

BRIFFLY

PLO holds key to peace: The Palestine Liberation Organisation holds the key to peace in the Gulf and PLO leader Yasser Arafat should ask Iraq President Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops from Kuwait, the Italian Foreign Minister in Rome was quoted as saying Sunday, reports AP.

Minister Gianni De Michelis talked by telephone on Saturday with Arafat and on Sunday received the PLO's permanent delegate to Italy, Nemer Hammad, for talks which allowed for "a further, deeper exchange of views on what can still be done in the attempt to save peace in the Gulf," the foreign ministry said in a communique.

De Michelis spoke with reporters Sunday afternoon in Venice, where he was attending a meeting of his Socialist Party.

The PLO "has in hand the key to peace," and for this reason Arafat ought to make a "unilateral declaration, issuing Saddam Hussein an invitation to withdraw from Kuwait based on the U N resolutions," the Italian news agency ANSA quoted De Michelis as saying. Such a decision would "certainly be in the interest of the Palestinians themselves," De Michelis said.

UK expels 28 Iraqi diplomats: Britain has ordered 28 Iraqi diplomats to leave within 48 hours, the foreign office announced in London Sunday, reports AFP.

Diplomatic relations are being maintained and four Iraqi diplomats will be allowed to stay, it said.

The Iraqi ambassador to London was called in early Sunday and notified of the decision, a foreign office spokesman said.

The foreign office said the expulsions had been decided as a precaution in view of Iraqi threats to western interests.

On January 3, London announced the expulsion of 75 Iraqi diplomats for security reasons following threats by Baghdad to attack western interests worldwide in the event of conflict in the Gulf.

The diplomats were given 24 hours to leave and the 68 others were given until January 10 to leave.

US, allies ready for war: The United States and its allies ranged against Iraq in the Gulf are prepared for war after January 15, U S Secretary of State James Baker said in Alconbury Sunday, reports Reuters.

The international coalition is well prepared politically, economically and militarily for any eventuality as we move towards midnight January 15," Baker told reporters on his aircraft flying from Turkey to Britain.

The United Nations has authorised war to drive Iraq from Kuwait after midnight on January 15 New York Time (0500 GMT January 16).

A senior official on the aircraft said all Washington's allies with ground forces in the Gulf, with the possible exception of Syria, had indicated they would join an attack on Iraq.

Baker meets Turkish officials: US Secretary of State James A. Baker III met Sunday with officials in strategic NATO country Ankara and said to have discussed the use of an air base near the Iraqi border in case of a Gulf war.

Shortly before Baker's 17:25 (15:25 GMT) departure for London, the U S ambassador to Turkey, Morton Abramowitz, read a statement to reporters saying that the talks had been "fruitful." He said Baker and Ozal had discussed a US military assistance programme for Turkey, but he gave no details.

As the officials met, tens of thousands of anti-war protesters gathered in Istanbul at a rally organized by the political opposition. No disturbances or arrests were reported.

Baker, on a whirlwind tour of countries in the multinational coalition opposing Iraq, arrived Sunday afternoon from the southern city of Adana, where his plane had been diverted Saturday night due to fog.

Iraqis won't cross into Jordan: Iraqi troops will not cross into Jordan unless the kingdom requests military support from Baghdad in the event of hostilities by Israel, Prime Minister Moudar Badran said in a report published in Amman Saturday, reports AFP.

Iraq will not cross the Jordanian border unless there is an official Jordanian request and only for the purpose of defending the kingdom," MR. Badran said in an interview published jointly in Amman by the local press and the Christian science monitor.

Iraq asked to free prisoners: A Tehran newspaper called Sunday on Baghdad to release some 2,000 jailed Iraqis and Iraqis of Iranian origin, the Islamic Republic News Agency from Cyprus reported, reports AP.

The agency, monitored in Nicosia, quoted the Farsi-language Jomhuri Islami as saying the prisoners, some of whom were Muslim theologians, were held on "baseless charges."

The daily said, "the prisoners are generally those whose families have been deported from Iraq and no information has since been available on their whereabouts," IRNA reported.

The prisoners apparently were people who had sympathized with Iran's Islamic revolution in the 1980-88 war between the two countries.

Iran has also called on Baghdad to release thousands of prisoners of war still held in Iraq despite a peace accord between the two countries.

