

International

Baghdad briefs UN Secretary-General

Iraq possesses hundreds of tons of nerve gas, 105 Scuds

BRIEFLY

US asks Iraqi troops out of the way:

The United States has told the Iraqi military to stay out of the way while allied troops build camps for Kurdish refugees...

The United Nations and Iraq, meanwhile, are moving forward with their agreement to establish way stations in the north for refugees wishing to return home.

The UN envoy who reached the agreement, Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan, said Friday he expected that plan and the allied effort eventually to be reconciled.

New Liberian President:

Amos Sawyer was re-elected in Monrovia Friday night as interim President by the Liberian National Conference...

The national conference agreed to drop the idea of a triumvirate interim government following the withdrawal from the conference of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

Palestinian to meet Baker:

The Palestine Liberation Organisation has given the green light for a Palestinian delegation to meet US Secretary of State James Baker in Jerusalem Saturday...

But the group will be reduced to three people who will hand a memorandum to Baker, the sources said. The sources did not say whether the Palestinians in Jerusalem had received replies to 11 questions they submitted to Baker through the American consulate.

Schwarzkopf meets Saudi minister:

General Norman Schwarzkopf on Friday paid a farewell visit to Saudi Arabian Defence Minister Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz who presented him with a commemorative gift...

Schwarzkopf is due to lead multinational forces which drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait in February after a seven-month occupation.

The agency, monitored in Nicosia, did not disclose the nature of the gift, merely saying the minister paid tribute to Schwarzkopf's wise and courageous command.

6 killed in Bombay bomb blast:

At least six people were killed and one more seriously wounded when a bomb exploded in a bus depot in Bombay Friday night...

The explosion occurred at about 10:30 pm (about 1700 GMT) in a bus terminal of the Bombay Electric Supply and Transport Undertaking, a private firm that runs Bombay's bus services.

The bus station is in the western region of the city. It was not immediately known what type of bomb was used in the attack and police said so far no body had claimed responsibility.

Five of those killed were employees of the transport firm, Sub Inspector of Police Rajendra Jadhav said. They included three bus conductors, a driver and a starter — an employee responsible for enforcing proper bus timings.

Mengistu offers to resign:

Ethiopian President Mengistu Haile Mariam, battling major rebel advances in the north, offered to resign if it would preserve the unity of the country, reports Reuter from Nairobi.

"As long as it would help restore the unity of the country, I am willing and ready to step down," Mengistu said on Friday in a three-hour speech broadcast on television and radio.

"I ask the Ethiopian people to give an urgent verdict on how best to stem the threat by the northern rebels — be it through peaceful means or force."

Rebels, who control vast tracts of the north and have come within 100 miles (160 km) of the capital Addis Ababa in the past two months, did not take Mengistu's offer seriously and said they would fight on.

96 more to be freed in Africa:

President Frederik de Klerk has approved the release of another 96 political prisoners, bringing to 215 the total number of political prisoners freed in the past week...

The releases are part of a deal between the government and the black nationalist African National Congress under which political prisoners are to be freed and exiles allowed to return in exchange for the ANC ending armed actions against the white minority government.

At a press conference on Friday, De Klerk said the government was on schedule to meeting the April 30 deadline for the release of prisoners.

Pro-democracy talks in Indonesia:

Dialogue aimed at bolstering democracy in Indonesia should remain within the system and its institutions, military chief General Try Sutrisno was quoted as saying Saturday, reports AFP.

"We can hold healthy communications, we can hold political education we can make social criticism but all of these should be oriented towards the interests of the national development," he told leading daily Kompas.

"They should not run outside the norms, system and institutions which we have already agreed on," Gen. Try said in an interview.

Soviet unrest worsens crisis:

A surge of industrial unrest in the Ukraine and tension in the Baltic Republic of Lithuania have worsened the crisis awaiting Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on his return from Japan and South Korea, reports Reuter from Moscow.

And the Kremlin chief will find little comfort in economic results for the first three months of this year, showing Gross National Product down eight per cent from 1990, productivity down nine per cent and foreign trade slashed by a third.

Friday's batch of bad news cast further doubt on Gorbachev's chances of saving the country from collapse with a programme of emergency measures due to be debated by Soviet Parliament on Monday.

No single Indian party to win majority in poll

NEW DELHI, Apr 20: With a month to go to elections, none of India's major political parties looks capable of emerging with a majority and pulling the world's largest democracy back on to solid political ground, reports AFP.

