

Gulf crisis

Marines played cat-and-mouse with Iraqis in Khafji

KHAFJI (Saudi Arabia), Feb 2: Fourteen U.S. Marine scouts hid in Khafji and played a perilous cat-and-mouse game with Iraqi invaders for nearly two days as the battle for the border town raged around them, reports AP.

Reducing back vital information to front lines, one of the two teams of seven men mined the staircase of their hide-out and steered artillery fire virtually on top of themselves to destroy nearby Iraqi vehicles.

"I'd be lying if I didn't say that dying hadn't crossed my mind," said Cpl. Chuck Ingraham. "We were shaking for two days from cold and fear."

One Marine, Cpl. Jeff Brown, was wounded slightly by shrapnel when the U.S. cluster shell he'd helped direct sprayed his hiding place with shrapnel. Now in line for a Purple Heart, Brown said he respects the Iraqi troops.

"They were good," said the 21-year-old soldier. "They kept the Saudi forces out of the city."

After two allied assaults were launched, partly to help free the trapped Americans, Saudi and Qatari soldiers advanced into Khafji on Thursday and the Marines dashed to freedom.

One team sprinted to allied lines through several hundred yards (meters) of no man's land. The second drove to safety in two Humvee jeeps, even though the tires of one had been punctured by shrapnel.

The fourteen reconnaissance Marines had entered the abandoned coastal town before the battle began, on what was described as a routine intelligence mission.

On Wednesday night, they heard Iraqi armor clank through deserted streets. Although the scouts might have escaped then, they said, they decided to stay to direct air artillery strikes on the Iraqis.

At one point, Brown said, Iraqi troops entered the four-story apartment complex his team was hiding in.

possibly looking for the Americans.

"We could see their helmets bobbing up and down," he said.

Although they had kept radio contact with the outside to shoot bursts and used code, they suspected the Iraqis were picking up their broadcasts. With Iraqis repeatedly nearby closing in on their hideouts, the Marines destroyed documents containing codewords and orders.

The Marines set up a series of Claymore mines in the stairwell of the complex, and stood ready to detonate them.

They sure would have had a rude awakening if they had come up after us," said Brown. "We would have blown them to hell."

Later that day, his team spotted a cluster of Iraqi armored personnel carriers nearby and called in the artillery strike that slightly wounded Brown.

"We knew we had to take those vehicles out," Brown said. "If we hadn't they could

have caused us and everyone else a hell of a lot of trouble."

One of the Marine teams had to change its hiding place during the battle to reach a safer location for spotting. And at one point, the Iraqis parked their armored personnel carriers directly outside the new hiding place.

Throughout that night, the Americans could hear the Iraqi soldiers yelling and laughing, and see them looking what appeared to be a supermarket for food.

For all the scouts, it was their first taste of combat.

"I never expected that kind of fear," said Lance Cpl. David McNamee, 19.

Ingraham said: "I didn't eat, I hardly drank any water and hardly got any sleep."

One reporter, who toured Khafji Friday, saw little evidence of looting. Most shops had their steel shutters in place, though glass windows had been shattered. On one street corner, there was a pile of TV sets.



BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (C) surrounded by his top military advisers in a bunker somewhere in Iraq. This picture was released on January 31 in Amman through a Jordanian newspaper. —AFP/UNB photo

Air raids turn Baghdad into living hell

BAGHDAD, Feb 2: Two weeks of allied air attacks have turned life in Baghdad into living hell, reports Reuters.

Every day has become a battle for life's most basic necessities. Every day brings fear of being killed or wounded by missiles or bombs.

There is no power. There is little water.

There is very little petrol, so little that some motorists spend the night in front of filling stations, wrapped in blankets against the bitter cold, to gain an early place in the queue.

By the time filling stations open at 8 am up to 400 cars are waiting their turn to buy newly-introduced ration of 30 liters for 15 days.

Petrol sales resumed this week after a blanket nationwide halt. The most simple things, all the things one took for granted no longer exist," one Baghdad resident said. "Even shaving in the morning is almost impossible. Where do you get the water?"

Iraqi authorities this week introduced a system which provides for the two halves of the capital, bisected by the Tigris river, to take turns in getting three days supply of water.

The next three days are waterless and few Baghdadis have containers to store enough water to last them through the week. "Old habits die hard," said another resident, "I still automatically

flip the light switch when I get home. Nothing happens of course. I still turn the tap and expect water, nothing."

But perhaps the worst aspect of life under the Allied bombs is fear and uncertainty. Fear of dying or being maimed, fear of losing one's child, husband or parent.

