

Military leaders 'take stock' of situation

A meeting between President Gorbachev and military leaders yesterday was also attended by officials from the new republics

PRESIDENT Gorbachev held talks yesterday with senior Soviet military commanders, officials said. A defence ministry spokesman said the meeting was held annually: "It is perfectly natural that we take stock at the end of the year."

The meeting was chaired by the Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, and was also attended by representatives of the general staff and all the military districts of the country.

For the first time, military representatives from the republics also attended the talks, the spokesman said.

The meeting is expected to continue today.

The Russian President, Mr Boris Yeltsin, will meet the country's military leadership this morning to discuss the new commonwealth, the Russian deputy prime minister, Mr Gennady Burbulis, said.

Mr Yeltsin "has already spoken with the Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, after the Minsk document was drawn up," he told a news conference in Moscow, referring to the Sunday meeting in the capital of Byelarus.

The defence minister "showed understanding, and in particular approved article six of the agreement, which provides that the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States retain, under a unified command, a common strategic space", Mr Burbulis said.

Russian leaders said the defence minister has expressed support "in principle" for a new Slavic commonwealth after being assured that control of the Soviet military would remain under the unified command of the three commonwealth republics.

The Russians reiterated the Soviet Union was dead and said Mr Gorbachev could either support the new commonwealth or try to prevent the new alliance.

They said they were too busy developing their new union to worry about what to do with Mr Gorbachev and his crumbling central government, but made it clear the Soviet president no longer had a country to govern.

"What we are dealing with is not a dissolution of the union," a Russian republic politician, Mr Sergei Shakhrai, said, "not a decision to dissolve the union, but just coming to grips with what already is a reality." — (AFP, UPI)

Soviet embassy status 'unchanged'

DUBLIN — The status of the Soviet embassy has not yet changed following the proclamation of a commonwealth of independence states of Russia, Ukraine and Byelarus (formerly Byelorussia), according to an embassy official, Joe Carroll reports.

The chargé d'affaires, Mr Victor Bolus, told *The Irish Times* that "legally we are still the same embassy as we used to be." He pointed out that the embassy represents the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, that is it represents the union as well as the republics.

Kazakhstan drops 'Soviet, socialist'

MOSCOW — The parliament of Kazakhstan decided yesterday to drop the words "Soviet and socialist" from the central Asian republic's title and rename it the Kazakh republic, at the request of the republic's president, Tass said.

The name change had not been on the agenda for the parliamentary session in Alma Ata, but was introduced at the request of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who sent in a written appeal. — (AFP)

De Klerk cancels Moscow trip

PRETORIA — President Frederik de Klerk has cancelled a planned trip to Moscow on Friday because of the uncertain political situation in the Soviet Union, the South African foreign minister, Mr Pik Botha, confirmed. — (AFP)

More EC aid for Soviet cities

THE EC decided yesterday to allocate food aid worth 250 million European Currency Units (ECU's) to Moscow and St Petersburg to help the two Russian cities through the winter, a spokesman said.

EC finance ministers will meet in Brussels to discuss how to finance the aid, which will take the form of a grant, he said. It is in addition to 1.9 billion ECU's in existing EC aid pledges to the Soviet Union. — (AFP)