

UN experts destroy Iraq's main chemical weapons facility

MANAMA, June 15: UN chemical weapons experts completed the destruction of Saddam Hussein's main chemical weapons facility Tuesday, then over cups of tea returned to the Iraqis, reports AP.

Although other Iraqi arms facilities remain to be dismantled, the end of the Muthanna operation is a big step in the UN campaign to prevent the Iraqi leader from posing a military threat in the region.

Ron Manley of Britain, leader of the UN chemical team, described the handover to reporters after returning to the regional headquarters of the UN commission overseeing destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

After checking that the soil was not contaminated, Hossain Amin, director of Iraq's National Monitoring Directorate, took charge of the chemical plant at Samarra, 60 miles (100 kms) north of Baghdad.

The facility will be subject

to long-term UN monitoring to ensure Saddam does not try to revive the chemical weapons programme he secretly built up for more than a decade before the 1991 Gulf War.

Muthanna was used to produce chemical weapons that were used against Iraq in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq.

The main plant was blown up by UN inspectors because it contained a significant amount of equipment designed to manufacture chemical weapons, Manley said.

The handover was "a very simple meeting, very pleasant," he said. "It was a combined operation from the beginning. We thanked each other, exchanged a few memories. We had a cup of tea."

Under terms of the Gulf War cease-fire, Iraq is not permitted to have or develop chemical, nuclear or biological weapons.

Govt, rebels locked in heavy fighting 60 boys butchered in Kigali

KIGALI, June 15: A total of 60 Tutsi teenage boys were abducted by Hutu militia from a church complex in the Rwandan capital of Kigali on Tuesday and butchered in a big pit nearby, a UN official said he had been told by survivors today, reports Reuter.

UN military spokesman Major John-Guy Plante said the survivors saw a total of 60 boys taken away from the Saint Paul Church and killed near a bridge at a spot called Rugenge in a government-held part of the city.

"There is a big hole there where a lot of massacres have taken place," Plante said.

He said survivors had reported the militia came through a hole in the fence at the bottom of the complex of religious buildings to take away the boys.

Mortar exchanges and small arms fire rocked the capital today despite the promise of a cease-fire between the two warring sides

declared at an African summit in Tunis.

AP adds: Despite a ceasefire declaration, dozens of mortar shells crashed into downtown Kigali and all signs pointed to more heavy fighting for control of the capital.

"They're still making a lot of noise," Maj Jean-Guy Plante, the UN military spokesman, said of the warring factions. As he spoke, another shell exploded not far from the UN compound.

"You can hear it for yourself. It sure doesn't sound like a ceasefire," he said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press office in Nairobi, Kenya.

The government army, dominated by the majority Hutu tribe, and the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front, led by the minority Tutsis, declared an immediate ceasefire Tuesday in Tunisia, during an Organization of African Unity summit.

A Hutu militia abducted 30 to 40 Tutsi children Tuesday

from the Ste. Famille church in Kigali where they had sought shelter, and the United Nations feared they would be massacred.

"When they take them away, they usually kill them," said Brig Gen Henry Anyidoho, deputy commander of the UN force.

There was no official word on the fate of the children Wednesday. But fleeing civilians said bodies were dumped in a big hole near the church-school complex, where some 3,000 Tutsis are held up.

The lightly armed United Nations force, made up of 450 men, has been unable to reach the scene because aggressive Hutu militias control the area.

The United Nations evacuated 400 Tutsis on Monday to another part of the capital the rebels control. But efforts to rescue more were suspended Tuesday when the militias refused UN forces access to the church. Hours later, the children were abducted.

Off the Record

Miss Belgium mania sweeps the Philippines

MANILA: Belgium's Miss Universe candidate did not even make it to the semifinals. But in the Philippines, thousands of people, young and old, men and women, crowd around makeshift stalls every day to buy her picture, reports AP.

Pictures featuring Christelle Roelands, a 19-year-old public relations student from Rocour, in swimsuit, evening gown and party dresses have become the hottest selling item among vendors of selected pictures of the 77 candidates in last month's pageant.

Miss Belgium even outsells Sushmita Sen of India, who won the crown.

The reason for the "Belgiummania" is that Miss Roelands' soft features, long brown hair and smile look like the kind of dolls popular with Filipino girls.

"She's very beautiful," men and women gushed as they crowded around a stall Wednesday in Manila's Santa Cruz district to stare at Miss Belgium smiling in her bikini. "She looks like a doll," several of them said.

Throughout the three-week pageant, Miss Belgium was a favourite among star-struck Filipinos. Her photos were splashed daily on front pages of national newspapers.

