

BRIFFLY

Jordanians intensifying defence : Expecting to be caught in the cross fire if war begins in the Gulf, Jordanians have stepped up military and civil defence preparations to cope with fallout from an Israeli-Iraq conflict, reports AP.

Bordered by Israel on the west and Iraq on the east, Jordan fears Israel would participate in an anti-Iraq offensive and use Jordanian territory as a springboard. As a deterrent, military sources say the government might activate the 100,000-member army reserves.

Officials take seriously the threats by Iraq's Saddam Hussein to attack Israel in retaliation should the US-dominated multinational force launch an assault to oust his forces from Kuwait.

Many Jordanians believe Israeli leaders then would opt for reprisal regardless of any US appeals to stay on the sidelines.

3 US aircraft carriers join naval force : Three US Navy aircraft carriers and a US Marine amphibious force have joined the air and naval fleet arrayed against Iraq. Navy sources in Manama said Tuesday, reports AP.

The US-dominated multinational army deployed to the Gulf region could attack Iraq if it does not withdraw from Kuwait by the end of the day Tuesday, a deadline set by the United Nations.

The 72,800-ton USS Theodore Roosevelt and the 60,300-ton USS America passed through the Suez Canal from the eastern Mediterranean on Monday and Tuesday.

The 50,000-ton USS Ranger reached the Arabian Sea coming from the Philippines, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

The deployment brings to six the number of aircraft carriers in the US fleet in the Gulf, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Oman.

Mines planted on Iraq's border: The Turkish military has dug on Iraq's northern border, dispatching tens of thousands of extra soldiers and mining the border in case of a "second front" war, diplomats and military analysts say in Ankara, reports AP. Experts agree that a full-scale war along the 250-kilometer border is unlikely. Iraq and Turkey would face prohibitive military and political costs if they launched offensives on the frontier, according to Western diplomats and analysts.

But both countries have still made extensive defence preparations, in case a second front does open in the north while the US-dominated coalition drives from Kuwait to the southern border of Iraq.

70,000 march thru' Sanaa: About 70,000 demonstrators in Sanaa marched through the Yemen capital Tuesday, urging Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to "liberate Tel Aviv" and denouncing American troops buildup in the Gulf.

The marchers changed their way to Arab and foreign embassies carrying big placards reading "O, Saddam the flame, liberate Tel Aviv" and "We are your soldiers, Saddam".

They also called for an Arab solution to the crisis caused by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait last August 2.

The demonstrators, including political party members and students, held up traffic for about two hours.

US soldier killed: One soldier died and three others were injured when two US army vehicles collided, military officials said Monday, reports AFP.

The accident occurred Sunday when a high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle, the modern version of the jeep, from the 24th infantry division crashed into a tractor trailer of the 2nd corps support command, US officials said.

The dead soldier was a member of the 24th infantry division.

The names of the dead and injured soldiers were being withheld until their families are notified.

The death brings to 61 the number of US servicemen killed in the Gulf region since troops were sent there in August.

America sailing thru' Suez: The US aircraft carrier America was sailing through the Suez Canal Tuesday with seven support ships to join a US-led armada massed against Iraq in the Gulf region, witnesses said, reports Reuter.

US defence officials said on Monday that six carriers including the America, with a total of more than 450 warplanes on board, would be in position near Iraq on Tuesday in the final hours before a UN deadline for Baghdad to quit Kuwait.

The officials said the carrier Theodore Roosevelt sailed through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea on Monday and joined the Saratoga and John F. Kennedy. The carrier Midway was in the Gulf and the Ranger in the northern Arabian Sea.

Pindi rebuilt N-plant: Pakistani scientists have rebuilt an old five megawatt US supplied nuclear reactor into a 10 megawatt reactor, the country's top atomic official in Karachi said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The reactor will be commissioned in July at the Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology near the capital Islamabad, Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) Chairman Munir Ahmed Khan said.

He said the United States had supplied the old reactor in 1965, adding, "we have redone it now."

