

UN men begin destroying Iraq's nerve gas reserve

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25: The full-scale destruction of Iraq's stockpile of nerve gas began Thursday as UN weapons experts disposed of a third of a ton of the deadly agent Sarin, UN officials said, reports AP.

The nerve agent was destroyed in hydrolysis unit built by the Iraqis under UN supervision at their chemical weapons arsenal at Muthanna, 100 kilometers (60 miles) northwest of Baghdad.

The chief inspector, Garth Whitty, said that the first day's operations went without a hitch, said Tim Trevan, spokesman for the UN Special Commission that is dismantling Iraq's weapon programmes.

He said the UN team plans to "continue such destruction on a daily basis" and to increase productivity as they and their Iraqi counterparts gain experience.

Under the cease-fire agreement ending the Gulf War, Iraq is obliged to cooperate with UN inspectors in eliminating its nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programmes as well as long-range missiles.

"By a combination of continuous air monitoring and sample-taking analysis, the team was able to ensure that the agent was thoroughly destroyed and that there was no contamination of the surrounding environment," he said.

The hydrolysis plant uses water to convert the agent to non-toxic salts. A team of up to 30 disposal specialists are stationed in Iraq permanently for the six to 18 months it should take to destroy the chemical stockpile.

About 70 tons of nerve agent and 400 tons of mustard gas await destruction at Muthanna, UN experts say.

That represents what was in storage when the Gulf War ended in February 1991, as well as the amounts put into bulk storage tanks from a few of the nerve agent bombs and half the total mustard bombs already dismantled.

Muthanna has between 30,000 to 40,000 damaged chemical weapons, including 12,500 artillery shells, 8,000 rockets and thousands of aerial bombs collected from throughout Iraq, UN experts say.

Special militias formed to intimidate non-Serbs Shelling foils UN bid to restore power supply to Sarajevo

SARAJEVO (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Sept 25: Shelling frustrated UN soldiers' attempts Thursday to restore electrical power that was knocked out three days earlier to 80 per cent of the Bosnian capital, reports AP.

In neighbouring Croatia, the United Nations' chief civilian officer warned Croatian officials not to begin returning refugees to the easternmost of four UN protection zones, saying that Serb militias were still menacing civilians.

Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, the envoys leading the ongoing Yugoslav peace conference in Geneva, said they would fly to Banja Luka on Friday to investigate similar reports of intimidation around the Serb stronghold in northern Bosnia.

Serb fighters who want to remain tied to Serbia and Montenegro the remaining republics in Yugoslavia, have captured two-thirds of Bosnia. At

least 10,000 people have been killed since Bosnia's Muslim and Croats voted February 29 for independence from Yugoslavia.

Shelling began Wednesday morning as a team of engineers left UN Protection Force headquarters in an armored car for the damaged electricity station north of the city at Ugorako. They made no progress on repairs.

Sarajevo has suffered from irregular electricity and water supplies for much of its nearly six-month-long siege by Serb forces. Only about 20 per cent of the city of 400,000 residents has had power since shells slammed into the Ugorako power substation Monday night.

The warring parties — Muslims, Serbs and Croats — signed an agreement last weekend in Geneva not to disrupt basic utility supplies.

Bosnian state radio said Thursday that water supply lines near Stup, a western sub-

urb that has seen heavy fighting, were being repaired. Water should be running again soon in all newer parts of Sarajevo and in about 40 per cent of house in the old town, it said.

The Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency said at least six Serb fighters were wounded in clashes around Bihac, a government stronghold in north-west Bosnia. Croatian radio said Serb artillery hit the center of Bihac, wounding five children and one adult.

In neighboring Croatia, authorities have been pressuring the United Nations to begin returning Croats and other ethnic groups forced to flee four zones of the republic that were seized by Serbs last year.

Cedric Thornberry, chief UN civil affairs officer, said in a letter Thursday that he opposed returning refugees to their homes in the eastern sector, which witnessed intense fighting last year —

around the cities of Osijek, Vukovar, Vinkovci and Beli Manastir.

UN officials report that Serb fighters based in the area, instead of disarming under terms of the UN plan, have formed special militias to intimidate non-Serbs, attacking houses and blowing up churches.

