

BRIEFLY

Iraq uses chemical arms: Iran:

Iran's UN Ambassador said on Saturday that Iraq was using chemical weapons against rebels in both northern and southern Iraq. Reuter reports from Washington.

The Ambassador Kamal Kharrazi, said in a television interview that the United Nations should be concerned...with chemical weapons which are used these days, right now, against Kurds in the north and the people who are in the south.

When asked if he had evidence that Iraq was using the chemical weapons, the Ambassador replied, yes, they are, because among the refugees in Iran, as well as the southern part of Iraq, there have been many cases that they had been injured by chemical weapons.

Panama-Soviet ties set up:

Panama and the Soviet Union have agreed to establish diplomatic relations, the Panamanian Foreign Ministry announced Saturday in Panama city, reports AFP.

A ministry statement said the Panamanian and Soviet Ambassadors to the United Nations, Cesar Pereira and Yuri Vorontsov, signed an agreement on the establishment of relations Friday at UN Headquarters in New York.

It said the accord called first for the exchange of consular delegations between the two capitals to be followed by the appointment of Ambassadors at an unspecified future date.

500 refugees leave Kuwait:

More than 500 refugees from Iraq were evacuated from northern Kuwait Saturday and put on flights to Egypt. AP reports from Abdaly.

The refugees, mostly Egyptians, were the first group to be evacuated from the Red Crescent refugee camp in this Kuwaiti town near the Iraqi border.

About 1,100 refugees remain at the camp, operated by the main Muslim humanitarian organization, the equivalent of the Red Cross. The remaining refugees are mostly Iraqis or nomadic Bedouins who are stateless. At another camp a little farther north, in Kuwaiti territory, more than 7,000 refugees are being cared for by the US Army.

Cost for Aoun's departure:

Lebanese President Elias Hrawi says that the departure from Lebanon of General Michael Aoun is linked to the reimbursement of some 30 million dollars claimed by the Lebanese government, AFP reports from Paris.

Speaking on French television Saturday, Hrawi said that the first thing (Gen. Aoun) must do...is to repay the money he transferred to France under his name and the name of his wife.

He said that he had provided the French Ambassador with documents proving the money had been transferred.

Bombs wreck US bank in Athens:

Powerful bombs wrecked two offices of the US Citibank in Athens early Sunday but caused no injuries, police said in Athens, reports Reuter.

They said time-bombs were placed outside the offices in the city centre and blew up at the same time.

No one has claimed responsibility but police said the extreme-left November 17 guerilla group were probably the culprits.

Agents of foreigners commit treason: Hammadi

Thousands of Iraqis massacred in Kirkuk

NICOSIA, Mar 31: Kurdish rebels against President Saddam Hussein accused his army of killing thousands of people while his new Prime Minister speaking as though the unrest was over promised Iraqis a future of security and stability, law and democracy, reports Reuter.

After a month of rebellion which flared after Iraq's routed army fled occupied Kuwait at the end of the six-week Gulf war, rebels said savage fighting continued for the oil centre of Kirkuk and other areas of northern Iraq.

"The casualty toll is unbelievable, enormous," said a spokesman for the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). "The battles have widened. They are

very ferocious." Iraqi troops, he said "are annihilating all the Kurds who fall into their hands. Thousands of civilians in Kirkuk have been killed or wounded by air raids and artillery...."

Iraqi official media said on Saturday that anti-Saddam forces had committed murder, rape and looting in Tamim province, which includes Kirkuk. It blamed the crimes on "scoundrels" who entered Iraq from abroad.

Prime Minister Saadoun Hammadi told the nation in a radio and television broadcast: "peace and security is the first task of the state...."

"The government should exert maximum effort to con-

solidate security and maintain peace throughout the country in a neutral manner and providing justice and equality for all.

"Iraq will remain united, independent and free," Hammadi added. "It will enjoy security and stability and its economy will prosper while law and democracy will flourish."

He noted that Allied air attacks during the six-week Gulf war caused "considerable damage."

Thereafter, Hammadi said, "agents of the foreigners... committed high treason, stabbing their country in the back at a critical time and inflicting on the country material and moral damage no less than the

damage caused by the aggression itself."

By "foreigners" Hammadi apparently meant Iraqis. Saddam's government has frequently accused Tehran of aiding rebels, especially Shi'ite Muslims in the south whose post-war uprising now appears to have been crushed. Iran denies the charges, echoed in Cairo on Saturday by the Iraqi League conference since the end of the Gulf war.

