will be able to influence the events at a United Nations conference," said Steve Yolen, international press coordinator for the forum.

Arafat's wife in Amman

AMMAN, June 3: PLO Chief Yasser Arafat's new wife arrived in Amman secretly on Tuesday and was rushed to the hospital where her husband is recovering from brain surgery, security officials said, reports Reuter.

Journalists eager to get a glimpse of 28-year-old Suha Tawil, who wed Arafat, 62, in a secret ceremony last year, were cleared from the airport exit and the hospital entrance.

No one is allowed to talk to her or see her, said a guard at the King Hussein Medical Centre.

Officials said Tawil was met at the airport by the wife of a senior cabinet minister in what was believed to be her first official welcome outside Palestine Liberation Organisation headquarters in Tunis as Arafat's wife.

Arafat underwent surgery on Monday to remove a blood clot in the brain caused by a plane crash in the Libyan desert in April.

World leaked out in February that Arafat, made president of the Palestinian state proclaimed by the Palestinian parliament-in-exile in 1988 had married Tawil.

Under an agreement with Turkey, which borders Iraq's Kurdish region on the north, the United Nations is providing humanitarian supplies to the Kurdish minority in a security zone where Kurds are sheltered from reprisals by Baghdad.

Beruter said the standoff shows little promise of improving. "It's not going to change as long as Saddam Hussein is there," he said.

This week that the continuing failure to reach agreement on Middle East arms transfers reflected a lack of political will on the part of the big nations to slow such lucrative sales.

Belarus to sign NPT

MOSCOW, June 3: Belarus is prepared to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the conventional weapons treaty, an official of the Belarus parliament said Tuesday, according to ITAR-Tass, reports AFP.

"Our final objective is to be a de-nuclearised and neutral state," said Michislav Grib, president of the parliamentary commission on national security, defence and anti-crime activities.

"All tactical weapons have already been removed from Belarus territory and strategic weapons will be removed as and when they can be destroyed in Russia," he said.

Belarus is one of the four nuclear states of the CIS with the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Off the Record
Battle for single-gender status

GERMANY: In an age of sexual equality, some national Girl Guide/Scout movements are fighting to preserve their single-gender status, reports Reuter.

The dilemma is confronting the organisation in its 80th anniversary year. It was founded by Lady Baden-Powell to do for girls what the Boy Scout movement, created by her husband Sir Robert, was doing for boys.

"Nouveau-traditionalists" in the movement want to Give Girls the chance to compete on equal terms in a man's world, but insist that does not mean becoming a unisex organisation.

Girls are now and always will be the only reason for girl scouting, said Beverly Gayhardt, executive director of the US based North Atlantic Girl Scouts. She spoke during an international Girl Scout/Guide conference in the Bavarian Alps with the theme 'the girl comes first in scouting'.

This issue is under discussion at the international level, 104 countries — but the question of joint or merged scouts and guides is confined mainly to our European sisters," said Gayhardt, who heads some 10,000 mostly American Girl Scouts from families of US servicemen all over Europe.

Alive but officially dead

DOYLESTOWN, Pa.: Not only was Eugene Francis Smith dead, he was in trouble, according to the state of Pennsylvania, reports AP.

In February 1990, a police officer stopped Smith and told him his car registration was expired and that state computer records showed he was dead.

"I was dead and because of that I was not allowed to drive," said Smith, still breathing at age 33. "I agreed that it would be a hazard for a dead person to be driving."

Smith found life wasn't easy for an officially dead man. Without a licence, he lost his job as a driver for a warehouse. Without that job, he had to find a cheaper place to live and take a job nearby, at a deli.

Being an officially dead taxpayer, no one in the state capital took him seriously.

"I would call and I could hear them say, 'Oh, this is that guy again; it's that dead guy again,' and I could hear them laugh and they would say nobody there could help me," Smith said.

Finally, Susan Rakus, an aide to Congressman Peter H. Kostmayer, took his case and learned what was needed to prove Smith was alive and revive him on state transportation records.

Navymen pay the price

WASHINGTON: Seventy US Navy personnel face possible disciplinary action for their roles in a 1991 sex abuse incident at a Las Vegas pilots convention, the service says, reports AP.

The Navy announced late Tuesday it had singled out the individuals from among those who attended the annual Tailhook Association convention where Navy and Marine Corps aviators molested at least 26 women — half of them Navy officers — when the women were forced to run a 'gantlet' in a hotel hallway.

The 70, whom the Navy did not identify, include six assault suspects, 57 people who were either at the gantlet or in nearby areas, five who may have violated conduct standards and two who possibly thwarted the inquiry.

The names of the 70 were referred to their commanding officers for possible punishment.

During the convention, women were pushed through a gantlet of up to 200 men.

The government also decided to withdraw police guards and escorts provided to some members of the National and Provincial Assemblies and Senate, as well as to advisors and special assistants to the Chief Minister.

Informed sources said both decisions were linked to the arrest of Shahood Hashmi.

Japan reluctant to accept chinese dissidents

TOKYO, June 3: Dozens of Chinese dissidents have been stranded in Japan since the Tiananmen massacre with no hope of obtaining asylum from a country which, sensitive about upsetting Beijing, is reluctant to have them at all, reports AFP.