President Ramaswamy Venkataraman Friday officially gave the go-ahead for the country's 521 million eligible voters to go to the polls on May 20, 23 and 26 to select their candidates for parliament.

The President's announcement excluded the troubled States of Punjab and Assam, where the autonomous Election Commission Friday

postponed elections. Nor will Kashmir be going to the polls because of the violent secessionist campaign there. Elsewhere the elections have been staggered so that security forces can be deployed in erupting at almost any time this ethnic strife-torn land of 850 million inhabitants.

Separatist movements like those in Kashmir and Punjab have thrived on the political instability and legislative paralysis that followed the defeat of Rajiv Gandhi's Congress (I) Party in elections in November 1989, thus paving the way for a series of governments based on shaky and expedient coalitions.

UNITED NATIONS Apr. 20: Iraq told the United Nations it possessed hundreds of tonnes of nerve and mustard gases and 105 scud-type missiles including 30 with chemical warhead, according to documents obtained by reuter on Friday.

Some of the nerve gas, called sarin, is contained in thousands of shells, short-range missiles and aerial bombs as well as in bulk storage, the documents said.

Iraq also reported possession of 650 tonnes of another type of nerve gas called Tabun along with large quantities of mustard gas in aerial bombs and artillery shells.

The letter was Iraq's first step towards complying with U.N. demands to destroy the missiles it fired against Israel and Saudi Arabia in the Gulf war and the chemical weapons it is alleged to have used against Iran and Iraqi Kurds.

As required by a Security Council Resolution adopted earlier this month, it sent a letter to the United Nations saying it still had ballistic missiles and chemical weapons. Thus setting in motion a complicated clock that could see the destruction of these weapons in about two months.

Hussein gave listings and locations of chemical weapons and ballistic missiles in his letter but said Iraq did not possess any biological weapons, which the Security Council also ordered destroyed.

On nuclear weapons, the foreign minister said all Iraq's atomic materials were used for peaceful purposes and had already been put under safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said: they declare no nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons-usable material or other related facilities or activities. We don't think that response is satisfactory.

Other U.S. officials said they were certain Iraq had highly enriched uranium supplied by France and the Soviet Union which could be used for nuclear weapons.

In an implied threat to force Iraq to comply with council resolutions, the sanctions committee of the Security Council made no immediate decision at a closed-door meeting on Friday on Baghdad's request to be allowed to sell nearly one billion dollars worth of oil to pay for food and other goods it says it urgently needs.

The committee is expected to wait until it becomes clear that Iraq will not impede a plan

by the United States, Britain and France to set up protected camps for Kurdish and other refugees, diplomats said. Nevertheless, the list presented by Iraq was substantial, and according to one Soviet

diplomat showed Iraq's willingness to comply with the U.N. resolution.

Hussein said Baghdad's arsenal contains 51 Al-Hussein upgraded scud-type missiles with a range of 400 miles (640

k.m.) and one Scud missile with a range of 32-180 miles (52-290 km.).

In addition, it has five Scud-type conventional warheads, 18 Al-Hussein-type conventional warheads and another

30 with chemical warheads. Iraq also said it had four missile launchers and gave their locations, two mobile missile erections, 28 fixed platforms for ballistic missiles in what it called its western zone and four missile platforms in the same area.

On chemical weapons, the documents listed the nerve gases sarin and Tabun, which kill after a few minutes when the lungs no longer work, but they can be dissipated in the air, depending on temperature and winds.

The letter said Iraq had 6,920 artillery shells filled with Sarin. Another 2,500 Sarin were under the debris of a levelled storeroom, as were 200 Sarin-filled aerial bombs. Iraq also reported possession of 650 tonnes of Tabun along with large quantities of mustard gas in aerial bombs and artillery shells.

It said that five research and development sites for chemical weapons had been destroyed, presumably by allied bombing in the Gulf war.

UN discloses composition of peacekeeping force in Gulf

UNITED NATIONS, Apr. 20: The United Nations on Friday disclosed the composition of the 1,440-man peacekeeping mission in the Gulf, which includes 300 officers with about 100 of them drawn from the five permanent members of the Security Council, reports Reuter.

