

## New treatment puts children's diarrhoea on the run

AFP, Paris

Researchers in the United States say they have identified a drug that is effective against rotavirus, a diarrhoea-inducing bug that kills around half a million children a year.

They tested nitazoxanide -- a drug initially formulated to combat a different intestinal microbe -- among 50 children admitted to Cairo University Children's Hospital in Egypt.

The group were randomly given either nitazoxanide or a harmless look-alike, a placebo, twice a day for three days.

Children in the placebo group took 75 hours of recovery; in the nitazoxanide group, this took 31 hours. Both groups were treated with the conventional response of oral rehydration and salts.

Nitazoxanide, made by Romark Laboratories and commercialised under the brand name of Alinia, was licensed in 2002 against infection by two kinds of protozoa parasites -- Cryptosporidium parvum and Giardia lamblia.

## Fatah gunmen torch Hamas offices

REUTERS, Ramallah

Fatah gunmen torched Hamas offices yesterday as violence escalated between followers of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and rival Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh.

Members of Abbas's Fatah movement set fire to two Hamas offices in the towns of Salfit and Qalqilya in the West Bank, witnesses said. Fatah gunmen also fired at a facility belonging to Hamas in the city of Nablus.

Nobody was hurt in the incidents overnight, which followed an arson attack by Fatah gunmen on Haniyeh's office at the Palestinian parliamentary building in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Monday evening.

Hamas and Abbas have been locked in an intensifying power struggle since the Islamists took control of the government in March after trouncing Fatah in

parliamentary elections.

Tension has exploded repeatedly in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas has its main powerbase, and gun battles have killed at least 20 Palestinians.

The violence has spilled into the West Bank, Fatah's stronghold, in the form of a series of arson and shooting attacks against Hamas offices. Fatah called it revenge for a Hamas assault on a security headquarters in Gaza.

"They (Hamas) will see," a gunman, who declined to give his name, said between firing volleys of shots into the air outside Haniyeh's Ramallah office.

"We will target them here in the West Bank if they keep targeting Fatah and our security services in Gaza," he said.

In the Monday night attack on the parliament building in Ramallah, gunmen set fire to Haniyeh's office, tossed furniture

out of windows and fired shots inside the complex.

It was a symbolic attack on Haniyeh, who is unable to visit Ramallah due to Israeli travel bans and so holds court in Gaza.

Tension has been inflamed by a referendum that Abbas has called for July 26 on his vision of a Palestinian state side-by-side with Israel.

Hamas, which seeks to destroy the Jewish state, has labelled the referendum a coup attempt.

Support for Abbas's position in the referendum has dropped steeply in recent days, with 61 percent of Palestinians saying they will support a two-state plan in the July vote compared with 77 percent a week ago, a Palestinian survey found.

Abbas and Haniyeh were expected to meet on Tuesday evening to attempt to resolve their disagreements over the referendum.



PHOTO: AFP  
Medics treat a wounded Palestinian girl at a hospital in Gaza City following an Israeli air raid yesterday. Eleven people, including two militants and two children, were killed in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday in this year's deadliest air strike by the Israeli military on the Palestinian territory.

## Saddam trial judge declares last day of defence testimony

AFP, Baghdad

The judge in the trial of ousted Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and seven co-defendants on crimes against humanity declared that Tuesday would be the last day of defence witness testimony.

The surprise announcement came a day after a stormy trial session in which defence lawyers said they were not being given enough time to prepare the case and repeated claims of difficulties in summoning witnesses.

"Our witnesses have been intimidated -- four of our witnesses were assaulted and arrested," said US attorney Curtis Doebbler, one of Saddam's lawyers. "We ask that the trial be stopped and you give us additional time to prepare."

Instead, Judge Rauf Abdel Rahman read out confessions from the defence's key witnesses who were arrested following their testi-

monies two weeks ago.

In their confessions the witnesses had recanted their testimony and claimed they had been paid off or coerced by the defence, according to the presiding judge.

The defence was not given a chance to react to these confessions on Tuesday and the trial went straight into further witness testimony from one of Saddam's former bodyguards.

"I want to tell the defence attorneys that we are not going to listen to their endless rhetoric," the judge said. "The session is to present their witnesses. They have to choose one of the options -- either rhetoric or witnesses."

Abdel-Rahman also announced that Saddam's half-brother, former head of intelligence Barzan al-Tikriti, would not attend the session following his expulsion from the court Monday.