Saddam urged to earn honour: Pope John Paul II on Sunday urged Iraq to earn itself a place of honour in history by making a "gesture of peace" to spare humanity the tragedy of new war, reports AP.

In an unusually blunt appeal, he also pressed for an international conference to discuss all Mideast problems. The pope did not specify what Iraq should do. It was the first time since Iraq's Aug 2 invasion of Kuwait that the pope appealed to Baghdad by name.

He made the appeal during his regular Sunday noon appearance in Vatican City from the window of his private studio overlooking St. Peter's Square.

About 30,000 people listened to his sermon, which the Vatican has said would be a special occasion to pray for peace in the Gulf.

In present conditions, a war wouldn't solve the problems, it would only aggravate them," the pope said. "The solution can be found in generous proposals for peace, by both sides."

Vietnam's war hero in India: Vietnamese War hero and Vice Premier General Vo Nguyen Giap is in India on a goodwill visit and to attend ceremonies marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ho Chi Minh, the Nhan Dan newspaper in Hanoi said Saturday, reports AP.

Gen. Giap left Hanoi Friday for New Delhi on a friendship visit and was to attend ceremonies in the east Indian city of Calcutta marking the anniversary, the newspaper said.

Ho Chi Minh, founding father of modern Vietnam was born on May 19, 1890. But the newspaper gave no reason for the delay in the celebrations, nor did it specify when they would be held.

No other details were given of Gen. Giap's visit to India.

Iliescu in Pakistan: A 21-gun salute boomed Pakistan's welcome Sunday in Islamabad to Romanian President Ion Iliescu, whose troubled National Salvation Front is struggling to retain power in the face of widespread protests at home, reports AP.

Iliescu is in Pakistan for less than 24 hours enroute to China. He will hold a series of meetings with Pakistan's President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Pires concedes defeat: Prime Minister Pedro Pires conceded defeat early Monday in the first pluralist elections in Portuguese-speaking Africa, ending 15 years of single party rule in the Atlantic archipelago nation, reports AP.

Official results in Sunday's elections for the 79-seat parliament were expected later Monday.

Only God knows : Perez

Gulf war today or just another day?



SOMEWHERE IN SAUDI ARABIA: The US marines adjusting the elevation on a Hawk anti-aircraft missile during a drill under way as part of high preparedness for a possible Gulf war. The missiles are aimed at Iraqi military installations

IN EASTERN (Saudi Arabia), Jan 14: At an air base capable of delivering one million pounds (453,000 kilograms) of bombs a day against the Iraqis, Staff Sgt. Barney Strock views January 15 as the tick, tick, 'tick of a countdown leading to a blastoff, reports AP.

"We can't wait for it to get here. The faster we get our job done, the faster we go home," said Strock, crew chief for an F-15E fighter pilot. "I'd be real disappointed to be stuck out here for another six months."

January 15 has been a date circled in red ever since November 29, when the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 678, telling Iraq to withdraw or face possible military action. So far, Iraq has shown no sign of withdrawing.

For those involved in Operation Desert Shield, the date

has been the focus of concentration, the way a sprinter toes the starting blocks anticipating the starter's gun.

Having a focus makes it easier to endure the daytime sun, the nighttime chill, the ubiquitous flies, the scorpions, the desert desolation and the wanting that has forever been the soldier's lot. For some, there's nothing special about January 15.

"The 15th's just another day," said Col. David Eberly, deputy commander of the 4th Tactical Fighter Wing, which has five fighter squadrons based in central Saudi Arabia.

From the troops in the front-line fighting holes to the highest generals in the high-tech war rooms, the kick-off date dominates thinking.

"I'm looking forward to that

day. Sitting out here waiting everyday is boring. Something's going to happen and I'd like to know what," said Lance Cpl. Tyler Hanby, as he dug a machine gun bunker in the northern desert.

And Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the 430,000-strong Operation Desert Shield force, said: "I don't plan to be here in another five months. We all want to get this damn thing over with."

A report from Paris adds: U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de

Cuellar arrived in Paris early Monday for talks with President Francois Mitterrand after more than three hours of discussions with Iraqi leaders on averting a Gulf war.

