

BRIEFLY

250m dollar aid for Israel: Germany is contributing humanitarian aid of 250 million dollars (166 million dollars) to Israel as a sign of "solidarity" after the Iraqi missile attacks against it, Chancellor Helmut Kohl in Bonn said Wednesday.

Mr. Kohl also said that Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher would go to Israel very shortly to hand a personal message from him to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

19000 refugees flee to Jordan: Some 19,000 refugees, including more than 12,000 from Asia, have fled Iraq and Kuwait into Jordan since Friday, a Jordanian official in Amman said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Jordanian authorities are bracing for a feared influx of 750,000 people escaping war in the Gulf, with some experts here putting the figure at closer to two million.

Amman, earlier this month closed its border with Iraq but agreed to reopen it Friday following an agreement by international organizations to pay for the accommodation of refugees in Jordan as well as their repatriation.

Perez condemns Iraqi action: UN Secretary-General Javier Perez De Cuellar late on Wednesday condemned Iraq's recent "unprovoked missile attacks" against Israel that had caused scores of casualties, reports Reuter.

His statement was issued in United Nations several hours after a US spokesman had been asked to comment on reports that Israeli diplomats were unhappy at the absence of any formal condemnation of the Scud missile raids, which began last Friday.

There have since been three further attacks, including one on Tuesday on a Tel Aviv suburb in which three people died and nearly 100 were injured.

Iraq destroys Saudi oil town: An Iraqi missile intercepted by a Patriot missile over Saudi Arabia on Tuesday night showered the country's main oil town with large chunks of debris but no-one was hurt, industry executives in Dhahran said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

They said, pieces of metal, some too heavy to move, cascaded down on the Saudi Aramco Compound, home to 12,000 Saudi and expatriate employees, during the missile attack.

Some pierced the roof of houses and one — the size of a coffee cup and burning hot — landed in a resident's living room.

Israel to get 37,000 Gas masks: Norway on Wednesday decided to send 7,000 gas masks to the Israeli-occupied West Bank and the Gaza strip. The masks were requested by UNRWA, the United Nations Organisation for Palestinian refugees, reports AP.

Some 1.5 million Palestinians live in the occupied areas, and only few have been given gas masks by Israeli authorities.

Sweden will send 25,000 masks, the foreign ministry in Stockholm announced.

"We are trying to sort out where we can get the masks. They will be sent as soon as possible," Norwegian Foreign Ministry press spokesman Bjorn Blokhus in Oslo said.

Bush phones Shamir: President George Bush telephoned Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir after the third Iraqi missile attack on Tel Aviv to express his outrage and thank Shamir for Israel's continued restraint, the White House in Washington said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

It said Bush called Shamir at midnight on Tuesday (0500 gmt) — 7 am on Wednesday in Israel — after a Scud crashed into an apartment building in the Tel Aviv area killing three people and wounding 96.

Israel confident to get Patriot: Israeli commanders have expressed confidence in the US-supplied Patriot system after the anti-missile missiles destroyed an Iraqi Scud rocket a day after one got through AP from Tel Aviv says.

After the failure a day before, US Patriot missiles shot down the Scud Wednesday night that was fired toward Haifa in northern Israel, the army reported. It was fourth Iraqi missile attack on Israel in five days.

On Tuesday, Patriots hit an Iraqi Scud but failed to detonate the warhead, which blasted the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan, wounding at least 70 people. The army said three elderly people died of heart attacks.

Britons seek help: British Nationals living in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia nearest to the Iraqi and Kuwaiti borders have asked for help in leaving the country, the foreign office said in London Wednesday, reports AFP.

A spokesman said Britain was studying ways to provide help and had been in touch with private airlines and the ministry of transport, but gave no further details.

The British request comes after the US government said military transport flights would be arranged for Americans living in the same region who wished to leave Saudi Arabia.

Iraq displays 2 US pilots: Two captured allied pilots appeared on Iraqi television on Wednesday and said they had been afraid to fight Baghdad, Iraqi radio said as reported by from Nicosia Reuter.

