

International

Former top CIA official charged with perjury

WASHINGTON, Sept 7: A former top CIA official was charged on Friday with perjury, making false statements and obstruction in the Iran-Contra affair, the worst scandal of Ronald Reagan's presidency, reports Reuter.

Clair George, Deputy Director of the CIA's secret operations during the scandal was indicted by a federal grand jury on 10 criminal counts, prosecutors said.

The 33-page indictment charged that George lied to the Congress about his knowledge of the diversion of Iran arms sale profits to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels and of former White House aide Oliver North's secret operation to help the Contras in 1985-86.

Trains collide in Congo: 150 killed

BRAZZAVILLE, Sept 7: At least 100 people were killed when two trains collided overnight on the line between Brazzaville the Congo's political capital and Pointe Noire its economic capital, Interim Transport Minister Demba Thelo said late Friday, reports AFP.

However, the toll was "provisional" and could run higher, Thelo told journalists who travelled with him to the town of Dolisie 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the crash site at Mouyoutou Station, 400 kilometers (240 miles) south of here.

Reliable sources contacted by telephone in Dolisie said the final death toll could reach 150 or 200.

30 minutes end decades of Kremlin rule

MOSCOW, Sept 7: It took just 30 minutes to end half a century of Kremlin rule in the three Baltic republics and not much longer to restore Leningrad's pre-revolutionary name of St Petersburg, reports Reuter.

On a day of dramatic fast moving events in the crumbling Soviet emperor on Friday, the KGB security police let a double agent's family leave the country and a senior official said all republics and former republics backed a plan to decentralise economic ties.

In the Baltic states Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — there was deep satisfaction tinged with slight irritation at the new state council's decision in Moscow to recognise their independence after dozens of countries had already done so.

The council was set up on Thursday to run the Soviet Union for a transitional period

following last month's coup attempt until a looser alliance of sovereign republics is established.

Its first act, recognising the Baltic states, was unanimous and took just 30 minutes.

At another meeting in Moscow, the Russian parliament's presidium unanimously and speedily decreed Leningrad could take back its old name St Petersburg, dealing another blow to the memory of state founder Vladimir Lenin and the communism he espoused.

The Baltic's rejoicing at finally shedding the yoke of Kremlin and communist domination 51 years after they were obliged to shoulder it under a Nazi-Soviet pact was tempered by the realisation that freedom has a price.

This is the start of a long long path of hard work needed to build an independent state, said Rein Kovo an aide to Estonian Prime Minister Edgar Savisaar. It's something that doesn't happen every day after all.

Bonded by common economic backwardness, the three states are interested in joining a trade zone with the remaining republics.

Arkady Volsky, deputy head of an interim committee running the Soviet economy told a conference in Moscow that leading Soviet economist and free market advocate Gligor Yavlinsky had the support of all the present and former republics for the idea of decentralising economic ties.

But in other areas the Baltic states want to go their own way, although it will take years to unravel the mesh of economic cultural and defence ties built up over the decades.

The first and most important question would be the question of the Soviet armed forces said Latvian President

India rejects Pak claims of killing 4,000 Kashmiris

ACCRA, Sept 7: India rejects Pakistani claims that Indian troops have killed 4,000 innocent civilians in Kashmir, Delhi's Ambassador to the United Nations said on Friday, reports Reuter.

The factual position is that so many thousand people have died in Kashmir over about the last two years, mainly at the hands of terrorists who are all being trained and armed in Pakistan, Chinmoy Gharekhan of the United Nations, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference

in the Ghanaian capital, Accra.

He was responding to a conference address by Pakistan's foreign secretary Shaharyar Khan on Thursday, accusing Indian troops of widespread killings to put down a Muslim uprising in the Indian part of the mountain state.

The speech provoked a heated exchange between representatives of the two NAM members.

Gharekhan said he had no figures on how many people had been killed in Kashmir. He said the Pakistani figure of 4,000 could be true but stressed that most were killed by the insurgents or were themselves rebels labelled "civilians" by Islamabad.

There is a tremendous insurgency going on and the Indian security forces have to do what they have to do, he said. We have to protect our territory and in the process certainly people have got killed.

He said all reports of Indian Army excesses were investigated and court martials held.

Gharekhan said there was internationally-recognised evidence of at least 65 training camps for Kashmiri rebels in Pakistan.

But he said the two governments were working on confidence-building measures such as advance warning of troop movements near the border.

BRIEFLY

International body on disasters: UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar on Friday launched a special high level council for the international decade for natural disaster reduction, with members from five different continents, reports AFP from New York.