Before leaving Baghdad, the U.N. chief said of the prospect

of war, "It is a question, if you believe in God, only God knows." De Cuellar arrived by private plane at 2:20 a.m. (0120 GMT) at Le Bourget Airport north of Paris.

In Baghdad, De Cuellar met with President Saddam Hussein for 3-1/2 hours Sunday and then told reporters it was impossible to say if there would be war in the Gulf.

"Well as you know it is a question almost impossible to answer in any language, even in my Spanish language," the UN chief said. "It is a question, if you believe in God, only God knows. If you don't believe in God, who knows."

Speaking in English, De Cuellar said, "I have always said that I am neither optimistic or pessimistic but always hopeful. I could not have been secretary general if I was not hopeful."

Summit with Gorbachev depends on actions : US

Lithuanian govt in exile being set up in Poland

WARSAW, Jan 14: Lithuania's Foreign Minister said on Sunday he would form a government in exile if the elected administration in Vilnius was overthrown, reports agencies.

"If the government and Parliament of Lithuania for these or other reasons can not function, I am obliged by the Lithuanian Parliament's vote yesterday at eight in the morning to build a government in exile," Foreign Minister Algirdas said he held talks with Deputy Foreign Minister Jerzy Makarczyk but refused to comment on the Polish reaction to a possibility of a Lithuanian government in exile being set up in Warsaw.

The official Pap news agency said the Polish Cabinet would meet late in the evening to discuss its position on the events in Vilnius while the Interior Ministry said it would grant Lithuanians fleeing to Poland the status of war refugees.

A Foreign Ministry sources said officials were concerned by the prospect of a Lithuanian government being established in Warsaw.

Poland supports Lithuania's independence drive and has had semi-official contacts with its leaders but, careful to avoid damaging relations with Moscow, it never formally recognised the republic's declaration of independence last March.

A Lithuanian source in Warsaw said a possible site for the government in exile could also be the Vatican city where a Vilnius envoy is officially accredited.

"It depends what happens in the next few hours, the next few days," Sununu told Leslie Stahl on CBS television's "Face the Nation."

Soviet "actions could cost the Soviet Union the support of Western Europe and the United States," he added.

He said the United States had not yet had time to analyze fast-moving events in Lithuania.

Saudargas insisted the Baltic republic's government and Parliament were still functioning, even after the Soviet army declared a curfew in the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas and moved to install a new pro-Moscow government in the republic.

White House chief of Staff John Sununu on Sunday in New York said whether or not President George Bush attends a planned summit in February with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev could depend on Soviet actions in Lithuania.

"I depends what happens in the next few hours, the next few days," Sununu told Leslie Stahl on CBS television's "Face the Nation."

Soviet "actions could cost the Soviet Union the support of Western Europe and the United States," he added.

He said the United States had not yet had time to analyze fast-moving events in Lithuania.

A long wait for Perez

BAGHDAD, Jan 14: For UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, it was a long wait Sunday to talk about peace with Saddam Hussein, reports AP.

The 71-year-old Peruvian sat next to an ornate phone in a government guest house for 6 hours, 15 minutes before being called by the Iraqi president.

Meanwhile, Saddam met with a Japanese delegation and Iraqi officials.

Lunch time came at 1 p.m. and passed. Perez de Cuellar had lunch in the dining room of the guest house in the Iraqi capital.

Tea time came at 4 p.m. and passed.

Iraqi officials, immaculately dressed in three-piece black suits, Perez de Cuellar that their president would see him the moment he finished a "preparatory meeting."

Perez de Cuellar, with 50 years of diplomatic experience, waited and waited patiently.

Sunday began with confusion.

An Iraqi official who answered the telephones at the guest house, where Perez de Cuellar was staying said the UN chief had left for "Qasr," Arabic for "palace", but also the term for the homes of all dignitaries in Iraq.

Perez de Cuellar had gone to meet Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, not Saddam.

Chief UN spokesman Francois Giuliani said Perez de Cuellar met former Nicaraguan leader Daniel Ortega and Arafat on Sunday morning. Then he began his wait for a call from Saddam.

The categorical word on his meeting came around 5 p.m. when spokesman Giuliani said that a meeting has been scheduled for 6.15 p.m.

The meeting lasted for three and a half hours. Afterward, Perez de Cuellar said he was unsure if there would be war or peace.

Now, the world waits.