One time, she posed sensually for photographers, oblivious to the fact that the sash she was wearing misspelled the name of her country. After that, she came to be known as "Miss Beli-gum."

A gift fit for a king!

SHIPSHEWANA, Indiana: What do you get the king who has everything, including a 500 million dollars mosque built in his honour?

The man who tends the cherished Arabian horses of Morocco's King Hassan II hopes the answer is a carriage from a Shiphshewana company, reports AP.

The six carriage builders at Troyer Saddlery and Carriage Co are finishing a white coach that will be presented to the king on his 65th birthday July 9.

"I hope we don't disappoint him," company owner Dennis Troyer said Tuesday. "I don't think we will, but you never know how a king will react."

The stable master, known to Troyer only as Ahmed, was put in touch with the Indiana company through a breeder of Arabian horses in Pennsylvania. His frantic call came in mid-April and caught Troyer with an eight-week backlog of orders.

Troyer rearranged the company's work schedule to handle the job. He also worked the project into Ahmed's "modest" budget of about 10,000 dollars.

He said he needed a carriage for the king's birthday and I had to help him," Troyer said. "He sounded so desperate, and I didn't want to pass up the opportunity to do it."

Man convicted of abetting room-mate commit suicide

LOS ANGELES: A man authorities said gave his roommate a loaded gun and said "just do it" was convicted Monday under California's rarely used 19th century law banning assisted suicide, reports AP.

A jury deliberated a little more than two days before findings that Alex Coventry's actions violated the 1873 law forbidding anyone from intentionally aiding, advising or encouraging someone to commit suicide.

Coventry, 44, faces up to three years in prison when he is sentenced Tuesday by Superior Court Judge Ronald Coen.

Leonard Medina, 42, fired a fatal shot into his chest on July 2 at the apartment he and Coventry shared. Medina had a history of threatening suicide.

Khmer Rouge rejects ceasefire offer

PHNOM PENH, June 15: Khmer Rouge leaders resumed peace talks with the government Wednesday but rejected an offer to begin a truce June 30, government officials said, reports AP.

The talks were to continue Thursday, but government officials said Wednesday's session did not make them optimistic that any progress would be made.

King Norodom Sihanouk, who organised the talks, said this week's session may be the last if no breakthrough results, a royal aide reported.

The chief Khmer Rouge delegate, Chan Youran, said Wednesday his group wanted peace but also called for mutual concessions and compromises. He said there should be discussions of what the Khmer Rouge should hand over to the government, and what the government "should in turn give" to the Khmer Rouge.

He didn't elaborate, but the Khmer Rouge is seeking im-

portant roles in the government and military.

The talks at the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh followed the failure of the first round of talks in North Korea late last month.

Premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh said after attending the Pyongyang talks that the government had no choice but to continue fighting because the Khmer Rouge rejected a truce offer and instead made demands that amounted to the dissolution of the government.

The government was formed after United Nations-organized elections in May 1993, which the Khmer Rouge boycotted.

During its fanatical Communist rule in the 1970s, the Khmer Rouge killed, worked or starved to death hundreds of thousands of people. It was toppled from power by a Vietnamese invasion in late 1978, but has been fighting from the jungles ever since.



Marianne Heiberg (widow of Johan Joergen Holst, the Norwegian foreign minister) smiles after receiving the "European of the Year" award from French President Francois Mitterrand (R) at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Tuesday. Her husband was given the award posthumously for his efforts in brokering the Israeli-PLO autonomy accord. — AFP photo

Israelis not allowed in Jericho during Arafat's trip

JERUSALEM, June 15: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat will not meet any Israelis when he arrives in Jericho, as the army has decided to keep them all away, reports AP.

This measure has been taken for security reasons, a senior military source told reporters Tuesday. The only Israelis allowed in will be a handful of journalists.

"On the other hand all the Palestinians will be allowed to go to the town that day."

"But there are limits on how many people will be able to press into Jericho because the area covers only 62 square kilometres," he said.

The source said no date had been set yet for Arafat's trip which has been repeatedly delayed but is now expected to take place late this month or in early July.

The army and the Palestinian police force "will cooperate and try to ensure order," he added.

BRIEFLY

Peres begins Ukraine trip: Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres began a two-day visit to Ukraine on Wednesday, the first by a senior Israeli official to the former Soviet republic of 53 million people. AP reports from Kiev.

"Ukraine is returning to the centre of Europe, which greatly facilitates strengthening relations between our two states," Peres told journalists after arriving at Kiev's airport.