After the opening attack of the war, massive air strikes on Baghdad and targets throughout the country on January 17, a few local telephone still functioned and some of the capital's citizens could exchange views.

Wave after wave of strikes have ended all that. Now not even ministries can communicate with each other.

"I wish I had no dispute with the Iraqi people," a Baghdad resident said on Friday. "It certainly looks different from Baghdad."

So do US statements that the air war is being waged exclusively against military targets.

On Friday five cruise missiles — flying at an almost sedate speed and plainly visible — crossed Baghdad from West to East and smashed into the city.

The air strike began at 11 am (GMT) as a group of international correspondents visited what Iraqi officials say was a baby milk factory before a missile reduced it to a tangle of twisted steel girders and flattened walls.

According to Washington, the plant was in fact producing

chemical weapons. Inside the building however, spilt milk powder, containers, signs such as "pasteurising line" and stationery appeared to indicate the plant was everything the Iraqis said it was.

Plant Manager Adel Sarsam said the factory in Abu Ghreib, 16 km (10 miles) west of Baghdad, had been the only one in Iraq to produce powdered instant formula.

One sheet of paper pulled out randomly from the rubble by correspondents referred to a "scientific conference for state establishments for milk production" in 1985.

Information Ministry officials said the plant was built by the French company Sodelec under a contract signed in 1975. Work began in 1977.

According to a document produced by the ministry, an Iraqi delegation went to the United States on August 2, the day Iraq invaded Kuwait, to sign an initial agreement with the American Wyeth Company to operate the factory.

There were 11 wounded treated at two different hospitals. They included six children. One of them aged 12 was hit by shrapnel that pierced his back and came to rest in his abdomen, according to physician Zaku Ghazi. His young patient, he said, was on the verge of death.

30 Iraqis killed in Khafji

RIYADH, Feb 2: A British military spokesman said Friday that 30 Iraqi soldiers had been killed in the retaking of the Saudi border town of Khafji and not 300 as a British air force officer had announced earlier, reports Reuters.

The spokesman in Riyadh told Reuters that the original figure of 300 was mistakenly written on notes for Group Captain Niall Irving who gave a briefing to reporters earlier Friday.

A Saudi spokesman told a briefing in the Saudi capital Friday night that 30 Iraqis had been killed, 400 captured and 33 wounded in house-to-house, tank-to-tank fighting.

Iran's stand may change on Israeli retaliation

NICOSIA, Feb 2: Iran's neutrality in the Gulf war could change if Israel retaliated for Iraqi missile attacks, the Deputy Speaker of the Iranian Majlis (Parliament) said Friday, reports Reuters.

Ansullah Bayat said: "If Israel is stupid enough to respond to Iraqi missile attacks the leader and officials of the Islamic Republic will undoubtedly take a position quite different from their present one."

His remarks to a Friday prayer meeting at the north-western city of Zanjan were carried by the Iranian news agency.

Allied pilots bomb Iraqi armour

IN NORTHEASTERN SAUDI ARABIA, Feb 2: Allied pilots nearly had an aerial traffic jam as they knocked out Iraqi tanks and other armor during battles along the Kuwaiti border, one pilot said, reports AP.

"My biggest danger was running into another U.S. aircraft," said Marine Lt. Col. Dick White, 39, commander of the Tomcat squadron of Harrier jets.

Allies rule out full-scale Iraqi invasion of S. Arabia

DHAHRAN (Saudi Arabia), Feb 2: Allied aircraft picked off Iraqi armor just north of the Saudi-Kuwait border on Friday after a flurry of troop movements and five incursions into Saudi territory over three days, reports Reuters.

Allied commanders dismissed speculation that Iraq was planning a full-scale invasion of Saudi Arabia and said Iraq's redeployment gave them a chance for plans to hit targets previously buried in the sands of southern Kuwait.

They said they gave Iraq a bloody nose in the five engagements, especially in the battle to retake the Saudi border town of Khafji from two to three Iraqi armored battalions.

Saudi and Qatari troops,

backed by US artillery and aircraft, killed 30 Iraqis, wounded 33 and captured at least 400 in the 36-hour battle for Khafji, the fiercest engagement since the United States and its allies launched Operation Desert Storm on January 17.

The Saudi army suffered its first casualties in combat in recent history—15 soldiers killed, 33 wounded and four missing—the commander of Saudi forces General Khaled Bin Sultan said.

Allied officers in the field, often quoting intelligence reports, had given the impression the Iraqis were massing for more attacks but spokesmen on Friday played down the significance of recent Iraqi redeployments.

