

Business Briefs

Asia

Malaysia and India sign cooperation agreement

Malaysia and India signed a defense agreement in Kuala Lumpur on Feb. 2. "The agreement will allow logistics support for aircraft that are common to both countries," Malaysian Defense Minister Najib Razak said after signing the pact with his Indian counterpart, Sharad Pawar.

Malaysia is considering buying 30 MiG-29s from the Russians, which have been offered at \$24 million each, and has been looking to India to provide parts and service for the fighters. The United States had offered Malaysia F-16 and F/A-18 Hornet fighters, but Malaysian officials say that their cost is almost double that of the MiG-29s.

In remarks before signing the agreement, Najib called the memorandum a milestone in relations between the two countries. "Through this agreement, I hope India would assist Malaysia in areas such as military training, logistics support, and defense industry," he said.

Neo-Liberalism

Britain on dead-end course, says Bérégovoy

Britain has chosen a self-defeating economic course, French Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy said on Feb. 4. "I feel today that Britain is going down a dead-end path. And that is true for everything," he said. Lowering interest rates and depreciation of the pound has not helped the economy to recover. "You can see that confidence is not coming back and unemployment in Britain is rising at a pace clearly faster than elsewhere."

Bérégovoy claimed that British Prime Minister John Major was the victim of Thatcher's ultra-liberal policies. Referring to the decision by Hoover, the U.S. appliance maker, to shift production from France to Scotland because of low wage costs, he said: "You can see where unfettered liberalism gets you. The Scottish workers, a pistol loaded with job cuts

at their heads, have agreed to give up employment rights, the right to strike, [and] accepted a blow to their pension funds and wage cuts."

Britain is becoming the "sweatshop" of Europe. After the recent fall of the pound, tensions between Britain and the European Community over the increasingly competitive battle for jobs are rising. Relatively low wages and worker benefits have already helped Britain to lure a disproportionate share of foreign investment. In early February, S.C. Johnson and Son Inc., the U.S. household-products maker, announced it would be moving production from France to Britain. Philips Electronics will also cease production in its Dutch cathode tube plant in favor of Britain.

Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission, attacked Britain for "job-poaching" by downgrading workers' rights and benefits to secure investment. French officials have blamed Britain for "social dumping." According to a 1990 survey, social security and other insurance costs in Britain made up 14.5% of worker compensation. In Germany, that figure stood at 22%, compared with 28.6% in France. These low costs are further signs that the productive powers of labor of the average British worker has been eroding.

Both Bérégovoy and Delors are themselves notorious monetarists, who favor a slightly more sugared form of free-market poison.

Russia

Refugee migration has become a major problem

The internal migration of ethnic and other refugees inside the former Soviet Union is becoming a problem that could soon go out of control, warned a report which was presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on Feb. 4.

The report states: "More than 460,000 ethnic refugees have been officially registered at the federal migration service of Russia. This pertains to Russians who were living outside Russia and to non-Russians who fled the ethnic conflicts and civil wars in Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ossetia, Ingushetia,

Abkhazia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan." Further refugee flows are anticipated from "the Baltic states where other ethnic conflicts have broken out."

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the report states, millions of people have become "candidates" for such migrations. There are 25 million ethnic Russians living outside Russia in the former Soviet Union, and there are at least 128 different ethnic groups who were victims of the mass deportation policies of Stalin. Certain victims of forced migration, like the Cossack peoples of southern Russia and the Tatars coming from Ukraine, want to regain their territory of origin.

The Strasbourg Assembly has asked the Russian government "to adopt as soon as possible legislation concerning migrants, refugees and displaced persons," and "to encourage the non-governmental organizations and charitable organizations to put in place communities of self-help for displaced persons," the French daily *Libération* reported.

AIDS

Only testing slows disease spread

A study of heterosexual college students found that focusing on education to stop the spread of AIDS generally worked only when coupled with blood tests. Researchers at the University of California at Los Angeles led by Dr. Neil Wenger said that there was little change in the sexual behavior of students who were exposed to an education program alone about the human immunodeficiency virus and the way it is acquired, but among students who underwent both education and testing for HIV, there was a marked increase in the number who talked to their sexual partners about the virus and asked questions about their partners' HIV status, UPI reported on Feb. 5.

"Only when education was combined with HIV antibody testing was there a significant effect on communication" between sexual partners, said Wenger.

Meanwhile, French researcher Dr. Luc Montagnier, head of the Pasteur Institute team that isolated the virus in 1983, called for a glob-

al foundation on research and prevention of AIDS, in a commentary in the Feb. 3 *Le Monde*. He forecast that nearly 10 million people infected today could be dead within 10 years if no cure is found. "Our cause concerns the world . . . we have to destroy AIDS, otherwise AIDS destroys us." He said that the hope remains of finding a vaccine, but not immediately.

