

Iraq keeps secret lid on battlefield

WASHINGTON, Feb 4: Due to deep earth bunkers, decoys and other feints, Iraq has kept a lid on its battle field secrets despite one of the most intensive intelligence operations in history on the Allied side, reports Reuters.

"I guess there is a tendency to believe that because we know what we do know from intelligence that we must know everything," Defence Department spokesman Pete Williams said this week. "And of course, we don't."

Among the gaps: The mobile launchers used by Iraq to fire 54 Scud Ballistic missiles in the first 15 days of the Gulf war, half against Saudi Arabia and half against Israel.

Army General Norman Schwarzkopf, Allied Commander in the Gulf, has equated finding the launchers with looking for "a needle in the haystack." At a January 18 briefing in Riyadh he said estimates of their number "varied very widely, even within the intelligence community."

Iraq appears to have fooled overhead reconnaissance, at least some of the time, by using decoy launchers, officials said.

At other times, troops cram launchers into underground shelters before Allied pilots can react to infrared sensors that detect heat given off as the missiles are fired. That information can be in the hands of US battlefield commanders

in just 90 seconds.

US intelligence also has been hard-put to gauge the impact of relentless Allied bombing on Elite Republican Guard Units — the core of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's military power — because they are dug in deeply.

"It's one thing to do bomb-damage assessment on a building," Williams told Reuters. "It's another thing on tanks that are hidden, people that you can't see. So you can't do battle damage assessment on the republican guards the way you can on a power plant."

Intelligence also may have fallen short in the war's first major ground fighting. Late on Tuesday, Iraqi tanks and infantry thrust across the Kuwaiti border into Saudi Arabia at four points in assaults that killed 11 US Marines.

Intruding troops took two Marine reconnaissance teams by surprise north of the Saudi town of Khafji. Marine Colonel John Admire told reporters there after the town was retaken.

Brigadier General Pat Stevens of the US Central Command denied any failure in Allied preparation for the Iraqi attack.

"We probably have the finest ability to see the battle field of any armed force in history," he said at a briefing on Thursday. "There's no failure, absolutely none."

For its eyes in the sky, the United States is reported to have at least five orbiting KH-

11 "keyhole" satellites — each capable of picking out objects as small as a license plate — plus a lacrosse satellite that uses radar to peer through clouds and collect images 24 hours a day.

In addition, the United States has advanced "signals intelligence" satellites hovering over the equator to intercept Iraqi walkie-talkie, phone and radio traffic.

One obvious blind spot stems from the difficulty of recruiting informants in a totalitarian society and if anybody's even slightly suspect, they're dead," said William Colby, head of the US Central Intelligence Agency from 1973 to 1976.

Ironically, Iraq's partial success in thwarting US intelligence may be due in part to tips Washington gave it about Iraqi vulnerabilities during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Howard Teicher, a National Security Council staff member from 1982 to 1987, said shared US intelligence helped Saddam enhance his command apparatus and military communications.

For instance, Saddam, aware of US eavesdropping capabilities, may be sending false radio messages to throw the Allies of the track while his true orders move through underground cables, Teicher said.

"The net effect of our advising them, undoubtedly enhanced their ability to now cope with US," he said.



SAUDI ARABIA: A group of wild camels watch from the roadside as a truck in a convoy hauling an M1-A1 Abrams tank passes February 3 heading north toward the Kuwait-Saudi border. The Allied forces buildup continues near the border to prevent crossing by Iraqi forces.

An Eye-witness Account No safe place in Iraq, no place to run

HILLA (Iraq), Feb 4: "There's no safe place in Iraq, no place to run", Hadi Sultan, a 56-year-old resident of Baghdad, summed up the feeling of many Iraqis who fled the capital at the beginning of the Gulf war to what they thought were safe places, reports Reuters.

"I moved to Hilla after the first attack on Baghdad, thinking it was safe because there are no installations of military value here", he said.

"Next day, bang!" A sprawling villa where Sultan, his son and two daughters and several neighbours from Baghdad thought they were secure, was hit.

The house next door was obliterated.

On a tour of Hilla, which adjoins the ancient city of Babylon 100 km (60 miles) south of Baghdad, and a nearby village off the road, correspondents heard similar stories that underlined the vast chaos left by the US-led air war on Iraq, now in its 18th day.

The tour was arranged by Iraq's Ministry of Information for groups of international correspondents.

The purpose was to show that the Allied strikes have devastated residential areas and killed civilians, despite Washington's insistence that air raids were aimed exclusively at military targets.