"A climate of intimidation and hostility exists in various locations on both sides," Thornberry's letter said.

"It would be quite wrong for those who have suffered the trauma of being driven from their homes to run the major risk of new personal disasters through premature return, and we cannot support it."

In Austria, Serb-dominated Yugoslavia suffered another diplomatic setback when the International Atomic Energy Agency followed the lead of the UN General Assembly and barred it from the nuclear watchdog group.

Put more pressure on Baghdad, Kuwait asks world bodies

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Thursday urged the international community to put more pressure on Iraq to fulfil its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions that ended the Gulf War, reports AFP.

Sheikh Salem Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, told the 47th general assembly that Baghdad "continues to shake the parameter of stability throughout the region."

Sheikh Salem enumerated a long list of Iraq's failures to live up to UN resolutions and said there was a "responsibility on the international community to bring further pressure to bear on Iraq and to remain vigilant to its practices and to ensure its complete implementation" of the resolutions.

The Foreign Minister cited the continued problem of Kuwaiti nationals being held by Iraq, Baghdad's unwillingness

to cooperate on establishing a border with the Emirate, and its failure to accept responsibility for the destruction of Kuwaiti property destroyed during the invasion and occupation.

Sheikh Salem also expressed concern over the dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the island of Abu Musa, saying it could have "a direct impact on regional peace and stability."

Last month Abu Dhabi accused Tehran of seizing control of the island, which lies near the strategic strait of Hormuz in the southern Gulf. Iran says it has a "historic" claim over Abu Musa.

Sheikh Salem expressed Kuwait's support of the United Arab Emirates in the dispute, and called Iran to abide by an accord on the island and to "accept international conventions for the peaceful settlement of conflicts."

BRIEFLY

Alija to visit Pakistan: The President of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic, will make a two-day visit to Pakistan starting this weekend, a foreign office spokesman said Thursday, reports AFP from Islamabad.

Izetbegovic's trip, due to start Sunday, follows the visit of his special envoy Stjepan Djodjic to Pakistan on Tuesday. Djodjic brought a special message from the Bosnian President for Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The spokesman said Pakistan had been forthright in its support to Bosnia against Serbia's "blatant aggression."

Pakistan has already recognised Bosnia as an independent sovereign state and fully supported the defence of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. It agreed to establish a Bosnian mission in Islamabad soon.

Afghan parties meet tomorrow: A commission representing all the parties in Afghanistan's ruling coalition is to meet on Sunday to begin organising a council to decide the future government, Vice President Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi said on Thursday, reports Reuter from Kabul.

The commission is to be composed of two representatives from each Mujahideen party, as agreed in a peace accord signed this month by President Burhanuddin Rabbani and disident hardline leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Mohammadi said.

"It is a very delicate matter and their decisions will have to be taken very carefully," he said.

The commission will carry out preparatory work for a council of delegates from across Afghanistan which is to meet late next month or in November to decide the composition of the future government, Mohammadi said.

The commission will decide the selection process for the council and set dates.

14 Indian troops die in mishap: Fourteen Indian soldiers were killed when their truck skidded off a road in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh and plunged 500 feet (150 metres) into a gorge, officials said Friday, reports Reuter from Guwahati.

They said the accident occurred on Tuesday and rescue workers had to battle through bad weather to reach the site.

By Thursday night they had recovered 12 bodies and hoped to find the other two soon, they added.

King Hussein back home: King Hussein of Jordan flew his own aircraft home to a triumphant welcome and street parties Thursday following surgery for cancer in the United States, reports AFP from Amman.

Sixteen Jordanian air force ETS escorted the King's plane to Marka Military Airport in the suburbs of Amman, where Crown Prince Hassan Ibn Talal and Prime Minister Zeid Ibn Haker were waiting for the monarch and his wife, Queen Noor.

Tens of thousands of well-wishers lined the highway to the city as others leaned out of windows to shower the King with flowers, shouting Arab greetings to their leader who had been absent from Jordan for more than a month.

Thursday was declared a public holiday in Jordan.

King Hussein's motorcade — with Prince Hassan at the wheel of his brother's car — took more than three hours to cover the 25 kms (15 miles) to the royal palace.