The United States suspended all economic and military aid to Pakistan last October over fears that Pakistan is building nuclear weapons. Pakistan denies this.

Military warning defied in Belgrade: Slovenia and Croatia in Belgrade are defying warnings of a military crackdown against the two rebel Yugoslav republics and refusing to disarm their paramilitary forces, press reports said Tuesday, reports AP.

The defiance comes amid fears in both republics of a military crackdown similar to that by Soviet forces in Lithuania.

Yugoslavia's presidency last week ordered the army to enforce a decree demanding all "illegal" paramilitary groups hand in their weapons by Jan 19.

The presidency did not specify which groups it meant. But state-run newspapers said the order applied to defence militias in independence-minded Slovenia and Croatia, and to Serbs rebelling against republican authority in Croatia.

India accused of firing : Pakistan said on Tuesday Indian troops had fired artillery into its side of the disputed Kashmir state, killing two civilians, reports Reuter.

One civilian was injured and shops and houses were damaged by the shelling on Sunday on Athmuqam village in the Pakistan-administered Azad (free) Kashmir's Muzaffarabad district, a military statement said.

Tension has been running high along the UN-monitored military control line that divides Kashmir into Indian and Pakistani sectors, since a Muslim separatist revolt erupted on the Indian side in January last year.

More than 2,000 people have died in the uprising, which India accuses Pakistan of fomenting. Pakistan says its support for Kashmiri militants is only moral and political.

Hindus fleeing Punjab : Hindus are fleeing Punjab's border regions to the relative safety of major cities as Sikh militants step up their campaign for an independent homeland in the Indian state, reports AP.

In the past two months, hundreds have left their homes and many more are planning to migrate, notwithstanding government promises to post extra security forces in Hindu-minority towns. Hindu groups from Armitisar say.

China executes 6 : China has executed six men and imprisoned seven others for abducting and selling women in the northern province of Henan, the Henan daily newspaper in Beijing said, reports Reuter.

The men operated in two gangs between 1988 and 1989. They abducted 70 women as they arrived at bus and train stations in Henan, the January 10 edition of the newspaper, which reached Beijing on Sunday, said.

Go-ahead from Commander Bush awaited

5 lakh troops poised to drive Saddam out

IN EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA, Jan 16 : The deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait passed Wednesday and expectant troops said they were tired of waiting and ready to drive Saddam Hussein out by force, reports AP.

The deadline passed at midnight New York time (0500 GMT), 8 am in Saudi Arabia, site of a buildup of more than half a million allied troops confronting Saddam.

A Washington report adds : U. S. military forces in the Gulf region ran battle drills and flew air combat exercises Tuesday in the hours before a midnight deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. Saddam Hussein's troops added to their fortifications

the Pentagon said. Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams said the more than 415,000 U. S. military men and women in the region stood ready to execute any order from their commander-in-chief, President George Bush. The military also declared itself ready for any possible attack, with security measures

Off the Record

Skies darken, animals shriek

WELLINGTON, Jan 16 : Only hours before the deadline for Iraq to quit Kuwait, skies darkened over New Zealand and animals shrieked as the moon eclipsed the sun today, reports Reuter.

The rare solar eclipse unsettled even usually hard-headed financial market dealers as they awaited what seemed certain war in the Gulf.

In ancient times an eclipse was a symbol of impending doom and it certainly seems appropriate today, said one bond dealer.

Shortly after mid-day, less than six hours before the United Nations deadline, the moon blocked more than 90 per cent of the sun's disk, leaving only a dazzling ring of light.

Office workers, school children and pensioners crowded into the streets of Wellington, peering through swirling low cloud to catch glimpses of the annular eclipse.

Unlike a total eclipse, the sun is not totally obscured in an annular eclipse. The last such eclipse passed over habitation 15 years ago.

Outside the US Embassy, an anti-war demonstrator clad in a gas mask and anti-chemical overalls dug a grave as gloom settled over the city. Another protester against US involvement in the Gulf struck a slow drum beat as he laid a body in the grave.

Isolated already?