Iraq — which has fired 29 missiles at Israel and 28 at Saudi Arabia — has given few details of its toll from the Allied bombing beyond saying that 90 soldiers and 320 civilians have been killed.

In saying Allied bombing raids are carefully aimed at military targets, spokesmen

have acknowledged that even with precision-guided weapons there may be "collateral damage" — civilian casualties.

In Hilla, correspondents were taken to a residential area hard hit by Allied bombs as well as a secondary school and a children's clinic in the city centre.

Blackboards in the school and sheets of medical reports in the clinic left no doubt that these buildings were what the Iraqis said they were.

In the village of Al-Haswa, a huge crater about 50 metres (yards) in diameter marked the impact of what appeared to have been 500 kg (1,100 pound) bombs in an area of one-storey houses surrounded by low walls in the typical style of rural Iraq.

In both places, residents gave varying casualty figures, with 35 to 40 dead frequently mentioned in Al-Haswa.

There, Nabil Wadi, a 23-year-old student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad, said he was looking for his family — parents, three sisters and two brothers — who fled the capital on the first day of the war.

"The house they shared was over there," he said, pointing to one of the cratered.

"Neighbours said my people have moved again to go to a safer place further south. I don't know whether they are still alive."

According to Iraqi figures, Allied air strikes have diminished steadily over the past few days, apparently because most targets of economic or military value, have been destroyed.

But the huge movement of people sparked by the war is still continuing.

By some estimates, more than a million of Baghdad's four million inhabitants fled at the outbreak of the war.

Many went to Sulaimaniya, northeast of Baghdad. Others fled Muslim Shiite sect.

Over the past few days, thousands have trickled back to Baghdad.

"When I left on January 17, the entire 60 km (40 miles) stretch of the road from the capital to Khalis was packed bumper to bumper", said one Baghdad resident.

Khalis is the junction of the road to Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya, both cities that had been considered safer than Baghdad.

"What I found in Sulaimaniya after a few days was air raid, air raid, just as in Baghdad. The water supply stopped, electricity was cut, life was just as miserable as in the capital."

"So I returned. Might as well be miserable in familiar surroundings," he said.

In the bombed residential areas toured by correspondents on Saturday and Sunday, one theme recurred in conversations: US President George Bush said he had no quarrel with the Iraqi people, but US aircraft were hitting civilian targets.

In Al-Haswa, one angry villager accused both the western press and western governments of hypocrisy and double standards in viewing casualties among innocent by standers.

"I know it from listening to foreign radios," shouted Ibrahim Mesir. "If one Israeli is searched in an attack, there is a huge outcry. What about us?"

He stretched his arm to indicate a scene of devastation. "Does anyone care? Are we worthless?"

'Welcome to Khafji, have a nice trip'

KHAFJI (Saudi Arabia), Feb 4: Iraqi soldiers only knew they were going into the battle of Khafji the night before when they each received a chicken to kill for dinner, their captors said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

"Up to them, they were living on bread, water and tinned milk. They knew something was up when they got the chickens," said an Arab forces captain as he guided a group of journalists through the devastated town on Saturday night.

Outside the town scene to the first major ground clash of the Gulf war, is a bullet-scattered sign saying, "welcome to Khafji city. Have a safe trip".

A few meters (yards) down the road, Saudi soldiers lounged on Iraqi Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) and just inside the gates lay the bodies of three Iraqi soldiers.

One of them had his right hand raised probably his last act before dying. Every building in the coastal resort was marked by bullets and almost every alley contained a battered Iraqi vehicle filled with looted goods.

Dresses stolen for the girls back home were scattered behind destroyed APCs.

The captain, who asked not to be named, held up a dress with disgust: "These are not soldiers. These are thieves," he said.

The 36-hour battle ended on Friday with that Saudi officials said were the deaths of 30 Iraqis and the capture of 429.

But Arab forces officers said many more have been killed. A British spokesman said this week that 300 were killed, then the death toll was officially revised to 30 and a slip of the pen blamed for the discrepancy.

Tanks blocked alleys, their sides smashed by artillery fire and their targets destroyed by bombs and rockets from US aircraft.

"The Iraqis backed themselves into corners everywhere", said one of the guides, an Arab forces major.

The biggest battlefield was a patch of desert on the outskirts of town facing the Gulf. There, about 30 Iraqi APCs and tanks lined up to fight Saudi and Qatari forces and lost.

The Allies attacked in two directions with massive firepower. The insides of Iraqi armoured vehicles were blown apart, leaving little doubt that their defenders died fighting.

"The field just a day ago was littered with bodies. They have now been removed", the captain said.

US marines in jeeps armed with anti-tank missiles patrolled the town while Saudi troops manned check points.

