

Saddam using hidden wealth to sustain his regime

AMMAN, July 19: Saddam Hussein is using up his hidden wealth at an increasing rate to sustain his regime, apparently gambling that UN sanctions will collapse before it runs out, Western intelligence officials say, reports AP.

They note that the Iraqi leader was estimated to have up to 30 billion dollar at his disposal when the Gulf War ended in February 1991.

The intelligence representatives stationed in Amman to monitor Iraq, said Saddam is using secret bank accounts in Switzerland and even assets abroad that were ostensibly frozen after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

One said Saddam also has been using the personal fortunes of relatives and cohorts in the United States, Britain and Germany, and probably has spent the billions looted from Kuwait.

Other sources say some of Saddam's gold reserves, held outside Iraq, have made their way onto the bullion market.

"It is my belief, and an operating assumption of the US Treasury, that through secret accounts and investments, covert Iraqi front companies and clandestine agents of his regime, Saddam Hussein is attempting to sustain and proliferate his tools for disregarding the UN embargo," said Richard Newcomb, director of the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

In a speech in Kuwait in February, he also said: "Iraqi agents throughout the world are working to circumvent the UN embargo; and, unfortunately, there are many parties who are willing to sell to them."

The Americans claim Jordan, long suspected of pro-Iraqi sympathies because King Hussein refused to join the anti-Saddam coalition in 1990, is Saddam's economic lifeline and turns a blind eye to sanctions violations.

US officials have alleged that 30 per cent of the goods flowing into Iraq from Jordan, the main conduit for humanitarian food and medicine shipments allowed by the United Nations, are forbidden materials.

Jordan denies it, but the Western intelligence officials say the kingdom plays a key role in Saddam's clandestine campaign to beat the sanctions.

They say 35 to 50 Iraqi front companies have been established in Jordan to import goods bound for Baghdad. The companies import goods ranging from cigarettes and whisky to communications equipment and industrial spare parts, the officials said, on condition of anonymity.

Newcomb said his office has identified 48 businesses and 44 individuals in 30 countries involved in sanctions-busting, including six members of Saddam's family. He said there may be many more.

ASEAN needs new security order with US pullout from Philippines

MANILA, July 19: ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Manila this week are seeking a new security framework for the region with the withdrawal of US forces from the Philippines and the end of the cold war, diplomats and officials say, reports Reuter.

The Americans are due to leave Subic bay, their last military base in the Philippines, by mid-December. According to Blas Ople, chairman of the Philippine Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, this has sparked fears of the emergence of a "Regional bully."

Philippine Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus said that once the Americans have gone, "the vacuum will have to be filled by someone."

"We in ASEAN are not yet ready to fill it ourselves,"

Manglapus told reporters in Manila. "As long as we're not ready, we have to dialogue with powers outside the region."

ASEAN — the Association of Southeast Asian Nations — groups Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines.

Manglapus, who is due to step down by the end of the month, said ASEAN must deal with an uncertain security outlook now that Americans are no longer responsible for policing the region.

"What fears will have to be met in the security discussions? It is the fear of the unknown the fear of regional conflicts," he said.

The foreign ministers' meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday will be followed by security discussions with ASEAN's traditional allies, the

United States and Japan. There will also be separate talks with Russia and China.

When you have all these big boys seated together, you have a framework which can mature into a genuine political and security structure," Ople told reporters.

ASEAN must also "face the fact" of China's military role in southeast Asia, according to Thai Foreign Minister Arsa Sarasin.

Along-running dispute over ownership of the spratly islands has increased ASEAN's concern about Chinese intentions, especially after Beijing's troops occupied Da Lac Reef in the spratly on July 4.

The isolated south China sea islands are claimed wholly or in part by China, Vietnam, Taiwan and ASEAN members Malaysia, Brunei and the

Philippines. Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said the quarrel over the spratlys, which security experts say may become the next flashpoint in the fastest growing region in the world, will be taken up in the Manila meetings.

Philippine and Malaysian diplomats want ASEAN to issue a declaration during other rival claimants to the potentially oil-rich islands to refrain from using force and have called for an international conference to settle the dispute peacefully.

China has rejected the idea of a multilateral conference, saying it is willing to hold bilateral negotiations with other nations but has refused "to have the issue internationalised," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin said in Beijing.



HANOI: Vietnamese communist Party Secretary-General Do Mooi casting his ballot in the National Assembly elections July 19. Hanoi has described the elections, in which 37 million voters will choose 395 deputies from 601 candidates, as the most free and democratic in the country's history.

