

Huge nuclear material litters Kazakhstan

MOSCOW, Apr 6: Eight million tonnes of radioactive material litter Kazakhstan, creating a radiation count equivalent to more than half the fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Itar-Tass reported Monday, says AFP.

The survey by a team of Kazakh scientists said the Central Asian republic also has another 225 million tonnes of less active nuclear material on its territory.

Pavel Kayukov, a geophysicist who led the team, said the most powerful radioactive material was buried in the western region near Semipalatinsk, which for years was a testing site for both underground and surface Soviet nuclear explosions.

The nuclear center there was closed in August 1991 on

the orders of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, after more than 500 nuclear explosions had been carried out since 1947.

Kayukov also accused the uranium industries located in the South and West of the republic of responsibility for the presence of millions of tonnes of radioactive waste around Kazakhstan.

He said the radioactivity in some petroleum deposits is 100 times over the acceptable levels set by the former Soviet Union.

In all, 529 nuclear waste dumps were counted by the team on its survey across the republic, which is the second largest member of the Commonwealth of Independent States after Russia.

Ukraine tries to become N-power, shouts Russia

MOSCOW, Apr 6: With growing urgency, Russia is shouting that Ukraine is trying to become a nuclear power. Ukrainian leaders deny it, but the world may well wonder: just how close is Kiev to getting its finger on the button, reports AP.

The answer, Russian and Western experts say, could range from a few months to several years, depending on how hard the Ukrainians try.

"Ukrainians do have the technical know-how, if only they decide to invest enough money and effort," said Alexander Kononov, Director of the centre for military policy at Moscow's Institute of the USA and Canada.

Western countries have worried about nuclear proliferation in the former Soviet Union since the country's collapse in 1991 left atomic weapons in four newly independent states: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

year in Lisbon, Portugal, to transfer their weapons to Russia or destroy them, eventually leaving Russia as the region's only nuclear power.

Belarus and Kazakhstan stuck to the agreement and ratified the START I and nuclear non-proliferation treaties. But Ukraine has become increasingly reluctant to send its warheads to Russia and has not yet joined either START I or NPT.

Russia has cried foul with growing vigor, culminating Monday in an official accusation that Ukraine was violating the Lisbon agreement and trying to "widen the circle of nuclear powers."

The statement followed the virtual breakdown of Russian-Ukrainian nuclear talks. Moscow also may have been emboldened by President Clinton, who capped the Vancouver summit with Boris Yeltsin on Sunday by endorsing Russia's bid to be sole heir of the Soviet nuclear arsenal.

Hezb-i-Islami warns of fresh bloodshed Fate of Hekmatyar's cabinet uncertain

CHARASAYAB, Afghanistan, Apr 6: Rebel leaders must accept a new Islamic government in Afghanistan or face more bloodshed. Prime Minister-designate Gulbuddin Hekmatyar warned Monday, reports AP.

Last week, Hekmatyar dismissed the cabinet formed by the nine rebel factions in April 1992 to replace, the ousted communist rulers and said he had picked a new one.

But President Burhanuddin Rabbani immediately reversed the order and said the cabinet would stay on until he had approved another.

The dispute deepened the tensions among former rebel leaders struggling for control in the Afghan capital of Kabul following 13 years of civil war against the Soviet-backed government.

At least 5,000 people have

been killed a more than 20,000 others wounded in fighting that began with the overthrow of the former communist regime. Hekmatyar's radical Hezb-i-Islami faction was blamed for most of the bloodshed.

Speaking to reporters at his base 20 kilometers (15 miles) south of Kabul, Hekmatyar referred to Rabbani's government as "the other side."

Hekmatyar argued the president had overstepped his authority spelled out in a peace and power-sharing pact signed last month. He said rebel negotiators had agreed that two cabinet positions would go to each faction.

But the other rebel chiefs said Hekmatyar had picked the new cabinet without talking to them. Hekmatyar has been accused of giving the most powerful portfolios in his new

cabinet to his closest allies.