"We are in a very precarious situation and depend entirely on the goodwill of the officials in the Ministry of Justice who have the power to decide whether it is still dangerous for us in China," said Veteran dissident Zhao Nan, 41.

Zhao spent two years undergoing "re-education through labour" in China from 1982-84 for his role in democracy Wall Movement in 1978 and 1979.

He arrived to study in Osaka in 1988 and in 1989 took part in many demonstrations in support of China's pro-democracy movement. In 1990, he became head of the Japan-branch of the Paris-based Federation for a Democratic China (FDC), one of the main overseas dissident organisations.

When Zhao's student visa expired in December 1990, he applied for political asylum in Japan. The Ministry of Justice rejected the application in March 1991, saying it had been made too long after the Tiananmen massacre.

Hong Jianbing, 30, was an official Chinese interpreter who made a daring defection to Japan in September 1990.

Hong let out of a moving taxi to escape two Foreign Ministry officials who were driving him against his will to the airport.

The Japanese Justice Ministry's verdict was the same, the reason different. This time it cited 'lack of evidence' — although the UN High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) supported Hong's application.

Hong was informed of the decision several days after he was briefly detained by police for shouting hostile slogans during a speech in the Japanese capital by visiting Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin.

"Japan is still very reluctant to accept foreigners and, in the case of the Chinese, political considerations are clear," said Hong's lawyer Kazuhiko Yamaguchi.

Bus massacre toll rises to 16 in Lanka

COLOMBO, June 3: The death toll in Tuesday's Tamil guerrilla bus massacre in eastern Sri Lanka rose to 16 today after a wounded policeman died in hospital, officials said, reports AFP.

Six guerrillas armed with automatic assault rifles boarded the bus at the coastal village of Komari late Tuesday and fired indiscriminately on passengers, killing 15 instantly, a military spokesman said.

The attack was believed to have been the work of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Two off-duty policemen were among the victims, most of whom Muslims, the spokesman said.

The LTTE is opposed to

Muslims and Sinhalese living in northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka which the movement claims as a traditional homeland of the Tamil minority.

The bus attack came as heavily armed troops supported by artillery and helicopter gunships consolidated their positions around Alampill village, captured from the LTTE late Tuesday.

Security forces lost seven soldiers in the battle but said at least 50 LTTE fighters were killed.

Since the armed forces' push in the northeast began last Thursday at least 83 soldiers have been killed along with an estimated 300 LTTE guerrillas, according to officials.

Tamil sources said 12 civilians were killed in air attacks.

Gunmen kill son of Pak politician

QUETTA June 3: Gunmen killed the son of a Pakistani opposition politician in the south western province of Baluchistan on Tuesday, police said, reports Reuter.

They said Salal Bugti, the son of former Baluchistan Chief Minister Akbar Bugti, was hit by a burst of kalashnikov assault rifle when he was driving in a car through a busy street in the provincial capital Quetta. He died instantly.

Two of his bodyguards and a passerby were injured, the police said.

Anti-govt protests put fledgling democracy on test in Nepal

KATMANDU, June 3: One year after democracy was re-born in Nepal, this poor Himalayan nation is tasting its fruits and paying the price of an open society, reports AP.

Wildly rising prices have prompted deadly anti-government street violence. Striking teachers and government workers paralyzed the new administration for its first three months. Infighting in the governing party is eroding its credibility.

Despite the setbacks, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala says he is not worried for his country.

"If all political parties work within the framework of the constitution, the future of democracy is very bright," he said in an interview.

Indeed, democracy and free speech have become taken for granted after three decades of absolute monarchy. Once-banned opposition parties are thriving. Newspapers are unbridled.

All religions are free to practice in this Hindu Kingdom, where propagation of any other religion had been a crime. Criticism of King Birendra is no longer a blasphemy punishable by law.

Koirala's Nepali Congress Party took office May 29, 1991 after winning Nepal's first free, multiparty polls in 32 years.

An earlier experiment with democracy in 1959 ended after one year. The first elected government, also formed by the Nepali Congress Party, was dismissed by Birendra's father, King Mahendra, who replaced it with a rubber-stamp assembly.

In April 1990 Birendra yielded absolute power after a nationwide pro-democracy uprising. A new constitution reduced the king to a figure-head and created an interim

coalition that ran the country until last year's election.

Soon after Koirala took over, civil servants launched Nepal's first real strike, a three-month standoff that ended when Koirala conceded their demand for more salary.

"Democracy has liberated us mentally but it takes time to stabilize. The new government cannot come out at once from the cobwebs of political and economic backgrounds that existed before," said Lok Raj Baral, a political scientist.

Koirala has set his first priority to bring down prices. For most Nepalese who are among

the poorest people in the world, his promise raised visions of a better life.

Their hopes were frustrated by a sharp devaluation last August to conform to a similar fiscal move by neighbouring India, with which Nepal's economy is closely linked. Prices of imports rose, from sewing needles to cement factories.

Rice, the staple food of the Nepalese, costs 14 rupees (30 cents) a kilogram (2.2 pounds), up from 8 rupees, and cooking oil rose by 22 per cent.