He plans to meet with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoly Zlenko and President Leonid Kravchuk before signing a package of trade agreements.

On Thursday, Peres will visit Kiev's Babi Yar district, where up to 200,000 Jews were killed during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine.

Russian PM to visit Italy, US: Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin will travel to Italy and the United States during the next week despite his recent treatment for kidney stones, his office announced Tuesday. AP reports from Moscow.

Chernomyrdin leaves for Italy on Sunday to attend the World Natural Gas Congress in Milan, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. He formerly was director of the major Russian oil and gas firm Gazprom.

On June 21, Chernomyrdin leaves for a five-day visit to the United States to participate in a joint US-Russia Commission which he heads with US Vice President Al Gore. He also may meet with President Clinton, ITAR-Tass said.

Pak aid for Azerbaijan: Pakistan is to send a plane-load of medical and humanitarian assistance for people displaced in the current fighting in Azerbaijan, officials here said, AFP reports from Islamabad.

They said the decision was taken by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto following a United Nations appeal for humanitarian assistance for the Azaris who are facing "severe hardships as a result of Armenian aggression."

BBC reporter's trial postponed: Angolan authorities postponed Tuesday the trial of a BBC radio reporter charged with unauthorised activities judicial officials said, AFP reports from Luanda.

Chris Simpson, a British national, was arrested Sunday after entering a prison inside a police station to interview three South Africans jailed there on drug offences.

Simpson was charged with trying to conduct the interview without proper authorisation. He was still in custody inside the prison Tuesday afternoon, officials said.

Serb leader praises Yeltsin: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic praised Russia and President Boris Yeltsin on Tuesday for their steadfast support of the Serbs, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, AP says from Moscow.

Karadzic, who is in Moscow to receive the Mikhail Sholokhov literary prize from the Russian Writers Union, said at a meeting with Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev that the Russians had been Serbs' friends for centuries.

"Nobody knows how the recent crisis over Sarajevo would end if it were not for the initiative of President Boris Yeltsin," Karadzic was quoted as saying.

Blast rocks Montreal: A huge explosion shook the Montreal area Tuesday evening, possibly caused by a meteorite, police said, AP reports from Montreal.

Police were trying to locate the source of the blast, but speculated it happened in a sparsely populated area because there was no immediate word of casualties or property damage.

People living southeast of Montreal reported seeing a bright flash in the sky, then hearing a loud explosion.

"It was a ball of fire with flames all around it and with a kind of tail behind it. It was falling and two or three minutes later there was a boom," one witness told a local radio station.

Carter in North Korea to help defuse N-tensions

SEOUL, June 15: Former US President Jimmy Carter crossed the heavily armed border with North Korea Wednesday, beginning a four-day effort to defuse nuclear tensions on the divided peninsula, reports AP.

In Seoul, sirens wailed and traffic came to a halt as authorities staged a civil-defence drill in the city center. The drill originally was to have been much larger, but authorities scaled it back dramatically to avoid fanning public fears.

North Korea, meanwhile, expressed renewed defiance in the face of pressure to submit to nuclear inspections.

In a speech carried Wednesday by Radio Pyongyang and monitored in Tokyo, the Communist state's defence minister, O Jin U, said North Korea would never again accept inspections because of the "arrogant and insolent" attitude of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In his trip to the North, Carter travelled through the truce village of Panmunjon inside the demilitarized zone that separates the two Koreas roughly along the 38th parallel. He did not speak to reporters,

but waved back at them from the northern side.

The former president's trip, although private, was endorsed by the Clinton administration, and is seen as part of a

aroused suspicions it is trying to build nuclear weapons.

"Heightening tensions, the North announced this week its withdrawal from the IAEA, the UN nuclear watchdog agency. The United States, Korea and Japan are pushing for UN sanctions, which the North said it would regard as an act of war."

In North Korea, Carter planned to meet with President Kim Il Sung. The former president met with President Kim Young-sam and other top government officials while in Seoul.

Washington has said Carter is carrying no message and was briefed by the State Department as a courtesy before he left for Korea.

However, South Korea's state television, KBS, reported that Carter was carrying an "unofficial package deal" from Washington that offers diplomatic recognition by the United States if North Korea allows open inspections of its nuclear operations.

The United States, closely allied with pro-Western South Korea, has no official ties with the North, North Korea.



Jimmy Carter US effort to convince the hard-line North it is on a collision course over its nuclear programme.