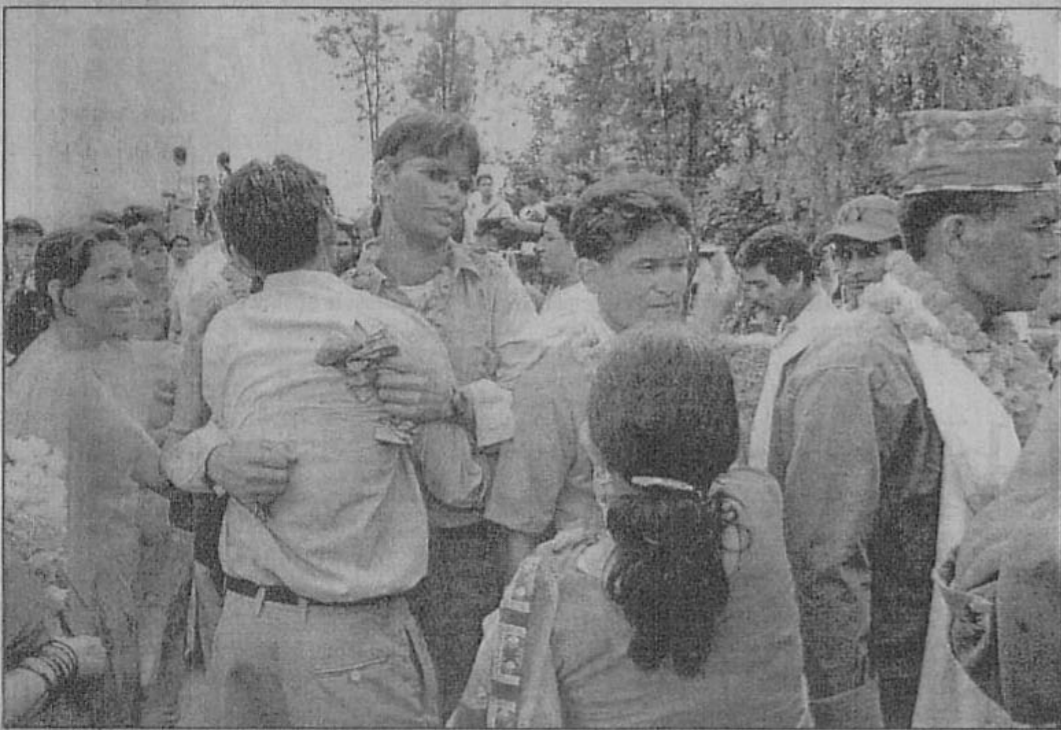


PHOTO: AFP  
A family member hugs a Maoist student covered with vermilion upon his release from Nakkhu jail near Kathmandu yesterday. The Maoists said that the government has agreed to release over 350 prisoners across the country in a bid to kick-start the high level second round of peace talks between government and Maoist rebels.

## Nepal frees 190 jailed Maoist rebels

AP, AFP, Katmandu

Nepal freed 190 jailed communist rebels yesterday after withdrawing terrorism cases against them as part of efforts to forge peace with the insurgents, officials said.

Home Ministry spokesman Daman Prasad Neupane said they were freed from jails in nine different cities and towns across this Himalayan nation on Tuesday following government announcement a day earlier that anyone jailed under a tough anti-terrorism law imposed by the previous government of King Gyanendra would be freed.

Maoist prisoners detained under a scrapped anti-terror law walked free from jails in Nepal's capital yesterday, a prisons official said.

The new government and Maoist rebels have been observing a ceasefire for more than a month after King Gyanendra was forced to

end 14 months of widely criticized direct rule in April.

"We have been released due to the people's struggle," said Himlal Sharma, a former general secretary of a Maoist-affiliated student union group.

Hundreds of well wishers and family members met the prisoners, who raised their fists in a communist salute and chanted Maoist slogans as they were released Tuesday afternoon.

They were greeted with flower garlands and sprinkled with red celebratory powder.

Sharma had been held for the past two years in Nakkhu jail in the capital under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance (TADO).

"Sixty-one from Nakkhu jail and eight from the central jail were released Tuesday," said Deepak Joshi, director general of the department of prisons.

## STATEMENT ON IRAN'S NUKES

# China, Russia reject joining West

AFP, Vienna

China and Russia have rejected joining the West in a joint statement urging Iran to halt uranium enrichment, in diplomatic manoeuvring yesterday ahead of a debate at the UN nuclear watchdog.