The radio said US navy pilot Lieutenant Jeffrey Zaun and Italian Air Force Captain Maurizio Cocciolone were interviewed in the second such televised display by Iraq of its allied prisoners of war.

Iraqi pilots on training: Iraqi fighter pilots are practicing to shoot down tanker and awacs early warning aircraft crucial to allied attacks that penetrate into Iraq, according to a British flight officer in the Gulf, reports AFP.

"We know from intelligence his fighters have been practising simulated shootdowns on his own civilian airliners," said Flight Lieutenant Keith Hewitt, referring to Saddam Hussein's air force.

Flt. Lt. Hewitt, 40, told the British Domestic News Agency Press Association in London that allied pilots were worried Iraq was saving its air force to be used for strikes against the refuelling.

Air raids destroy 2 Iraqi N-reactors

WASHINGTON, Jan 24: The Pentagon's top military officer said Wednesday that allied bombing raids in the Gulf war had completely destroyed two Iraqi nuclear reactors, reports Reuter.

"I think I can confirm you that the two operational reactors they had are both down. They're gone. They're finished," General Colin Powell, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters.

AFP from Rome says: Six Italian Tornado aircraft "successfully took part Wednesday in a fresh attack against" Iraqi military objectives in the Gulf, the Italian Defence Ministry announced.

The military did not say what the objectives were or whether they were in Iraq or occupied Kuwait, but stated that the operation took place "despite bad atmospheric conditions".

It was the fourth Italian sortie since the start of hostilities.

Last Friday, during Italy's first mission in the war, one Tornado was lost. The navigator, Captain Maurizio Cocciolone, was taken prisoner and has since been displayed on Iraqi television. The pilot, Captain Gianmarco Bellini, is listed as missing.

Italy has contributed 10 Tornados and five warships to the multinational coalition ranged against Iraq in the Gulf.

Fatal impact of a land battle warned
Iraq to turn desert into a sea of blood

MANAMA, Jan 24: Iraq intends to transform the desert into a "Sea of Blood" at the start of a land battle with US-led forces deployed in Saudi Arabia, an official Iraqi newspaper warned Wednesday, reports AFP.

The Defence Ministry newspaper Al-Qadisiyah warned that a prolonged battle with Iraqi forces would lead multinational troops "to a fatal impasse".

"Iraq's objective is to cause the maximum number of losses among the invaders, transforming the desert into a sea of blood", the paper said, according to excerpts carried by the Iraqi news agency monitored here.

The Iraqi fighter will strike with force when the hour of the battle is at hand", the paper said, as "only a small portion of Iraq might has been utilized until now."

Another newspaper, Al-Jumhuriya, denounced King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, holding him responsible for "each drop of blood shed by every woman, child and elder in Iraq and for the destruction of each Mosque".

King Fahd has incurred Iraq wrath by allowing the deployment in Saudi Arabia of more than 500,000 foreign troops in an international coalition to drive Iraq out of Kuwait.

Reuter from Nicosia adds: Iraq threatened on Tuesday to "respond strongly" against Gulf Arab States permitting US-led allied air and missile attacks against it from their territory, Baghdad radio reported.

"We reserve the right to respond strongly to the dens of treason in the land of Najd and Hejaz (Saudi Arabia) and the Sheikdoms of the Arab Gulf from which the missiles and aircraft of the blatant US aggression are staged", the radio quoted Information Minister Latif Nassif Al-Jassem as saying.

The broadcast threat, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), was the first against countries other than Saudi Arabia, which has been the target of several Iraqi Scud missile attacks. The attacks have been intercepted and destroyed by American Patriot missiles or have landed harmlessly in the desert or the sea.

Another report says: Iraq said food and medical shortages have caused the deaths of 4,224 children and old people and for the first time asked the United Nations to send a Humanitarian Mission to Baghdad to evaluate their needs, according to a cable obtained by Reuter on Wednesday.

But diplomats said it is unlikely any UN staff will go to Baghdad while the bombing continues.

The Security Council's sanctions committee last November asked Iraq to permit such a mission as a result of numerous reports from private groups that the UN trade embargo was depriving children of food and other needs.

