

Saddam's Air Force still intact

Massive US hunt for Scud launchers

BRITFLY

28 Iraqi troops flee : A total of 28 Iraqi soldiers have fled to Turkey since war broke out in the Gulf on Thursday, the semi-official Anatolia News Agency said on Friday.

Citing a local Turkish official, Anatolia in Ankara said the soldiers had crossed the border at Semdinli in recent days. Ten of the 28 took refuge at police stations in the border region where they were questioned by police, the official said, adding that they would be transferred to a refugee camp.

CNN journalists in Jordan : Ten journalists from Cable News Network, The Associated Press and the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. entered Jordan in a four-car convoy Friday after driving from Baghdad, reports AP. CNN said the journalists crossed the border at mid-afternoon New York time and would take several more hours to reach Amman, Jordan's capital.

CNN said five of its eight personnel based in Baghdad had left the Iraqi capital with four CBC journalists and one from the AP. Their convoy took Iraq's main highway to the border crossing at Trebil, CNN in New York said.

The network identified its personnel as Bernard Shaw, Mark Biello, Ingrid Formanek, John Holliman and Kris Krizmanich. AP reporter Dilip Ganguly and the CBC crew, Eric Rankin, Brian Denike, Hans Vanderzande and Christopher Davies, also traveled to Jordan.

Kuwaitis willing to die : One of four Kuwaitis attached as interpreters and interrogators to the US 82nd Airborne Division says they are willing to die in a ground assault on Iraqi forces to free their homeland, reports AP.

"If it costs us our lives, that's fine. We're willing to make the sacrifice," said one of the Kuwaitis, Jamal, who asked that his last name not be used because he still has family in occupied Kuwait. "We want our country free. We want our families free."

The four, who took a crash Army basic training course, are among 300 who have volunteered to assist the U.S. military to identify fake Kuwaiti identification cards held by Iraqis in Kuwait, in the event of a U.S. invasion.

Jordan's support to Iraq : Jordan's parliament in Amman Friday called on Arab and Muslim states to attack the interests of members of the US-dominated multinational force waging war against Iraq, reports AP.

Sixty-six members of the 80-member chamber who were present Friday voted in favour of a resolution calling for such attacks.

They also unanimously branded the air raids launched against Iraq as a "brutal aggression not only against the brotherly Iraqi people... but against all Arab and Muslim nations."

This was the strongest official stand taken to date by Jordan, which has officially remained neutral in the Gulf war, but where there is widespread support for Iraq since it invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2.

EC states Iraqi attack : The European Community strongly condemned Iraq's missile attack on Israel on Friday but appealed to Israel to stay out of the Gulf war, reports Reuters.

"Under the present circumstances, every restraint displayed by Israel must be interpreted as a sign of strength and not of weakness, the 12-member community said in Luxembourg in a statement.

Recalling that Israel's right to security constitutes one of the fundamental principles of the policy of the Community and its member states in the Middle East, they do hope that Israel will not be drawn into the conflict," the statement said.

Pak supplies arms : Pakistan and the United States were the greatest hindrance in a peaceful solution to the Afghan tangle, the Afghan Ambassador in India Ahmad Sarwar said in Meerut, reports PTI.

Afghanistan was keen on a peaceful solution but Pakistan was supplying sophisticated arms to rebels and encouraging them by smuggling injurious drugs, the Ambassador told Rotarians here Thursday night.

He said, Afghanistan had a democratically elected government with 26 ministers.

Mr Sarwar said, though it was a Muslim country, people of all religions had equal liberties and there was no discrimination against non-Muslims.

India, he said, had always supported a peaceful solution to the Afghan problem. He expressed his country's gratitude to India.

UN jetliner stopped : A UN-chartered jetliner carrying Vietnamese boat people home stopped over in Ho Chi Minh City Thursday for the first time ever before proceeding to Hanoi, the government announced, reports AP.

A government statement in Hong Kong said that in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon, the plane dropped off 29 Vietnamese who come from the southern part of Vietnam.

They were among 123 Vietnamese flown back to their Communist homeland from this British colony Thursday under a U.N.-sponsored repatriation program that started in March 1989.

The statement said that previously, a small number of Vietnamese returning to southern Vietnam had gone back via Hanoi on the regular flights.

Sharif cancels visit : Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Friday in Islamabad cancelled a scheduled week-long visit to Iran and Turkey because of the Gulf war, reports Reuters.

He had been due to leave for Iran on January 20, but a government statement said the visit had been postponed "till the situation improves in the Gulf region."

