

Tehran protests landing of 100 planes

Pentagon hints at Iraq-Iran deal

BRITFLY

S. Arabia denies Iraqi report: Saudi Arabia strongly denied on Monday an Iraqi report that 50 Israeli planes were taking part in operation "Desert Storm" mounted by Allied forces to chase Baghdad's troops from Kuwait, reports AFP.

A government spokesman in Riyadh said that Baghdad was resorting to "lies and pure inventions" and "vainly trying to draw away attention from its crimes."

The Saudis had already denied an Iraqi report on January 18 that 65 Israeli planes had landed at Saudi air bases.

Dhahran on missile alert: The eastern Saudi city of Dhahran went on missile alert for eight minutes from 12.19 tonight, reports Reuters.

Air raid sirens sounded around an air base used by US and Allied forces but Saudi radio and television did not interrupt their broadcasts. No explosions were heard and the alert was called off.

The sirens usually sound whenever allied forces detect Iraq firing long-range Scud missiles in any direction.

Iraq has fired 27 Scud missiles into Saudi Arabia over the past 10 days.

PLO leader jailed: Israel on Tuesday ordered Palestinian leader Sari Nusseibeh jailed without trial for six months on suspicion he spied for Iraq.

The Defence Minister in Jerusalem said in a statement, "The detention follows his activity of collecting security information for the Iraqi intelligence, especially after missile attacks on Israel."

Security sources said, Nusseibeh, a resident of Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem and a Pro-PLO leader of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip, passed information on where Iraqi missiles fired at Israel landed.

Use of Soviet missiles denied: Those missiles raining down on Israel and Saudi Arabia are not Soviet-designed Scuds as others believe, Iraq said on Tuesday night, reports Reuters.

Please call them "Hussein" missiles, the Military Industrialisation Corporation in Nicosia said in a complaint about western reports on this aspect of the Gulf war.

Military reference books published in the West describe the Hussein missile, developed for use in Iraq's 1980-1988 war with Iran, as a modified version of the Soviet Union's Scud, with the payload reduced to extend its range.

The "Mother of All Battles Radio" quoted a Corporation spokesman as saying, "The enemies are insisting on calling the Hussein missiles Scud and they know the missile they are trying to intercept is not a Scud and it does not work with a Scud system."

Blasts in Istanbul: Three bombs went off Tuesday night in Istanbul and two vehicles belonging to US diplomats were torched but there were no injuries, the Turkish News Agency Anatoly in Ankara said, reports AFP.

Of the three bombs, a powerful one damaged the offices of the American Churches Union Refugee Bureau.

A weaker bomb thrown from an emergency stair way damaged an apartment under the commercial offices of the American Union.

The third bomb exploded in the garden of the Italian consulate.

The attacks have not been claimed, the Turkish agency said.

US certain to win: US President George Bush said in Washington Tuesday night the United States and its allies were certain to win the Gulf war and vowed that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein would not be able to drag out the conflict.

In the prepared text of his annual 'state of the union' speech, Bush also said Soviet leaders had led him to believe there was reason for optimism about a peaceful settlement of the crisis in the Baltics.

"Tonight, I'm pleased to report that we are on course. Iraq's capacity to sustain war is being destroyed. Our investment, our training, our planning—all are paying off. Time will not be Saddam's salvation," he said.

Perez's security tightened: United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar's security detail has been beefed up since Iraq held him "personally responsible" for the Gulf war, the UN said Tuesday, reports AFP.

UN spokesman Francois Gulliani in New York said Mr. Perez de Cuellar's security was tightened after he received a letter from Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz Saturday blaming the UN chief for "the horrible crimes being committed against the noble Iraqi people who are struggling for their freedom."

UN officials declined to say if they had asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation or New York Police for help.

Shortly after the war broke out January 17, UN Security was tightened, including increased identification checks.

Deal with Baghdad denied: Iran's Ambassador to France Tuesday dismissed speculation that Tehran may have struck a secret deal with Baghdad and said escaping Iraqi planes would be impounded in order to shorten the Gulf war, reports Reuters.

"Not at all, we shall stick to strict neutrality," Ambassador Ali Ahani told radio Monte Carlo when asked whether there was an agreement between Iran and Iraq.

Some diplomats, puzzled by the arrival in Iran of dozens of Iraq's best aircraft, have speculated that the two countries may have struck a secret deal.

"We have said we would keep (the planes) until the end of the war. We shall not allow that they be returned to Iraq before the war is over," Ahani said in Paris.