Saudi and American soldiers walked around with cameras and looked for souvenirs.

The captain said the captured soldiers were demoralised and afraid they would be beaten. Instead, they were given lunch, he said.

Ozal fears revival of Christian-Muslim rift

DAVOS (Switzerland), Feb 4: Turkish President Turgut Ozal warned on Sunday that the historical rift between Christians and Muslims might be revived because of the Gulf crisis, reports Xinhua.

He said that the risk of such a revived conflict could not be avoided unless the Mideast problems including the Palestinian issue were addressed "properly".

The Turkish leader, speaking by satellite to business and political leaders at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, called for convening an international Mideast peace conference, and reaching a comprehensive economic and security agreement for the region.

He said he would support an arrangement for the Middle East like the conference on security and cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki negotiations.

He added: "It is essential to realize comprehensive economic cooperation in the region together with security arrangements."

Economic issues, Ozal explained, would most likely cause conflicts in the Mideast region in the future. He stressed that economic cooperation in the region should be the first step taken after the Gulf war is over in order to stabilize the region.

Ozal also proposed establishing an economic development fund financed by a "certain percentage of petroleum revenues and contributions from the rich western world." He said it was important to support Palestine, Jordan and Yemethrough the proposed fund.

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan were also scheduled to address the business conference by satellite.

Soviet space complex falling to earth

PARIS, Feb 4: A section of the Soviet Salyut-7/Cosmos-1686 space complex weighing up to two tonnes is expected to fall to earth February 6 or February 7 following the station's re-entry into the atmosphere. Tass news agency reported in a dispatch monitored here today, reports AFP.

Soviet air defence spokesman Mikhail Shpitainik whose unit is responsible for tracking the 40 tonne complex said most of it would burn up during atmospheric re-entry, but that a retrievable capsule protected by a thermal shield would not burn up completely and could present a threat. Tass reported.

The complex is composed of the Salyut-7 space station and the Cosmos 1686 satellite. The weight of the portion which will reach the earth will depend on the degree of disintegration of the capsule, and will between 1.26 tonnes and two tonnes, said Mr Shpitainik.

US Starlifter grounded in Bombay

NEW DELHI, Feb 4: An United States military transport making a refueling stop in India has been grounded following unspecified engine snags, PTI reported today, reports AFP.

The US C-141 Starlifter was grounded Friday at Bombay's bustling Sahar international airport where engineers found the big transport jet had engine trouble, PTI quoted airport officials as saying.

It was still on the tarmac late Saturday, the domestic news agency said. Its point of origin, destination and cargo were not known.

LTTE guerrillas set fire to food convoy

COLOMBO, Feb 4: Tamil separatist guerrillas attacked a six-truck food convoy in eastern Sri Lanka and set fire to four of the lorries, military sources said today, reports Reuters.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam fighters hit the convoy at Kiran on Wednesday. Four drivers abandoned their vehicles and fled. Two escaped and drove their lorries to the nearest army camp.

Car bomb blast in Belfast

BELFAST, Feb 4: Terrorists forced a man to drive an explosive-laden car toward a military camp late Sunday, but the driver escaped before the car bomb exploded, police said, reports AP.

The blast damaged houses and caused some injuries of unknown severity, a police spokesman said.

The house shook when the bomb went off, said reporter Tommy Walls, who lives near the targeted Ulster Defense Regiment west of Belfast. I was watching television with my wife and young daughter when there was a massive blast at the back of the house.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but the spokesman said it appeared to be the work of the Irish Republican Army.

The blast occurred in Magherafelt, about 30 miles (45 kilometers) west of Belfast. The defence regiment is a local force, predominantly Protestant, that operates within the British Army structure.

Best-laid plans can easily go astray in a fog of war

WASHINGTON, Feb 4: Military experts say a lot can go wrong in a long war in the Gulf, despite meticulous planning and high-tech weaponry, reports AP.

Chroniclers from Tolstoy to Tolstoy have long discussed the chaos of war. This time, with more than 1 million troops armed with some of the deadliest weapons facing each other on inhospitable terrain, the chances for things going away are increased.

According to Defense Department officials, vastly superior U.S. air power should take only a few days to knock out Iraq's air force and missile systems and sever Baghdad's communications and supply links with occupied Kuwait. Iraqi troops, isolated and pounded from the air, would then be able to offer only limited resistance to the eventual allied ground offensive into Kuwait, according to the officials' optimistic scenario.

