

Russia denies developing chemical weapons

WASHINGTON, June 25: Russia has assured the United States it is no longer developing chemical weapons and the administration expects this issue will soon be resolved. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Friday, reports Reuter.

The CNN interviewer did not probe the issue further. It was unclear how Christopher could be so certain about the matter. On Thursday, CIA director James Woolsey told Congress there was "growing evidence that Russia has continued elements of an offensive chemical weapons programme."

400 UNITA men killed in clashes with govt troops

LUANDA, June 25: Angolan state radio said today that 400 UNITA rebels had been killed in operations over the past few days and others had fled government forces after they broke a siege of the central city of Ndalatando, reports Reuter.

The radio said government troops had driven the rebels of Jonas Savimbi's UNITA (national union for the total independence of Angola) from the outskirts of Ndalatando, capital of the central province of Cuanza Norte.

Gunmen kill mayor, 3 others in Philippines

MARAWI, Philippines, June 25: Unidentified gunmen ambushed and killed a town mayor, two town police chiefs and a civilian in two separate attacks in this southern Philippine city, officials said today, reports AFP.

Amatonding, 35, Buting police commander chief inspector Anwar Macala, and an engineer related to the mayor were killed instantly. Amatonding's brother was wounded, police and the local Red Cross office said.

Marawi police chief Major Cesar Maruhom and two other policemen recovered the gunmen's getaway car two hours later and were bringing it to their office when they were ambushed by the same group.

During the follow-up operations, 400 soldiers of UNITA were killed and others fled in disarray, the radio said. The report could not be independently confirmed. The radio said the city, 220 KM east of Luanda, where 50 people were reported killed in UNITA shelling last week, was now calm and no longer threatened by UNITA artillery and mortars.

Bosnian commander orders fresh offensive against Serbs

SARAJEVO, June 25: The commander of the Muslim-led Bosnian army ordered a new offensive against the Serbs, calling on his men to get out of the trenches and go on the offensive. Sarajevo's leading newspaper reported on Friday, says Reuter.

The United Nations reported heavy firing in north-central Bosnia, where Muslim and Serb forces have been fighting in recent weeks, with 130 impacts reported on the Muslim-held town of Zavidovici in four and a half hours.

The Muslim-controlled town of Gracanica was hit by more than 300 shells, plus machine-gun and small arms fire during the day, a UN spokesman said.

In northeast Bosnia, UN officials said Bosnian government forces were closing in on a rebel Muslim stronghold in a conflict that could destabilise the uneasy military balance in the region.

Western observers said there were signs that Serb forces might intervene to prevent troops of the Muslim-led Sarajevo government capturing Muslim tycoon Pikret Abdic's breakaway fiefdom in the remote Bihac pocket.

This inter-Muslims war is a sideshow. But the possibility of Krajina Serb support makes it a dangerously destabilising conflict if you take it to its logical limits," said an aid official in Bihac.

In Washington, the Senate set the stage for a new battle over the arms embargo against Bosnia as the Clinton administration and NATO allies warned of dire consequences if the United States lifts the ban unilaterally.

Senate Republican leader Bob Dole and a group of members of both parties introduced legislation requiring the president to end the United Nations-mandated embargo to help the Bosnian Muslims achieve military balance with the Bosnian-Serbs.

Off the Record



"Peace", a white tiger cub born on May 11 in the Yongin Farmland in South Korea's Kyonggi province, plays on a rock Friday. News of Peace's birth have been splashed all over the front pages of South Korean newspapers, alongside stories announcing the first ever North-South summit meeting. In South Korea white tigers are considered to be omens of good fortune. — AFP photo

Mother hides new-born baby in store locker

WASRMINISTER, PA: A 28-year-old woman gave birth to a baby Friday, put it in a duffle bag and left it in a locker at the department store where she worked, police said, reports Reuter.

The woman was arrested for reckless endangerment. Police in this suburban Philadelphia community said, Kathrin Mae Howells, 28, said in a statement that she had hidden her pregnancy from her husband and given birth to a baby boy during the pre-dawn hours in her home.