Flood hits Ethiopia: Heavy rains and floods have destroyed houses and displaced several hundred families in villages in the southwestern Ethiopian region of Gamo Gofa, official radio Addis Ababa reported in a broadcast monitored here Thursday, reports AFP from Nairobi.

The radio said the flooding in the area was caused by the Baro river, which burst its banks after heavy rains that had fallen this week in the highlands of Iluababor and Kefa regions of western Ethiopia.

Last week, the radio said heavy rains had similarly destroyed hundreds of houses and left more than 200 families homeless in the eastern region of Hararge.

Several hundred hectares (acres) of crops and a large number of properties had also been destroyed by the heavy downpour, prompting officials of the Ethiopian Red Cross to step in to provide shelter for the victims of the Hararge flooding, the radio had said.

F-16s sale to Taiwan US, China fail to sink differences

NEW YORK, Sept 25: China and the United States have failed to resolve their differences over a planned sale of US F-16 fighter planes to Taiwan, a US official said Thursday, reports AFP.

But the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the two nations agreed not to let the dispute threaten other aspects of their relationship.

Acting US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen met for 40 minutes on the sidelines of the 47th UN General Assembly.

Bush seems stuck in a rut, fails to stir fears about Clinton

WASHINGTON, Sept 25: President Bush has brought back his old political team. He has tried new lines of attack. But nothing seems to work. He seems stuck in a rut, unable to stir fears about Bill Clinton or create optimism about four more years of Republican rule, reports AP.

One month after the Republican convention that was supposed to launch his comeback campaign, an embattled Bush continues to lag behind his Democratic rival by anywhere from 10 to 20 points.

"We have little ups and downs in the polls but basically Clinton has kept his lead," said

Andrew Kohut, director of surveys for the Times Mirror Center. "People are expressing as much strong support for Bill Clinton as they did for George Bush four years ago."

While Clinton has scored points by hammering Bush on the sad state of the economy, the president has not gotten much payback from his attacks on Clinton's avoidance of the draft during the Vietnam War.

In fact, Bush can't seem to decide how hard to press the so-called character issue. Some days he says that Clinton hasn't told the truth about the draft while other days he says that he doesn't want to talk about it, that it's simply a mat-

ter for voters to decide. "He (Bush) not only doesn't have a vision for America, he doesn't have a vision for getting elected," said Lyn Nofziger, who was White House political director for Ronald Reagan. "They're running out of time if they haven't already."

My feeling is, George Bush has reached the point where he really doesn't care about winning.

In the month since James A. Baker III took over as chief of staff, there have been some marked improvements in Bush's campaign.

Bush has sharpened the debate on differences with Clinton, particularly on taxes, and has begun to focus on Arkansas' bottom-dwelling ranking in many economic areas.

The president has finally addressed the "vision" question, defining a rationale for a second term based on an agenda of free enterprise, lower taxes and less government.

The indecision that plagued Bush's campaign has been replaced with a clear line of authority emanating from Baker. Campaign money is being spent more wisely, officials say. Bush has doled out favours, promises and tax breaks to farmers, defence employees, displaced workers, businessmen and average taxpayers — although he's been fuzzy about

how to pay for everything. But the miracle that Republicans hoped for hasn't materialised.

"We've stabilized and laid the groundwork for a possible breakthrough," one senior White House official said. But the official added, "It's not clear that we'll be able to make the breakthrough. We need to change the dynamic or the psychology of this campaign in the next couple of weeks."

Bush campaign press secretary Torie Clarke said the polls "ranged from 15 to 30 points (in Clinton's favour) at the convention. Now they're five to 15 points... Those are very good numbers for us right now."

Japanese troops start arriving in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Sept 25: The first of a 600-member battalion of Japanese troops arrived here today to join the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Cambodia, reports AP.

Lieutenant-Colonel Takashi Watanabe led five officers off a camouflaged C-130 transport plane into a crush of journalists jockeying to hear the first words of the head of an armed battalion of Japanese sent to another Asian country for the first time since the aggression of World War II.

"In a sense, this is very important for Japan," he said.

Thirty of his colleagues were to join him by Saturday via a series of C-130 flights bringing road repair equipment and supplies.



PHNOM PENH: Japanese self-defence force UN contingent Commander Lt. Col. Takashi Watanabe (C), escorted by Ambassador Yukio Imagawa (R) is swamped by journalists upon his arrival yesterday. The main body of Japanese troops will arrive on October 5.