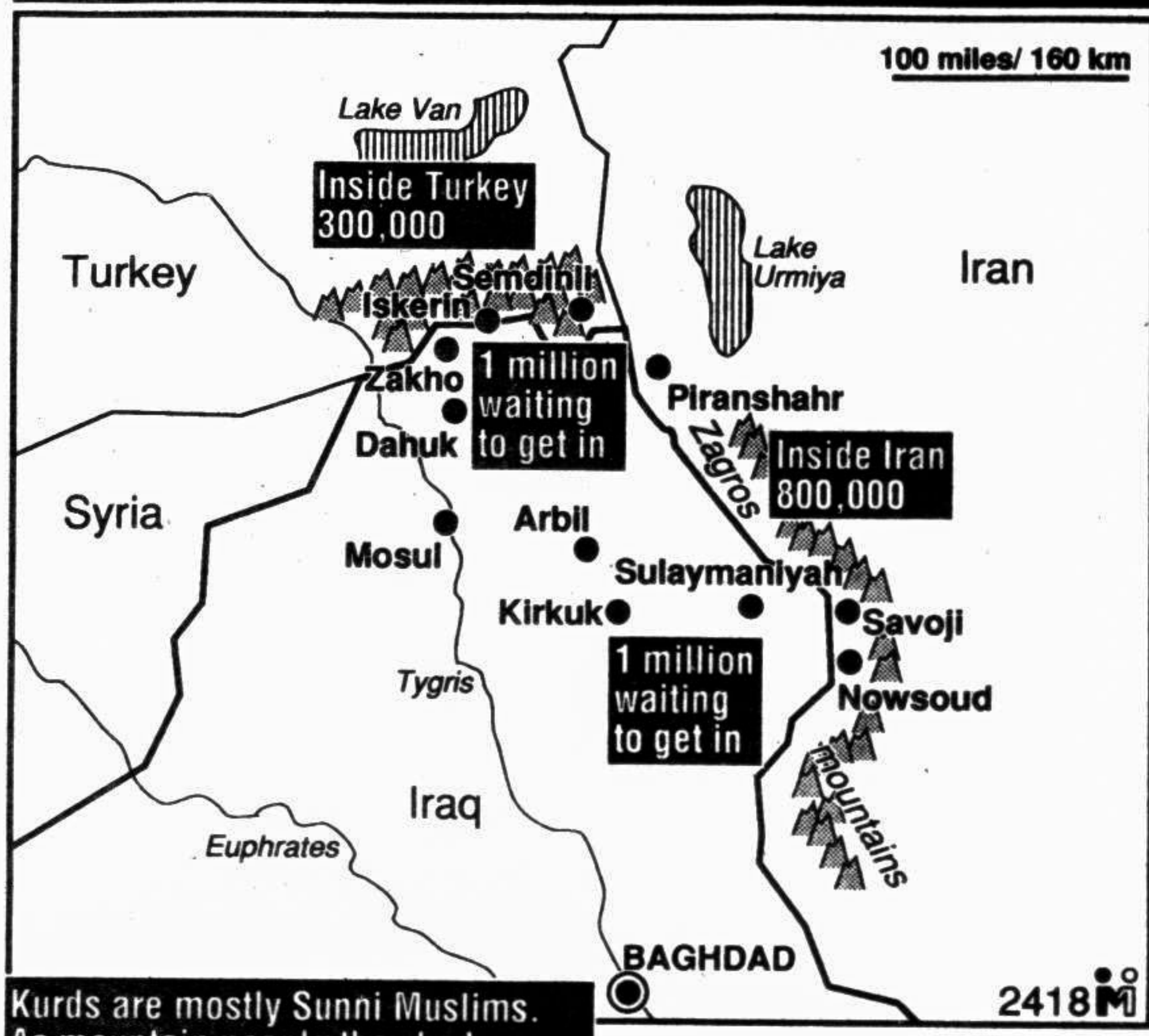
The first UN infantrymen to be deployed in a buffer zone along the Iraq-Kuwait border fly into Kuwait on Monday but setting up the 36-nation frontier force will take several weeks, its commander said in Kuwait on Friday.

Major General Gunther Greindl of Austria said the United Nations also was concerned about the fate of more than 15,000 Iraqi refugees in the demilitarised zone his force will patrol.

The mission will be made up of 300 unarmed military observers, protected initially by five infantry companies totalling 680 men to provide security, as well as a field engineering unit to help clear mines, a logistics unit and an air unit with planes and helicopters.

It will be the first time officers from the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China are serving in the same UN contingent.

