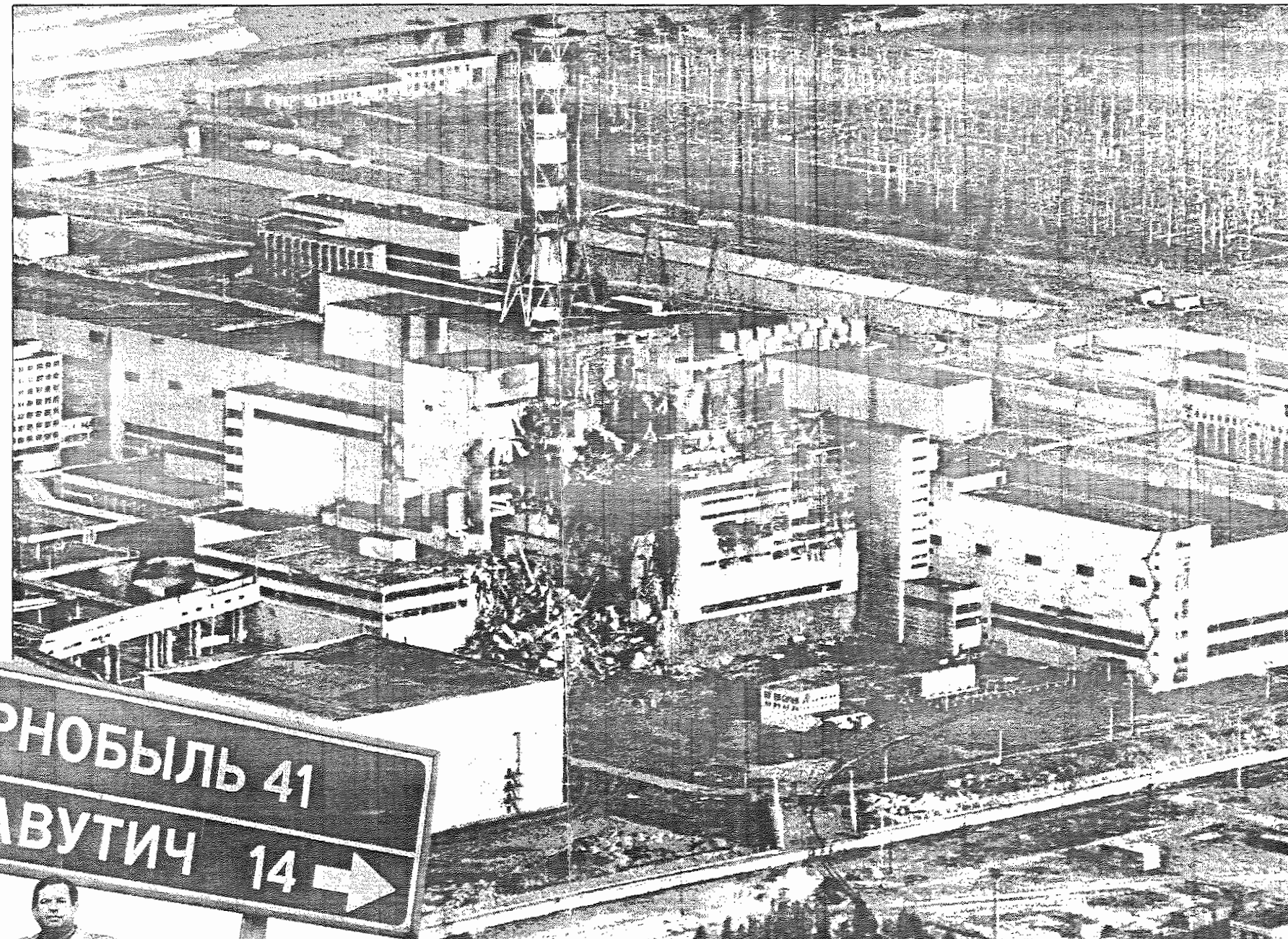


Ten years after the world's worst nuclear disaster, the physical and mental suffering of thousands of young victims goes on. **John Carey** talks to the retired Kent surgeon who has taken up their cause



Scene of the 1986 disaster: Chernobyl power station and, from left, Maurice Frohn, Dr Vasily Pasechnik and Victor Kubik

Why Maurice Frohn can't forget the children of Chernobyl

OLGA is 12, a bright-eyed little girl who loves dancing and gymnastics. A year ago she fell off her bike and developed pains in her stomach. Initially, a surgeon diagnosed appendicitis; further

latest development of what has become something of a personal crusade. Eighteen months ago, if you had told him that today his life would be dominated by Chernobyl. I suspect that he would have laughed in your face.



investigate the effects of radiation on children," says Frohn. "The following March they reported that there had been no big increase in the levels of cancer compared with before the accident."

Frohn summed up the crisis in his report. "Seven out of 21 areas around Chernigev have been declared disaster areas; 140,000 children have been affected by radiation and only 1 per cent are per-

are back in the area on a 10-day tour revisiting the same people and places. The aim, he says, is "to make sure they have received what I expect them to have received, that goods haven't

The little tablets that we ignore at our peril

MAURICE FROHN is at pains to stress that he does not want to be seen as a doom-monger. He also acknowledges that there are vast differences between the nuclear industry here and in eastern Europe. But he still insists that not enough is being done to protect thousands of people in Britain from the potentially cataclysmic effects of an accident at a nuclear power plant.

"I don't want to be critical of the British nuclear industry. I went round Dungeness only a few weeks ago and I thought they were splendid," he says. "I think the risk of a breakdown here is minimal — our nuclear plants are a different design and the discipline is different, too."

"The British industry is very well managed. But, even so, accidents do happen and I do wish we knew more about what to do if one does."

There is always the possibility of terrorist action or a freak plane crash, Frohn says, and it is ignorance that is the main cause of panic. Consequently, he argues that several lessons need to be learned from what happened at Chernobyl.

His advice is based on a check list drawn up by Dr Vasily Pasechnik, a senior doctor with responsibility for the care of mothers and babies in the Chernigev area.

Crucially, he says, potassium iodide tablets should be instantly available to every family in the affected area as they protect the thyroid from the harmful effects of radioactivity — something which is particularly important for children.

Frohn's own investigations have shown that this is far