US concern over Iraqi plan: The White House on Tuesday said that it was very concerned about the motivation of Iraq's diverting aircraft to neighbouring Iran, reports Xinhua.

White House spokesman in Washington Martin Fitzwater was asked at the daily briefing whether the Bush Administration believed that the Iraqi planes in Iran, mostly fighters and bombers, would be used for later attack on US forces.

Fitzwater said, the United States has got Iran's repeated assurances—the late one within 24 hours—through third parties that the Iraqi planes will be grounded for the duration of the war. Iran has declared neutral in the US-led multi-national fighting against Iraq.

Limb centre in Hanoi: A new artificial limb centre in Hanoi built with US help will produce between 500 and 800 artificial legs this year, the Vietnam News Agency reported late on Tuesday, reports Reuters from Hanoi.

It said, the Hanoi Prosthetic Technology Research Centre, inaugurated on Tuesday, was built with aid from the US prosthetic research foundation in Seattle, Washington.

The foundation has sent equipment and experts to help Vietnamese orthopaedic technicians since December 1989.

Traces of nerve gas found in Saudi desert

RIYADH, Jan 30: Members of a Czechoslovak chemical team recently detected "traces" of nerve gas in Saudi Arabia's northern desert, sources said Tuesday, reports AP.

The team theorized the traces came from Iraqi chemical factories bombed by US planes and said they were too small to pose a danger, according to sources familiar with Saudi military activities.

The sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity and cited field reports, said the tests were conducted several days ago.

"The theory was that the material was picked up and carried southward by the prevailing winds into Saudi Arabia," said one source.

"The Czechs ran several tests. They all came up with the same finding, so there was no doubt about what the trace elements were, or that the level was safe."

US Central Command spokesmen had no immediate comment on the reported findings.

NICOSIA, Jan 30: Iran's United Nations Ambassador said he had protested to Baghdad about Iraqi planes landing in Iran, which has taken a neutral stand in the Gulf war, reports Reuters.

Ambassador Kamal Kharrazi told Iranian radio in an interview from New York that he told U. S. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar Iran was confiscating the aircraft until the end of hostilities.

Military sources in London say up to 100 Iranian aircraft have sought refuge in Iran because of allied air supremacy in the Gulf war, now in its 13th day.

Iranian radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, on Tuesday quoted the ambassador as saying, "I informed Mr (Perez) de Cuellar of the emergency landing of the Iraqi aircraft on Iran's territory and also the decision of Iran's Supreme National Security Council pertaining to the confiscation of those aircraft till the war has ended."

"Also he was informed of the Islamic Republic of Iran's protest concerning that matter, which was conveyed to Iraq through its charge d'affaires in Tehran," Kharrazi said.

AP from Washington says: The U. S. Department shrugged off arguments for hunting down Iraq's top-of-the-line aircraft seeking refuge in Iran, contending the warplanes are not a high-priority target that threaten allied forces.

Lt. Gen. Thomas Kelly, the Pentagon spokesman for Operation Desert Storm, said 80 Iraqi planes have sought haven in Iran and 60 of those appear to be late models such as French-made Mirage F-1s, and Soviet-made Mig-29s and Mig-25s.

"They're putting the flower of their air force out," Kelly told reporters at a Pentagon briefing.

The general said allied war planners weren't exactly sure of the motives behind the movement—whether it was a plan to spare the aircraft for another conflict or whether pilots might be deserting.

It was clear, the general said, that Iran was allowing the planes to land, and he hinted that perhaps some kind of agreement had been reached between the once-hostile neighbours.

"This removes them as a threat to allied aircraft," Kelly said, adding that it appeared to do the aircraft little good to fly to a country that had no spare parts or maintenance crews for them. And grounded aircraft "begin to break after a time" without maintenance, he said.

"So I don't think it's a good deal" that would help Hussein retain a portion of his air force, Kelly said.

Secretary of State James A. Baker III said in a separate meeting with reporters, "Through diplomatic channels we received assurances that the aircraft would be kept in Iran, that Iran was maintaining its position of complete neutrality in this conflict."

"I could be a plan to save those aircraft for another time, to include during this conflict or after this conflict. I don't know what kind of arrangements Iraq has reached with Iran," Kelly said.

The general said the planes have departed Iraq piecemeal, as well as in organized groups, which may indicate some coordination among the pilots.

He said, however, that it was clear that Iran so far has stood by its pledge to remain neutral and impound the aircraft.

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Quotable Quotes

DHAKA, Jan 30: Here are some Quotes, reported by Reuters from U.S. servicemen in Operation Desert Storm in the Gulf.