Pindi will appeal to secure supply of F-16 from US

ISLAMABAD, July 19: Pakistan is planning to appeal to the International Court of Justice to secure the supply of contracted F-16 fighters from the US, reports Xinhua.

Local newspaper The News reported today that the Pakistan government is negotiating with two renowned lawyers of international law of the United States and France for taking up the matter before the International court for this purpose.

The foreign lawyers would be assisted by one or two eminent lawyers from Pakistan, the report said.

Reliable sources were quoted as saying that the petition would be moved immediately after the payment of the fifth and last quarterly installment to the US government by Pakistani authorities.

Up to now, Pakistan has already paid two installments to the US and is required to pay three more installments according to the original contract.

The US government has never objected to the receipt of installments despite its repeated claims that it would not supply F-16s to Pakistan, the report said.

According to the report, the Pakistan government is convinced that the international court of justice would, rule in Pakistan's favour under the obligations and considerations of international law.

Under the Pressler amendment of the US, the country

suspended millions of dollars in military and economic aid to Pakistan since October of 1990 on suspicion that Pakistan is making nuclear weapons and has resulted in the non-supply of the contracted F-16 fighters.

The report said the original contract, which signed a few years ago, however, did not lay down any such preconditions.

Pakistan's decision to appeal to the international court of justice is said to enjoy the tacit approval of the US administration who finds it considerably difficult to get the deal going through both the senate and the house of representatives which object to the sale of F-16s to Pakistan.

Heavy fighting in Kabul

KABUL, July 19: Heavy fighting broke out in southern Kabul late Saturday, and sources said the exchange of gunfire was between government forces and a Shiite group holding on to several government buildings, reports AFP.

The thud of what appeared to be cannon and rockets could be heard in southern Kabul, but further details on the fighting were not available.

Sources said security forces of the Islamic government that took over in Kabul on June 28 had entered government buildings in the southern districts of Kartai-i-Se and Kartai-i-Char to clear them of fighters of the Iran-backed Hezb-i-Wahdat Shiite group.

Reuters adds: A commission of former Afghan rebel factions

on Saturday arranged the release of a number of people kidnapped in Kabul in the past few days, official Kabul radio said.

The radio did not say how many people had been freed. Commission sources said hundreds had been captured in the latest of a series of clashes between political or ethnic rivals since the Mujahideen guerrillas seized power in April.

"A number of people who were arrested during recent disturbances in Kabul were exchanged and released," the radio said.

Commission sources said people seemed to have been kidnapped because of their ethnic origins rather than their political or religious affiliations.

Most of the kidnap victims were either minority ethnic Hazaras or Pashtuns, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group.

Abdullah, a commander from the hardline Ittehad-i-Islami Party who is involved in the negotiations for the release of the captives, said hundreds had been taken from both sides.

"It's poor and old people who have been taken," he said. Abdullah said 300 kidnapped Hazaras has been brought from posts belonging to various factions to his base.

A commission member from the mainly Shiite Hezb-i-Wahdat Party, Mustapha Karzami, said several captives have been exchanged over the past few days.

Bush defends military spending

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah, July 19: President George Bush on Saturday defended his administration's military and foreign aid spending during a campaign swing in the American west, reports Reuter.

Sitting in front of a pond at Utah's state arboretum, as ducks swam and reeds waved in the breeze behind him, Bush answered mild questions from a generally sympathetic audience for half an hour.

"We still have an obligation to help people abroad," Bush said, speaking into a hand-held microphone. He mentioned specifically famine in southern Africa as one disaster worthy of American assistance.

"We're not going to be able to cut off all our foreign aid or our defence spending has been reduced on defence particularly and I think we can probably reduce it more as we go along, but I don't think we can close our eyes" to a world that includes terrorists and leaders like Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, he said.

Austria summit seeks world help to end Y'slav war

VIENNA, July 19: European countries that have taken in thousands of refugees from fighting in Yugoslavia on Saturday appealed for international help to deal with the influx and end the war, reports AP.

As leaders of the countries met in Vienna, Austria took in more than 800 refugees who crossed the border by train from the former Yugoslav republic of Slovenia.

The German Foreign Ministry announced that Germany, too, would take some of the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina who had been stuck along the Croatian-Slovenian border.

Officials of Austria, Italy, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia met in Vienna in a summit of the Central European Initiative.

In a declaration, the countries called for the United Nations to bring the conflict in Yugoslavia to an immediate end.

FIS leaders will appeal to SC

ALGIERS, July 19: Lawyers for Algeria's outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) leaders are to appeal to the Supreme Court following the fundamentalists' 12-year prison sentences imposed by a military court earlier this week, reports Reuter.