Human Rights Watch report Israel torturing Palestinian detainees despite peace accord

JERUSALEM, June 15: Despite the Israel-PLO peace plan and the start of Palestinian self-rule, Israeli interrogators systematically torture Palestinian detainees, an international human rights group reported Wednesday, says AP.

"Such practices could undermine the Cairo Agreement," Human Rights Watch said in a statement. Israel and the PLO signed the agreement on May 4, introducing Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

The army unequivocally denied the charges, and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's office, which controls the secret service, issued a terse "no comment."

The Human Rights Watch report "Israel's interrogation of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories, alleges systematic torture by interroga-

tors belonging to the Israeli army and Israel's General Security Services.

The two agencies provide the bulk of interrogators in Israeli-controlled West Bank, where some 1 million Palestinians live.

Some of the methods detailed in the 316-page report, including prolonged standing and loud music, have been defended by Israeli spokesmen in the past as forms of pressure stopping well short of international definitions of torture.

Israel has said its interrogators are permitted to use "moderate physical pressure" to extract information about imminent attacks.

But the report says other harsher methods, including beatings and pressure on the testicles, remained standard practice after the Sept 13 PLO-Israel accord was signed

in Washington.

Bassem Tamimi of the West Bank town of Ramallah reported that an interrogator investigating the November slaying of a settler grabbed my chin and began to flip my head back and forth, then he started shaking it right and left, twisting my neck from side ... if I stood up straight, he smacked the top of my head with his hand."

Tamimi was hospitalized with a cerebral haemorrhage. The charges were eventually dropped.

N.S., a student from Ramallah, who was charged in December with belonging to the banned Hamas fundamentalist Islamic organisation — which opposes the peace accord — reported that his interrogators slapped and kicked him on his legs and testicles. He was eventually released on bail.

30 killed as rival Afghan factions clash

QUETTA, Pakistan, June 15: Clashes erupted between rival Afghan guerilla commanders in southern and eastern Afghanistan, killing 30 people and injuring dozens, officials of the various factions said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

A fierce battle between two commanders of the Jamiat-Islami Party led by President Burhanuddin Rabbani erupted near the southern city of Kandahar. Jamiat officials in Pakistan's southwestern city of Quetta said.

The two commanders, battling over possession of a checkpoint near Kandahar, attacked each others positions.

Mubarak gets UN Population Prize '94

GENEVA, June 15: The United Nations awarded its 1994 Population Prize worth 10,000 dollars to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the head of a Turkish Family Planning Association here Tuesday, reports AP.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali gave the prize to Mubarak and Vehbi Koc, President of the Turkish Foundation for Health and Family Planning.

Christopher may visit ME to expedite peace move

WASHINGTON, June 15: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher is considering a new trip to the Middle East to help push the peace process forward, a senior aide said here Tuesday, reports AP.

"We have under active consideration now when it might be productive for the secretary to make another visit to the region," said Robert Pelletreau, Assistant Secretary of State for New Eastern Affairs.

Christopher shuttled between Jerusalem and Damascus in April and May, and the Israeli daily The Jerusalem Post reported Sunday he was expected in Israel on June 22.

Pelletreau told a Congressional committee Tuesday that negotiations between Israel and Syria had entered a new and important phase.

"There are wide gaps and a large amount of work remains to be done," he said. But he added: "The idea and the responses that we are getting are serious and they are substantive."

"Both Israel and Syria have expressed their desire to see Secretary Christopher play this (mediating) role and the United States, for its part, is determined to do everything it can to move this negotiation forward in 1994."

Pelletreau said that in the discussions on eventual security arrangements for the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967, both sides were looking at an international presence that would include Americans.

He said it was premature to say whether US forces would be stationed in the Golan but added that if both sides wanted it, "we would consider such an action" within an international framework.

Asked about Syrian-US relations, Pelletreau said that a lot of issues "remained to be resolved."

Israel, Vatican set up ties

JERUSALEM, June 15: Israel and the Vatican established formal diplomatic ties Wednesday and will exchange ambassadors, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin announced, reports AP.

Explaining the rapid move towards relations, Beilin said criticism of establishing full diplomatic ties with Israel from Arab countries was much less than the Vatican had expected.

He said the Vatican would probably open its embassy in Jaffa, a former Arab village that is now part of Tel Aviv.



Elizabeth Taylor (C) appears at a press conference with her husband Larry Fortensky (R) and publicist Chen Sam (L) on Tuesday in Los Angeles to inaugurate the "Museum of Miniatures" and the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation event, "Small World, Big Hearts". This is Taylor's first public appearance since she was hospitalized March 23 for hip surgery. — AFP photo