Where the Kurds are



Kurds are mostly Sunni Muslims. As mountain people they had no political unity for centuries. Groups of villages owed allegiance to chiefs

400 BC: As Carduchi people they attacked retreating Greek leader Xenophon. Most famous scion was Saladin

Since 7th Cent name Kurd applied to West Iranians and others astride the Zagros

1914-17: Turks raised Kurds to fight Russians

1920: Treaty of Sevres. Turkey accepted scheme for Kurdish state, but it was stillborn

Since 1920 Kurds have staged many revolts to fight for independent Kurdistan

Who the Kurds are



Hundreds arrested in Kuwait

LONDON, Apr 20: The human rights group Amnesty International said in Friday hundreds of people had been arbitrarily arrested and scores tortured brutally or executed in Kuwait since the Iraqi withdrawal, reports Reuter.

It appealed to the Emir of Kuwait to intervene personally to put an end to human rights abuses.

"These violations are continuing and appear to be largely unchecked," the London-based group said, reporting on a two-week fact-finding mission by an Amnesty team that went to Kuwait on March 28 to investigate allegations of rights abuses and report on violations during the Iraqi occupation.

The team reported that scores of victims had been killed and hundreds more had

85 pc American households in debt

WASHINGTON, Apr 20: Eighty-five per cent of all American households owed money at some time last year — on mortgages and automobiles, credit cards and department store wares, reports AP.

US household debt nearly tripled in the last decade, according to a Federal Reserve study. But analysts say there's no need for alarm.

"I don't think it's dangerous," economist Bruce Steinberg of Merrill Lynch Capital Markets said. "I don't think it means mass consumer bankruptcies, or that people are going to lose their homes."

Still, the record debt could slow consumer spending and thus temper a recovery from the recession.

2m prostitutes excluded from voting in India

NEW DELHI, Apr 20: A recent Supreme Court ruling has left most of the estimated two million prostitutes in India excluded from voting in next month's general elections, a mass-circulation newspaper reported today, says AFP.

The ruling, handed down April 15, upheld the requirement that all claim applications for inclusion on voting lists be countersigned, according to the Indian Express.

The Express said that neighbours, clients and even house madams were unwilling to vouch for the prostitutes, the madams for fear of being caught legally in a dependency relationship with the girls.

Election list surveyors, who could do the job in the place of a resident, stay out of the red light districts, the paper added.

Off the Record

She buys a town

BRASELTON (Georgia): Actress Kim Basinger has taken ceremonial possession of the small Georgia town she bought for 20 million dollars, reports AP.

Wearing a Braselton button, Ms. Basinger accepted the key to the city from Mayor Henry Braselton on the porch of his house Wednesday.

"You have the key to my heart," Ms. Basinger said in front of several hundred town residents and a large media contingent. "I love this. It means a lot to me."

The 37-year-old actress is a native of nearby Athens, Florida. Ms. Basinger has said her plans for Braselton might include motion picture studios, recording studios and a concert hall. On Wednesday her first public visit to the town since purchasing it in 1989 she refused to reveal any more specifics.

Harry Braselton, a descendant of the town's founder, said he thinks Ms. Basinger's visit will help dilute criticism from town residents that she is moving too slowly on her plans for the town.

Least political Kennedy

WASHINGTON: Willie Smith spent his first year at Georgetown Medical School so quietly that one friend said "no one even knew he was a Kennedy," reports AP.

"He's the least political of all of them," said classmate Kathleen Albrecht. "He doesn't flaunt the fact that he's a Kennedy at all."

But that cloak of anonymity was lifted last week when police in Palm Beach, Florida, named William Kennedy Smith a suspect in an alleged rape on the beach outside the Kennedy family compound.

Today Smith, 30, is in seclusion, refusing to communicate with investigators beyond giving them a sample of his hair and blood.

Smith is avoiding his home in the fashionable Georgetown neighbourhood of Washington but still reports for a required hospital internship, according to friends.

£53,000 damages awarded for rat bite

CARDIFF (Wales): The parents of a baby blinded in one eye when a rat gnawed at his eyelids as he slept were awarded 53,000 pounds sterling (92,300 dollars) damages against their local council in Cardiff High Court on Friday, reports Reuter.

Harry Hutchings was four months old when the rat climbed into his cot. The court ruled that Newport Council had attempted but failed to rid his home of rats.