Diplomats played down the significance of this however, as China and Russia have already joined Britain, France, Germany and the United States in a ministerial agreement on June 1 calling on Iran to halt enrichment and join in talks on guaranteeing it will not make nuclear weapons.

"The effort didn't work to do a joint statement in Vienna," a senior European diplomat told AFP.

But the diplomat said the six world powers "have never man-

aged to get an EU-3 (Britain, France and Germany) plus three statement in Vienna," at meetings of the watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which oversees cooperation by nations with the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

A vigorous debate on Iran but no resolution is expected at this week's IAEA meeting of its 35-nation board of governors, with the Iranian issue expected to come up Wednesday or Thursday.

The EU-3 are expected to issue a statement of their own, with each of the six countries that have made the offer to Iran issuing individual statements.

Iranian allies Russia and China are both reluctant to threaten sanctions against Iran for nuclear

work, which the United States says show that Tehran wants to develop atomic weapons.

But the two nations closed ranks with the three European Union powers plus the United States in offering Iran talks on trade, security and technology benefits if it would suspend uranium enrichment, which makes nuclear reactor fuel but also atom bomb material.

Iran is currently examining the benefits package and is expected to respond by the end of the month.

"This has no influence on the overall situation," a Western diplomat said, although the developments in Vienna, although this diplomat and others admitted that Iran would try to exploit any division, perceived or real, among the world powers.

## More Kashmir protests against Indian forces

### Five rebels killed

AFP, Srinagar

Five rebels were killed yesterday, the Indian army said, as violence continued in Kashmir including clashes between security forces and villagers over the alleged desecration of a mosque.

Army spokesman Hemant Junaja said two rebels were killed along the de facto border dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Three others were shot dead in encounters in Pampore, near the summer capital Srinagar, and in the northern district of Kupwara.

Kashmir is in the grip of a separatist insurgency against New Delhi's rule that has left more than 44,000 people dead since 1989 by

official count. India says Pakistan arms the rebels, a charge denied by Islamabad.

Violence has continued despite a peace process between the two countries begun in January 2004 and as New Delhi moves to hold talks with moderate separatist leaders and political parties.

On Tuesday villagers in Kupwara held more protests that included clashes with police over a charge that security forces desecrated a mosque at the weekend during a search for militants.

Two protesters have been killed during five days of clashes with police, the latest a 16-year-old student who died on Monday.

Witnesses and police said villagers held noisy anti-government demonstrations throughout the

night and all day Tuesday despite an order by the government closing schools.

The army has denied any wrongdoing during the raid on the mosque. "It is a false and malicious and propaganda," Junaja said.

The region's main separatist faction, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, said security forces inflamed the issue by cracking down on the protesters.

"The authorities and the (security) forces are continuously taking steps to further worsen the situation," the group said in a statement.

"It is being done with an aim to create hurdles in the ongoing dialogue process," it said, referring to talks with New Delhi that began in September.

## FUEL PRICE HIKE

# Left parties take to Delhi streets

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Top leaders of India's Left parties, which provide crucial outside support to the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, yesterday courted arrest here and their trade unions enforced a general strike in the southern state of Kerala pressing for rollback of fuel price hike.

CPI (M) General Secretary Prakash Karat, his CPI counterpart AB Bardhan, Revolutionary Socialist Party leader Abani Roy and Forward Bloc's Debabrata Biswas were arrested for violating orders after leading a major demonstration against fuel price hike at Jantar Mantar in downtown Delhi.

Addressing a joint meeting of activists of Left parties, the Left leaders termed as "unjustifiable" the hike in prices of diesel and petrol and asked the government to reduce customs and excise

duties on fuel rather than passing the burden of international crude price hike on commoners.

They said had the government listened to the Left's suggestion for alternative ways to cushion the impact of international fuel price rise, the burden would not have come on the commoners.

In Kerala, ruled by the Left parties which came to power in assembly elections last month, a dawn-to-dusk general strike called by pro-Left trade unions against the hike in the price of petrol and diesel paralysed normal life. The strike is being held as part of the Left trade unions' nationwide agitation against the hike.

The strike was almost like a 'bandh' with shops and business establishments remained closed in all parts of the state and vehicles kept off the roads as the Private Bus Operators' Federation and transport unions joined the strike.



PHOTO: AFP  
Indian activists of the ruling Congress Party burn an effigy of the Chief Minister of West Bengal Buddhadev Bhattacharya as they demand a reduction of the state taxes on fuel prices in Kolkata yesterday. A sharp hike in Indian fuel prices sparked uproar against the government as both its communist allies and the main opposition Hindu nationalist party vowed nationwide protests against the ruling coalition.

