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UKP653' EPA103*

271641 :FALKLANDS:

BY ROBERT POWELL

BUENOS AIRES, MARCH 27, REUTER -- ARGENTINA HAS DISPATCHED A WARSHIP TO THE BRITISH-ADMINISTERED SOUTH ATLANTIC ISLAND OF SOUTH GEORGIA TO PROTECT A PARTY OF ARGENTINES WHO LANDED ON THE DISPUTED TERRITORY LAST WEEK.

ARGENTINE FOREIGN MINISTER NICANOR COSTA MENDEZ TOLD REPORTERS LAST NIGHT THAT THE ARGENTINE ANTARCTIC PATROL SHIP BAHIA PARAISO WAS STANDING BY THE MOUNTAINOUS SNOW-CAPPED ISLAND TO PROTECT THE GROUP, A PARTY OF SCRAP MERCHANTS FROM BUENOS AIRES.

BRITAIN, WHICH ADMINISTERS SOUTH GEORGIA AS A DEPENDENCY OF THE DISPUTED FALKLAND ISLANDS, SAYS THE SCRAP MERCHANTS LANDED ILLEGALLY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN LONDON SAID THE ICE PATROL VESSEL ENDURANCE WAS LYING OFF THE ISLAND READY TO INTERVENE IF NECESSARY.

THE BUENOS AIRES DAILY CLARIN QUOTED NAVAL SOURCES TODAY AS SAYING TWO ARGENTINE MISSILE-CARRYING CORVETTES, DRUMMOND AND GRAINVILLE, HAD ALSO BEEN DISPATCHED TO THE AREA AND ADDED THAT THERE WAS UNUSUAL ACTIVITY AT THE NAVAL BASES OF MAR DEL PLATA AND PUERTO BELGRANO.

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271644 :FALKLANDS 2 BUENOS AIRES:

MR COSTA MENDEZ DESCRIBED THE INCIDENT OVER SOUTH GEORGIA AS +GRAVE AND SERIOUS+ AND FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCES SAID HE WAS DUE TO MEET BRITISH AMBASSADOR ANTHONY WILLIAMS LATER TODAY TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE.

ARGENTINA CLAIMS SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE FALKLAND (MALVINAS) ISLANDS, SOUTH GEORGIA AND OTHER ISLANDS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC, WHICH BRITAIN HAS OCCUPIED SINCE 1833.

A BRITISH EMBASSY SPOKESMAN SAID TODAY +THE MAIN THING IS TO KEEP TALKING AND FIND A SOLUTION RATHER THAN FIGHT ABOUT IT.+

MR COSTA MENDEZ HAS HARDENED ARGENTINA'S STANCE ON THE FALKLAND ISSUE SINCE BECOMING FOREIGN MINISTER LAST DECEMBER AND HAS PRESSED BRITAIN TO SPEED UP NEGOTIATIONS FOR THEIR TRANSFER TO ARGENTINA.

THE PRESENT INCIDENT BEGAN WHEN A PARTY OF ARGENTINES LANDED ON SOUTH GEORGIA, 2,000 KM (1,200 MILES) EAST OF THE SOUTHERN TIP OF SOUTH AMERICA ON MARCH 19, TO DISMANTLE A DISUSED WHALING STATION AT LEITH HARBOUR.

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THE FOREIGN OFFICE IN LONDON ISSUED A PROTEST SAYING THE
ARGENTINES HAD FAILED TO UNDERGO IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES AT THE
TINY BRITISH SETTLEMENT OF GRYTVIKEN AND HAD ILLEGALLY HOISTED
AN ARGENTINE FLAG.

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271647 :FALKLANDS 3 BUENOS AIRES:

OFFICIAL SOURCES IN THE FALKLAND ISLANDS ESTIMATED THE
ARGENTINA LANDING PARTY AT BETWEEN SIX AND 10 PEOPLE:

HOWEVER, THE ARGENTINA SCRAP COMPANY, GEORGIA DEL SUR S. A.,
WHICH HAS A CONTRACT TO DISMANTLE THE WHALING STATION WITH THE
BRITISH OWNERS, CHRISTIAN SALVESEN LTD, ISSUED A STATEMENT
YESTERDAY SAYING IT HAD LANDED 39 MEN ON THE ISLAND.

A SPOKESMAN FOR THE COMPANY TOLD REUTERS THEY WOULD REMAIN
THERE UNTIL THE DISMANTLING OF THE WHALING STATION WAS
COMPLETED, BUT HE DECLINED TO SAY HOW LONG THIS WOULD TAKE.

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT SAID LAST TUESDAY THAT IT WAS MAKING
ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ARGENTINES' EARLY DEPARTURE.

==REUTER RP/RCW/ADB