"We saw a reasonable amount of movement. They were moving in every direction. We didn't see any pattern in it," Lieutenant General Thomas Kelly told a briefing at the Pentagon.

"I know of no indication there was a multi-divisional attack being prepared against Saudi Arabia," he added.

"We're not expecting right now or in an hour or two for them suddenly to come rushing across," said Group Captain Niall Irving, the spokesman for British headquarters in the Gulf.

Lieutenant-General Walt Boomer, the US Marine Corps Commander in Saudi Arabia, said the ground fighting helped prepare his men for bigger battles ahead and would

not disrupt the allied timetable for the campaign to drive Iraqi forces out of occupied Kuwait.

"People have probably gotten rid of some of their fear of the unknown, a few less cases of nerves, I would think," he said in a pool interview.

US and Allied commanders have speculated the Iraqi command wanted to goad them into invading Kuwait before the Allied air campaign had sufficiently weakened Iraqi defenses.

But Boomer said the allies were in no hurry and the Iraqi incursions would bring front-line Iraqi troops to the attention of the Allied air forces.

"Any time we see any troops moving, we (the air force) are going to go after them," said Brigadier-General Pat Stevens.

Feature Travel and Leisure

COAST TO COAST IN MALAYSIA

MALAYSIA, we imagined, would be a sanitized version of Thailand, as rich in temples and handicraft, poorer in crowds and grime. But after six weeks of covering the East and West coasts, what we carried back with us was an impression of a country thick with life—in the jungles and in the seas—and vast areas of silence and solitude. The melting-pot of Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures left a strange infertile mix; far richer was the land itself, the beaches and the islands, uncrowded and unspoiled.

"Imigresen" and "bagasi" signs point the way to passport checks and baggage carousels at Subang International Airport in Kuala Lumpur. The Malay language abounds in such words transformed from English—all the more delightful to the foreigner because someone had the excellent idea of endowing the scriptless language with Latin script: imperialistic perhaps, but a definite relief for a tourist bombarded with the convoluted squiggles of Thai or Tamil.

Temples and mosques, Chinese, Indian and Malay cultures, weaving and batik, such are the attractions listed in the glossy Malaysian tourist brochures. But the real magnet for tourists is Visit Malaysia Year 1990 was the country's treasure-house of islands and beaches, where one can still find white sand and solitude. We went out for a quick view of the capital and a longer look at the coasts.

Finding KL too picture-perfect a melting-pot of the races, we flew across the country to Terengganu, the stronghold of the Malay Muslims, on the East coast. In our hotel room in the town of Kuala Terengganu, we discovered a mysterious arrow drawn on the ceiling and labelled "Qiblat." It turned out that this pointed to Mecca, and was installed for the convenience of Muslim guests taking a break from their beach activities.

The waves were coming in strong. Monsoon-season currents off the East coast kill three or four people a week during the winter holidays. Standing in knee-deep water, we felt the outgoing current tugging so relentlessly that the sand was washed out from beneath us, and in ten seconds we were waist-deep. A grim sign next to the satay stalls was decorated with a skull and crossbones warning: "Death is awaiting you—Swimming in these waters is very risky."

Put your face down into the water, and a whole world opens up: rainbow-like parrot-fish, sea-urchins with their long needles and orange eyes, pale neon-fish, clown fish and coral that waves in the water like millions of miniature veils.

Sekayu Falls, about seventy kilometres from town, was a refreshing outing. The cold water came cascading down through the heart of the jungle, and a winding path up to the top was clean and untaxed. We splashed around, teeth chattering, and later walked down to a food stall where not a word of English was spoken by anyone except the owner's pet mynah, who interrupted our meal with raucous cries of "Hello." Back in Kuala Terengganu, we crossed the river to a boat-builders village, where massive skeletons of future ships lay gapping at the sea.

A two-hour drive down the coast took us to Tanjung Jara, a resort of airy wooden huts in the old Malay style, pleasing to the eye as the name is musical to the ear. Giant leatherback

turtles come to this precise spot every year between May and September in order to breed. The sea here was a deep turquoise, laced with foam; the current was even stronger than the previous beach, and it was all we could do to remain standing, black craggy boulders jutted out from the sea, and stood rather monochalantly against the crashing waves. When the tide went out in the morning, we would wander through the rocks marvelling at the crea-

tures trapped in the pools of water left behind. Bend down to pick up a sea-shell, and it runs angrily out of reach. Turn a cowrie shell upside-down, and tiny legs blossom out to heave it upright and scuttle past your feet. Peer into a mottled green spiral shell, and beady black eyes peer back at you. At the sound of our footsteps, dozens of crabs, gleaming blue and green, crawled sideways to the safety of the water. We came back from the East coast, our minds filled with pictures of the forthing waves beating on the prehistoric rocks, and our bags filled with shells of all hues and shapes.