On March 7, the rebel leaders signed a pact in Pakistan and in the Muslim holy city of Mecca to stop fighting, share power and accept Hekmatyar as prime minister.

But it was unclear how the agreement would be implemented and whether it offered a permanent settlement to the rebels' long-standing differences.

"Some people are deliberately trying to violate this accord so that it gradually loses its significance and becomes irrelevant," Hekmatyar said.

He warned the new government may be the last chance for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan.

Xinhua from Islamabad says: Hekmatyar has accused President Rabbani of violating the Islamabad peace accord by refusing to dismiss the old

cabinet. Hekmatyar hinted at a press conference in his headquarters at Charstab near Kabul on Monday that a failure of agreement on the new cabinet would push Kabul towards the brink of war, according to reports reaching in Islamabad today.

He said that the fact is that Rabbani wants the present government to continue without change and they consider themselves not bound by the Islamabad accord.

He blamed Rabbani for violating the Islamabad accord which he felt is the last chance for the peaceful settlement of the Afghan crisis.

On the possibility of war between his own Hezb-i-Islami and Rabbani's Jamiat-i-Islami, Hekmatyar said "we resent war, we will avoid war as long as it is not imposed on us."



An activist of the Azad Kashmir People's Party (AKPP) flashes victory sign as his jeep crosses a landslide successfully near Ghari Dopatta, 20 kms from Muzaffarabad on Tuesday. Pakistani troops and Azad Kashmir authorities erected hurdles in the way of marchers to foil their attempt to cross the ceasefire line separating Indian held Kashmir and Pakistan held Kashmir. Authorities successfully managed to halt the marchers 24 kms from the ceasefire line without any incident. — AFP/UNB photo.

Shiv Sena blacklists actor Hangal

NEW DELHI, Apr 6: Members of an extremist Hindu group have called for a boycott of films starring an Indian actor who attended a Pakistan national day function, the Press Trust of India said, reports Reuters.

The news agency said the Bombay-based Shiv Sena blacklisted veteran actor AK Hangal, a Hindu, after the showed up at the event in the city last month.

Shiv Sena volunteers dug up a cricket pitch in Bombay last October to prevent the first game of Pakistan's tour. Pakistan took its team home after the incident.

The boycott could harm Hangal professionally, with Shiv Sena volunteers keeping a close watch on cinemas to enforce the ban.

Serbian court bans Muslim magazine

BELGRADE, Apr 6: A Serbian court has banned the latest issue of the Muslim magazine Sandzak, published in the southern Serbian region of the same name, for containing caricatures held to be defamatory to Serbian leaders, the Muslim news agency ISA reported Monday, says AFP.

The court at Novi Pazar, the main town of Sandzak, accused the magazine's chief editor, Sefket Krcic, of "provoking national, racial or religious hatred," the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug said.

Muslims, who make up half of Sandzak's population of 44,000, demand autonomy

Lanka imposes curfew in Mannar Island

COLOMBO, Apr 6: An indefinite curfew was imposed Tuesday in northwestern Mannar Island after Tamil rebels killed three soldiers in an ambush, military officials said, reports AP.

The soldiers were in a jeep travelling on a causeway linking the island to the mainland when the rebels ambushed them Monday night, officials said.

Troops launched a cordon and search operation immediately after the curfew took effect at 6 am (0030 GMT), said the officials at the Joint Operations Command.

Over 17,500 people have been killed in Sri Lanka's decade-old Tamil separatist war, where rebels from the minority Tamil community are fighting for an independent homeland in the north and east of the country.

Off the Record



A pet monkey ruffles the hair of a seven-month-old baby girl in a southern Sri Lankan village. The monkey, named Kira, is useful around the house helping with baby sitting and picking fruits although Sri Lanka's wildlife law bans household pets other than cats and dogs. — AFP/UNB photo

World War II bomb disrupts Brussels' airport

BRUSSELS: A World War II bomb disrupted traffic at Brussels' international airport after it was unearthed by construction workers, news reports said Tuesday, reports AP.