"She placed the child in a grey duffle bag, and was in sort of a dilemma over how to get rid of it," a police detective said, citing Howells's statement.

He said Howells and her husband had two other children already and did not want any more.

Howells took the baby with her to a Caldor department store and left it in an empty locker while she went to her job behind the jewellery counter.

Another employee heard the baby crying and discovered it in the locker, and called police.

After her arrest, Howells was released on her own recognizance and ordered to stay away from the baby, who was listed in good condition in a local hospital, the detective said.

A county child protection service had been brought into the case, he said.

US warns Sanaa against further attacks on Aden

WASHINGTON, June 25: The United States, alarmed by increased shelling of Aden by Northern Yemen forces, warned Friday that further attacks would prompt urgent UN Security Council action, reports Reuter.

Yemen's civil war, urged an immediate return to negotiations and asked UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to send a fact-finding mission in the area to assess the prospects for renewed dialogue.

State Department spokesman Mike McCurry said shelling had intensified in the past 24 hours and expressed concern over reports of a large number of civilian casualties.

Another report says: The Sanaa-based Yemen government expressed surprise and alarm on Friday at a US warning that further attacks on the southern port of Aden would prompt UN Security Council action.

"We view these attacks as a clear violation of UN Security Council resolution 924," he said in a statement.

A statement by an official source and broadcast by Sanaa radio expressed "the astonishment and alarm of the government of the Republic of Yemen over the statement by the State Department's spokesman because it was not based on what is happening on the ground."

Further military operations will require urgent Security Council consideration, he added.

The Sanaa official statement, without mentioning the contents of the US spokesman's statement, accused the Southerners of continued provocations.

However, neither in the written statement nor in subsequent comments at a news briefing did he explain exactly what kind of action the Security Council might take against Northern Yemen if the attacks did not cease.

The source said northern forces had practically proved their abiding by the resolution and the rebels had exploited this to hit at the forces of legality by all types of weapons.



A southern Yemeni victim of northern bombings is buried Friday at the cemetery of the Crater neighbourhood of Aden. — AFP photo

Akihito pays tribute to US war dead

HONOLULU, HAWAII, June 25: Japan's Emperor Akihito dedicated a wreath Friday at a US war cemetery in Honolulu in tribute to US soldiers and sailors killed in World War Two, reports Reuter.

As an honour guard fired guns salute, Akihito also observed a minute of silence in front of the monument for the war dead at the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Punchbowl, overlooking central Honolulu. Two soldiers then played taps on bugles.

Honolulu is the last stop for Akihito and Empress Michiko's 16-day tour of United States.

The emperor and empress visited a wreath of flowers and a wreath of laurel at the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu.

Crackdowns on Kashmiris fuel furious anti-Indian agitation

ISLAMABAD, June 25: In occupied Kashmir, severe crackdowns marked by cruel violence against the people including women were reported from Kangan, 37 kilometres from Srinagar and Lal Chowk in Srinagar, resulting in furious anti-India demonstrations and effective reaction by the Mujahideen, killing five troops including two captains and injuring several others, reports APP.

Two persons were shot dead in cold blood and passengers were dragged out from a bus and mercilessly beaten, injuring fifteen of them. Thousands of people took part in the funeral of the two martyred persons and raised wrathful anti India slogans.

The Mujahideen reacted by engaging the troops in seven hour long shoot out which resulted in the killing of a captain and three troops on the spot while another critically injured captain succumbed to his injuries in the Badami Bagh Military Hospital in Srinagar. Eleven troops were injured.

In Lal Chowk, in Srinagar, people were herded together in an identity parade and they, particularly shopkeepers, were subjected to severe persecution. A young girl protesting against the arrest of her brother was harshly beaten by a BSF inspector. Cameras of three press photographers, covering the terrorism by the security forces were snatched and broken. The three photographers were badly beaten.

UN experts end mission to Iraq

MANAMA, June 25: A team of UN ballistic weapons experts ended a mission to Iraq on Friday to make sure the range of Iraqi missiles cannot be extended, a UN official said here.