We drove South from KL to Malacca, first foothold of all the colonial powers that came to Malaysia. Portuguese relics date as far back as the fifteenth century. In the quaint red-brick town, the smell of empire is still heavy in the air, from the tombstone of a young woman who died in childbirth in 1800, far from home, to the plaque in honour of Queen

Victoria, "Empress of India," laid by her "loyal and loving subjects" in this far-flung part of her realm.

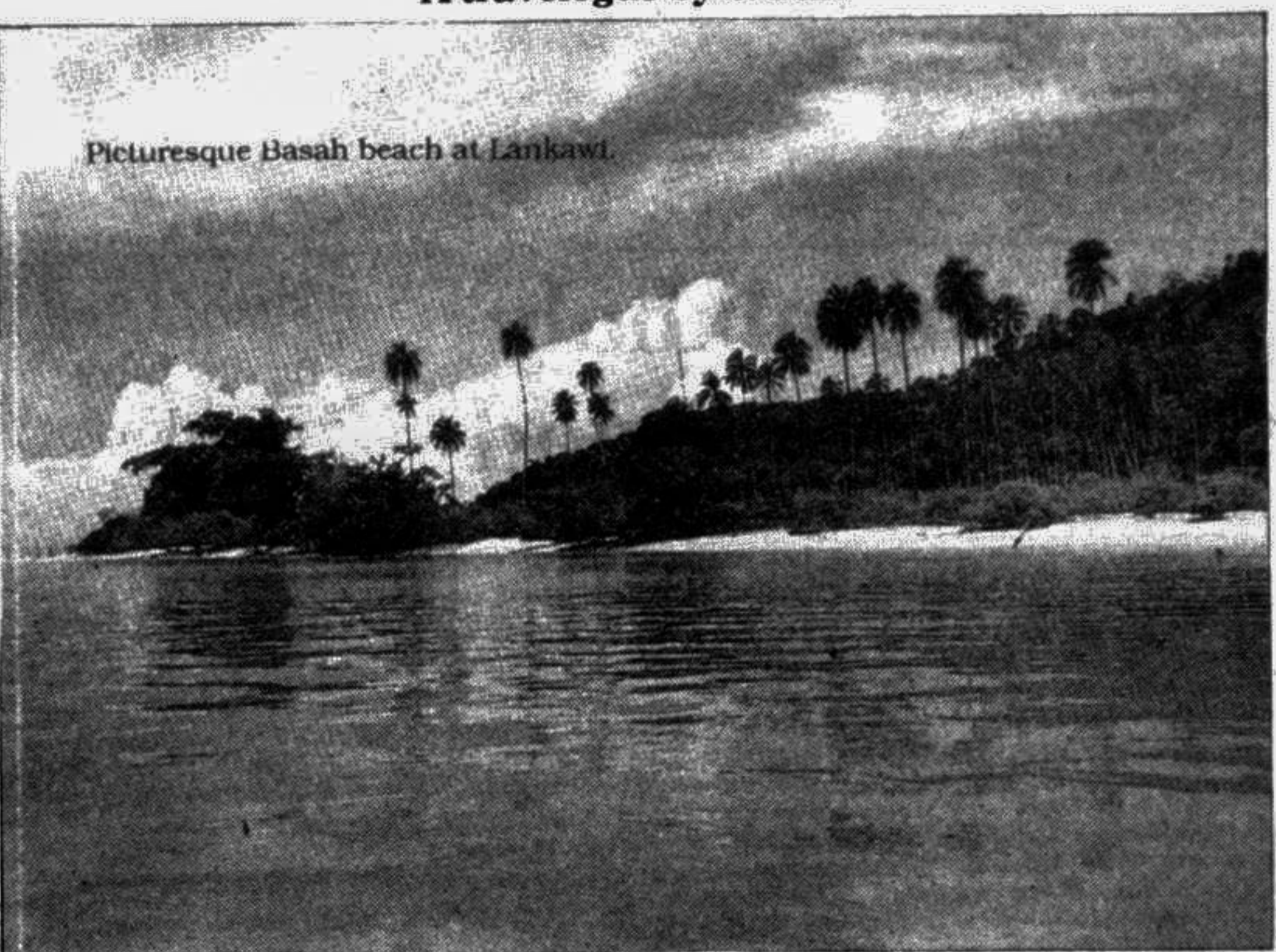
Our train, the KL-Butterworth Express, was an hour late. We lounged in the comfortable second-class car and watched the endless parade of violent American and Chinese movies.

