

International Intelligence

Ukraine Rada votes to cancel non-nuclear status

The Supreme Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine voted on March 24 to cancel the country's non-nuclear status, referring to country's pledge to scrap all remaining nuclear weapons from the Soviet era, and not to acquire or produce new ones. The Rada also voted to settle all remaining differences with Russia on the issue of the Black Sea Fleet, by ratifying the agreements reached between Russia and Ukraine on status and division of the Fleet. Under the Soviet Union, the Fleet had been based in Ukraine's Crimea on the Black Sea, which is free of ice during the winter.

Two hundred fifty members of the Rada, out of 450 members in all, voted to ratify the agreements, with Parliament Speaker Oleksandr Tkachenko from the Socialist Party declaring: "The law is ratified."

The Russian Black Sea Fleet will now be based in the Crimean port of Sevastopol until 2017, alongside Ukraine's Navy. Ukraine had long since ratified the Russia-Ukraine basic cooperation and friendship treaty, and Russia's Federation Council (Upper House) finally ratified it in February. However, the Federation Council had stipulated that the treaty would go into effect only after Ukraine had ratified the Black Sea Fleet agreements. Ukraine expects that Russia will now agree to have the friendship treaty take effect.

Kurdish leader: Coup vs. Saddam is a fantasy

Jalal Talabani, leader of the Kurdish Patriotic Union (PUK), one of the seven Iraqi opposition groups named by the U.S. Iraq Liberation Act, heaped scorn on an American idea to overthrow President Saddam Hussein as American "arrogance" and "mere wishful thinking," in an interview with the international Arabic daily *Al-Hayat* of March 26. His statements bespeak the condition of the opposition groups, which are disintegrating. Regarding his opposition to the Iraq Liberation Act, Talabani said:

"We reject the participation in foreign complots against the Iraqi regime, because we believe in the right of our own people to comprehensive democratic change and its ability to achieve that. This change is the mission of the Iraqi people."

Talabani continued, "We do not reject the principle of dialogue [with Baghdad], and I announced two days ago in a public speech, that we accept the dialogue and agreement if the regime agrees to stop the dictatorial rule and accept a democratic system, including a federal structure in Iraq." Talabani, like Britain's pet rebel John Garang in southern Sudan, is not known for his desire to reach peace, which accounts for his putting provocative conditions in the call for dialogue. However, he would have to proceed with negotiations should his stronger Kurdish rival, Massoud Barzani of the Kurdish Democratic Party (PDK), decide to talk with Saddam Hussein. Barzani is prepared to reach a deal with Saddam on limited autonomy for the Kurdish region. The PUK and PDK are not allowed to have contact with Saddam under the agreement they were forced to sign in Washington in September 1998, but, as Talabani told *Al-Hayat*, he "has nothing against shaking hands with Saddam again if the opportunity arises."

Conversely, Talabani also said that he will not attend the late-April conference in Washington organized by the Iraqi National Congress, because the INC, he believes, has become a private venture of its chieftain, Ahmad Al-Chalabi.

China-India interests outweigh differences

India and China have common interests which far outweigh their existing differences on the boundary question, said Chinese Ambassador Zhou Gang said in an address at the United Services Institution in New Delhi on March 24. "There exists profound traditional friendship between the people of the two countries. China and India sympathized and supported each other during their struggles of national independence and liberation against foreign aggression.

The two countries share similar or identical views on many major issues, such as economic development, human rights, environmental protection, combatting drug trafficking and crime, and population control," Zhou said.

There was nothing "abnormal" about some differences, he said. "As long as both sides proceed from the overall interests of bilateral friendly relations and handle these concerns on the basis of mutual trust . . . the differences will be narrowed gradually," he stated. "Good neighborly" relations will not only conform to their "fundamental interests," but will encourage "peace, stability, and development in Asia and the world at large." Zhou reiterated that the "outstanding issue between China and India is no more than the boundary dispute left behind by history. Fundamentally speaking, this is a legacy of history when India was ruled by colonialists."

Ecuador faces separatism in wake of bank failure

The tenuous mid-March political agreement for a new austerity package in Ecuador shattered on March 21, when the president of the country's largest savings bank, the Banco del Progreso, announced that it was shutting its doors because a run on deposits forced it into illiquidity. Bank president Fernando Aspiazu accused the government of President Jamil Mahuad of having forced the bank's failure, through prejudicial handling of the banks from the coastal region. Banco del Progreso is headquartered in the Pacific port of Guayaquil, which has historically been in a rivalry with the capital city of Quito, a rivalry many have tried to exploit.