Dominica's Prime Minister Eugenie Charles, Thailand's Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol, Japanese former Premier Takeo Fukuda, Mexican former President Miguel De La Madrid, Egypt's Susan Mubarak, Ide Umaru of Niger, Sweden's Lisbeth Palme, Marilyn Quayle of the United States, Yugoslav Janez Stanovnik, and M. C. Zalkhanov of the Soviet Union were to form the new council.

The United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 44/236 declared the 1990-2000 decade one in which a special worldwide effort would be made to minimise damage to roads, physical injuries and economic difficulties caused by natural disasters.

The Council's members were to assist the Secretary General in promoting ways to curb the effects of such disasters and in mobilising public and private sector support for the objectives outlined by the General Assembly.

The special council was to hold its first meeting October 9 in New York, on the occasion of the International Day for natural disaster reduction.

Perez to visit 3 countries: UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar will visit France, Iran and Saudi Arabia next week, a UN spokesman said Friday, reports AFP from New York.

Spokesman Francois Giuliani said that Perez de Cuellar would attend a conference in Paris on aid to Africa on Monday and would go on to Tehran the following day.

In the Iranian capital he will meet with President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani and also with Pakistani President Gholam Eshak Khan to discuss the truce in the Iran-Iraq and the situation in Afghanistan.

The UN spokesman said the release of hostages being held in the Middle East would not be on the agenda, but that Perez de Cuellar would welcome any further information on the crisis.

The Secretary General would leave Iran on September 13 for Saudi Arabia for meetings with Saudi leaders and with officials of other member countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Perez de Cuellar will return to New York on September 15.

UN team discovers 'something' in Iraq: International experts inspecting Iraq's chemical weapons capability said Friday they had discovered "something" but will temporarily withhold details for bureaucratic reasons, AFP from Baghdad says.

We have found something which we will have to consider and discuss a little bit, said Johan Santesson, the Head of the UN Chemical Weapons Inspection team to Iraq.

Meanwhile, a new team of ballistic experts arrived in Iraq Friday for a week-long visit to inspect missile-launching sites. We are going to inspect the sites of the western zone where they have the fixed structure for launchers, team leader Tom Brock said.

Santesson said details had to be withheld until he receives the issue to Rolf Ekeus, head of the United Nations Mission charged with disarming Iraq in the wake of the Gulf war.

US condemns Yugoslavia for using force: The United States on Friday condemned the "illegitimate use of force" by the Yugoslav military in violation of a ceasefire there, state Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said, reports Reuter from Washington.

We have been particularly disturbed by the use of major weapons systems by the Yugoslav military in violation of the ceasefire, including jet aircraft and air-to-ground missiles, Tutwiler told reporters at a briefing.

She said fighting continues in Yugoslavia, where the breakaway republic of Croatia is battling Serbian guerrillas and the Yugoslav military.

Foreign ministers of the European Community and Yugoslav leaders plan to meet in the Hague today to discuss the continuing violence in Yugoslavia, and Tutwiler backed this move.

One killed, 25 injured in Pakistan: One man was killed and 25 were injured on Friday when an unidentified attacker threw a grenade into a public meeting of militant Sunnis in Pakistan, reports Reuter from Lahore.

Police said the attack, the second on the Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba (ASS) organisation within a few hours, took place during a meeting in Lahore, capital of Punjab province.

The attacker lobbed the grenade from behind the stage into the middle of the meeting of local members of the ASS, which frequently clashes with Shi'ite Muslim activists.



JERUSALEM: Rawan Awni Abu Gosh, 5, a Palestinian girl shows at the oil city of Jerusalem September 6 US Secretary of State James Baker's response to her letter asking for help as her father is in Israeli prison. Baker answered, "please don't lose hope and don't lose your faith in peace." — AFP/UNB photo

Hong Kong obsessed with money, says outsiders

HONG KONG, Sept 7: Outsiders often remark that the teeming free-market British colony of Hong Kong, with its crass commercialism and materialist values, is obsessed with money, reports IPS.

With just six years to go before Hong Kong is handed over to China in 1997, the frenzy with which people make their money is matched only by the intensity with which they protect, invest and spend it.

