

OIC expresses solidarity with Azerbaijan

JEDDAH, Apr 5: The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Sunday condemned Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan...

In a statement issued at the headquarters of the OIC here, Secretary General Hamid Algabadi expressed deep concern in the face of the upsurge in fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan...

The Armenian offensive against the Azeri town of Kelabadzhar has led to a serious escalation and extension to the conflict which, he charged, is encouraged and backed from abroad.

Yeltsin seeks guarantee of minorities' rights from Latvia, Estonia

US, Russia ask Ukraine to surrender N-arms

VANCOUVER, Apr 5: The United States and Russia turned up the heat on Ukraine on Sunday to surrender the nuclear weapons it inherited from the former Soviet Union...

Belarus and Kazakhstan have already ratified Start-1, but Ukraine has not yet done so. Some Ukrainian politicians say the country should hold on for the time being to strategic missiles inherited from the Soviet arsenal.

Belarus has also signed the NPT and Kazakhstan has promised to do so. Ukraine is delaying on this too, although a parliamentary debate on nuclear policy is expected in Kiev soon.

Clinton said he and Yeltsin had discussed during their two-day summit the need to ensure that Ukraine, along with Belarus and Kazakhstan, ratify the START treaty and

accede to the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states. Under the NPT, non-nuclear weapon states pledge not to acquire atomic arms and nuclear weapon states promise not to transfer them to those who do not have them.

Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan were the four republics holding strategic weapons on their territory when the Soviet Union broke up at the end of 1991.

By big-power agreement, Russia has inherited the mantle of the Soviet Union as a nuclear power, but the other three republics promised last year to give up their nuclear weapons.

intercontinental missiles and 30 bombers with an estimated 416 warheads of bombs and cruise missiles.

The ability to use these is held not by the Ukrainian government but the joint command of the Commonwealth of Independent States, successor to the Soviet command. But Kiev's permission is required to remove or dismantle them.

A major concern among Ukrainians is that Russia might at some time move to re-establish control over their country.

This fear has given Ukrainian nationalists an argument for refusing to surrender their strategic weapons, and Ukraine has demanded

security guarantees. A senior US diplomat recently predicted Washington and Moscow would soon begin putting economic pressure on Ukraine if Kiev did not agree to fulfill its commitments to abandon nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, President Yeltsin warned Latvia and Estonia on Sunday that they must guarantee the rights of Russian minorities in order to ensure Moscow's adherence to its agreed schedule of Soviet-era troop withdrawals.

Yeltsin, whose giant Russian federation assumed control of Soviet forces in the Baltics after the communist superpower collapsed, said the

treatment of local Russians would determine the pace and scope of the withdrawal. We will be scheduling the actual withdrawal in line with what they decide in the human rights area, Yeltsin said.

The Russian leader drew a sharp contrast with neighbouring Lithuania, where he said Russian-speakers enjoyed human rights.

We are adhering very closely to the schedule on troop withdrawals from Lithuania and we're completing work on that since Lithuania does not violate human rights and treats the Russian-speaking population fairly, he said.

Jakarta, Manila won't join defence exercise in Australia

CANBERRA, Apr 5: Warships and aircraft from Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Thailand will join Australian defence forces in a major exercise off the Australian port of Darwin next month, officials said today, reports AFP.

Indonesia and the Philippines were unable to accept invitations to participate in Kakadu, which will be the first exercise in Australian waters involving this group of nations, a navy spokesman said.

The ships will spend the first week of what was described as a getting to know you exercise practicing signalling and other operating techniques to make sure each nation was confident of working with the others.

BRIEFLY

5-yr suspended jail for Denard: Ex-mercenary Bob Denard, who retired after leading raids and coups across Africa for 30 years, was convicted and given a five-year suspended sentence Monday for criminal association, AP reports from Paris.

The 14th Correctional Court found Denard guilty of recruiting French mercenaries for a failed coup against the Marxist government in the west African nation of Benin in 1977.

