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Chernobyl

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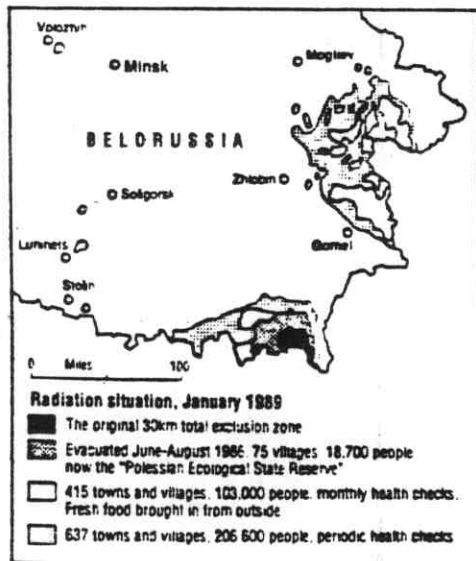
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Chernobyl won't go away

FOREIGN REPORT has obtained a map issued on February 1st of the impact of the Chernobyl disaster in Belorussia. Chernobyl is in the Ukraine, but the wind direction at the time meant that parts of Belorussia were among the worst affected. No maps are available for the Ukraine or the Baltic republics—Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia—which also suffered from fall-out.

Belorussia's premier, **Michal Kovaleu**, has revealed that contamination, especially from Caesium-137, was worse than had been initially supposed. About 20% of farm land is contaminated. A large patch of land between Gomel and Mogilev was contaminated because it was also drenched by a rainstorm at the

crucial time. One inhabitant complained at a public meeting in Kiev last month that "it's getting to the point that, if they know you're from Gomel, people are afraid to touch



you".

The central government has done a lot. It is monitoring the health of 103,000 people in the worst areas and giving wage-earners a 25% bonus for living on land which does not grow fresh fruit and

vegetables. The government gives 206,600 people "periodic" medical checks. Last month it allocated an extra 240m roubles on top of the 700m roubles already spent for post-Chernobyl work in Belorussia. On February 1st it announced that 20 more villages will have to be evacuated in order for their inhabitants' lifetime exposure to radioactivity to stay below internationally accepted levels.

Nonetheless, doubts linger. The incidence of illness in the contaminated areas has increased. Officials say this is due to an outbreak of influenza, but radiation is known to produce debility and lessen bodily resistance to germs. Although food is checked for radiation, and approved for sale if this is below the permitted level, labels contain no indication of whether it is partly contaminated or uncontaminated—an important matter because radiation can accumulate in the body. Many farmers in contaminated areas are waiting to receive "special tractors" with sealed cabins. Dairy farmers in these areas cannot obtain fodder from outside, and are feeding cows with what they grow themselves. The cows produce contaminated milk.

Testing the "Team Spirit"

As **President Bush** prepared to meet South Korea's **President Roh Tae Woo** in Seoul on February 27th, preparations began unusually quietly for one of the western world's biggest military exercises. Why quiet, since 200,000 troops can hardly charge about the South Korean countryside for a fortnight in secret? Because relations between South Korea and America have become sensitive. "Team Spirit", the codename for the manoeuvres, is more of a wish than reality.

Last year's exercises, involving 60,000 American and 140,000 South Korean troops, were announced on January 28th and carried out in the second half of March. The event had become a journalists' jamboree; North Koreans and other communists were invited to observe. "We even used to exaggerate the scale and length of the exercises," says one high-ranking Korean officer wistfully, "so as to make them seem more impressive."

Last month, with the long-awaited thaw between North and South Korea seeming at last to be getting somewhere, the announcement of the exercises failed to appear. Yet the troop movements have begun. Earlier this month, an American military convoy clogged the traffic as it travelled south-east from Seoul towards the coast. American army officers began to arrive quietly for "an exercise".

In the past, these exercises have served as the North Koreans' favourite excuse for calling off negotiations. That is no longer an issue this year. The North's negotiator, citing the exercises, flounced out of the latest effort at talks at Panmunjom on February 8th.

The reason to remain careful is that anti-Americanism is rising among radical students and the opposition. Delaying the announcement of the manoeuvres was probably part of a strategy not to say anything that might provoke trouble before Bush's visit. (Despite a police ban on mass rallies whose organisers do not promise beforehand to be peaceful, the firebomb-throwing opposition was planning to meet Bush with riots and demonstrations.) The exercise will be announced in early March. To avoid giving the North Koreans a chance to call it