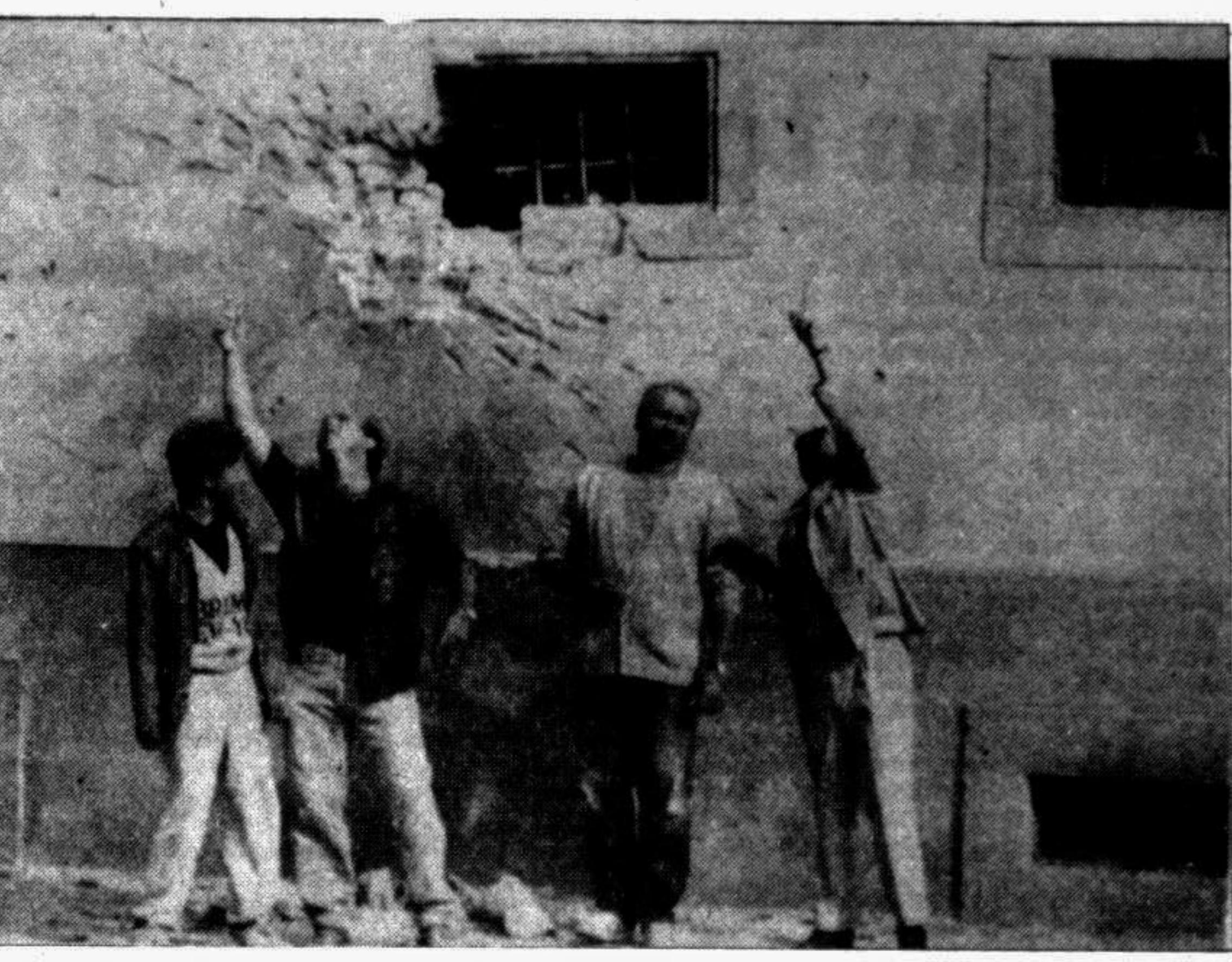
Hence the scenes of panic last week as depositors rushed to withdraw their hard-earned savings from major international banks.

Some 40 million US Dollars were removed in one day from the Standard Chartered Bank last week in the fourth bank

run in the colony in two months.

The run was precipitated by rumours that Standard Chartered Bank was "insolvent." Considering that the government had shut down the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) Hong Kong subsidiary two days after assurances that it was sound, few were willing to believe government statements that Standard Chartered, one of the two-note-issuing banks in Hong Kong, was under no threat whatsoever.

The panic recalled in incident of six years ago when hundreds of frantic people queued for hours outside branches of Maria's cake shops on rumours that the huge



OSIJEK (Yugoslavia): Local citizens survey the damage to this regional capital September 6 after the heaviest night of bombardment by Yugoslav Army artillery and rocket. — AFP photo

DPRK able to produce N-arms : CIA

TOKYO, Sept 7: US intelligence officials have told Japanese government officials that North Korea already had the capability to produce nuclear weapons, Kyodo news service reported Friday, says AFP.

The Japanese news agency quoted foreign diplomatic sources in Tokyo as saying that three US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials met with Japanese Foreign Ministry and Defense Agency officials Thursday to brief them on the latest information on North Korea's nuclear capabilities.

The CIA officials reportedly told the Japanese officials that Pyongyang was now capable of producing nuclear weapons, revising their views that it would not be able to do so until around 1995.

Using satellite pictures of Yongbyon, 90 kilometers (56.25 miles) north of Pyongyang, the CIA officials explained that North Korea could produce about seven kilograms (15.4 pounds) of plutonium annually from the operating nuclear reactor there.