Immediately following his televised charges, Aspiazu led hundreds of depositors to the Guayaquil mayor's office, where they joined hundreds more to demand an "Independent Guayaquil!" The mayor is former Ecuador President León Febres Cordero, a neo-liberal advocate of International Monetary Fund policies. Febres Cordero addressed the crowd from his balcony, telling them that "Guayaquil is on a war footing. . . . When Guayaquil raises the arm of war,

Briefly

UKRAINE'S Popular Rukh leader Vyacheslav Chornovil was killed on March 25 in an auto accident near Kiev, according to Itar-TASS. Chornovil had led Rukh since its formation in the late 1980s, and became well known as a staunch advocate of Ukrainian independence.

THE PRO-DOPE Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation is cheering the appearance of a Sydney University of Technology orientation handbook, which contains five pages explaining how to inject heroin. The foundation is headed by Australian Capital Territory Health Minister Mike Moore, George Soros's man in Australia. New South Wales Premier Bob Carr attacked the handbook as a "do-it-yourself guide to drug abuse."

INDIA'S CONGRESS Party, which has decided to pursue an independent foreign policy, sent a five-member delegation for a week-long visit to China, beginning April 6. Party foreign affairs adviser Natwar Singh will bring a message from party president Mrs. Sonia Gandhi to Chinese President Jiang Zemin, recalling the good relations between the two countries and hoping for continued cooperation.

PAKISTANI AND INDIAN security experts are to meet in April to find ways "to agree on security concepts and nuclear doctrines," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said on March 22. Aziz said that the two sides have set a schedule of meetings to "intensify" their dialogue, in keeping with a declaration signed by the two countries' Prime Ministers in February in Lahore.

EIGHT SCOTTISH MPs introduced a resolution into Britain's House of Commons on March 25, backing the Edinburgh City Council's opposition to the Bank of Scotland's joint banking scheme with U.S. TV Elmer Gantry, Pat Robertson. The branchless bank would operate by phone with its customers. The Bank of Scotland has hired a new public relations team to deal with the flak over their deal with Robertson.

then there will be war." The mob screamed, "Independence! Independence!" and "Guayaquil without Jamil!"

President Jamil Mahuad has responded with yet another bandaid, by announcing the government's intent to restructure the Banco del Progreso. It would be kept alive — although its deposits are largely frozen, as are the savings deposits of most Ecuadorans — until May 4, said Mahuad, when the bank must come up with fresh capital, or it would have to "shut down, definitively." The head of the notoriously political Ecuadoran Army, Gen. Telmo Sandoval, made his own intervention, warning that, "for the benefit of our beloved fatherland," the political class must "commit fewer errors."

Sergeyev visits India, hails 'strategic' ties

Indo-Russian ties are rising to the "level of real strategic partnership" in the face of an intense struggle for the formation of a multi-polar world, Russian Defense Minister Marshal Igor D. Sergeyev said on March 19, as he arrived in India for an official five-day visit.

Sergeyev responded to written questions from *The Hindu*, saying that "a new re-division of the world through the use of force-related factors, economic, political, and military," is taking place. A "strong-arm leadership strategy" is visible in Europe and "institutions of international law, embodied in the UN" are being affected. He blamed the United States for unilaterally altering the international security architecture. "The United States, which remains a global pole of force, seeks unilaterally to cash in on the Cold War outcome in its own interests. And the point at issue, to my mind, is as follows: Either the world will go back to multi-polarity, typical of the previous stages of historical developments, or one superpower will dominate the system of international relations. It seems, however, that it is too early to draw final conclusions, since only two trends are discernible and other development patterns may emerge."

Sergeyev said that the "present-day Rus-

sia has no military opponent, but military strength may still be used in the world to attain political and economic gains. We take this into account and react accordingly."

The ramifications of Indo-Russian "strategic cooperation" go far beyond South Asia, he said. Their bilateral ties are relevant "also for international security. This cooperation helps to form a well-balanced multi-polar system of relations on a worldwide scale."

Sergeyev said that Indian and Russian experts are working on a contract to train Indian military specialists "to run and effectively operate up-to-date Russian-made military equipment." The training would take place at the Russian Defense Ministry's key establishments.

Habibie meets with local leaders in Aceh province

Indonesian President B.J. Habibie apologized for human rights abuses committed by the military during the nine-year battle against the Free Aceh movement, during his visit to the northernmost province on March 26. In a two-hour meeting with local leaders, Habibie said, "We don't want a future in a cage. We want a better future. I deliver an apology for what has been done by the security forces, by accident or deliberately, to all the people of Aceh." A report released earlier in March disclosed that anti-rebel operations in three of Aceh's eight districts had left thousands of widows and orphans, rape victims, and homeless. Gov. Syamsuddin Mahmud reported that the government had offered social, educational, and health assistance to victims, and to pay for the reburial of Acehnese killed; he expressed gratitude to Habibie for redressing "the mistakes of the previous government." Habibie also indicated the possibility of greater autonomy and more equitable revenue-sharing.

The trip was marred by an incident prior to Habibie's arrival, when a demonstration of 1,000 students calling for independence attempted to break through security lines; warning shots and tear gas were used, with 20 injured.