Saad Kasem Al-Hammoudi, speaking after a low-key meeting in which references to Iraq and its delegate were scrupulously avoided, accused other Arab countries of not helping Baghdad repel "foreign invaders".

He said Israel and a neighbouring state had helped the Kurds and Shi'ites and complained that other Arab States had done nothing to prevent post-war occupation of part of Southern Iraq by Allied coalition forces.

More than 500 Egyptian guest-workers who fled to the Allied occupied area to escape the disturbances were transferred to Kuwait on Saturday then flown to Cairo aboard two airliners.

The International Organisation for Migration, a UN body, is planning other mercy flights for thousands more third country nationals in Squalid Refugee camps along the Iraq-Kuwait border.

Iraqi radio reported on Saturday night that Saddam's Revolution Command Council had declared an amnesty for members of the armed forces who "return to the national ranks in the northern part of the country."

Kurdish rebels have reported the defection to their side during recent fighting of large numbers of Iraqi troops.

Hammadi, a Baath Party loyalist who has served in Iraq cabinets since 1968, praised Saddam as "the honest struggler who stood firm for the sake of principles."

"He has given this leadership courage, dedication and cohesion with the people," Hammadi said.

NICOSIA, Mar 31: Iraq will pardon army deserters in the north — the scene of fierce fighting between loyalist troops and Kurdish rebels — if they return to their units, the Iraqi News Agency INA reported Saturday.

The agency, monitored in Cyprus, said the decision had been taken by the revolutionary command council, Iraq's highest body.

Returning deserters who brought their weapons with them would be honoured, the agency said.

Kurdish groups have reported army soldiers defecting to their ranks rpt ranks.

AP form Dohuk adds: Iraqi troops trying to crush a Kurdish rebellion shelled the outskirts of this northern provincial capital as tens of thousands of civilians fled, some on foot and others in cars crammed with belongings.

One Kurdish rebel leader said Saturday that government forces were concentrating just north of Mosul, the largest city in northern Iraq, and there were reports Saturday of fighting in the area.

Prime Minister Saadoun Hammadi said the government was succeeding in putting down rebellions in the north and south. He promised a return to "democratic life" in Iraq.

The official Iraqi News Agency also reported that the ruling Revolutionary Command Council declared an amnesty for soldiers who return to their posts in the north. Shi'ite rebels in the south and Kurdish rebels in the north have both said thousands of Iraqi soldiers have defected to their side.

Iraqi government newspapers accused the rebels of murder and looting in the northern oil centre of Kirkuk, which the government claimed to have recaptured on Thursday.

Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani, who arrived in Dohuk after a tour of the mountainous Kurdish region, urged a crowd of several hundred Kurds to stay and fight any government attack.

But people were streaming out of the city Saturday, located 48 kilometres (30 miles) south of the Turkish border, as government artillery shells thumped into surrounding fields.

President Saddam Hussein's forces last week launched a major offensive against the Kurdish rebels. The rebels had captured nearly all their historic homeland in northeastern Iraq following the allied rout of Saddam's army in Kuwait last month.



SALMAN (Iraq): Picture of the Iraqi Military Airport of Salman 30 Mar in the south east of Iraq, which was destroyed by the French Airforce and which is now occupied by the US Army. — AFP photo

Lankan troops kill 100 Tigers

COLOMBO, Mar 31: Government aircraft and ground forces killed about 100 Tamil Tigers after the rebels violated a cease-fire and ambushed a patrol in the battle-plagued Mannar district, military officials said Sunday, reports AP.

The officials of the Joint Operations Command said 34 soldiers were injured in the fighting Saturday. There was no statement from the Tigers, who have been fighting since 1983 for a separate Tamil homeland in Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lanka.

The officials, who cannot be identified under briefing rules, said the patrol was ambushed near Veepankulam, a village 20 kilometers (13 miles) southwest of Mannar town. The district capital is 217 kilometers (136 miles) north of Colombo.

Helicopters and fixed-wing ground attack aircraft were called in to support the troops fighting off the ambush, the officials said.

It was the second alleged rebel violation of a three-day weekend truce to permit 35,000 children to take scholarship exams in the northern and western provinces.

On Friday, the military claimed the Tigers killed an army sergeant in a garrison in the northern Vavuniya district. Three rebels died in the attack.

Saturday's battle was a few kilometers southeast of two army camps that were the site of a furious three-day fight two weeks ago. The military claimed 300 rebels and 28 soldiers were killed, but the Tigers denied they lost that many men.