Iraq replied on January 14, three days before the war broke out, with a brief cable sent to the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Geneva and to the U.N. Children's

Fund (UNICEF), based in New York.

The cable, from the Ministry of Health, said that "the economic embargo imposed on Iraqi children and the Iraqi people, an embargo which also cuts off supplies of drugs, medical necessities, food and baby milk, has caused 4,224 deaths among children and the elderly".

"Since your organisation is concerned with humanitarian issues, we invite your representatives to visit our country to witness at first hand the shortages in drugs, medical necessities food and milk, with a view to working with our country to break the economic embargo", it said.

Under Security Council resolutions against Iraq, medical supplies are permitted to enter the country. But food is prohibited, except under humanitarian circumstances after evaluation by groups such as the United Nations or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).



Cheney tells briefing
Republican Guards being destroyed

UNDATED, Jan 24: Patriot missiles knocked down incoming Iraqi Scuds over Israel and Saudi Arabia Wednesday as US officials declared that the massive bombing of Iraq had destroyed its nuclear capability and won air superiority, reports AFP.

US Defense Secretary Dick Cheney told a briefing in Washington that allied forces had won air superiority over Iraq and begun the work of destroying the Republican Guard, the of mainstay of Iraq's Land Forces.

"First we're going to cut it off and then we're going to kill it," General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said of the Iraqi Army, which he said relied on lengthy supply lines.

Mr. Cheney and Gen. Powell said air strikes had knocked out Iraq's nuclear capability and damaged its capacity to make chemical and biological weapons.

So far, a total of 41 Iraqi aircraft had been destroyed in the air raid.

The prospect, meanwhile, that neighbouring Turkey would be drawn into the war loomed large as Iraq warned Ankara over its decision to allow US warplanes to bomb Iraq from its bases.

Gasoline sale in Iraq suspended

NICOSIA, Cyprus: Iraq said it was suspending gasoline sales Wednesday as allied forces reported hits on major refineries, says AP.

Iraqi Radio called U.S. President George Bush a war criminal, accusing him of ordering air raids on non-military targets.

Iraq praised its own missile attacks on civilian areas of Israel. The latest strike, which injured at least 70 people in Tel Aviv, was carried out "for the sake of Palestine," Iraqi Radio said.

In a new claim, an army engineering corps officer was quoted by the Iraqi News Agency as saying 400 enemy missiles had been defused and many of them later fired back at the allied forces.

Iraqi Radio, monitored in Cyprus, branded Bush, French President Francois Mitterrand and British Prime Minister John Major war criminals. It said they had ordered their forces to bomb civilians, factories.

Off the Record

10 baby Saddams in Bangladesh!

AMMAN: At least 412 newborn babies in Jordan have been named "Saddam" in honor of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

A senior official at the civil affairs department said the name, almost unheard of in Jordan before Iraq's Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait, has been given to 6 percent of all male babies born since then.

"Many Jordanians have named their male babies Saddam in honor of President Saddam Hussein, who has become very popular among the masses who regard him as the Arab's hero," the official said on condition of anonymity.

The name Saddam has become even more popular since the US-led multinational force attacked Iraq last Thursday. Twenty-two baby boys have been named Saddam in the past five days, compared with an average of 17 per week since August, the official said.

Similar reports have come from Malaysia and Bangladesh. Saddam has long been a common name in Iraq.

In Bangladesh, the newspaper Khabar said 10 boys were given the name in a two-day period in the northern city of Rangpur.

"I will call my son Saddam Hussein. Every child in Bangladesh should become a hero like him," the newspaper quoted Abul Hossain, a trader, as saying.

Thieves too afraid of missiles

JERUSALEM: A national emergency over Iraqi missile attacks has cleared Israel's streets of criminals. Acting police spokesman Moshe Alexandroni said crime had dropped by more than half as Israelis, guarding against Iraq missile attacks, spent more time indoors.

"I believe the thieves are afraid, like everyone else," he told Reuter. "It's only natural, no?"

Doctors scared

IN EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA: Although they are far from the front lines, the specter of chemical warfare haunts the doctors and nurses at the US Army's 85th Evacuation Hospital who will have to treat the soldiers who may be contaminated, reports AP.

