Page 2

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Off The Wire

National and international news from the Reuter News Report

Libya releases Britons from embassy in Tripoli

LONDON — Libya released 25 Britons from the British embassy in Tripoli Wednesday, the British Foreign Office said, but London police kept up their siege of the Libyan mission here. The Britons, including 11 women and two children, were confined to their embassy by "Revolutionary Guards" Tuesday, apparently in retaliation for the siege of the Libyan Embassy in London. British police surrounded and sealed off the embassy Tuesday after gunfire from the building killed a policewoman and wounded 10 Libyan demonstrators protesting the rule of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Despite the apparent softening in Libya's attitude, the police in London renewed their demand that the 30 Libyans holed up in their embassy, an 18th century Georgian mansion, leave and allow police to search the grounds for weapons.

Two senators escape injury

WASHINGTON - Two U.S. senators escaped injury Wednesday when their helicopter was hit by small arms ground fire and forced to make a precautionary landing in Honduras, Pentagon officials said. Democratic Senators Lawton Chiles of Florida and Bennett Johnson of Louisiana were on a visit to a refugee camp at Colomoncagua when the incident occurred. A second helicopter carrying the wife of U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, John Nebroponte, was also hit by the fire near the border with El Salvador, the officials said. The Pentagon said there were no injuries to the nine passengers and six crew members of the two UH-1 transport helicopters. Pentagon officials said they did not know where the fire came from and said the incident was being investigated.

Chemical weapons plan unveiled

GENEVA, Switzerland - Vice President George Bush Wednesday unveiled a plan to outlaw chemical weapons and said it contained "unprecedented" proposals to overcome the problem of verification. He asked that the Soviet Union study it seriously and not reject it out of hand. Bush presented the 40nation Geneva disarmament conference with a draft treaty which would ban the possession, storage, production or export of chemical arms. Soviet chief negotiator Viktor Issraelyan, in a low-key reply, said Moscow would study the draft "as we study all the documents submitted by any delegation at the disarmament conference."



Navy underprices ships - GAO

WASHINGTON — The Navy, ignoring established guidelines, has been underpricing decommissioned ships sold to foreign countries, the General Accounting Office said Wednesday.

The GAO, a congressional watchdog agency, said if the Navy had charged appropriate prices in the sale of 11 ships in 1981 and 1982, the government would have recouped \$36.4 million, instead of the \$5.2 million actually received.

"Thus, the U.S. government provided \$31.2 million through these sales in what is tantamount to grant foreign assistance," the GAO said. All the ships were Gearing-class destroyers. Countries buying them included Turkey, Taiwan and Pakistan. Prices imposed by the Navy were generally based on scrap value rather than the higher fair value called for in Navy guidelines, the GAO said.

Fast gene defect test developed

BOSTON — A University of Cincinnati research team said Wednesday it had devised a test to identify a fatal genetic defect in fetuses in only three days, compared with the six-week waiting period which is now required. The test allows doctors to identify unborn children with glycogen storage disease Type IIA. The scientists, reporting in the New England Journal of Medicine, said the new test would reduce the stress parents feel when they must await the test result, and would mean a woman who chose to abort the fetus would face fewer risks.