

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Saudi Arabia fires OPEC leader

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Sheik Ahmed Zaki Yamani, Saudi Arabia's long-standing petroleum minister and leader of OPEC, has been fired, the official Saudi Press Agency reported in a terse announcement Thursday.

There have been rumors that Yamani was on the outs with the royal family, and King Fahd appeared to undercut him at a critical juncture of the Oct. 6-22 OPEC meeting. But there was no evidence that he was in danger of losing his job.

The surprise announcement issued before dawn in Riyadh said Planning Minister Hisham Nazar had replaced Yamani. Nazar is considered one of the key ministers in this kingdom of 11 million.

Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil-exporter and the leading OPEC member. In recent statements Saudi Arabia

has made it clear that it will demand an increase in its own production quota of 4.35 million barrels a day.

The announcement of Yamani's firing came amid reports within the oil industry that Saudi Arabia was offering a 50 cent-per-barrel discount on its oil prices. The Saudi government denied this Monday.

Yamani, his country's oil minister since 1962, is the architect of the Saudi oil policy and the figurehead in OPEC's rise to prominence worldwide. He was appointed oil minister by King Saud, the present monarch's half-brother.

Yamani, a lawyer by trade, is considered the architect of the 1973 Arab oil embargo that triggered the first major oil price rise and reshaped the world economy.

He remained the key OPEC powerbroker, the top man in the oil cartel's hierarchy.

In Brief

Science Academy opposes Star Wars

WASHINGTON — National Academy of Science members think President Reagan's "Star Wars" program cannot produce an effective defense against Soviet nuclear attack and they believe spending for the program should be cut, according to a survey released Thursday.

The survey was conducted among NAS members in scientific fields relevant to SDI, such as physics and mathematics. The NAS is a private organization chartered by Congress.

Of those responding, 78 percent said prospects are either "extremely poor" or "poor" that a survivable and cost-effective SDI system can be built within the next 25 years. Only 4 percent said the odds of success are better than even.

Soviet leader plans visit to Cuba, Latin America

WASHINGTON — Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev is planning to visit Latin America, apparently in an attempt to penetrate peacefully an area where the United States has long been the dominant influence, administration officials say.

The Soviet Communist Party General Secretary plans to visit Cuba, Moscow's closest ally in the hemisphere, and also is expected to become the first Soviet leader ever to travel to Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, the officials said.

Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze visited Mexico City three weeks ago and laid the groundwork for the Soviet-Mexican summit, according to the officials, who insisted on anonymity.

Other officials, however, said they were concerned that the Shevardnadze

talks and the prospective visit by Gorbachev raises the possibility of an expanded "Soviet foothold" in this hemisphere.

A long-term Soviet goal in Mexico is the opening of consular offices in northern Mexico, which would enable the Soviets to widen their intelligence-gathering capabilities in the southern United States, the officials said.

As far as is known, the only Soviet leader to have visited Latin America was the late Leonid Breznev, who travelled to Cuba for a Communist Party congress in 1975.

But Moscow has been quietly expanding its diplomatic ties in Latin America, increasing the number of countries with which it has formal relations from five to 16 over the past 26 years, according to the State Department.

Customs agents make largest cocaine seizure

MIAMI — U.S. Customs agents inspecting a furniture shipment discovered 4,620 pounds of cocaine, the largest amount ever seized in this country, federal officials said Wednesday.

The cocaine, seized earlier this month, had a wholesale value of more than \$46 million and would be worth at least 10 times that on the street, said Drug Enforcement Administration spokesman Jack Hook.

Customs agents were checking two 4-foot-long containers that held sofas and chairs when they spotted empty, false compartments inside the merchandise, said George Heavey, commissioner of the Southeast Region of the Customs Service.

No arrests have been made and none are expected immediately, but an investigation is continuing, said Diogenes K. Galanos, head of the DEA office in Miami.

Cargo ship MALARGO I brought the shipment from La Guaria, Venezuela, to the Port of Palm Beach. The rusty blue furniture containers were unloaded Oct. 9, and the vessel had left port before agents found the cocaine Oct. 17, Galanos said.

The cocaine was packed in plastic-wrapped bundles stuffed under the container's false floor.

Before discovery of the cache, the largest cocaine seizure in the United States was a March 1982 find of 3,940 pound aboard a Colombia Airlines Cargo jet that traveled from Medellin, Colombia, to Miami.

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