The 64-year-old Denard, arrested in February 1 when he returned home hoping to clear his name, also faces charges of murder and theft in connection with the 1989 assassination of the president of the Comoros Islands.

Despite the charges, Judge Chantal Perdrix on Saturday allowed Denard freed pending the case. During his four-year exile in South Africa, Denard was convicted in absentia in 1991 to five years in prison for leading the Benin coup attempt.

Harley Allen dies of cancer: Grammy-nominated bluegrass singer Harley Allen has died of lung cancer. He was 63, AP reports from Dayton, Ohio.

Allen, who lived in the Dayton area, died Saturday at Miami Valley Hospital. Allen was credited with originating the 'high lonesome' style of harmony used in bluegrass music. His career spanned four decades and included performances at Carnegie Hall in New York City and the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville.

The vocalist-songwriter-guitarist known as 'Red' received a Grammy nomination this year for best bluegrass album. 'It hasn't been bad for a fella who comes from Pigeon's Roost, Ky, with not much education and no guitar,' he said earlier this year. 'My music has taken me everywhere.'

Allen is survived by his wife, Betty, and eight children.

Bus explosion kills 5 in Amritsar: Three bags of dynamite placed on the roof of a bus exploded when it arrived in Amritsar on Monday killing five people and injuring 32, police and witnesses said, AP reports from Amritsar.

Authorities suspect that a Sikh terrorist placed the bags with other luggage on top of the bus and left the vehicle shortly before they exploded, said District Police Chief Hardip Singh.

The blast, which ripped the roof off the bus, injured many people who were waiting in the station or selling food there. The bus arrived in Punjab's Sikh holy city after travelling 150 kilometres (95 miles) from the industrial town of Ludhiana.

Hostel collapse claims 11 in China: Eleven people were killed and 25 others injured when a two-story dormitory building collapsed in the outskirts of the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou. It was reported yesterday, says AFP from Hong Kong.

The brick building which served as dormitory for migrant workers collapsed in Huangpu early Sunday, killing 11 people, the semi-official Hong Kong-China news service said, adding that the collapse was blamed on poor construction of the building's foundations.

6 Filipinos killed in violence: Six people were killed over the weekend in gun battles in the lawless southern Philippines, authorities said Monday, AP reports from Zamboanga, Philippines.

The military's Southern Command said soldiers manning a checkpoint in a village in Patikul on Jolo Island engaged in a 10-minute gun battle Sunday night with men who fired at them from a passenger jeep.

The soldiers killed three men they later identified as members of the secessionist Moro national Liberation Front, military spokesman Lt. Cmdr Arturo Alviar said.

Museum on Great Wall: A museum on the Great Wall is now under construction and will be completed this year in the badaling special zone in the suburbs of Beijing, Xinhua reports from Beijing.

The museum will depict the history and the general picture of the Great Wall, as well as the ancient military significance, local people of various nationalities, folk customs and culture related to the Great Wall, the largest construction project in the world.

Two museums on the Great Wall have already been built and opened to tourists at the east and west ends of the Great Wall, that is, Shanhaiguan in the east and Jiayuguan in the west.

ICFTU-AFRO team to go Malawi: The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and its African Regional Organisation (AFRO) are preparing for a delegation to visit Malawi in order to press for the release of detained pro-democracy leader Chakufwa Chihana, AFP reports from Harare.

In a statement released Sunday in Harare, the Brussels-based union movement also called on Malawi's government to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit Chihana as a matter of urgency in view of his deteriorating health.

Peace rallies to end violence in N Ireland

LONDON, Apr 5: Thousands turned out in Ireland, London, and Belfast on Sunday to call for an end to violence in Northern Ireland and support a new peace movement formed after two British boys were killed in an IRA bombing, reports Reuters.

This is an ideal day for all of us to join together and once more show that we want a ceasefire, we want peace and we want it now, said Irish housewife-turned-peace campaigner Susan McHugh in a statement issued to mark the rallies.