Noriega paid \$300,000 by US : The US government paid deposed Panamanian strongman Manuel Antonio Noriega more than 300,000 dollars in payment and gifts, not "millions of dollars" as the ousted General's attorney's have claimed in Miami according to papers filed by the government Friday.

Thick fog blinds US pilots!

WITH US FORCES IN THE GULF, Jan 19: More than 40 US F-18 Hornet fighter bombers flew into Iraq on Friday to destroy tanks of Saddam Hussein's elite Republican Guard but fog could force them to abort the raid, pilots said, reports Reuters.

The mission was intended to widen the US-led western and Arab coalition's bombardment beyond strikes aimed at knocking out Iraq's air defences, communications and Scud missiles, one of the main Iraqi means of retaliation.

We put a lot of work into these things, planning for it and getting ready, Marine Corps pilot Captain Rocky Morrison, 32, told reporters.

There were just high altitude clouds and that sort of thing, instead of dragging a lot of people down there and getting shot up we just

turned around and came home, he said. "We'll do it another time."

The pilots had planned to drop 500-lb (225-kg) bombs and cluster bombs on Saddam's elite Republican Guard entrenched around an ARC in an area north west of Kuwait.

"Cloud cover made it difficult to continue bombing because yesterday's sortie by the marine air wing was intended to go mainly for tanks, Lieutenant-Colonel George Stuart, 42, said.

Tanks are a very hard target, he added. You want to see the ground defences. We couldn't do that so we called an abort.

The pilots returned to base without dropping any bombs but Stuart said they would return.

"The general target remains the same. We'll fight them until they don't exist anymore."

NICOSIA, Jan 19: U.S. forces in the Gulf, using massive high-tech air power to pound Iraq, have redoubled their hunt for elusive mobile launchers which fired scud missiles against Israel and Saudi Arabia, reports Reuters.

American's Gulf Commander, General Norman Schwarzkopf told reporters on Friday afternoon his planes had destroyed six of Iraq's mobile Scud missile launchers and were attacking others. The United States is uncertain exactly how many mobile launchers Iraq had for Scud-B, a Soviet missile it has adapted to increase in range. A pre-war estimate from the London based International Institute for Strategic Studies was 36.

Finding them all, Schwarzkopf said, was "like hunting a needle in a haystack." U.S. and allied air forces flew more than 2,000 missions a day on Thursday and Friday, the first two days of the war.

Along with ship-launched Cruise missiles they subjected key military installations to the most accurate bombardment in history.

Videotapes shot by attacking U.S. planes and made public on Friday showed, among other feats of pinpoint accuracy, "smart" U.S. bombs homing in on weak points like doors and skylights to penetrate and demolish target buildings.

Bad weather moved across southern Iraq on Friday evening frustrating U.S. marine corps pilots in their first hunt for the up-to-date T-72 tanks of Iraq's elite republican guard.

Iraq, which invaded and occupied Kuwait on August 2, reported shooting down a total of 94 allied aircraft since the war began early on Thursday and said it had captured some U.S. pilots.

Schwarzkopf said seven allied aircraft - three American, two British, one Italian and a Kuwaiti - had been lost and at least eight Iraqi combat planes had been shot down in dog-fights.

Reuter correspondent Maamoun Youssef, in a report from Baghdad, said thousands fled the Iraqi capital after a heavy air raid on Thursday night. Two explosions rocked the city on Friday evening.

Ap adds from Washington : The Iraqi air force may have survived largely intact despite two days of intensive allied air attacks on Iraq and Kuwait, Pentagon officials indicated Friday.

Only 11 of Iraq's estimated 700 aircraft have been confirmed destroyed either in dogfights or raids on Iraqi air bases since operation desert storm began, said Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams.

"Airplanes themselves are not among the first targets" he said, stressing runways and air bases were the prime objectives.



BAGHDAD—A USAF F-15 fighter flying over the Iraqi capital to carry out operations. — AFP/UNB photo



BAGHDAD—Smoke rising amid buildings in downtown Baghdad early January 17 during an air raid by the US-led multinational force. The photo was taken from the window of the Rasheed Hotel. — AFP/UNB photo

US wants a democratic govt in Iraq

BONN, Jan 19: The U.S. Ambassador to Germany, Vernon Walters, said on Friday Washington wants a democratically elected government to emerge in Iraq after the Gulf war, reports Reuters.

Walters made the comment on German television when asked what the United States wanted to see in the region if the multinational force it leads defeated Iraq.

"The political concept is that we are going to have a democratically elected government in Iraq," he said without elaborating.

"We are not fighting against the Iraqi people, we are not fighting to destroy or disarm Iraq. We want to free Kuwait and have people everywhere understand that aggression does not pay any more."