The official news agency APS quoted lawyer Ali Yahia Abdennour as saying on Saturday the appeal would be lodged before next Wednesday, the deadline for such move.

It did not say whether the appeal was against conviction or sentence.

Off the Record

Elvis endorses Clinton

CARLISLE, Pa: Bill Clinton received an endorsement Saturday from one of his favourite musicians — Elvis Sort of, reports AP.

"I heard he was a (John F) Kennedy fan. Then I heard he was an Elvis fan," Ronnie Allyn of Harrisburg, who performs around the country as the late rock singer. "If he likes Elvis, he can't be all bad," he said.

Allyn who said he voted for George Bush in 1988, said he also liked the fact that Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate's wife, looked like actress Teri Garr.

"And I like what he stands for too," he added, including the governor's abortion rights position. Allyn said he didn't know that Clinton himself is sometimes referred to as Elvis. That was a weighty responsibility, he said. "When you put on an Elvis suit, you get a lot of power," he said. "Some guys can't handle that."



4 days in a crumpled van

MONTREAL: After surviving for four days in a crumpled van in a shallow Canadian river, Marlon Kuhnreich told relatives he doesn't know what caused the accident that killed his 5-year-old brother Andrew, reports AP.

Isador Caron, 64, was driving his two grandsons to a family cottage in Willaboro, N.Y. Tuesday when their van veered off a highway about 45 miles (72 kilometers) southeast of Montreal and plunged into the L'Acadie River.

Despite a search by police in helicopters, cars and on foot, Caron and Marlon Kuhnreich, 7, were not found until Friday when two volunteer rescuers discovered the van in shallow water under a bridge.

Caron is in stable condition in Montreal's Jewish General Hospital. His son Eli, the boy's uncle, said Saturday that "It's too early to ask (him) any questions and he isn't volunteering any information about the accident."

Luc Gadoury, a spokesman for the Quebec provincial police, said police were investigating.

"Saving All My Love" we wed "On Our Own"

MENDHAM, N.J.: Dionne Warwick, Patti LaBelle, Gloria Estefan, Donald Trump and basketball star Isiah Thomas were among the guests Saturday for the wedding of Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown, reports AP.

A Houston spokeswoman, Regina Brown, didn't return several telephone calls to confirm the private ceremony occurred, but a worker hired to help decorate Houston's mansion said it had. The worker wouldn't give his name.

Large balloons floated high over the singer's Mendham estate, apparently to discourage snooping from the air.

The ceremony was planned for a large tent before about 150 relatives and friends, Brown said earlier. About 600 people were invited to a reception under a larger tent on the grounds.

Houston, 28, a native of nearby Newark, and Brown, 23, a Boston native, dated for three years.

Houston is known for the hits "How will I know?", "The Greatest Love of All" and "Saving All My Love." Brown's hits include "My Prerogative" and "On Our Own."



VIENNA: A grandmother lays hands on the head of a young boy as he holds a 20 schilling-note (US 1.88 dollar) and while eating some bread on his arrival by special train carrying up to 1500 Bosnian refugees here July 18. Informed sources said more refugees would be deposited at Baden, and the remaining 800 to 1000 would be found shelter in the capital.

She battles neighbours for her cats

LOS ANGELES: A New York cat fancier and lottery-made millionaire has brought her 20 pets to a custom-built home in the Studio City section of Los Angeles after successfully battling the neighbours, reports AP.

A cargo plane packed with rows of cages brought Francine Katzenbogen and her felines to their ritzy new home Thursday after a 3,000-mile (4,800-kilometer) journey.

Katzenbogen said she worried all the way.

"I'm just nervous about them. They've never been out of the house," said Katzenbogen, 40, who flew with her pets.

The \$1.8 million flight was the finale of three-year battle over Katzenbogen's plant to move the cats to her California estate.

The property includes a \$100,000, six-room guest house she built in a garage for the stray cats she adopted and considers her family.

In March, about 50 neighbours protested when Katzenbogen applied for a variance to the zoning limit of three cats per household. Opponents argued the animals would lower property values, cause health problems, bother dogs and attract coyotes.

BRIEFLY

UK apologizes to US lawyer: The British government has apologized to a US lawyer who complained of a humiliating search and interrogation by customs officials at London's Heathrow Airport. The Sunday Times said, reports AP from London.

Paymaster General Sir John Cope had written to Margaret Jackson, who is black, to express his regret for "the distressed suffered," it said.

No one was immediately available from the Home Office to comment.

Jackson, 38, a former parking violations judge-trainee from New York, had complained to the Home Office that she was insulted and humiliated by customs officers who suspected her of being a drug smuggler.