But here are a few elements that could derail the best-laid battlefield plans:

—The weather. Until the war starts no one knows how great a factor this could be. The swirl of sand and dust could play havoc with delicate weapons systems. Temperatures hot enough to melt machines and make soldiers keel over are only months away.

America's technological wonders could be rendered nearly useless by sandstorms that would seriously erode the ability of laser- and TV-guided missiles to home in on their targets.

Rain could be a factor in the coming winter weeks, creating

another visibility obstacle for Cobrahelicopters seeking targets for their Hellfire missiles.

The Army has tried to prepare for all exigencies by training troops on the Mojave Desert in California, but memories are fresh of the last U.S. military encounter with the desert night—the botched attempt to rescue hostages at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in which eight American soldiers died in a wind-swept Iranian desert.

—Technology. "Never before has the United States introduced so many new elements of military technology into one intense effort," said retired Rear Adm. Eugene Carroll, an adviser for the Center for Defense Information, a think tank which opposes U.S. military action in the Gulf.

Carroll said many things can go wrong with weapons systems that have not been tested in battle, despite assurances from the military that its equipment will work.

The U.S. Air Force has rushed into use a new surveillance system known as "Joint Stars" that would allow field commanders to monitor enemy troop and tank formations. But only two prototype planes deploying the system have been built so far. It's apparently the first time the Air Force has sent to a potential battlefield a system still in the developmental stage.

—The multinational force. There are few indications, at least publicly, that the 400,000 U.S. troops are adequately coordinated with the British, French, Saudi,

Kuwait, Egyptian, Syrian and other allied forces scattered along the Saudi-Kuwait border. This could result in disastrous mix-ups.

"Identification of friend or foe will be one of the greatest concerns," said Bruce Blair, a military analyst with the Brookings Institution in Washington, another think tank.

France said that if war breaks out it would ground the five Mirage F1-CR jets it has in Saudi Arabia because they resemble Mirage F1s France sold to Iraq. France has also deployed a number of delta-wing Mirage 2000 jetfighters, which are more easily distinguishable from the Iraqi Mirages. There is no grounding order for them.

—The Iraqis. A preemptive strike by Iraqi aircraft and Scud missiles could seriously disrupt the allied military command's ability to control the way the war unfolds, Blair said. This would be particularly true if the Iraqis penetrated U.S. defenses with missiles carrying chemical weapons, or hit Israel, resulting in Israeli retaliation that would undermine Arab support for the anti-Iraq coalition.

—Accidental Casualties. There is the possibility that artillery shells will accidentally fall on friendly troops, by misfires of incorrect artillery coordinates.

In Vietnam, along with the 47,244 Americans killed doing battle with the enemy, there were 10,466 other deaths, many due to what Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf III, head of U.S. forces in the Gulf, has called the "fog of war."

Saddam wins hearts of Arabs

CAIRO, Feb 4: In his bloody bid to become a latter-day Saladin, Saddam Hussein has won the hearts of many Arabs from the Atlantic shores of Morocco to Yemen's Arabian Sea coast.

Saddam has made no secret of his ambitions. He has compared himself with Saladin, the Muslim warrior who drove the Crusaders from Jerusalem in 1187. He even claims to have been born in the same town as Saladin.

Saddam is now betting that by standing up to one of history's strongest military forces, which is led by non-Arabs, all Arab states except Egypt, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf neighbours eventually will come around to his side.

To his admirers, the Iraqi president has become a well-spring of pride for an Arab people long ignored or quashed.

The phenomenon is nurtured by Arab anger at the United States, leader of the 26-nation coalition whose warplanes are pounding Iraq and occupied Kuwait.

superiority over the last four decades.

By playing to those feelings, Saddam has stitched together support covering the Arab body politic from Muslim extremists to secular leftists.

"With every day that passes, these groups are getting more united," said Assad Abdul-Rahman a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization who formerly taught political science at Kuwait University. "With every day that passes, they are getting convinced more and more they should support Saddam Hussein."

Even in Egypt, a small anti-war movement is budding. Dissidents such as the Muslim Brotherhood find the massive air war against Iraq repugnant.

Sayed Rashed a member of parliament and executive of the Federation of Trade Unions, said: "Any war between Arab brothers and any attack on an Arab force is a calamity for all Arabs."

