

Lack of progress leads India to review role in chemical arms treaty

[NEW DELHI] India is threatening to withdraw from the United Nations Chemical Weapons Convention if key players among the 162 signatories do not ratify it before the treaty takes effect on 29 April. Only 72 countries have so far ratified the treaty, which bans chemical weapons. New Delhi was among the first to ratify it last September, but officials have now said the government will "review" the decision because the treaty as it stands "is shorn of both its key principles — representativeness and disarmament character".

India's objection is that it allows countries such as the United States and Russia to retain their chemical arsenals while making it necessary for treaty members to open up their chemical industry for intrusive inspection. India also feels that its security-related concerns are not answered by the treaty without the membership of Pakistan and China, which both have chemical weapons capability.

Meanwhile, US President Bill Clinton has issued a last-ditch appeal to Republican senators not to obstruct a bill ratifying the convention, which will be put to the vote this week. Clinton needs to secure 67 out of 100

senate votes. Assuming support from every single Democrat senator, he still needs votes from at least 22 Republicans. Tom Daschle, leader of the 45-strong Democrat contingent in the Senate, puts the president's chances as no greater than 50:50. The treaty will take effect regardless of US support, as it has already obtained the required minimum number of ratifications.

FBI laboratory 'requires urgent overhaul'

[WASHINGTON] The vaunted crime laboratory of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which examines 600,000 pieces of criminal evidence a year for federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, is in need of an urgent overhaul, according to a report released last week by the Justice Department. After an 18-month investigation focused on three units within the laboratory's scientific analysis section, the department's inspector general found "significant instances" of substandard analytical work, deficient practices and flawed scientific testimony.

The tainted evidence may affect the outcome of several high-profile cases, including the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York and the 1995 bombing of a government building in Oklahoma City. Even before the final report, the FBI had begun to make reforms,

including removing the directors of the laboratory's explosives and chemistry units, and moving to have the laboratory accredited by an outside body, the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors.

CF gene tests backed for pregnant women

[WASHINGTON] An expert panel convened by the US National Institutes of Health last week recommended that pregnant women and those considering having babies should be offered genetic testing for mutations that cause cystic fibrosis, and that health insurers should cover the costs of testing.

If implemented, the recommendations — aimed also at those with family histories of the disease — would mark the first broad-based population screening for carriers of genetic disease in the United States. The panel's recommendations are expected to carry considerable weight and could, for example, provide ammunition that could be used by patients to challenge insurers who refuse to pay for testing.

German funding agency to be led by biochemist

[MUNICH] Ernst-Ludwig Winnaker, head of the Centre for Genetics at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, is to be

Obtaining **reliable**
PCR results means
using **Ready-To-Go**
PCR Beads

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