-- "I've been bombed by our own Air Force. I don't think they did it intentionally," General Norman Schwarzkopf, U.S. Commander of Allied Forces in the Gulf.

-- "We're all tired, we all stink, but that's life in the magic kingdom," --U.S. Marine Staff Sergeant Allen Bruce in a peptalk to his men.

-- "I went from bombs to bombast," --U.S. Army Chaplain Lieutenant-Colonel Don Alyn, who once served as an artillery officer.

-- "The light at the end of the tunnel is Baghdad," --U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Jeffrey Wheeler.

-- "I hate the new Army. Nobody smokes," --A veteran Army Sergeant.

-- "We put on our pants the same way as everybody else. It's just that ours have shirts attached," --A U.S. Navy fighter pilot on the mystique of his job.

-- "We got all these culture classes before we got over here and I'm still wondering when we'll see a Saudi," --Captain Salvador Rodas, on deployment in remote desert regions.

-- "He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword," --Commander Jeff Turner, quoting the Bible, on launching a Cruise missile into Iraq.

-- "You can't get a hostage out of a missile, a missile can't be afraid," --U.S. Navy Lieutenant Guy Zanti, on the advantages of Cruise missiles.

-- "What was he (the General) going to do, send me to Saudi Arabia?" --Major Frank Timmons, on his unconventional methods of asking senior officers to sign supply documents.

-- "We validated the physical principle that water runs downhill," --Marine Lieutenant-colonel Jay Vesely, on digging a foxhole in the rain.

-- "If we want to make Iraq the 51st state then that will take a little longer," --Marine Master Sergeant Michael Zelenak, on how long the Gulf war might last.

-- "We got all these culture



WASHINGTON: In this photo taken from Cable News Network (CNN) January 29 CNN reporter Peter Arnett (L) interviewing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (R) January 28. Hussein said in the interview that the Allied air raids had failed. — AFP/UNB Photo.

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Iran seeks UN permission to supply food for Iraqis

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 30: Under the security council's trade embargo against Iraq, food is barred except in humanitarian circumstances and only under supervision of the ICRC of the United Nations with approval of the sanctions committee.

Iran on Monday told Perez de Cuellar it had strongly protested to Iraq about the landing of warplanes in Iran and said they would be impounded until the end of the war and the pilots interrogated.

Ambassador Kamil Kharrazi repeated to reporters Iran's position of neutrality in the Gulf war and warned all combatants not to violate his country's air space. His comments were also contained in a letter distributed on Tuesday.

The United States has estimated that more than 80 Iraqi planes have flown to Iran.

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Off the Record

'Thou shall not kill'

IN CENTRAL SAUDI ARABIA: U. S. Airman Lt. Clete Shawn Rice deftly screwed a small fuse into a 500-pound (225-kilogram) bomb. Seconds later, she popped in another. As the bombs rolled down the assembly line, the 20-year-old pondered the morality of preparing weapons of war, reports AP.

God's commandment—"thou shall not kill"—doesn't seem to apply, she concluded.

Tech. Sgt. Hattie Monson, the crew chief for an F-16A, lavishes loving attention on the fighter-bomber she's nicknamed Six, after her lucky number, and agonizes every time it heads north to pound Iraqi targets.

"We really don't think about what our bombs are doing. We're thinking about our airplanes and our air crews," she said.

Though barred from flying combat missions, women in the U. S. Air Force are playing a bigger role than in any past war.

From making and loading bombs to calibrating electronic equipment, doing combat surgery and flying cargo runs away from the frontlines, women have become an integral part of the air war machine.

Some came here at great personal sacrifice. Staff Sgt. Pam Krolewicz-Milas left behind her 10-month-old daughter, two older stepchildren, and a husband who had just been diagnosed as having cancer to come here because she wanted to support America.

Injustice outside ignored WASHINGTON: U. S. Democrats support the war against Iraq, but President George Bush is ignoring injustice elsewhere and problems at home, Senate majority leader George Mitchell said Tuesday in his response to the President's Annual State of the Union address.

"We ask him to join us in putting our own house in order," said Mr. Mitchell, a Maine Democrat.

He called on the President to develop a national energy policy to reduce the nation's dependence on foreign oil, overhaul the nation's health care system and as a "first priority" develop a program for economic growth.

"The President has locked himself in his war room, leaving our domestic needs banging at the door," said representative John Conyers, a Michigan democrat.

Mr. Mitchell also said the United States cannot oppose repression in one part of the world and overlook it in another.

