

BRIEFLY

War may cost US 268 b dollars:

The Gulf war could cost the United States as much as 268 billion dollars if it lasts six months, a private group estimated on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The report by the Public Citizen Consumer Organisation said costs would be about 164 billion dollars if the war lasts only two months.

At the news conference, James Love in Washington said the war translates to a cost for a family of four of between 2,624 to 4,288 dollars.

The costs were not just figured on military expenditures alone, but included other factors such as higher petrol prices paid by consumers.

Security Council to meet again: The 15-member UN Security Council held consultations Wednesday and agreed to meet again at a later date, amid disagreement over a proposed debate on the Gulf war, diplomatic sources in New York said, reports AFP.

Zimbabwean Ambassador Simbarashe Mumbengegwi presided over the meeting, called by nine UN member states who said they wanted to debate the issues in the Gulf war and call for a cease-fire to allow further diplomatic efforts to end the war.

The United States, the Soviet Union, France and Britain have opposed holding a formal Security Council meeting while the war continues. Such a gathering was requested by Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Cuba, Yemen, Jordan and Sudan.

AFP sues US government: Agence France-Presse, the French news agency, sued the US government on Wednesday over rules restricting press coverage of the war in the Gulf, reports Reuter from New York.

The suit by the Paris-based wire service and one of its American photo graphers is similar to another case filed previously by 13 other news organisations.

Both suits are pending in Manhattan Federal Court. Under the US Defence Department rules, reporters must gather news through pools under military escort and all dispatches must be cleared by a military censor prior to release.

B-52s to start bombing: US B-52 bombers are to start bombing Iraqi front-line troops dug in along the Kuwait-Saudi border, military sources said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

They said, this marked as a witch of emphasis from the use of B-52s against Iraq's elite Republican Guard which is held in reserve on the Iraq-Kuwait border.

The Republican Guard would continue to be the target of precision bombing from other Allied strike aircraft.

The sources in London said there were up to 26 infantry divisions of 14,000 men each dug in behind a huge obstacle belt stretching down the coast from Kuwait city along the Kuwait-Saudi border and into Iraq.

Libya denies German TV report: Libya denied a report by German television on Wednesday that it was building a huge underground storage bunker for chemical and nuclear weapons, reports Reuter from Nicosia.

The Libyan news agency JANA, monitored in Cyprus, said the report by the German ZDF television was "baseless."

It said the report "was part of a news psychological and media campaign against Libya, Arabs and the Muslims."

ZDF said the project, built with help from German and other European specialists, was based on German tunnel-building technology, involving lasers and other advanced surveying equipment.

ICRC fails to visit POWs: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Wednesday it had failed to gain access to Allied prisoners of war in Iraq, reports Reuter from London.

ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga told British Defence Secretary Tom King that Iraq had not given his organisation a list of POWs' names, military sources said.

Sommaruga said he would do all he could to ensure the Iraqi government fulfilled its obligations under the Geneva Convention.

The US-led alliance says it has 57 military personnel captured or missing in the Gulf.

Underground Libyan bunker: Libya is building a huge underground storage bunker for chemical and nuclear weapons with help from German and other European specialists, ZDF Television said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The project was based on German Tunnel-Building Technology, involving laser and other advanced surveying equipment, the network in Bonn said.

A ZDF statement said, the underground armour 40 km (25 miles) from Tripoli would be the largest in the Middle East. It cited no sources and said ZDF would broadcast more about the subject later on Wednesday.

Fresh clash in Khafji: A Saudi military spokesman said in Riyadh Wednesday that Saudi and Iraqi troops clashed in the Saudi border town of Khafji again Tuesday night, reports Xinhua.

The spokesman told a press briefing that the Iraqis 'sneaked' into Khafji during the night and were pushed back into the Iraq-occupied Kuwait by Saudi soldiers.

Khafji, some 10 kilometers from the Saudi-Kuwait border, was the scene of fierce fighting between Iraqi and Allied troops.