Thousands of people in towns and villages across Ireland joined spontaneous peace rallies.



General view of a cemetery in Sarajevo on Sunday. The war started in Sarajevo a year ago in the night early April 5. — AFP/UNB photo



Mumtaz Rathore, former Kashmiri prime minister and president of the Azad Kashmir People's Party (AKPP), speaks to a large gathering of marchers in downtown Muzaffarabad on Sunday. Rathore is leading some 3,000 supporters on a march towards the Indian border to call for a free Kashmir. — AFP/UNB photo

French socialists feud after defeat

PARIS, Apr 5: Still reeling from a parliamentary election debacle, the Socialist Party has plunged into bitter infighting after the ouster of party leader Laurent Fabius, reports AP.

Prominent Socialists refused seats on the party's ruling council and denounced what they called a coup by former Premier Michel Rocard, who emerged as leader in a party vote Saturday.

Rocard tried to close the rift with conciliatory statements Sunday, but dissidents called him the leader of only a rump party. One small faction was on the verge of bolting the party.

There was a tough vote, and some comrades have been bad losers, Rocard said. But in the state we're in, closing ranks is a necessity for survival.

Long riven by factions, the Socialist party has held together in recent years due to a common interest in retaining power.

On March 28, however, voters fed up with unemployment and a string of scandals elected an overwhelming right-wing majority to the National Assembly. Even Rocard lost his seat as the Socialists were reduced to an opposition of 54 in the 577-member National Assembly.

If Rocard, 62, fails to quickly heal the wounds, his chances of rebuilding the tattered left into a force capable of winning the presidency in 1995 could collapse.

Fabius told France 2 television that Rocard's presidential ambitions have

had the consequence of breaking up the party. Fabius is favourite of Socialist President Francois Mitterrand.

It was arrogance that was defeated, Rocard said. My priority is the reconstruction of the left, not personal adventures.

Mitterrand maintained a public silence, but other Socialists warned Rocard he had won a costly victory.

How can this new leadership pretend to rally forces beyond the party, when its first problem is going to be to win back half the Socialists? demanded Pierre Mauroy, one of those who refused a seat on the new 21-member ruling council.

Only loyalists of Rocard and former party leader Lionel

Russia plans complete pullout from Cuba

VANCOUVER, Apr 5: President Boris Yeltsin said Sunday that Russia is finalizing a schedule for a complete withdrawal of troops from Cuba, reports AP.

Yeltsin, however, declined to be more specific in response to a question at his joint news conference with President Clinton at the conclusion of their two-day summit in this western Canadian seaport.

In September 1991, then-President Mikhail Gorbachev told then-Secretary of State James Baker that he had ordered the withdrawal of a combat brigade from the Caribbean island nation.

In regard to troop withdrawals, we have already initiated that withdrawal and are now finalizing a schedule for the final withdrawal of troops, Yeltsin said Sunday.

Off the Record

He falls in love with Russia

VANCOUVER: "Since I was a boy, I have been personally fascinated with the history, the music and the culture, and the literature of Russia," US President Bill Clinton said Sunday in explaining his personal feeling for Russia, reports AFP.

In a press conference with Russian reporters following the US-Russian summit here this weekend, Clinton was asked why he had quoted 20th century Russian poet Anna Akhmatova in a speech on aid to Russia.

I have been thrilled by Russian music since I was a serious student of music for more than 30 years now. I have read major Russian novelists and many of your poets and followed your ballet and tried to know as much as could about your history, the US President replied.

I remember for example — a lot of you know I like music very much — one of my most moving experiences for me as a musician was when Leonard Bernstein took the New York Philharmonic to Moscow and played (Dmitri) Sostakovich's Fifth Symphony to the Russians. And he played the last movement more rapidly than anyone had ever played it before because it was technically so difficult, he added.

We're inseparable

LOS ANGELES: Country music star Clint Black and his wife, Lisa Hartman, denied a published report suggesting their marriage was on the rocks, saying in unison: "We're inseparable," reports AP.