Iraqi POWs frightened IN NORTHERN SAUDI ARABIA: Iraqi prisoners of war are very frightened of airplanes and some turn white and curl up into fetal positions when they hear them overhead, the commander of a Marine field hospital said Tuesday, reports AP.

Navy Lt. Cmdr. Keith Boehm said the evidence provided by Iraqi prisoners observed at other U. S. medical facilities showed the Gulf war is exacting a heavy psychological toll.

"They are very, very frightened when planes come overhead," he said. "You could see them turn white, then turn up into a fetal position, some of them."

"They're very scared about what was going to happen to them. They're under a tremendous amount of pressure," he said.

Boehm added that Iraqi troops in the field "feel it far more than we do up here because they're preparing their positions. They're working during the day then they're up all night with the bombing."

"You can only do that for so long before you just can't function any more. You just physically can't function. You're drained and you just can't do it," he said.

More than 100 Iraqis have been taken prisoner by U. S. forces since the war started on Jan. 17.

Passport babies HONG KONG: Contracting marriages of convenience to obtain residency abroad is not an uncommon practice for people desperate to get out of their countries, reports IPS.

But in Hong Kong, the phenomenon takes the form of "passport babies" as a kind of insurance as the date of the 1997 handover of the British colony to China approaches.

Many women hope that by giving birth on foreign soil they may be able to obtain foreign nationality for their children and secure their future outside a Hong Kong ruled by China.

Some even hope that foreign passports will mean their children will be able to "sponsor" their parents for emigration.

A Canadian or U. S.-born child can sponsor its parents on reaching the age of 18.

According to reports from both the United States and Canadian consulates in Hong Kong, the number of Hong Kong women ostensibly visiting their countries as tourists—but actually to have their babies—has risen since the June 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement in China.

Graduate dogs BEIJING: Twenty-three shepherd dogs have graduated from a two-year course to become China's first certified earthquake rescue dogs, the China Daily reported, says AFP.

The dogs were trained to smell out survivors buried under rubble and to carry food, water and medicine through obstacles like water, fire and narrow passages, the newspaper said.

They passed their final field tests at the rescue dog training centre of the Fujian Provincial Earthquake Administration "with sharp senses, quick response and conscientious performances," the newspaper added.

Eggs that delight wildlife experts LOS ANGELES: Two pairs of California condors have laid eggs in captivity, raising hopes that the four rare birds might be bred later this year, wildlife officials said, reports AP.

Keepers discovered the two eggs while monitoring the condor units in Los Angeles Zoo and the San Diego wild animal park via closed circuit cameras. The eggs, laid hours apart Saturday, were quickly removed from the nests.

There are just 40 California condors known to exist and all are in captivity—21 at the San Diego park and 19 at the Los Angeles Zoo. The eggs are the first clutch of 1991.

"It's significant for us because it's really early in the season," said Mike Wallace, the zoo's bird curator and condor program director.

"We have a lot of pairs looking very good, so we're hoping for a good season," Wallace said.

California condors are believed extinct in the wild, the last survivors brought into captivity in 1987. Since 1988, 12 condors have been born in captivity and all have survived, Wallace said.

Habash threatens to attack US installations

DAMASCUS, Jan 30: A radical Palestinian leader said Saturday the war against Iraq will turn into another Vietnam and vowed to strike at U.S. Israeli and other western military targets in support of Saddam Hussein, reports AP.

Speaking at an interview in Damascus, which staunchly backs the U.S.-led coalition arrayed against Saddam, George Habash declared: "If we have the opportunity, we shall not hesitate to hit... Israeli, American, British or French military targets to help Iraq."

Habash is leader of the popular front for the Liberation Palestine, the second-largest faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization. His group is famed for a series of hijacking in the late 1960s and 1970s that were aimed at drawing attention to the Palestinian problem.

But Habash's group has backed the 1988 renunciation of terrorism pledged by PLO chairman Yasser Arafat.

Retorting that commitment, he said: "We will not allow ourselves to strike against civilian targets. That's impossible, we are not terrorists."

Habash had moved out of Damascus temporarily after Saddam's Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait which touched off the Gulf conflict. He went to Iraq, Syria's chief Arab rival, to voice his support. He then returned to Damascus.

Syria and Iraq are ruled by rival wings of the pan-Arab Baath Party and have been at loggerheads or more than a decade. Syria has committed about 19,000 troops to the U.S.-led operation Desert Storm.



SAUDI ARABIA: A French soldier adjusts ammunition to his machine gun while his colleagues wait in a firing position earlier this week, in the Saudi Desert. —AFP Photo