U.S. President George Bush said earlier in Washington that Iraq leader Saddam Hussein was not target of U.S.-led bombing raids that have pounded military sites in Iraq and Kuwait.

"We're not targeting any individual," Bush said when asked if the anti-Iraq coalition were trying to kill Saddam.

Israeli plane landing in Saudi Arabia denied

RIYADH, Jan 19: Saudi Arabia on Friday denied an Iraqi claim that Israeli planes had landed on its territory to take part in the offensive against Iraq, reports AFP.

A Saudi military spokesman said that the claim was an attempt by the Iraqi regime to distract attention from the losses it is suffering.

Earlier the official Iraqi News agency quoted an Iraqi military source as saying that 64 Israeli warplanes had landed at Saudi bases on Friday.

Iraq asks Muslims to strike US interests

NICOSIA, Jan 19: Official Iraqi Radio on Friday called on Muslims worldwide to strike U.S. interests wherever they may be found and on Saudi citizens "to rise up" against King Fahd, reports AFP.

In a broadcast monitored in Nicosia, the radio also said Iraq "will never capitulate to foreigners" and will fight until the nests of traitors and invaders are annihilated.

The statement was repeated several times, with the broadcast interspersed with verses from the Quran and military songs.

Appealing to the sons of Najd and Hijaz a reference to Saudi Arabia's two main provinces - the statement said: "The confrontation has begun and the time has come for you to rise up."

"The traitor Fahd lied to you when he told you that he had called on the Americans to

defend the country against a possible Iraqi attack, whereas he is using the kingdoms' aircraft and those of the enemy to strike at Iraq."

"It is time for us to get rid of the agent Fahd, who has betrayed the Arab nation and has made his country into a base for the aggression against Iraq," the statement said.

And in another appeal, the radio called on "Muslims and believers to rise up, save the Arab nation and strike the interests of the Americans wherever they may be found."

Xinhua from Cairo adds: Iraq's ruling Baath Socialist Party Friday called upon the Arab and Muslim people to support Iraq in its present war which it termed the 'great

fight' and 'mother of all battles,' according to reports reaching here from Baghdad.

In a statement issued Friday evening, the party said that Iraq is not the target of the attack by U.S. and allied forces renaissance and awakening.

The statement apparently designed to provoke Arab national and Islamic religious sentiments, said that 'time has come for popular and historic revolutionary action.'

"There is no room delay in engaging in the great fight to crush the aggression, as Jihad' (holy war) against this aggression is a sacred" it asserted.

"Baghdad had a respite yesterday (Friday) after being the target of allied aircraft and missiles for a second night running."

After the dramatics of the night it was surprising to find, driving around Baghdad in the early dawn (on Friday), that few buildings had been hit.



SAUDI ARABIA — A Saudi Muslim leading civilians and members of the military in prayers while wearing a gas mask in a bomb shelter on Friday. — AFP/ UNB photo.

Off the Record

Iraqi PoWs to be treated as Hajis

RIYADH: Iraqi troops, who desert or are captured will be considered "military refugees" and treated as if they were performing a religious pilgrimage, or Hajj, the Saudi Commander of the Joint Forces Command said Friday, reports AFP.

In a statement, General Khalid bin Sultan, Commander of the Saudi Armed Forces, noted that "joint campaign planning gives to Saudi Arabia responsibility for receiving and handling Iraqi prisoners of war."

"In recognition that our battle is not with the people of Iraq but with the present leadership of that country, we will treat the Iraqis not as prisoners but as military refugees," he said.

Prince Khalid said that the Iraqis, while being guarded, are to be fed, sheltered and otherwise taken care of as though they were pilgrims in our country for the annual Hajj to Mecca and Medina, Islam's holiest sites.

He said several military refugees have come into Saudi hands since Operation Desert Storm began Thursday but did not provide a figure.

The statement also said that Saudi pilots flying mostly F-15 Eagles and Tornados have flown some 200 combat sorties since the bombing of Iraqi targets began at 3:00 a.m. (0000 GMT) Thursday.

It said all of the Saudi aircraft have returned safely to their bases.

British pilots break down

MANAMA (Bahrain): Royal Air Force pilots broke down in tears Friday when they returned from a mission in which a second Tornado bomber was lost, reports AP.

The emotional scenes at Muharraq air base followed yet another strike against Iraqi air installations.

"You feel guilty that you have survived and they haven't," said Squadron Leader Pablo Mason, 40, from Birmingham. The 13-year-veteran of the Royal Air Force should have been celebrating his 17th wedding anniversary Friday.

Mason cried as he attempted to explain how he came to terms with going airborne time and again on bombing missions knowing it could be his turn next to be shot down.