— AFP/UNB photo

Russia defends sale of submarines to Iran

NEW YORK, Sept 25: Russia's foreign minister Thursday defended his country's sale of three non-nuclear submarines to Iran, saying the \$1.75 billion deal would give Moscow much-needed capital to implement economic reform and might even improve stability in the Gulf region, reports AP.

"There is a clear need to provide markets for the sale of our export commodities", Andrei Kozyrev said after meeting with his US counterpart, Acting Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger.

Eagleburger expressed concern over the deal but suggested there was little the United States could do about it.

"If the Russians want to sell submarines, I guess they could sell submarines," he told reporters during a round of meetings with foreign ministers here for the UN General Assembly session.

During their 90-minute meeting, Kozyrev and Eagleburger discussed a wide range of topics, including Mideast peace talks in Washington, and began drafting a landmark treaty to sharply reduce long-range nuclear missiles.

Approved by Presidents Bush and Boris N. Yeltsin, the treaty known popularly as START 2, would scrap thousands of multi-warhead nuclear missiles, considered the most dangerous type.

Eagleburger said he would continue the work with Kozyrev in a meeting to be scheduled later.

Without qualification, Eagleburger condemned the Russian sale of three submarines, valued at \$1.75 billion each, to Iran's radical government. The United States regards the submarines as potential threat to US naval units operating in the Gulf.

"It is a matter of concern," Eagleburger said. "It has been raised. It will be raised again."

Kozyrev gave no sign of backing down in what is a rare dispute with the United States. Since the Soviet Union fell apart last winter US relations with Moscow have been close.

"Our expert analysis says these sales are not exceeding limits which could destabilize the area," he said at a brief news conference.

In fact, Kozyrev went on, "These sales will probably enhance stability and also enhance our communications line with Iran."

He said Russia must have close ties with its Persian Gulf neighbour.

Eagleburger, stepping into the exchange with a reporter, said in a strong voice: "It will come as no surprise we have a different view."

IAEA suspends Y'Slavia

VIENNA, Sept 25: The rump state of Yugoslavia was thrown out of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Thursday following its expulsion from the UN General Assembly earlier in the week, reports Reuter.

The IAEA — the United Nations' nuclear safety watchdog — passed a resolution at its annual general conference suspending Yugoslavia from the current meeting and demanding it reapply for membership.

But IAEA officials said Yugoslavia, now consisting of Serbia and Montenegro, could continue to work with the agency at a practical level while the membership issue was resolved.

The resolution was proposed by the British delegation in its capacity as current President of the European Community.

The vote was supported by 69-member states. Three

countries — Yugoslavia, Zambia and Zimbabwe — voted against and 12 abstained, including Russia.

Delegates said Belgrade would not be readmitted until IAEA members felt it was no longer the main aggressor in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

During the debate on the resolution, Yugoslavia delegation leader Jelencovic Djurkovic-Tuvic said Belgrade remained willing to fulfil its obligations to the IAEA.

The country's only nuclear installation is a Russia-made research reactor at Vica, near Belgrade, which started operating in 1956. According to IAEA officials, the reactor will remain open to regular inspections by agency experts.

Djurkovic-Tuvic said Yugoslavia would have to take legal advice to see whether it was still bound by the Non-Proliferation Treaty banning the spread of nuclear weapons.

Arafat to visit Cairo soon

CAIRO, Sept 25: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will come to Cairo for talks with Egyptian officials next week to assess the Middle East peace process, the Egyptian Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported yesterday, reports Xinhua.

The two sides will discuss the outcome of the sixth round of bilateral Arab-Israeli negotiations in Washington, a well-informed Palestinian source was quoted as saying yesterday.

Conservative survives Labour party attack

LONDON, Sept 25: The British government late Thursday survived an opposition Labour Party attack on its handling of last week's sterling crisis by 42 votes, reports AFP.

At the end of the first day of an emergency debate in the House of Commons, recalled following the withdrawal of sterling from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in a policy U-turn last week, MPs voted 330 to 288 to reject a Labour amendment.