She said she was singled out for a body search and three hours of questioning because of her colour.

6 hurt in Rhode prison clash: Inmates at a state prison took over an exercise yard Saturday and six guards suffered minor injuries, authorities said, reports AP from Cranston, US.

Correctional officers regained control of the yard four hours later by firing tear gas into a building where about 10 inmates held out, said A T Wall, a spokesman for the state Department of Corrections.

About 35 other inmates surrendered three hours into the standoff, Wall said.

The guards were injured about 6:30 pm after letting about 45 inmates into the yard from a maximum security cellblock.

Crew of UAE ship rescued: A German cargo ship, Annegret, on Saturday rescued all 15 crew members of "el-Salama," which sank for unknown reason 40 miles off the Somali coast, navigation authorities said, reports AP from Egypt.

El-Salama, owned by the United Arab Emirates, was en route from Somalia to Dubai.

The crew members were from Kenya, Pakistan, India and Somalia. They were in life boats when picked up by Annegret.

Cuban exiles to hold protest: Cuban exiles living in South Florida set sail on Saturday in a flotilla of about 35 boats to hold a protest ceremony off Cuba, reports Reuter from Miami.

The pleasure crafts and fishing boats set off before dawn from key West and assembled 13 miles off Cuba in international waters.

Organisers Alex Rodriguez said the group wanted to draw attention to President Fidel Castro's "unlawful treatment" of the Cuban people, Cuban authorities did not interfere with the flotilla.

The US coast guard reported that 49 Cuban refugees were picked up on Friday night and Saturday trying to make their way to the United States. A total of 929 Cuban refugees have been picked up by coast guard this year.

3 killed in Bombay train crash: At least three people were killed and some 40 more injured when two trains crashed in Bombay Saturday, police and fire brigade officials said, AFP reports from Bombay.

The injured were hospitalised in some five hospitals, police said.

The collision occurred on the suburb of Bombay, between Kalwa and Thane, late Saturday when one train derailed and crashed into another coming from the opposite direction.

Both were local passenger trains, police said, adding senior railway officials with relief personnel had reached the area.

Director of the Dubai Medical Centre for Treatment and Research (DMCTR). "Treatment at our centre is unconventional. We resort to drugs only when there is an extreme necessity."

The centre, a private facility set up by a wealthy UAE businessman, uses the same methods as similar to unconventional centres in Germany, the United States and other western countries, Shaheen told AFP. Its parent centre is based in Panama city in Florida.

"The main idea of our treatment programme is to activate and strengthen the immune system so the body will by itself resist the disease and eventually overcome it. In some cases, we can reach the required result," he said.

"But in the cases of patients who suffer from a serious immunity deficiency like in AIDS or cancer, our programme becomes longer and more comprehensive."

AIDS, cancer patients rushing UAE for treatment

DUBAI (United Arab Emirates), July 19: Patients with AIDS or cancer from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other countries are rushing to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the hope of finding treatment at a new clinic that uses herbs and other unconventional medicine, reports AFP.

The facility, which began operation five months ago, says its focus is on strengthening the immune system in the body and treatment involves herbs, vitamins, diet, sport, acupuncture and other unconventional techniques.

More than 200 patients from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Gulf states have visited the centre, nine of them with the deadly Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

The clinic claims that some have been cured while others have got better. "We are giving hope to patients, especially those suffering from AIDS," said Wael Shaheen,

According to Shaheen, eight of the nine AIDS patients treated at the centre were now feeling better while one of them had died because the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome was in its final stage.

Treatment of AIDS, for which the centre has imported advanced testing equipment, involves increasing the white blood cells, which provides the body with its defence, as well as cleaning the body of poisons in a process termed medically as detoxification.

Dr Shaheen said such a process required increasing the patients temperature to a fever level and giving him coffee enemas.

"I am not saying we can provide full recovery for the AIDS patient because we can not kill the virus," Shaheen said.

"What we are doing is strengthening the body's defences by increasing the number of the white blood cells, which are gradually destroyed by the AIDS virus. This delays the AIDS

symptoms by several years through resisting the virus attack and enables the patient to live longer."

Shaheen did not identify the AIDS patients but several countries in the region have report cases of the killer disease. In the UAE, authorities said more than 1,000 people had been found carrying HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, but most of them were foreigners who were deported.

DMCTR is the first facility of its kind in the Middle East and it also deals with rheumatism, heart and skin diseases and other maladies.

"We receive an average two to three patients a day, most of those who come to us have lost hope from conventional treatment or have been told by their doctors to stay at home because their case is hopeless," Shaheen said.

"The AIDS patients have been under our observation. They are now much better physically and psychologically."