A Hollywood Reporter item published Friday said, "At the moment, and hopefully it's only a momentary thing, Clint Black and Lisa Hartman are no longer under the same roof."

That single sentence was quickly spread nationwide by entertainment reporters. "That's one sentence too many. We're beyond upset," the country singer said by telephone from the Los Angeles home he and Miss Hartman share. "We're very much in love. We're very happily married."



Gorbachev won't run for presidency

MOSCOW, Apr 5: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on Sunday called for early elections to resolve Russia's political crisis, but said he has no plan to run for president himself, reports AP.

"We need elections," Gorbachev told commonwealth television. "If we keep Russia in such a state, we will ruin everything."

The country's hard-line Congress of People's Deputies has voted to hold an April 25 referendum to decide its power struggle with President Boris Yeltsin.

The 1,033-member Congress, dominated by former Communists, is opposed to Yeltsin's painful economic reforms and pro-Western foreign policy. It has been steadily eroding Yeltsin's powers.

The planned referendum will focus on confidence in the president and his socio-economic policy. The legislators also want to ask the Russians whether they favour early presidential and parliamentary elections.

Curfew clamped on Maghazi House to house search in Gaza, West Bank

GAZA, Apr 5: Israeli troops clamped a curfew on Maghazi in the occupied Gaza Strip on Sunday and searched from house to house for Arab suspects and weapons, Israeli military officials said, reports Reuters.

Troops enforcing the closure of the Strip and the occupied West Bank made a similar raid on Friday in Gaza's Shati refugee camp, rounding up hundreds of men and boys. Most were released. During the raid on Maghazi, which started before dawn of Sunday, soldiers armed with automatic rifles roused men, women and children from their beds and homeowners were forced to empty closets and pull apart furniture.

Israeli television showed Palestinian men painting over graffiti on outside walls under the soldiers' guns. Detained men knelt in the dust, hands shown removing their combat boots to enter and search a

All-party meet to solve main issues in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Apr 5: The all-party meeting for solution of the main issues facing Nepal, including the controversial Tanakpur accord with India, has resumed, local press reported today, says Xinhua.

Two meetings were held on Sunday, both under the chairmanship of lower house Speaker Daman Nath Dhungana, to give the final shape to the working procedures to be followed regarding the main matters which were under consideration by the current session of the parliament.

The first round of all-party meeting held on March 10 to 12 achieved a consensus that the parliament should exercise its right and make an evaluation on the Tanakpur accord which was signed in 1991 on a dam project.

But, so far no progress has been made on this issue in the ongoing parliament winter session which will be concluded within a few days.

Sarajevo under artillery attack

SARAJEVO, Apr 5: The Bosnian capital Sarajevo came under artillery and sniper attack today after intense fighting the previous day killed at least seven people and wounded 28, reports Reuters.

Sarajevo Radio said fighting in violation of a ceasefire across the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia also continued around the eastern Muslim town of Gorazde which is blockaded by Serbs.

Resident said the shelling was sporadic in besieged Sarajevo this morning with sniper fire around the presidential building near the centre.

Among the wounded were 14 children, some of whom were treated for shrapnel wounds. Sarajevo Radio said more



English-born Emma Thompson won the Oscar for 1993 for her role in the movie 'Howard's End' as Best Actress. Here the award-winning actress is talking to the Press after she had received the award. — Star TV photo

Election win ups Keating's popularity

CANBERRA, Apr 5: Paul Keating's shock election win has helped boost his popularity to its highest level since he became Prime Minister just over 15 months ago, according to a major opinion poll published today, reports Reuters.

Keating's approval rating rose to 46 per cent, eight points higher than in a poll taken just before the March 13 elections which returned Labour to power with an increased majority.

In contrast, support for conservative opposition leader John Hewson has slumped 10 points to 37 per cent, the Morgan poll in the local edition of Time magazine found.