Communist rebel leader freed in Manila

MANILA, Sept 25: Philippine communist guerrilla chief Rodolfo Salas stepped into freedom today after six years in jail and vowed to go "back to the barricades", reports Reuter.

The former chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines told reporters that oppression and injustice continued to reign in the country, leaving him with no choice but to continue fighting for change.

Off the Record

Spirits sent him to seize power

HARARE: A man claiming he was sent by spirits to seize power stormed into the offices of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe on Thursday, bared his chest and beat up a policeman, witnesses and police said, reports Reuter.

Riot police were called into Mugabe's offices in the capital Harare and arrested the intruder, said to be in his early 40s. Dressed in feathers, black cloth and python skin, the man chanted that he had been sent by a spirit to seize power from Mugabe and bring rain to the drought-racked southern African country, the witnesses said.

They said the man demanded to see Mugabe, who was away on a tour of the provinces. He then began taking off his cloths from the waist up, but police were called in.

He beat up one policeman with a knobkerrie before security agents summoned reinforcements and subdued him, they said.

Police spokesman Augustine Masundire said the man had been taken to hospital for examination as "police believe he is mentally ill."

Even lawyer had tears

GREENEVILLE: Parents reunited with their infant daughters who were accidentally switched at birth will need months of counseling, an attorney for one of the couples said Thursday, reports AP.

The 15 unidentified parents reclaimed their rightful 4-month-old infants Tuesday at a psychologist's office in a scene described by one lawyer as traumatic.

"Even the lawyers had tears in their eyes," said Jack Burkhard, who represents one set of parents.

Gary Brewer, who represents the other parents, said, "the families are devastated."

Takoma Hospital president Jim Thompson on Wednesday acknowledged that identification bracelets on the babies' ankles had come off at the hospital and been switched when they were replaced.

The hospital said it had provided counseling to both families. Some hospital workers were transferred after the mix-up, but no one has been fired, Thompson said.

Brewer said Burkhard's clients became suspicious that the child they had brought home from the hospital was not their own and had a paternity test performed.

Burkhard said his clients spent 2 hours at the counselor's office getting ready for the exchange.

"Both sets held their babies," he said. "Watching the exchange, you could tell the children had bonded to the other parents."

"It's going to take several months of counseling to get the parents over the hurdle. How successful, only time will tell."

Privately he is shy

NEW YORK: Here's the good news about marriage to John McEnroe: His screaming fits are limited to the tennis courts, reports AP.

"John is really much more temperamental in his work than at home," wife Tatum O'Neal said in Sunday's Parade magazine. "Privately, he's shy. It's endearing to me that he keeps something to himself."

And how is the 33-year-old tennis star as a dad? "He's a devoted husband and father with an old-fashioned sense of morals," said O'Neal.

The 28-year-old actress, who won an Oscar at age 10, has this dream for the future: "He takes care of the kids while I make two pictures a year and get to pick my scripts and work with whomever I want, and that our kids go to great schools and live happily ever after."

The couple, married six years, have three children: Kevin, 6, Sean, 5, and Emily, 1.

Gouldian Finches are in danger

SYDNEY: One of the world's most beautiful birds, the Australian Gouldian Finch, is in danger of extinction after a mysterious and dramatic decline in numbers, researchers said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Only 2,000 adult birds may be left in the wild after being common across the north of the continent in the 1970s, according to Ray Nias of the World Fund for Nature.

Only two large colonies of the brilliant purple, yellow and green birds are known, both in the northern territory, and these appear to be critical to its long-term survival, Nias said.

SC talks on frozen Iraqi funds begin

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25: Security Council members on Thursday began informal discussions of a US resolution to seize frozen Iraqi funds to pay for UN weapons inspectors and humanitarian aid to Kurds and other Iraqis, reports Reuter.

But compared to previous US efforts to seize Baghdad's assets this draft is drawn narrowly and is limited to money derived from oil, Iraq's main export. It also allows states to deduct any debts first and put a 200 million dollar cap on funds they would be required to seize.

Officials most likely to be replaced are Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady and budget director Richard Darman, who have failed to produce a successful strategy for reviving the economy, and Veterans Secretary Edward Derwinski, whose low standing among veterans groups helped cost Bush the endorsement of the 2.2 million-member veterans of Foreign Wars.