The runway at Zaventem airport was closed for 20 minutes after the bomb was discovered Monday afternoon. Some planes were diverted to provincial airports.

Army bomb-disposal experts rendered the 85 kilo (187 pound) bomb harmless with a controlled explosion.

Reports said the bomb was made in the United States. It was likely dropped during a World War II bombardment of German-occupied Belgium.

The bomb was found by workers building an extension to the airport.

She demands apology not compensation

TOKYO: Song Shin-do, a Korean who says she was forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers during World War II, sued the government Monday, demanding a personal apology but no compensation, reports AP.

Song, 71, became the first ethnic Korean living in Japan to identify herself as a wartime sex slave.

"For 48 years I've felt so ashamed of my past," Song told reporters. "But as I get old, I finally decided it's better to speak out than dying without telling my story."

Women from South Korea and the Philippines already have sued the Japanese government, asking for an apology and compensation.

But Song said she doesn't want money. "I can't bring money to my grave. I want to her that old man Miyazawa apologize," she said, referring to Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa.

Miyazawa has issued general apologies, including one on a trip to Seoul in January 1992. But one of Song's lawyers, Kim Gyong duk, said the suit demanded a clear apology to Song herself.

The suit charges the government with "crimes against humanity."

Song, like many other Korean women, said her ordeal started with deception. In 1938, a Korean broker lured her to Pyongyang from her hometown south of Seoul with promises of a well-paying job at the war front.

Instead, she was sent to a camp in Wuchang in northeastern China, where she was forced to have sex with dozens of Japanese soldiers daily for three years, she said. She was later transferred to other brothels in China until the war ended in 1945.



Two Russian prostitutes sit in their kitchen after injecting themselves with a mixture of drugs, following a night on the streets on Sunday. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Ghali in Bangkok: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali arrived in Bangkok yesterday for an overnight stop before a visit to troubled Cambodia, reports AFP from Bangkok.

He told reporters at the airport that next month's UN-organised elections in Cambodia will be held despite the increasingly unstable situation in the country.

Boutros-Ghali travels to Phnom Penh tomorrow of a two-day visit to inspect the UN operation in Cambodia as the campaign for the May 23-27 election formally begins.

The radical Khmer Rouge faction is boycotting the election, and has been blamed for an escalating number of attacks in recent days which have seen four UN peacekeepers killed and several injured.

Fatah wing slates Syria: The Fatah wing of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Monday accused Syria of ordering murders of its members to force the PLO to resume peace talks with Israel, reports AFP from Sidon.

Mounir Maqdash, head of Fatah's armed wing said in a statement published here PLO members had been executed by the Fatah-Revolutionary Council of Abou Nidal.

Maqdash said "Gangs of the traitor Abou Nidal" had "Assassinated, on Syria's instructions, our leaders in order to force our people into accepting the Israeli conditions of the peace negotiations."

Italian politician under inquiry: The former Secretary of the Christian Democrat Party, Arnaldo Forlani, is under investigation by magistrates probing Italy's ever-widening graft and corruption scandal, judicial sources said Monday, AFP reports from Rome.

Forlani is being investigated in connection with the illicit funding of political parties in a scam involving public road-building contracts, the sources said.

Rebels kill 10 in Peru: Maoist Shining Path guerrillas on Monday ambushed a truck while it patrolled a highland region, killing 10 members of the security forces and their civilian driver and wounding eight others, police said, reports Reuters from Trujillo.

Police in this northern city, in communication with the remote zone through radio, originally reported 30 members of the security forces had died.

About 50 Shining Path guerrillas mined the truck carrying 19 members of a mixed patrol on the highway between Santiago De Chuco and Trujillo, some 5000 kms (330 miles) north of Lima, police said.