Most Americans favour relaxed life

NEW YORK, Mar 31: A poll conducted by Time magazine and cable News Network (CNN) released on Saturday indicated that most Americans are tired of tressness and materialism and are rediscovering home life and basic values, reports Reuter.

Of 500 adults surveyed, 69 per cent said they would like to slow down and live a more relaxed life, in contrast to only 19 per cent who say they would like a more exciting, faster-paced life.

Asked about priorities, 89 per cent of those surveyed said it was more important to spend time with their families and 56 per cent felt strongly about finding time for personal interests and hobbies.

Only 13 per cent saw importance in keeping up with fashions and trends and just seven per cent said it was worth shopping for status-symbol products.

Shekhar's secret parleys with Sikh separatists

CHANDIGARH, Mar 31: Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar disclosed Sunday he had met three groups of Sikh militants to discuss the separatist insurgency which has racked Punjab state for eight years, reports AP.

Chandra Shekhar did not reveal whom he met or when, but said his initiative was broken off when his 4-month-old government resigned March 6.

He had earlier said he was ready to meet the outlawed militants, but he had kept secret the fact that he had already held such meetings.

The contact apparently was facilitated by Samranjit Singh Mann, a Sikh politician with links to the militants whom the Prime Minister met last December.

"Since I do not know the whereabouts of the militants I left it to Mann to bring them forward. Since then, I have talked to three groups of militants, and they seemed to be constructive in approach," he said.

Though his efforts were interrupted by political events, "I'm working on it," he said.

Militants have killed nearly 1,000 people so far this year in what the government describes as terrorist actions. About 500 militants have died in battles with police or by rival groups.

The government has been debating whether to allow Punjab to vote in national elections in two months when

most of India will choose a new Parliament.

Opponents say the campaigning could become violent and that the militants could intimidate voters to deny a fair election. Advocates say it would help restore normal life and bring the troubled state back into the Indian mainstream.

Chandra Shekhar said the outgoing government "is keen to hold elections," but would decide on the basis of the security situation.

"I have seen that the psychology of the people of Punjab has changed and they want

peace," he said at a news conference.

Punjab has been under direct federal rule since 1987, when the state legislature was dismissed.

The militants seek independence from India for their wealthy agricultural state. Where Sikhs are narrowly in the majority. Nationwide, Sikhs are 2 per cent of India's 844 million people.

Meanwhile, a meeting of prominent Muslim leaders from across the country will be held here on April 2 to take stock of the current political situation in the country, reports PTL.

Talking to newsmen on Sunday, Javed Habib, a member of the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee, said the meeting, among other things, would also discuss the role of the Muslim leaders in the forthcoming elections.

The meeting would also assess the performance of different political parties in the country before deciding to extend support to any of them, Habib said.

He said the main emphasis would be on the attitude of the political parties of the major national issues including the problems confronting the minorities.

Prominent, among those, who would attend the meeting are SS Owasli, Zafaryab Jilani, M Latif, Yasin Akhtar Misbahi and Ahmad Bukhari.



500 foreigners leave Kuwait for home

KUWAIT, Mar 31: More than 500 foreigners, fleeing post-Gulf war strife in Iraq, left a squalid refugee camp in Kuwait on Saturday to return to their countries, reports Reuter.

They took off for Cairo aboard two airliners, one of them the Kuwait Airways Jumbo jet used by the Emir, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, for his foreign trips.

The exodus was coordinated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), a United Nations body.

Shekhar protests US envoy's comment on Kashmir

CHANDIGARH, Mar 31: Indian Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar, Sunday described as "irresponsible" the statement of the US Ambassador to Pakistan that Kashmir was an international issue, reports PTL.

Speaking at a 'Meet the press' programme at the Chandigarh Press Club here, the Prime Minister said he would go by the stand taken by the State Department of the USA that Kashmir was an issue between India and Pakistan and it has to be negotiated under the Simla Agreement.

"Both the USA and the UK do not support referendum on Kashmir", Chandra Shekhar said.

E. Europe's switch to democracy completed

Albanians go to polls, end 50 years of one-party rule

TIRANA, Mar 31: Communist Albania went to the polls Sunday for the country's first multi-party elections in nearly 50 years of one-party rule, reports Reuter.

Polling stations opened at 6 A.M. (0400 GMT) across the tiny Balkan state of 3.3 million people, which has been ruled by the (Communist) Party of Labour (PLA) since World War two.

The elections to a 250-seat Parliament are being contested by more than 1,000 candidates from 11 political parties, including five opposition parties founded after Communist President Ramiz Alia lifted a ban on opposition last December.