## Humans must go into space: Hawking

AP, Hong Kong

The survival of the human race depends on its ability to find new homes elsewhere in the universe because there's an increasing risk that a disaster will destroy the Earth, world-renowned scientist Stephen Hawking said yesterday.

The British astrophysicist told a news conference in Hong Kong that humans could have a permanent base on the moon in 20 years and a colony on Mars in the next 40 years.

"We won't find anywhere as nice as Earth unless we go to another star system," added Hawking, who arrived to a rock star's welcome Monday. Tickets for his lecture planned for Wednesday were sold out.

He added that if humans can avoid killing themselves in the next 100 years, they should have space settlements that can continue without support from Earth.

"It is important for the human race to spread out into space for the survival of the species," Hawking said. "Life on Earth is at the ever-increasing risk of being wiped out by a disaster, such as sudden global warming, nuclear war, a genetically engineered virus or other dangers we have not yet thought of."



PHOTO: AP  
Renowned astrophysicist Stephen Hawking from the University of Cambridge, front, is accompanied by his nurse during a visit at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in Hong Kong Tuesday.

## S Afghanistan tense after Taliban strikes

AFP, AP, Kandahar

Southern Afghanistan remained tense yesterday after 37 Taliban fighters were said to have been killed in major strikes by Afghan and coalition troops.

Taliban militants killed a district intelligence chief in a drive-by shooting in southern Afghanistan, a police official said Tuesday.

Zulmai Khan was driving home from his office in the Ghazni provincial district of Waghuz on Monday when two men on motorcycles shot him to death, provincial police chief Thafir Khan said.

"According to our information, the Taliban carried out this attack," the provincial police chief told The Associated Press.

Taliban militants have been stepping up attacks against Afghan officials and US-led coalition forces in a bid to derail American-led reconstruction efforts in this Central Asian nation.

Fifteen militants were killed when Afghan security forces backed by the US-led coalition

attacked their hideout in the southern province of Uruzgan on Sunday, General Rahmatullah Raufi said.

The dead included a man "most likely" to be a brother-in-law of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, Raufi said, speaking on Monday.

Twelve other Taliban were killed the same day in neighbouring Kandahar province when coalition warplanes bombed a building in which militants were taking refuge, Raufi said.

Ten Taliban were also believed to have been killed in a separate battle Sunday in Helmand province's Sangin district, Raufi said.

"We believe that 10 Taliban might have been killed but their bodies were not seen," he said. Taliban sometimes take the bodies of their fallen comrades with them after battle.

Two Afghan civilians were also killed and nine others including two children were wounded in a bomb attack Monday in southeastern Paktia province in an attack blamed on Taliban insurgents.

## Suicides highlight needs for Guantanamo closure

### Says UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

AFP, Geneva

The suicide of three inmates at the US "war on terror" detention centre at Guantanamo Bay came as little surprise and highlights the need to shut down the controversial facility, the United Nations' human rights office said Tuesday.

"It was a very, very tragic event. It was not completely unexpected that this would happen," said Jose Diaz, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The deaths, amid a prisoner hunger strike, were described by US officials as the first successful suicides after repeated attempts at the camp, which is located in a US military toehold in Cuba.

International human rights groups, UN watchdogs and many foreign governments have repeatedly criticised the United States for holding the vast majority of the around 450 detainees in a "legal black hole" since Guantanamo was set up in 2002.

Criticism of the prison surged after guards on Saturday found three inmates -- two Saudis and a Yemeni -- hanged from the ceilings of their maximum security cells.

"The focus on attention should be on closing Guantanamo. Practically everyone agrees on this," Diaz told reporters.

"It would seem, judging from statements coming from the US administration, that some in the US administration also believe who this place should be closed," he added.

On Sunday Arlen Specter, a senior senator from President George W. Bush's Republican party joined other critics of the policy of prolonged detentions at Guantanamo.

Washington does not acknowledge that the detainees are prisoners of war or entitled to the full protection of the Geneva Conventions.

Only a handful of the suspected al-Qaeda members and Taliban fighters held there have been charged with terrorist crimes, but Washington says many of the other inmates are highly dangerous.

"What we need to do now is reflect collectively on how to facilitate the process of closing down Guantanamo and what's going to be done with the people who are being held there in those conditions," said Diaz.