



**IN THE NEWS**

Top stories from the state, nation and world

**Pentagon warns soldiers of possible gas exposure**

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is warning 5,000 Gulf War veterans that they may have been exposed to nerve gas when U.S. troops destroyed an Iraqi weapons depot in 1991. A spokesman said the number could grow.

This figure is far higher than the number of soldiers officials said they were trying to contact in June, when the Pentagon disclosed that U.S. troops may have been exposed to nerve gas in the destruction of the weapons depot at Khamisiyah in southern Iraq on March 4, 1991.

The depot, known as Bunker 73, contained both conventional and chemical weapons, officials said.

Officials said in June that 300 members to 400 members of the Army's 37th Engineer Battalion from Fort Bragg were near the demolition. Earlier this month, investigators for a presidential advisory panel said they believed as many as 1,100 U.S. troops were exposed in that incident.

However, an announcement Thursday described a second low-level exposure to chemical weapons on March 10, 1991.

Members of the 37th Battalion destroyed an unknown number of chemical rockets found in stacks of crated munitions in a pit area about two miles from Bunker 73.

Lawmakers expressed frustration over the Pentagon's handling of the matter.

"From my view, this tells me the cover-up continues," said Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight subcommittee on human resources and intergovernmental relations.

"We are continually getting bad news and it is not going to stop," said Shays, upset that no Pentagon official would appear before his panel to explain the growing number of potential exposures.

**Yeltsin agrees to transfer full power during surgery**

MOSCOW — President Boris Yeltsin agreed Thursday to transfer full power to his prime minister while he undergoes heart surgery, including control over the so-called nuclear button.

Yeltsin signed a decree that specifically says Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin will be put in charge of Russia's nuclear arsenal and the firing activation mechanism known as the nuclear button.

The president said he would issue another decree specifying when Chernomyrdin will take control. The date of Yeltsin's bypass operation has not been set.

Speculation has swirled over who will control Russia's nuclear arsenal during Yeltsin's surgery. The president already has granted Chernomyrdin control over Russia's security forces, but he has retained responsibility for nuclear weaponry.

Yeltsin, 65, has been in the Central Clinical Hospital, the Kremlin hospital, since Friday for what his spokesman has insisted are routine tests in preparation for heart bypass surgery.

One of Russia's leading cardiologists said today that Yeltsin's heart troubles go back to when he was a teenager.

**U.S. questions motives of North Korean infiltration**

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Warren Christopher expressed concern Thursday about the attempted infiltration by North Korean agents into South Korea and urged both Seoul and Pyongyang to exercise restraint.

"We wish that all parties would avoid taking any further provocative actions of the kind reflected apparently in this step," Christopher said in a news conference.

Appearing with Christopher was Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda, who said he shares Christopher's views.

"We very much hope that this incident won't develop into something that will have negative effects on the environment," Ikeda said.

He said it was important that nothing disrupt the agreement under which Japan, South Korea and other nations are helping North Korea abandon its plutonium-producing nuclear reactors and shift to safer models.

Ikeda said the process has become an important source for dialogue with the North Koreans.

Later, Christopher's spokesman, Nicholas Burns, issued a clarification in which he took a tougher line against North Korea than Christopher.

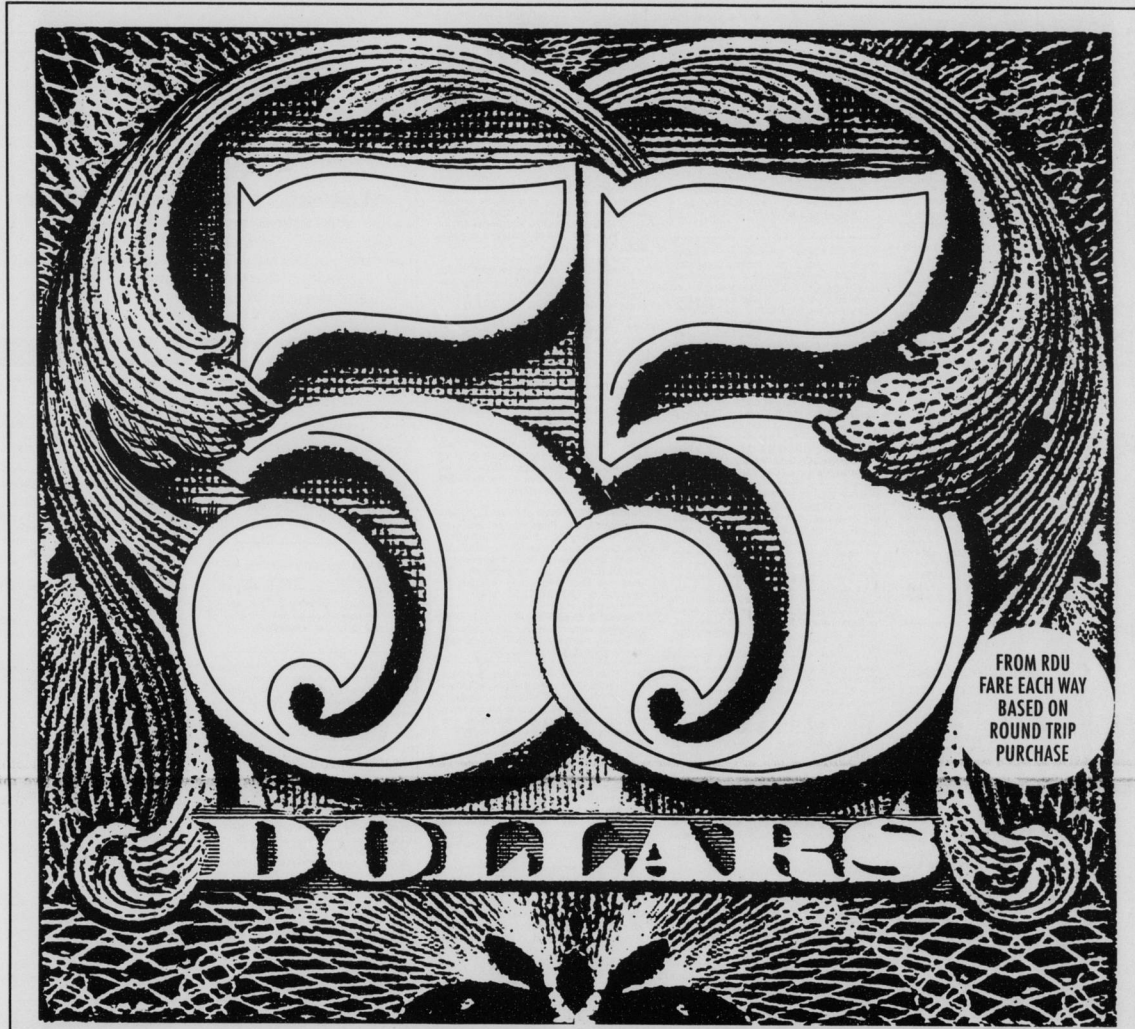
Burns urged North Korea "not to engage in any provocative acts," adding that Christopher did not intend to direct his admonition against South Korea.

"It's a very bizarre incident," Burns said. "The fact that the submarine was where it was is provocative."

Five months have passed since the United States and South Korea proposed a direct North-South dialogue with American and Chinese officials serving as mediators. North Korea has yet to give a definitive response to the proposal.

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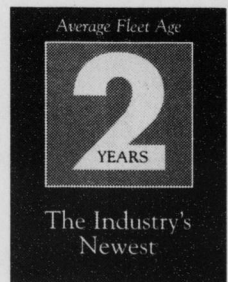


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