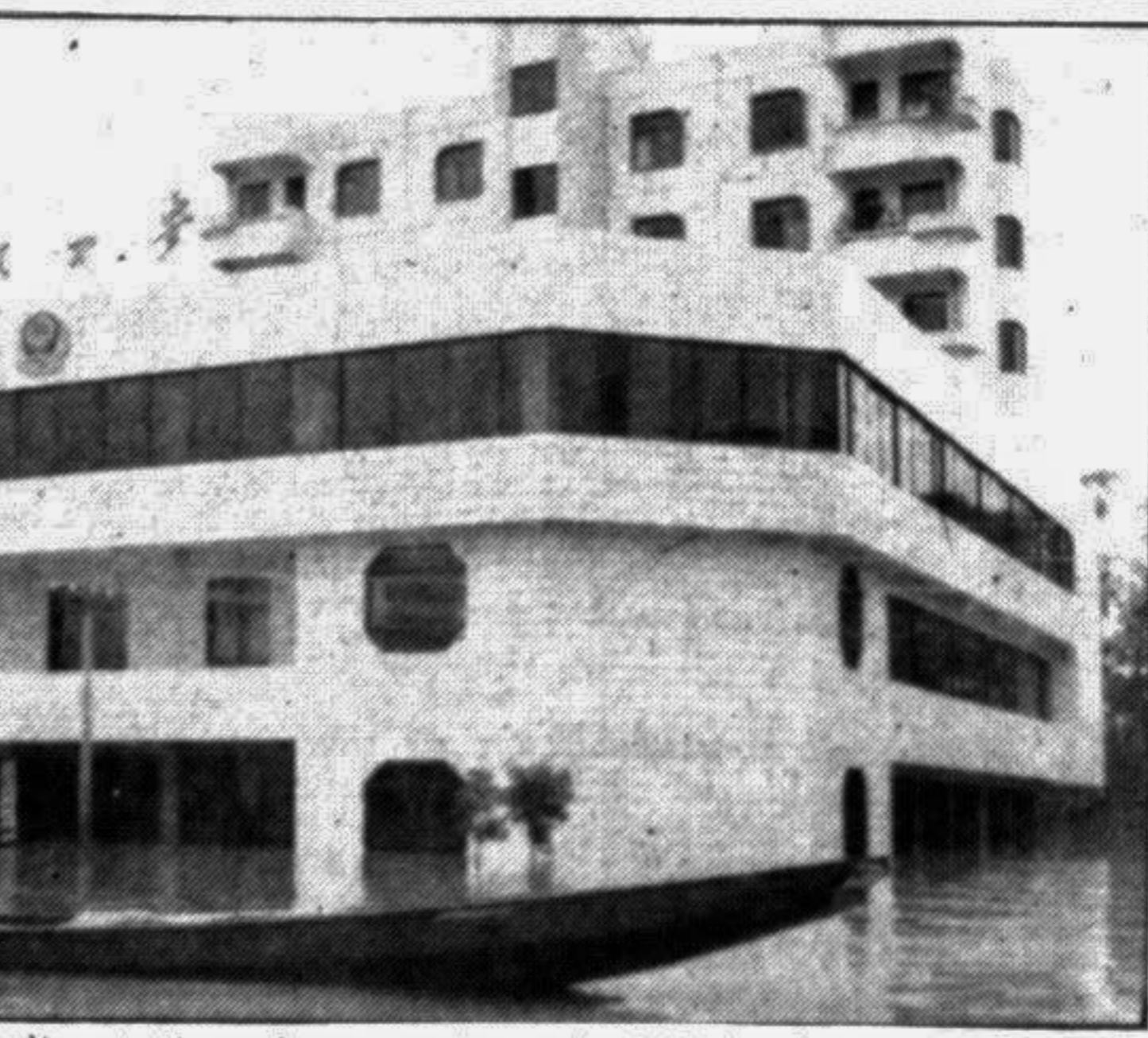
Ronald Opsahl, UN coordinator in Bahrain, told AFP that the 30 experts led by American Mark Silver placed monitoring devices known as "bar codes" on the missiles.