Seven policemen, three soldiers and a civilian driver died in the attack or in a gunbattle that followed, police said. Another five policemen and three soldiers were wounded.

High winds delay launch of Discovery

CAPE CANAVERAL, Apr 6: Dangerously high winds delayed Tuesday's launch of space shuttle Discovery on a mission to study the thinning of the earth's protective ozone layer, reports AP.

Discovery was supposed to lift off at 1:32 am EDT (0532 GMT), but NASA held the countdown at the nine-minute mark in hopes the high crosswinds would subside at the Kennedy Space Center's shuttle emergency landing strip. Safety guidelines are stricter for nighttime launches.

Engineers also were assessing a last-minute problem with an engine valve that appeared to be too hot.

Yeltsin returns home to start campaign for referendum

MOSCOW, Apr 6: President Boris Yeltsin, buoyed by promises of 1.6 billion dollars in US aid to help his reforms, has returned home to start a vigorous campaign for support in a key referendum on April 25, reports Reuters.

Yeltsin, on the way back from his first summit with US President Bill Clinton, stopped off in the central Siberian city of Bratsk on Monday where he urged the population to back reforms as well as the idea of early elections.

The ballot paper, changed last week by the conservative supreme legislature as part of a raging power struggle with Yeltsin, will contain four questions. I propose a simple formula

for voting — go out and vote "yes" to all four questions," Yeltsin said after visiting the city's giant aluminium smelter.

The Russian leader needs the support to half the electorate according to rules set by the congress of People's Deputies, the supreme legislature. He must start campaigning immediately if he is to have any chance of overcoming growing political apathy.

The questions are a vote of confidence in the president, a vote of confidence in reforms begun since the Soviet collapse in late 1991, and two on whether early presidential and parliamentary elections should be held.

Don't be afraid to say yes even to the question relating to the re-election of the presi-

dent Yeltsin added, saying he was sure he would win re-election.

First Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Shumiko told Interfax news agency that the presidential team was only interested in the questions on the vote of confidence in Yeltsin and on early parliamentary elections.

First Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Shumeiko told Interfax news agency that the presidential team was only interested in the questions on the vote of confidence in Yeltsin and on early parliamentary elections.

He dismissed the question of confidence in the painful economic reforms—which Yeltsin's opponents hope will result in a large "no vote"—as

illogical. Confidence in the president automatically means confidence in his policy, he said.

An opinion poll in the daily evening newspaper Izvestia said 43 per cent of those asked said they would vote for Yeltsin.

"The most optimistic forecasts suggest Yeltsin could get the backing of 46 per cent of the population, which in any normal country would be considered a great achievement," it said.

On Monday, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney called for swift international action to deliver billions of dollars to Russia to keep its fledgling democracy alive.

"If the international finan-

cial institutions are swift and effective, relief and assistance from this quarter could also be in the billions of dollars," Mulroney said.

Mulroney noted that Friday's decision by the Paris Club to re-schedule Russian debt would provide about dollars 15 billion in immediate assistance.

"That should be the immediate objective of the G 7 (Group of Seven major industrialised nations), to insure that decisions are made that place Russia irreversibly on the road to freedom and eventual economic greatness," he said.

Mulroney hosted the US-Russian summit in Vancouver at the weekend at which President Bill Clinton an-

Cholera claims 143 in West Bengal

CALCUTTA, India, Apr 6: Cholera has killed 143 people and affected some 8,000 others in India's West Bengal state, the state health Minister said Monday, reports AFP.

West Bengal state health Minister Prasanta Sur told reporters here the disease had spread in several villages across four districts but was not yet an epidemic.

Doctors in West Bengal had earlier identified the disease as gastroenteritis due to a lack of drinking water in the villages.

The West Bengal administration has taken all steps to halt the spread of cholera, which has also claimed victims in Calcutta since the first deaths were reported.