Off the Record

Half a billion people to vanish in smoke

NEW DELHI: Tobacco will eventually kill about half a billion of all people alive if current worldwide smoking patterns persist, according to a paper circulated at the World Cardiology Congress underway here, reports PTI.

Without large reductions in early smoking uptake or smoking persistence, tobacco related mortality will rise from the three million deaths in 1990 to some 10 million deaths annually during the second quarter of the next century, the paper said.

Some 120 million people will still be in middle age when killed and will lose an average of 20 years of life. According to the paper prepared by Richard Peto, Chairman of the World Health Organisation's consultative group on tobacco-related mortality.

These projections are based on currently available smoking and mortality patterns and demographic trends.

Only for a coat

NEW YORK: A New York teenager, who was shot and killed by gunmen who wanted his leather jacket has become the sixth person killed by a coat thief in just over a month in a city where a fancy coat can be a deadly target, reports Reuter.

Police said Quran Horton, 16, was shot once in the chest on Thursday night for his "Eight-ball" jacket, a popular leather coat with a white collar and the number eight in a ball emblazoned on the back.

He was pronounced dead at an area hospital. Horton was the 15th person shot by coat thieves since December 2 and the sixth to die, police said.

On Wednesday, another 16-year old from the Brooklyn neighbourhood was wounded by thieves who were after his down jacket. Police said the youth gave the robber his coat but was shot in the hand as the gunmen fled.

Police have made no arrests in either case.

Lollipops in trouble

ANCHORAGE (Alaska): The state has gone sour on an entrepreneur's new confection--the wally Pop, named for Gov. Walter J. Hickel, reports AP.

Chris Main was told to stop making the novelty lollipops because the packaging, including the state seal, an Alaska map and the words "Official Alaskan Wally Pop," violated state law, officials ruled.

Using the state seal for any advertising or commercial purpose without permission is a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in prison and a 500-dollar fine, Fisher said.

Main said he thought the seal was in the public domain. He has just a handful left the 2,000 Wally Pops he made for 9 cents each. Most sold for a quarter but Main expects the price to jump drastically when uneaten Wally Pops become collectors' items.

They find virtues in suicide!

MELBOURNE (Australia): Young Australian men are killing themselves at an alarming rate, the Victorian opposition said, calling for a government inquiry, reports AFP.

Phil Gude, the Liberal Youth Affairs spokesman from the southeastern state, said Bureau of Statistics figures showed the suicide rate for young men had almost doubled in the past decade.

Mr. Gude claimed Australia now had her second highest suicide rate for young males in the world, behind Finland.

For Australia, the Bureau's figures showed that the suicide rate for young men had jumped from 10.6 per 100,000 to 28 between 1968 and 1988. In 1988, 388 young Australian men and 60 women killed themselves, he said, demanding immediate research into numbers and causes of suicide.

A real grocer



PARIS --- A man, over his hips in water, hands over groceries to another in the streets of Wareq, a suburb of Charleville, which the river Meuse has flooded with over one metre fifty of water - AFP/UNB photo

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, January 15, the 15th day of 1991. There are 350 days left in the year, reports UNB.

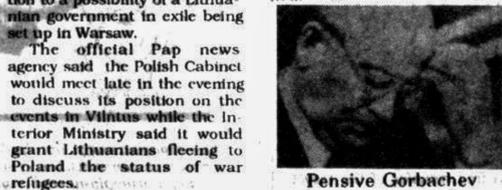
1963 - The Congo's President Moise Tshombe accepts United Nations plan for secession of Katanga.

1986 - Communist Party chief Mikhail S. Gorbachev announces that Soviet Union is proposing plan for "ridding the Earth of nuclear weapons within 15 years."

1988 - Soviet Union offers proposal which it calls prerequisite to agreement for cutting intercontinental nuclear forces by 50 percent.

1989 - Riot police in Prague, Czechoslovakia, use water cannon and dogs to disperse at least 2,000 people who defy a ban on an independent rally.

1990 - Bulgarian parliament abolishes Communist Party's monopoly on power in that country.



Pensive Gorbachev



VILNIUS (Lithuania) --- A demonstrator runs in front of a Soviet tank as the Soviet troops take control of the Lithuanian radio and television installations Sunday. At least 13 people were killed and 145 others injured in the assault - AFP/UNB photo