"You've got to worry about that," said Col. Bob Leaver, 50, a neurosurgeon. "It's that kind of unknown element because none of us have ever faced that before. That makes you a bit apprehensive."

Leaver said he believes that hospital's medical staff is well prepared for treating soldiers who have been exposed to chemical warfare.

"It's scary, nonetheless. All of us are taking pretreatment pills that allow you to treat someone if they are exposed," Leaver said.

The drug, phosostigmine, "makes your system more acceptable to further treatment should you be exposed to the gas."

The hospital has 408 beds—48 intensive care, 160 intermediate and 200 minimal care. There are six operating tables, two each in three operating rooms.

Twenty-six doctors, 47 nurses and 93 medics are attached to the hospital.

'Iraqi President a genius'

WASHINGTON: US military leaders on Wednesday portrayed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as a "genius" with a big arsenal still intact, reports Reuter.

"I want to caution you... that a military operation of this intensity and complexity cannot be scored every evening of like a college track meet or a basketball tournament," US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney said at a news conference.

Cheney and General Colin Powell, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, guaranteed eventual victory but clearly hoped to refocus expectations and stop public morale from swinging between euphoria and impatience.

"We're dealing with an enemy that is resourceful, an enemy that knows how to work around problems, an enemy that is a genius," Powell said.

Black rain in Iranian province

NICOSIA: Black, greasy rain poured on an Iranian coastal province, caused by burning Kuwaiti oilfields, the Iranian news agency IRNA said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

It said the black rain fell on Bushehr province, about 250 km (160 miles) east of Kuwait, for 10 minutes on Tuesday.

"According to environment specialists here the rain was black and greasy because of the fire in the Kuwaiti oil wells and other areas in the Persian Gulf region," IRNA said in a report from Bushehr Port.

A US military spokesman said on Tuesday aerial photographs showed Iraq had blown up some oil wells and storage tanks at Al Wafra field in the Kuwaiti portion of the so-called neutral zone shared with Saudi Arabia on Kuwait's southern border.

Iraq was widely reported to have mined oilfields in Kuwait following the US-led military buildup after its August 2 invasion of the emirate.

Perez urged to take steps

Iran for regional security system

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 24: Iran on Wednesday sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Javier Perez De Cuellar proposing a Regional Security System within a UN framework but without foreign troops to ensure long-term stability in the Middle East.

The letter, obtained by Reuter, also says Iran, which fought an eight-year war with Iraq, considered it "imperative" to stay out of the current Gulf war.

But the letter, signed by Ambassador Kamal Kharrazi, said Iran reserved the right of self-defence "to take all necessary measures" against any violation of its sovereignty or territorial integrity.

Kharrazi said, the Security Council should assess the present situation in light of its resolutions and take a more active role in achieving... the complete withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait, termination of the present armed conflict and withdrawal of foreign forces from the region.

The Ambassador said that stability in the Gulf region could only be realised through "a regional security and cooperation mechanism within a United Nations framework."

He said the intervention or presence of foreign forces had "historically been misguided and destabilising."

Another report says: Secretary-General Javier Perez De Cuellar late on Wednesday condemned Iraq's recent "unprovoked missile attacks" against Israel that had caused scores of casualties.

His statement was issued several hours after a UN spokesman had been asked to comment on reports that Israeli diplomats were unhappy at the absence of any formal condemnation of the Scud missile raids, which began last Friday.

US shows Iraqi sabotage

RUYADIH, Jan 24: The US Central command Wednesday released six photographs showing what they said was a Kuwait oil field sabotaged by the Iraqis, reports AFP.

The aerial photographs of the Al-Wafra field were taken by the US military, a US army spokesman said.

Shown are several oil heads burning with plumes of black smoke billowing into the sky, according to David Mangon, a journalist for the US-based "The Oil Daily".



SOMEWHERE IN SAUDI ARABIA --- A Saudi shepherd guiding his goats around a US marine tank in the desert near the Kuwaiti border. According to reports, still unconfirmed, Iraqi ground forces captured a few Saudi outposts on Wednesday.