WASHINGTON: In explaining the reasons for seeking high-level talks now with Iraq, President George Bush said he was afraid that President Saddam Hussein was "somewhat isolated" by those around him and was not "getting the message" about the forces arrayed against his country.

The remarks echoed US intelligence reports about Mr. Hussein and his inner circle, the group of men closest to the Iraqi leader. They are people who rarely question Mr. Hussein and loyally do his bidding, according to administration officials with access to those reports.

"They're not advisers really, in the sense of people exchanging views," said a member of an administration task force that has been watching developments in Iraq since the Gulf crisis began.

"They're political lieutenants," he said. "There's lot of selective filtering of information."

The Iraqi regime has been likened frequently to an organized crime family. But even chiefs in the best of such families have some autonomy.

Mr Hussein is said to be more dictatorial. His inner circle has been a shifting cast, but most of its member come from the Sunni Muslim village of Tikrit, north of Baghdad, where the Iraqi leader was born in 1937.

"They tend to be thugs or sycophants," a Middle East expert said. The members of the inner circle are often described as reluctant to tell Mr. Hussein what he does not want to hear.

"Saddam doesn't have much respect for people who don't see things the way he does," a US official said. None of these top aides is well known in the United States.

The most visible Iraqi official on "American television, Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, whom Mr. Bush was invited to meet with him in Washington, may have been in the inner circle 18 months to two years ago, according to experts in Washington.

Rare bird's escape from soup

HONG KONG, Jan 16 : A rare bird, on sale alongside chickens and other edible but common species in a Hong Kong market, had a narrow escape from the soup, reports Reuter.

A passerby spotted the cabot's tragopan at a tiny poultry stand in Mong Kok, a teeming district of open-air markets and food stands, the Agriculture and Fisheries Department said on Wednesday.

"The cabot's tragopan is protected under cities so we took it," a spokeswoman said. The World Wildlife Fund for Nature says there are only 5,000 of the birds in the world. But the stallion sold two before the bird was rescued and taken to a local zoo until it can be seen overseas for captive breeding.

Some two weeks ago, Hong Kong officials rescued from the dinner table a rare clouded leopard from China, which was also protected under cities.

It had escaped, supposedly from a restaurant, but nobody would admit it after the police were called, the spokeswoman said.

Dentist the culprit

MIAMI, Jan 16 : A woman who contracted AIDS from her late dentist said Tuesday the dentist may have infected two other people according to a Federal report including genetic tests on the patients, reports AFP.

Kimberly Bergalis and her attorneys said the tests reported by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) "strongly suggest" Dr. David Acer, who died of AIDS in September, infected the three people.

The report shows the strains of AIDS in all four people were virtually identical.

"Now they finally believe me, but where were they when I was standing by myself?" asked Ms. Bergalis, who contracted the deadly HIV virus which causes AIDS when she went to the dentist for a tooth extraction.

"Whether they apologize or not, it's still not going to change the fact that what happened to me could have been prevented," she said.

MS. Bergalis is believed to be the first person in the United States to contract Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome from an infected health care worker.

The other two patients were identified only as an elderly woman married for 20 years and a young man, both of whom like Ms. Bergalis, have no other risk factors for the disease.

Today in History

Today is Thursday, January 17, the 17th day of 1991. There are 348 days left in the year, reports AP. Highlights in history on this date : 1562 - Michel de Hoptal promulgates Edict of St. Germain, which recognizes Huguenots in France. 1595 - France's King Henry IV declares war on Spain. 1601 - Treaty of Lyons between France, Spain and Savoy; Capital of Spain is transferred from Madrid to Valladolid. 1656 - Treaty of Koenigsberg between Sweden and Brandenburg. 1759 - Holy Roman Empire declares war on Prussia. 1852 - Sand River Convention establishes South African Republic of Transvaal. 1945 - Soviet troops and Polish patriotic forces liberate Warsaw, more than five years after it fell to Nazi Germany in World War II. 1948 - Netherlands and Republic of Indonesia sign truce. 1959 - Federal State of Mali is formed by Union of Republics of Senegal and French Sudan. 1967 - Indonesia's Foreign Minister Adam Malik tells President Sukarno to resign or face alternative of being brought down in dishonour. 1988 - Iran says Revolutionary Guards launched offensive against Iraq forces in northern mountains of Kurdistan. 1989 - Military officials of North Korea and United Nations Command meet for the first time since the end of the Korean War to discuss tension-easing measures. 1990 - Medellin Cartel says it has lost drug and offers skeptical U. S. and Colombian authorities an end of terror in exchange for pardon. Today's Birthdays : Leonhard Fuchs, German physician (1501-1566); Benjamin Franklin, U.S. statesman (1706-1790); Anton Chekhov, Russian dramatist (1860-1904); James Earl Jones, U.S. actor (1931-).