Montagnier expressed support for a world foundation on AIDS treatment and prevention that is to be launched soon by U.N. Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization Secretary General Federico Mayor and French Health Minister Bernard Kouchner. Montagnier invited President Clinton to support the foundation.

Science

Optical biophysics spurs leap in cancer treatment

New biochemical and optical biophysics techniques are leading to a leap in the treatment of cancer, Reuters reported on Jan. 25. The changes are likely to make today's radiation and chemotherapy treatments, with the high toll they exact on the whole body, seem like the Dark Ages to future generations.

"There has been a quantum leap in the past 10 years in our understanding of what creates cancer cells," said David Secher, director of drug development for the U.K. Cancer Research Campaign.

One technique being explored uses light-sensitive drugs based on chemicals called porphyrins. When exposed to certain lightwaves, they become highly unstable and produce a reactive form of oxygen that kills nearby tissue. The porphyrin drugs, injected into the body, travel to the tumor or cancer cells in the blood where they are treated with lightwaves using lasers or optic fibers. The method is particularly useful in treating tumors that are hard to reach with conventional surgery, as well as some leukemias.

Increasingly, researchers are turning to the body itself to try to find better drugs. Human-based hormones for breast and prostate cancer are already in use. Another area of research

involves understanding the functioning of the cancer cell to block it at key points, to understand a cancer's DNA code to try to disrupt it, and to develop methods to detect cancer at an early stage.

"Gene therapy is the way of the future," said Nicholas Wright of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, which provides much of the funding for cancer research in Britain. "By the time one gets to all these advanced drugs, it's a bit too late really. Early diagnosis has the most hope, and if one could find the genetic marker for a cancer and then screen for it, you could do a lot more to cure people."

Health

Food irradiation may be used to combat E. coli

Food irradiation is being considered as one of the measures to ensure that hamburger meat is not contaminated with bacteria, according to Russell Cross, the administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety Inspection Service. Recently, two children died and 300 adults became sick after eating undercooked hamburger meat contaminated with E. coli bacteria in the United States. The outbreak has cost \$1 million in government and medical costs, according to health officials, *USA Today* reported on Feb. 3.

An epidemic of E. coli bacterium infections, which first surfaced in Seattle on Jan. 13, continues to spread throughout the Northwest. The outbreak has been traced to hamburgers served at Jack-in-the-Box fast food outlets in Washington and other states. Cases have been reported in Nevada, Oregon, and Idaho.

E. coli is a strain of the *Escherichia coli* bacterium that grows in the intestinal tracts and feces of animals, particularly dairy cattle. Primary transmission occurs when people eat contaminated food or liquids. Beef can become contaminated during slaughtering. Symptoms include severe diarrhea and stomach cramps. In about 10% of cases, it causes kidney failure. It can lead to heart failure, stroke, or damage to the pancreas.

Briefly

● **THE BIRTH RATE** in North Africa is falling steeply, French demographer Prof. Youssef Courbage said in Brussels on Feb. 1. European fears of a "flood of Arab immigrants" are wildly exaggerated, he said. He expects the working-age population in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to level off about the year 2005.

● **NATIONAL IRANIAN Oil Co.** officials, headed by Sayed Mehdi Hosseini, will soon participate in talks with U.S. firms on possible projects. Amoco Corp., which had extensive operations in Iran from 1958 until the revolution, will be participating in the talks.

● **GENERAL MOTORS** will write off \$20.8 billion for 1992, allegedly in accordance with changes in accounting practices designed to more accurately reflect future costs of employee health and benefit plans. The move will result in a total loss of \$23.5 billion, exceeding the record loss recently set by IBM.

● **ARMENIA**, which is rationing electricity and running water because of energy shortages caused by the Azerbaijan blockade, faces more International Monetary Fund austerity. On Feb. 2, President Ter-Petrosian replaced Prime Minister Arutyunian and his cabinet, which had opposed radical free market policies, with Deputy Prime Minister Bagratian, who backs such "reforms."

● **CHINA'S** entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade would trigger a 20 million job loss over three years, the *South China Morning Post*, a Hong Kong-based newspaper, reported. Beijing is hoping for GATT membership this year.

● **THE DUTCH** manufacturer DAF, a leading truck-maker, filed for protection against its creditors on Feb. 2 after British banks in DAF's banking consortium (National Westminster, Barclays, and Lloyds) and the Dutch government failed to agree on emergency short-term funding. The collapse puts 12-15,000 jobs at risk.