

Thursday, April 19, 1990

Soviets deny reports of embargo

MOSCOW (AP) — The Soviet Union shut off oil supplies to Lithuania's only refinery Wednesday as Moscow began to impose Mikhail S. Gorbachev's threatened economic embargo on the breakaway Baltic republic, Lithuanian officials said.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis said the move represented "economic coercion and economic warfare against a neighboring country."

"Truly, this is recognition of the independence of Lithuania," he said. "It is hard to imagine why the people of Lithuania ... are being punished. What was their crime?"

Lithuanian Premier Kazimiera Prunskiene went to Oslo, Norway, on a three-day mission seeking alternative oil supplies.

In Washington, Secretary of State James A. Baker III said action by Moscow against Lithuania could doom commercial relations between the Soviet Union and the United States.

He said, "It's very difficult to see some of the commercial aspects of our relationship surviving the use of force or coercion" against Lithuania.

President Bush's spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater, said "we are looking into" reports of the oil cutoff.

He also said Bush received a private letter from Landsbergis — "The

Lithuanians claim Moscow imposed blockade of oil supply

president has not seen it yet but he will. We won't comment on the content."

The move came just hours after Soviet Deputy Oil and Gas Minister Aklim Mukhamedzyanov told the Soviet news agency Tass that reports of an energy cutoff to Lithuania "are completely groundless."

"It is hard to imagine why the people of Lithuania ... are being punished. What was their crime?"

threat with panic-buying, but stocks were adequate and no rationing was anticipated, Lithuania's energy minister, Leonas Asmantas, said before the shutdown Wednesday.

The Supreme Council refused Wednesday to bow to Gorbachev's ultimatum that it rescind independence-oriented laws, but offered to

— Vytautas Landsbergis, Lithuanian president

He said the Soviet Council of Ministers issued no instructions to stop the flow.

Lithuania is entirely dependent on the Soviet Union for all oil and gas, and petroleum products are the Soviet Union's most profitable export.

Sales of gasoline to Lithuanian motorists have tripled this week as residents reacted to Gorbachev's

pass no more such measures if the Kremlin starts immediate talks.

After the Supreme Council legislature approved an official response to Gorbachev, Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis warned Gorbachev that an embargo of such supplies would hurt other republics as well as Lithuania.

"An economic blockade would influence Latvia, Estonia and the Kali-

ningrad region of Russia," Landsbergis was quoted as telling a news conference.

But anticipating a possible Soviet embargo, the Supreme Council urged Lithuanian factories and consumers to "prepare themselves for spiritual endurance and strict economy on all consumption." It did not announce specific conservation measures.

At the end of two days of sometimes heated debate, the Supreme Council drafted a letter to Gorbachev promising that if talks began before May 1, it would not pass any more measures to implement its March 11 declaration of independence.

That offer represented an effort to compromise with Moscow, but was unlikely to be accepted by the Soviet leadership.

In their resolution — titled "On the Expansion of Relations Between the Republic of Lithuania and the U.S.S.R." — members of the Supreme Council reaffirmed their declaration of independence, and also appealed to Gorbachev not to use violence against Lithuanians or impose the economic sanctions he threatened on Friday.

Grenade explosion kills children on bus

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — A rifle-fired grenade slammed into a schoolbus and exploded during Christian factional fighting Wednesday, killing 11 schoolchildren and at least four other people.

"The driver was burning as the bus hit the sidewalk," mumbled one dazed witness.

"Many of the pupils yelled for help as we tried to extinguish the fire," a soldier said. "At least one teacher also was among the dead along with the driver."

A police spokesman said the bus was hit while crossing into Christian east Beirut in the afternoon. It was bringing children back from school in south Beirut. The grenade ignited the fuel tank.

"It couldn't be determined who fired the rifle grenade," said the spokesman, who cannot be named in line with regulations.

Gen. Michel Aoun's radio station accused gunmen of Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces militia

of firing at the bus.

"Geagea is taking pleasure today at the sight of the burned corpses of innocent children," the broadcast said.

Geagea's command could not be reached by telephone. But the pro-Geagea Voice of Lebanon radio station called the hit "mysterious."

Aoun and Geagea have been involved in a bloody power struggle for control of the 310-square-mile Christian enclave for more than two months. The showdown has killed 892 people and wounded 2,388 since it started Jan. 30. Most victims have been civilians.