They (the Iraqis) brought the existing missiles to a site suitable for this operation and where the job can be done safely," he said.

The operation was part of UN long term monitoring of Iraqi weapon programmes.

Under UN resolutions adopted after the 1991 Gulf War Iraq is banned from possessing missiles with a range exceeding 150 kilometres.

Most historians agree the Korean War began before dawn on June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces led by columns of tanks, invaded a virtually defenseless South.



A man rows his boat past the police station, along a main road which has been transformed into a river by heavy flooding in Yingde, 140 km north of Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province in southern China. — AFP photo

Anniversary of the start of Korean War Thousands attend prayer rally in Seoul

SEOUL, June 25: Tens of thousands of South Korean Christians rallied in Seoul Saturday the 44th anniversary of the start of the Korean War, to pray for a peaceful end to tensions over the North's nuclear programme, reports AP.

Organisers said 100,000 people attended the prayer rally at Seoul's sprawling Yoido Plaza, while police estimated the number at 80,000.

Communist North Korea, meanwhile, told the United States that it must end its hostility towards the North to avoid another conflict.

They eased somewhat, however, after a remarkable trip last week by former US President Jimmy Carter to North Korea.

But North Korea's official media again Saturday accused Washington and South Korea of launching the war.

Foreign nations are looking for every crack by which to invade again," official Radio Pyongyang said, according to South Korea's Naewoo Press.

Participants at the rally in Seoul prayed for the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula, for a peaceful end to nuclear tensions, and for the souls of the war dead.

Four million people were killed or injured in the three-year war, including 54,246 Americans who died fighting on South Korea's side.

Near the border with North Korea, scattered groups of South Koreans stood quietly and peered across barbed wire fences into the North.

The tragedy can't be allowed to happen again," said Lee Chae-suk, a 67-year-old war veteran among those at the border. "It has to be prevented."

Tensions have escalated in recent months over North Korea's suspected development of nuclear weapons and

Rabbani's troops rocket Hekmatyar's positions

KABUL, June 25: Supported by fighter jets, the president's army launched a major ground offensive at dawn Saturday in a bid to push back rival Islamic factions entrenched on the edge of Kabul, reports AP.

rarely makes public appearances, but says if he resigned it would leave a power vacuum. Rabbani's spokesman, Aziz Murad, said recently that the president plans to remain in office for at least another six months.

President Burhanuddin Rabbani's troops began the assault by firing scores of rockets at daybreak, targeting the hill-top positions held by the renegade Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his ally, warlord Rashid Dostum.

Many observers are expecting Hekmatyar and Dostum to step up their attacks after June 28 to try to force Rabbani from office.

The rocket attacks were quickly followed by heavy machine gun fire and at least 10 bombing raids by the president's air force. Huge plumes of smoke rose from the ancient Bala Hissar fort in the southern part of the city, an outpost controlled by the Hekmatyar-Dostum forces.

There are at least nine separate factions in the Afghan civil war. All favour an Islamic government and have no real ideological differences. The fight is seen as little more than a raw power struggle between faction leaders who openly despise one another.

The president's military officials confirmed the offensive but gave no word on whether they had captured any ground.

There has been almost daily fighting for the past six months, leaving an estimated 2,000 dead, 20,000 injured and forcing some 500,000 people to flee from their homes.

There was no information on casualties, but by 10 a.m. (0530 GMT) Saturday it was clear that the battle was one of the fiercest in months in Afghanistan's brutal civil war.

Rabbani's forces continue to hold all the strategic parts of the capital, including the presidential palace, the Defence Ministry and the airport.

The president's army appeared to be pre-empting an attack expected from the prime minister in coming days.

The front-lines in the south and southeast part of the city along Kabul River have barely changed despite the months of heavy fighting.

Rabbani is supposed to step down June 28 under an agreement reached last year between the quarrel some Islamic factions. But Rabbani has said the accord no longer valid since Hekmatyar and Dostum launched a January 1 assault on Kabul overthrow the president.

However, the government has virtually no civil authority, and much of Kabul lies in ruins. The economy has been destroyed, entire neighbourhoods have been flattened, there is no electricity and food is expensive.