On the Squadron's second sortie into enemy territory, an engine of one of the two-man Tornado bombers caught fire after being hit and crashed. The pilot and navigator were seen to eject and there is hope that they are safe.

Their early Friday, another of the jets crashed on return from the bombing mission. There are fears the crew may have perished with the aircraft.

The Tornados were two of eight allied planes that have been shot down so far by the Iraqi military. The other planes include four American, one Kuwaiti and one Italian.

Hard times for foolish carnivals

BERLIN: The Gulf war means hard times for the Carnival in Europe, reports AP.

People are cancelling pre-Lent Carnival events, both formal and foolish, and questioning the propriety of having public fun on a large scale while combat is spreading on Europe's doorstep.

The Viennese on Wednesday canceled Austria's premier winter social event, the Opera Ball, which normally counts political leaders and royalty among its 7,000 guests. It was the first time the Carnival-time ball has been canceled since it was inaugurated after World War II.

The Italian cities of Venice and Viareggio called off traditional Carnival celebrations, and organizers of next week's fashion shows in Rome dropped a series of black-tie dinners and other gaudy.

In Munich and other German cities, at least 25 Carnival balls were canceled, including those of the German-American Women's Club and the German Fashion School.

The Frankfurter Rundschau newspaper quoted Munich Mayor Georg Kronawitter as saying, "I assume nobody in Munich is in the mood for boisterous celebrations."

German organizers have put off a decision on whether to hold their silliest events of the year, the Rose Monday parades held in many cities on the Monday before Ash Wednesday. The motto of this hard-drinking German festival is "Whoever acts like a fool is really celebrating," and people work in some 3,000 clubs to build gaudy parade floats or arrange the beer supply.

World-class car driver being sued

MIAMI : World-class race car driver Emerson Fittipaldi is being sued for a boating accident that severely injured another boater, reports AP.

Raul Egueras is asking for more than 500,000 dollars in a negligence lawsuit filed against Fittipaldi this week in Dade County civil court.

The lawsuit claims Marine Patrol officer Manuel Padilla spotted Fittipaldi speeding and, while turning his boat to chase him, collided with the outboard motor boat that Egueras was riding in.

"Mr. Fittipaldi has a penchant for going fast, whether in cars or boats," Egueras attorney Edwin Ratiner said.

Fittipaldi, a two-time formula One champion and Indianapolis 500 winner, was not available for comment Wednesday.

Egueras suffered multiple fractures of his right arm as well as a head injury, according to a Florida Marine Patrol investigation. The plaintiff also claimed he hasn't been able to work since the accident.

The Marine Patrol said Fittipaldi saw the collision, turned around and helped the injured.

Art thieves on rampage

LONDON: Worldwide art thefts, estimated to be worth at least 500 million dollars a year, are being recorded on computers in London and New York in an effort to combat the growing crime.

Directors of the International Art and Antique Loss Register released details of the system in London on Tuesday. After four years in development, has been in operation since the beginning of this year.

Register staff record thefts reported by museums, private owners, insurers and police forces to see if stolen goods match those offered for sale in the catalogues of 168 auction houses throughout the world.

Julian Radcliffe, chairman of the register, said Iraq could be involved in the stolen art trail.

"The Iraqi authorities are believed to have removed tremendous treasures from their museums and if they try to sell them abroad, as we suspect they may, we will try to stop them arriving on the international art market," said Radcliffe, a director of Lloyd's insurance brokers, Hogg Group PLC.

"Stolen art has become an increasing international problem, behind drugs in financial terms but close to international counterfeiting and illegal arms dealing," Radcliffe told a news conference.

Today in History

- Today is Sunday, January 20, the 20th day of 1991.
- There are 345 days left in the year, reports AP.
- Highlights in history on this date.
- 1265 -- England's Parliament meets for first time.
- 1503 -- Casa Contratacion Board of Trade is formed in Spain to deal with affairs in America.
- 1839 -- Chile wins Battle of Yungay against Peru-Bolivian Federation, resulting in dissolution of that union.
- 1887 -- New Zealand annexes Kermadec Islands in Pacific; U.S. Senate approves leasing Pearl Harbor in Hawaii as naval base.
- 1925 -- Soviet Union and Japan form alliance; Britain and China sign Treaty of Peking.
- 1968 -- President Aref's regime in Iraq is deposed, and new government is formed under Al-Bakr.
- 1989 -- George Bush becomes the 41st president of the United States.
- 1990 -- Soviet troops storm Azerbaijan capital of Baku, leaving dozens dead and wounded, as President Mikhail Gorbachev defends action on national television.