But by and large, the aim of the Egyptian anti-war movement is to bring home Egypt's 36,000 troops from the coalition, not to support the man

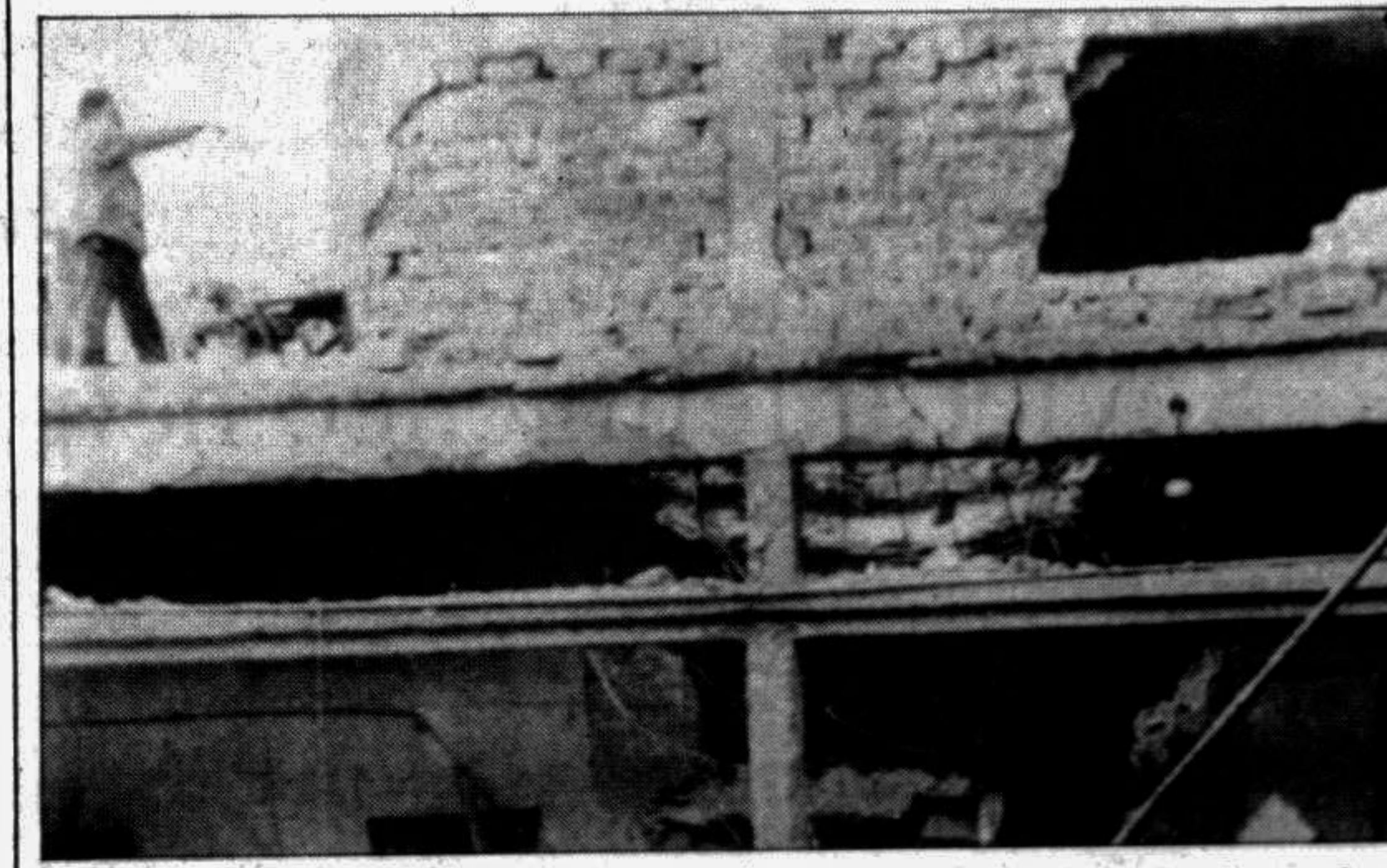
Cairo newspapers call the tyrant of Baghdad.

Most Egyptians accuse Saddam of being the despot of his country and causing the economic ruin of theirs. This is not the case for Arabs in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

In Jordan, adulation of Saddam is almost universal, transcending economic and social class.

Officially neutral Jordan's dependence on its larger neighbor is so complete that allied attacks on Iraqi tanker trucks caused Amman to impose immediate oil rationing. Sanctions against Iraq and the loss of tourism because of the war have cost Jordan billions of dollars.

In Algiers, posters and wallet-sized snapshots of Saddam are everywhere, from Casbah shops to schoolyards. Teenagers have nicknamed suburban public square "Place Saddam Hussein" and installed a suburban public square "Place Saddam Hussein" and installed "Scud El Hussein" a makeshift rocket sculpted from an old utility pole.



KUWAIT CITY: This photo, released by Iraqi officials February 3, shows according to these sources civilian areas in Kuwait City which were hit by Allied bombardment at an undisclosed date.