The Hekmatyar-Dostum forces began returning rocket fire Saturday morning shortly after they came under attack.

The reclusive president

BRIEFLY

60 feared drowned in India: At least 60 people were feared killed in India's eastern Bihar state on Friday after their boat capsized in a river, the United News of India said, Reuter reports from New Delhi.

The news agency said most of the victims were feared drowned in the Gandhak river in the state's Champaran district where women. The boatman, the only known survivor, swam ashore, it said.

Pak bus mishap claims 12: At least 12 people were killed and six injured when a mini-bus and a van had a head-on collision in northwest Pakistan, news reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Islamabad.

The accident near the town of Kohat late Friday killed all 11 passengers of the van while one died and six were injured among those travelling in the other vehicle.

4 killed in US plane crash: A B-52 bomber crashed and exploded in flames at Fairchild Air Force Base in eastern Washington state killing all four crew members aboard, officials said Friday, Reuter reports from Spokane, Washington.

Base spokeswoman Jennifer McDonald said the plane crashed at 2:16 pm pdt (5:16 pm edt) (2116 GMT) as it was approaching for a "touch and go" manoeuvre in which it would have descended as if for a landing and then taken off again.

Chinese flood toll rises to 719: River levels have slowly begun falling in southeastern China where more than two weeks of torrential rain and floods have killed at least 719 people, official news reports said Saturday, AP says from Beijing.

Aid for the 61 million people who live in the flooded areas began pouring in from Hong Kong and Japan. The China Daily said donations from Hong Kong totalled more than 6.2 million dollars by late in the week, while the Japanese government announced it was donating 1 million dollars in cash and electrical generators.

Direct economic losses from the flooding in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Jiangxi, Fujian and Zhejiang provinces — virtually all of southeastern China — are estimated at 30.5 billion yuan (3.5 billion dollars), the China Daily said.

Encephalitis kills 18 in Vietnam

An outbreak of Japanese B encephalitis in northern Vietnam's Red River delta region has killed 18 people, many of them children, since the middle of May, a report said Saturday, AP says from Hanoi.

The Hospital for the Protection of Children in Hanoi has treated 360 people for the sometimes fatal disease during the past month, the Lao Dong (Labour) trade union newspaper reported. Most of the patients were less than 15 years old and came from the capital city and four rural provinces nearby.

Another 50 people were hospitalised in the port city of Haiphong, the paper said. Japanese B encephalitis is caused by a virus that lives in pigs, and is transmitted by the Culex mosquito. It can cause death from muscle paralysis and results in some kind of physical or mental disability in 90 per cent of its cases, said Rafi Kot, an infectious disease expert at the Swedish Clinic in Hanoi.

The accident, which injured 17 others, occurred along Highway 1 in Dong Nai, 70 kilometers (43 miles) east of Ho Chi Minh City. About 40 people were traveling in the bus from Quang Ngai province, 525 kilometers (325 miles) northeast of the city, when it smashed into the back of a lumber truck early in the morning of June 21, Khanh said.

China executes 47 for drug related crimes

BEIJING, June 25: At least 47 criminals, including four from Taiwan, have been executed in China for drug related crimes in an intensive campaign in the run-up to international anti-drugs day, reports said Saturday, says AFP.

infested Yunnan Province which has emerged as a major entrepot for heroin from the nearby Golden Triangle region of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand destined for Western markets.

The criminals were condemned and executed Friday, when 13 more individuals were sentenced to death, including two from Hong Kong, reports said one day ahead of the international day for promoting the fight against drugs.

Some 13 executions took place in central Shaanxi Province, one in northeastern Qinghai, three in Chongqing in southwestern Sichuan and seven in Xiamen in southeastern Fujian, reports said.

Three more were given suspended death sentences and 15 received prison terms — including five for life — in five Chinese provinces.

Four Taiwanese nationals, identified by China News Service (CNS) as Chen Xingli, Chen Zhiang, Lin Quanchong and Wang Deyang, were among the seven executed in Xiamen, where six more individuals were also condemned to death.