Blast kills 3 in Sialkot: A bomb blew up a mini-bus on Wednesday near the northeastern Pakistani border town of Sialkot, killing at least three people and injuring 27, local news agencies in Islamabad said, reports Reuter.

Earlier, police in the Punjab province capital Lahore said the bomb went off at a bus station south Sialkot killing two people. But both the official Associated Press of Pakistan and the private Pakistan Press International News Agency later said the explosion happened inside the bus.

Five people died, and 27 were injured, PPI said. AP put the death toll at three.

Nobody claimed responsibility. Police said it could be an act of sabotage.

'India, Pakistan must bury the hatchet'

Farooq Abdullah seeks US mediation on Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: India's best known Kashmiri leader, Farooq Abdullah, appealed to Washington on Wednesday to mediate between India and Pakistan and in their dispute over Kashmir, reports Reuter.

Abdullah, whose national conference government resigned amid growing Kashmiri separatist violence more than a year ago, told foreign correspondents former US President Jimmy Carter would be a good choice as mediator.

"Americans have a good influence over the government of Pakistan if American good offices can be used," he said.

New Delhi accused Pakistan of backing a Kashmiri militant separatist campaign in India's Jammu and Kashmir state

which comprises two-thirds of the disputed Himalayan region. Islamabad, which rules the rest, denies the charge.

Some 2,000 people have died since the campaign exploded in January last year.

Abdullah, who was Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir India's only Muslim majority state said Carter had mediated in other countries and could do the same on Kashmir.

"India and Pakistan must bury the hatchet," he said in a reference to their three wars two of which were fought over Kashmir. Abdullah said Islamabad had suggested a proposal to India recently, but would give no details.

He said a solution could be based only on current control

on the ground. The present division of the region dates from the last war with Pakistan which ended in 1971.

But a political solution would mean concessions to the Kashmiris, Abdullah added.

He said New Delhi would have to create more jobs in an area almost entirely dependent on the tourism that has vanished in the violence.

Militant suspects, mostly young men, should be released swiftly and what he described as atrocities committed by security forces had to be stopped, Abdullah said.

There have been atrocities on both sides," he said, adding that the government on its part must stop security forces from burning towns, shooting



UNDATED - The US jet fighters bombed the pressure system of Kuwaiti oilfields in frantic attempts to stop further oil spill, poised to cause an ecological disaster. — AFP/UNB Photo.

All kinds of arms for battle of Kuwait

US stockpiling lethal weapons

AN AIRBASE IN THE GULF, Feb 7: US forces are stockpiling lethal ammunition for the battle of Kuwait, including fuel explosives that ignite in mid-air like a small nuclear explosion, reports Reuter.

Correspondents who toured this major US airbase saw, for the first time, stocks of deadly fuel air explosives and Gator bombs which explode to scatter mines.

Major James McClain said fuel air explosives had not yet been used in the war against Iraq.

"We have the ability to use all kinds of weapons and that's just one of them," he said.

Fuel air bombs spread a cloud of flammable mist in the air and ignite it in an explosion that resembles a small nuclear device.

The Gator bomb also explodes in mid-air, scattering small mines on roadways in killer traps for Iraqi convoys.

Marine personnel said Gator bombs were used by marine aircraft for several days on what one top officer called a "special request" but were

not currently being loaded onto aircraft.

Rows of F/A-18 bombers were lined up on the tarmac, grounded by low cloud cover that pilots said would have silhouetted them for Iraqi gunners.

Colonel Don Beaufait of Detroit, Michigan, said the spells

plan has always been that subsequent to the air campaign there would be some form of ground campaign. That's basically what we have been working on for the past week and a half.

"I am certain we are having an effect on them. And it's

costing us very little in terms of lives."

He said Iraq's elite Republican Guards were "very well dug in."

"We've caught some of their equipment in the open. I can't venture to say how many troops we've killed. We'll have a lot easier job when they start moving."