After the twenty-minute ferry ride, we set foot on Penang Island, glistening with shops. The beaches were warm and peaceful, if a bit boring after the dramatics of the South China Sea. There was not much else in Penang, unless you had never set foot in Asia before, and thrilled to the sight of pseudo-temples where people sold souvenirs right under Buddha's nose.

North of Penang lie the group of islands known as Langkawi. The islands appear suddenly on the horizon, great lumps of emerald-green forest fringed with pearly beaches, set in the turquoise waters. Legend has it that a princess sentenced to death over a love affair cursed the main island so that seven generations would go by before there was any progress. Langkawi is still fairly undiscovered, but progress is coming fast. The waters are clear as crystal, and coral reefs off the islands blaze with colour. We snapped on our masks and snorkelling tubes and paddled off to the reef. Put your face down into the water, and a whole world opens up: rainbow-like parrot-fish, and sea-urchins with their long needles and orange eyes, pale neon-fish, clown fish, and coral that waves in the water like millions of miniature veils, green, lilac and vivid red.

In the early morning, we hiked up through lush jungle trails, as toucans clapped their breaks excitedly in the tree-tops and velvety buffaloes started curiously. The dark trees suddenly opened up to a waterfall, and down below, beyond the foot of the mountain, sparkled the sea. Far away in Kuala Lumpur, wealthy citizens sipped their drinks in clubs with such delightful rules as "a member is limited to one spouse only," and on a mountain in Langkawi, we drank in the real taste of Malaysia.

Only 55 km away from Kuala Terengganu the Kenyir Lake is beautifully landscaped to render a peaceful sanctuary for family outings and picnics.



Picturesque Basah beach at Lankawi.

THE SEA LIONS OF Seal Bay

by Kym Tilbrook

AUSTRALIAN sea lions, which were hunted to near extinction in the 19th century are re-establishing themselves in thriving colonies off the South Australian and Western Australian coastlines.

The ranks of the now-protected mammals have risen steadily to up to 5000 with about 75 per cent of the world population located on islands off the South Australian coast.

The largest population is found on the Pages conservation Park two remote islands near rugged Fleurieu Peninsula south of Adelaide the South Australian capital.

Dangerous Reef off Port Lincoln on the West Coast—home of the great white shark (the white pointer)—also has a large population.

About 1000 Australian sea lions are found off the Western Australian coast as far north as the Houtman Abrolhos.

And between 400 and 500 have made their home at Seal Bay. On Kangaroo islands windswept South Coast 20km (12.4 miles) off the southwestern tip of Fleurieu Peninsula.

The engaging mammals have made the wide, sandy beach of Seal Bay their home and have become a drawcard for tourists to kangaroo island.

There are sea lions of all ages. South Australian national Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) guide Mr. John Karan said. They live breed and die here.

Scaling was South Australia's first industry. By 1836, when the State was settled, most colonies of sea lions—a species of seal—had been destroyed.

The first records of sea lions in South Australia came from logged observations made by Matthew Flinders in 1801-02 of "hair seals", as they were known, along the north coast of Kangaroo island.

The NPWS assistant district ranger for Kangaroo island, Mr. Terry Dennis said.

The number of animals taken by sealers or their location will never be known but

early ships cargo manifests list tens of thousands of seal-skins bound for the lucrative markets of Europe and Canton.

By the mid-19th century sealing was no longer profitable and whaling fished out shortly after.

The cudgel and musket had exacted their toll, with the Australian sea-lion population becoming one of the rarest pinnipeds in the world.

When the first ships began to arrive on Australia's southern shores, seals were killed to supplement the diet of sailors. It was soon realized that the sea lions were valuable for skins and oil, and the slaughter began.

Mr. Dennis said there were two species of otarid (eared) seals breeding in South Australian waters, mainly on islands. They were the Australian sea lion (*Neophoca cinerea*) and the New Zealand fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*). The major breeding colonies of both species occur either on remote islands or along the south coast of Kangaroo island.

Kangaroo island relies heavily on the sea lions for its tourist dollars.

Up to 80,000 people a year, including 8000 to 10,000 from overseas, watch the mammals laze on the beach or romp in the surf.

A few years ago the beach was open for tourists to roam at will. But the increase in visitors has meant that the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service has had to take firm management steps.