War of words. A timeline from August to January detailing the conflict between President George Bush and President Saddam Hussein. Key events include Iraq invading Kuwait, the start of UN Security Council resolutions, and the deployment of US troops.

Over 24 US bombers flown to Middle East

WASHINGTON, Jan 16 : More than two dozen U.S. B-52 bombers have been flown to an undisclosed Middle Eastern region in range to strike targets in Iraq and Kuwait. A U.S. television network said on Tuesday night, reports Reuter. The B-52 is the air force's main long range bomber and can carry Cruise missiles, bombs and nuclear weapons. NBC news' Defence Department correspondent said he had been told that the bombers had been flown to an undisclosed Middle Eastern nation. NBC also said U.S. intelligence officials believed Iraq had five fully loaded oil tankers

in Kuwait city harbour and were prepared to set the oil from the tankers on fire in the event of a U.S. attack. That would hamper any attempt to land troops in Kuwait and make it difficult for U.S. warplanes to spot targets. The Defence Department said it could not confirm the NBC report. Each B-52 can carry to 12 Cruise missiles which are launched from the air to strike targets on the ground. Some models of the B-52 can fly as far as 10,000 miles (16,100KM) without inflight refuelling while other models have a range of 7,500 miles (12,000KM) without inflight. Ap from Washington adds : U.S. soldiers moved into combat preparedness as Iraq continued to build its forces along a front of expected conflict, the defence department said Tuesday. The Department of Defense is ready to execute any order we receive from the president," Defense Department spokesman Pete Williams said. I could say a general matter, we are taking prudent actions, we are giving due consideration to the current climate in that area, and "we've taken appropriate defensive measures in anticipating the im-

Unusual calm in White House

WASHINGTON, Jan 16: At one minute past midnight here Wednesday (0500 GMT) it came down to this: one man, one decision, reports AP. By all accounts, when the clock ran out on the U.A. deadline for Iraq to leave Kuwait, the decision-maker -- U.S. President George Bush -- was asleep. He left the Oval office at 6:30 p.m. (2330 GMT) and walked his dog Ranger around the White house grounds. Then he retired to the third-floor living quarters of the White House, watched TV news shows and had dinner, aides said. If there was any war planning going on, it went undetected. Although lights burned as always in the 24-hour basement situation room and a handful of reporters stayed through the night in the press briefing room, most of the west wing of the White House -- where the President and his staff works -- was dark. And if Bush was asleep, he was a heavy sleeper. Because it was anything but quiet outside the White House as

hundreds of demonstrators maintained a noisy vigil. The crowd, chanting "no blood for oil" and banging a drum, swelled to about 1,500 as midnight neared. But the calm within the heavily guarded White house complex was clearly the lull before the storm. Some White House aides were privately suggesting a U.S. military strike could come later Wednesday, even though they conceded it was just a guess. And at the Defence Department, officials told reporters to get a good night's sleep -- that it might be their last for a while. Fitzwater on Tuesday said the President was "at peace with himself" and "reflective and resolute." Indeed, White House spokeswoman Laura Melillo said from her home that "I believe he's asleep" when asked shortly after midnight whether the President had indeed slept through the deadline. Bush on Tuesday tried to maintain a normal schedule, but the Gulf crisis was clearly uppermost on his mind.