They also told the Japanese officials that the Yongbyon plutonium concentration facilities already have partly begun operation, according to Kyodo.

Kyodo noted that CIA had previously said North Korea would not have enough plutonium to build a bomb before a large nuclear reactor was opened in 1994.

Removing those troops is

Baltic residents vow to build democracy

VILNIUS (Lithuania), Sept 7: Beaming Baltic residents celebrated the Soviet Union's recognition of their independence Friday and vowed to build democracy where totalitarianism reigned for more than 50 years, reports AFP.

We are joining the international community of the world with the banner of peace and freedom in our hands, said Latvian President Anatoly Gorbovniks.

In neighboring Lithuania, President Vytautas Landsbergis, was just as effusive after the Soviet State Council unanimously passed a resolution recognizing Baltic independence.

The fact that this decision has been made is a very joyful and positive act in all aspects, not only for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, but also for the Soviet Union itself and the whole world, he told a news conference.

Amid the impromptu parties and optimism, however, was recognition of the problems that lie ahead for the three republics and sadness that their freedom did not come without sacrifice.

It would have been better if it had come earlier and no blood had to be spilled, said Vilnius police officer Jerzy Ryszard Daszyński, referring to the deaths of more than 20 people in clashes with Soviet troops in the Baltics over the past 18 months.

It is now easier for them to postpone wedding plans — there are more unwed men than women in Japan.

Off the Record

Women like Christmas cake

TOKYO: Japanese women are delaying marriage while men seem increasingly anxious to tie the knot, latest government statistics show, reports Reuter.

The average age at which women marry rose last year to 25.9 years, a health and welfare ministry official said on Friday. The marriage age for men fell to 28.4.

The Japanese have a saying that women are like Christmas cake — after the 25th's no good. But more and more women are choosing to follow a care before they marry.

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Crackdown on prostitution

BEIJING: A crackdown on prostitution in China has led to a sharp drop in cases of sexually transmitted diseases in major cities, reports Reuter.

The drop in cities such as Canton and Beijing has averaged 30 per cent in the first half of this year, reversing the trend of the past several years, state media reported on Saturday.

More than 29,000 prostitutes and their customers were detained in a two-month crackdown in June and July, according to official figures.

Saturday's reports said more than 40 per cent of prostitutes arrested were infected with disease.

Altogether 44,117 cases of sexually transmitted diseases were reported in China in 1990. Gonorrhoea accounted for 60 per cent and syphilis 1.2 per cent.

By the end of last year, 493 people were found to be infected with the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and six people had full-blown AIDS.

The standing committee of parliament on Wednesday passed a law stipulating a minimum of 10 years in jail for anyone forcing a woman into prostitution or running a brothel.

The maximum penalty is death.

Hopes for cancer patients

LONDON: A team of French doctors said on Friday they successfully treated three terminal cancer patients with a new biogenetic drug rather than risky and painful bone-marrow transplants, reports Reuter.

The study, published in the Lancet, is the first to substantiate laboratory findings that GM-CSF, one of the most promising drugs to be developed with gene-splicing techniques, has broader and more sustained benefits than bone-marrow transplants.

The other two patients in the study died without any sustained recovery and the researchers said they already had severely damaged blood cells as a result of chemotherapy. None of the five patients in the study could tolerate bone-marrow transplants.

GM-CSF, which was approved in the United States this year, is made by immunex corp and licensed to Hoechst Agfor sale in Europe. It stimulates portions of the blood cell that allow cell proliferation.

The drug is currently used primarily in chemotherapy patients to help them rebuild their blood cells, and to improve the viability of bone-marrow transplants, but scientists also believe the drug may have broader potential in treating cancer.

Anti-Greenhouse layer

WASHINGTON: A newly discovered layer of atmosphere on a moon of saturn may help solve global warming on earth, a US space scientist said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Alone in our solar system, saturn's moon Titan has been found to have not only a layer that traps atmospheric heat like that found on earth but a second anti-Greenhouse layer that offsets the resulting warming effect.

Christopher Mackay of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) described the second atmospheric layer in an interview as a high altitude have that actually makes the moon colder than it would be.

The NASA research scientist and his fellow researchers have drawn their conclusions from Titan from information collected during the orbit of NASA space probe Voyager 1, which gathered data on saturn as it flew by.

Their findings are to be published in today's issue of science magazine.

Only three planetary bodies in our solar system are known to be shrouded with an atmospheric layer of Greenhouse gases — Titan, venus, and earth.

Without these Greenhouse gases, which trap heat and there by warm the atmosphere, the earth would be some 85 degrees fahrenheit colder (30 degrees Celsius) than it is now, Mackay said.