Another report says: Albania completes Eastern Europe's switch to democracy in multi-party elections Sunday which the main opposition

democratic party say will oust communists from power after nearly 50 years of monopoly rule.

On the eve of the vote, more than 250 political prisoners walked free from jail under an amnesty which appeared designed to show international observers that the small Balkan country had broken fully with its Stalinist past.

About 1.9 million Albanians were eligible to vote to elect a 250-seat people's assembly as Europe's last Marxist outpost savoured democracy as enjoyed a year ago by the rest of Eastern Europe's former communist-ruled countries.

"It's fantastic to be able to vote the way I think, knowing I'll be voting for the first pluralist parliament in a democratic Albania," said Hasa Nuri, a 36-year-old engineer and

Democratic Party supporter in the industrial town of Elbasan. Polls open at six A.M. (0400 GMT) and close at eight P.M. (1800 GMT), with final results expected on Tuesday.

The democrats were formed just four months ago after Communist President Ramiz Alia, under pressure from student-led protests, lifted a ban on political pluralism enforced with a rod of iron by his late Stalinist predecessor Enver Hoxha.

Democratic leaders forecast they would win an absolute majority if voting was free and fair, ousting the Communist Party of Labour in its first real test of public opinion since Hoxha took power in 1944.

More than 1,000 candidates from 11 political parties and organisations were standing, with the main contest between the democrats,

Off the Record

It's not easy being a President: Aquino

MANILA: Philippine President Corason Aquino said it was not easy being a President and having critics who thought they knew how to run the country better, reports Reuter.

Aquino, charged with mismanaging the economy by opposition group said she was confident Filipinos would see through the motives of politicians and journalists who attacked her.

"I read in newspapers and hear on television these wise people who do nothing but criticise anything that anyone in my government does," Aquino said in her twice-weekly newspaper column in the Manila tabloid People's Journal.

"It is not easy being a President," she said.

"But the hardest thing is you cannot please all the people who want to give you advice on how to run the government, especially... the 'instant economic experts'."

A political novice when she took power in a 1986 popular revolt that ended Ferdinand Marcos's 20-year rule, Aquino said the nation would judge her critics in the 1992 presidential elections.

"I am confident the people will not waste our newly-won freedom and democracy on candidates who think only of their own selfish interests."

Aquino has said she will not seek re-election when her current term runs out in June next year.



Kid enkindles the hope

BANGALORE: India's first test tube baby, five-year-old Harsha Chawda, yesterday inaugurated the 'Hope in Fertility Clinic', a speciality hospital for treatment of infertility here, reports PTL.

Seven other babies born because of medically assisted reproductive technology were also present.

Dr T.C. Anand Kumar, the clinic's promoter, said facilities offered include invitro fertilisation embryo transfer, semen bank and cryopreservation of sperm and embryos.

Men get pocket money from wives

TOKYO: Young single women living with their parents are more affluent than any other group in Japan as they are able to spend what they have on personal interests such as fashion, according to a government study, reports Kyodo.

The management and coordination agency said its survey showed the average Japanese female spent 54,618 yen in pocket money in November 1989, compared with 52,206 yen for the average male.

Women under 30, most of whom lived with their parents, averaged a relatively high 64,334 yen in pocket money. Fashion, hobbies and entertainment dominated their spending.

Men spent their pocket money largely on more mundane expenses such as meals and drinks.

Male heads of household had 51,674 yen at their disposal. As against the 55,366 yen spent by young and unmarried men.

The agency's survey covered 6,200 Japanese aged 18 or older in 4,584 households in 656 cities and 535 towns and villages across the country. The poll excluded single-member households, and nearly 80 per cent of the respondents were men.

The survey also revealed that men received most of their pocket money from their wives.

Bucks all over

LOUISVILLE: Tabloids and teen-age girls are offering big bucks for anything New Kids on the Block singer Donnie Wahlberg touched during his booking on arson charges or for inside information about the case.

"It's insane," said Jefferson County Corrections Chief Richard Frey, who has been bombarded with dozens of calls about the items like the paper bag that held Wahlberg's wallet.

One person offered 5,000 dollars for it, Frey said. Wahlberg, 22, was charged Wednesday with first-degree arson after an early-morning fire in a hallway carpet at the historic Seelback Hotel in downtown Louisville.



BANGKOK: Jiraprapa Savettanand, an 18-year-old student, is presented with a sash from former Miss Thailand 1990 (L) after being crowned Miss Thailand 1991, 30 Mar. (COLOR KEY: sash red, bathing suit blue) — AFP photo