The police spokesman said the bus belonged to the Mrajeh Elementary School, a private school in south Beirut.

It was not immediately clear why students from predominantly Christian east Beirut were attending school in south Beirut, a Shiite Moslem stronghold.

U.S. recorded smallest trade deficit in six years

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States in February recorded its smallest trade deficit in more than six years, a \$6.49 billion imbalance that reflected a sharp drop in oil imports, the government reported Wednesday.

The Bush administration, which is counting on strong export growth this year to boost a sluggish domestic economy, hailed the dramatic narrowing of the deficit.

But some private economists cautioned that the improvement could be short-lived.

The Commerce Department said February's trade gap was down 30 percent from a \$9.32 billion January deficit. It was the best trade showing since December 1983, when the deficit was \$5.68 billion.

Imports fell by 7.6 percent, to \$38.12 billion, while U.S. exports

totaled \$31.63 billion, a modest 1 percent decline from an all-time high for exports set in January.

Michael Boskin, President Bush's chief economic adviser, called the trade figure "very good news indeed" while cautioning that "we can't tell yet the extent to which it is a temporary or permanent phenomenon."

Some private economists remained pessimistic, contending that February's good showing came primarily from a huge 20 percent drop in oil imports that's not likely to be sustained.

With U.S. domestic oil production at 25-year lows, many economists look for America's dependence on foreign oil to continue rising, thus holding back improvements in the trade deficit.

A stronger dollar makes U.S. goods less competitive in overseas markets.

Anniversary of 1906 earthquake brings more aftershocks to Northern California

WATSONVILLE, Calif. (AP) — About 75 earthquakes jolted Northern California on Wednesday, the anniversary of the catastrophic Great Quake of 1906. The temblors were aftershocks of the October quake that killed 67, geologists said.

There were no reports of injuries or major damage from Wednesday morning's quakes, the largest measuring up to 5.4 on the Richter scale. Eight others registered at least 3.3.

The temblors on the San Andreas Fault were felt from San Francisco to King City, 150 miles south. The San Andreas also caused the 1906 and Oct. 17 quakes.

"All the memories came back to the kids — this one especially," Darrell Daniels said with his 4-year-old daughter, Eleth, on his lap.

"She won't let me go." The family is living in a mobile home because their home in downtown Watsonville was condemned after the October quake.

Wednesday's aftershocks were centered about four miles east of Watsonville, 60 miles south of San Francisco. October's 7.1-magnitude quake caused major damage to the farming community.

The temblors began at 8:38 a.m. (CDT), shortly after a group of Great Quake survivors gathered in San Francisco to commemorate the 1906 disaster. The strongest quake Wednesday struck at 8:54 a.m. (CDT). In all, about 75 were recorded, according to Pat Jorgensen, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park.

Nine quakes of 3.3 or larger were recorded, the USGS said.

Including the latest temblors, the number of aftershocks from the October quake registering 3.0 or more grew to 115. Of those, 38 had magnitudes of 4.0 or larger.

The University of California-Berkeley Seismographic Station said the strongest quake Wednesday had a preliminary reading of 5.4 on the Richter scale. Allen Lindh of the USGS also issued a preliminary report of 5.4.

The Richter scale is a gauge of energy released by an earthquake, as measured by the ground motion recorded on a seismograph. Every increase of one number, for example from magnitude 5.5 to magnitude 6.5, means that the ground motion is 10 times greater.

"We are considering them aftershocks," said David Oppenheimer, a Geological Survey seismologist. "They occurred in the same location of other aftershocks of Loma Prieta." Loma Prieta was the name given to October's quake.

He said aftershocks from a magnitude 7.1 quake can continue for two years.

"We figured it was all over," said Robert Holson, a former Watsonville resident who was injured Wednesday. "But the power's off, the phone's dead, helicopters are flying all over. It's like it's starting all over again."

Early damage reports from the Watsonville area were light, with some dishes broken and small rockslides on Highway 152 into Watsonville. San Francisco police said many worried residents called, but no damage was reported.

Ron Rutkowski, spokesman for Pacific Gas & Electric Co., said about 11,000 customers in the Watsonville and Santa Cruz area lost power. All service was restored by noon.

Wednesday marked the 84th anniversary of the 1906 quake, which struck at 5:13 a.m. on April 18.

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