He added: "They aren't doing much good. They are sitting there in southern Iraq. As soon as we start advancing into Kuwait they'll more likely than not be employed."

Major Charles Mitchell, 36, of Kalispell, Montana, an F-8 pilot, said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had set up his troops properly.

"The guy's smart. He's dug in. In this desert environment you don't have the trees to hide behind, but you can certainly blend in."

Concern mounted across the United States over the fate of some of the 22 American and allied servicemen missing in action who may have been taken prisoner in Iraq. Reports from Baghdad said some POWs were put on display in the streets and on television.

Cable News Network (CNN) aired recordings of some of the men giving their names, ranks and missions along with greetings to their families. So he made statements against the war but the recordings had been passed through Iraqi censors and it was not clear if the men were under duress.

"It's patently obvious that these men have been subjected to torture and physical beating," Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona told CNN.

- 600 missions being flown a day
- Republican Guards well dug-in

of bad weather would probably clear before March, making easier the task of aircrews in the nearly 2,000 Allied aircraft deployed in the Gulf war.

Bad weather was a problem especially in attacks on bridges, Beaufait said. "You may have a degraded mission — reach the target and have to turn around."

Allied officials say some 600 missions a day are being flown against Iraqi frontline troops.

Colonel Manfred Rietsch, Commander of Marine Air Group 11, said: "The overall

Iran yet to brief anti-Iraq coalition on peace move

CAIRO, Feb 7: Iran has not informed three principal Arab partners of the anti-Iraq coalition about its announced initiative to end the Gulf War, Arab officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

President Hashemi Rafsanjani of Iran on Monday offered to mediate an end to the war, which started Jan. 17 after Iraqi President Saddam Hussein refused to withdraw occupation troops from Kuwait.

The foreign ministers of Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the Kuwait Foreign Ministry's second-ranking official said Wednesday they have received no details of any Iranian plan. They met with President Hosni Mubarak before speaking with reporters.

Sheikh Nasser al-Ahmed al-Sabah of Kuwait said he saw

Rafsanjani in Tehran Tuesday night and was told only that Iran still demands Iraq leave Kuwait and Sheikh Jaber 'el-Ahmed el-Sabah's government be restored.

"I have not been informed about the Iranian initiative, but during my meeting with President Rafsanjani he emphasized his country's neutrality," he told reporters.

Rafsanjani sent the initiative in a letter to Saddam through Iraq's deputy foreign minister, who visited Tehran over the weekend.

An Iranian official at the United Nations said no detailed proposal exists yet, but that the initiative hinges on Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

Sheikh Nasser repeated Wednesday that his country will accept nothing less.

In Washington, US President George Bush said Monday he had seen no Iranian peace plan and had nothing to negotiate with Saddam. But the Soviet Union and Turkey have signaled support for the Iranian initiative.

Both Sheikh Nasser and Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, gave Mubarak letters from their heads of state. Prince Saud said King Fahd's message followed up on a meeting between the two leaders in Saudi Arabia last week.

The Saudi official arrived in Cairo from Damascus, Syria, where he met with President Hafez Assad.

Prince Saud's host, Foreign Minister Esmat Abdel-Meguid of Egypt, said new-found close

ties among Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia are "the basic foundation for the future."

The three strongly opposed Saddam's Aug. 2 takeover of Kuwait. Cairo and Damascus later sent troops to Saudi Arabia for the US-led coalition confronting Iraq.

Egypt has 36,000 troops there and Syria 19,000. Syrian troops exchanged fire with the Iraqis for the first time Monday, but Egyptian soldiers have yet to engage in combat.

Reuter adds from the United Nations: Iran said on Tuesday it was waiting for a signal from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein that he was willing to withdraw from Kuwait before Tehran could offer a concrete peace plan to end the Gulf war.

Protest against federal takeover

20,000 arrested in Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: Shops closed and streets emptied of traffic in four Indian states Wednesday as residents answered an opposition call for a day-long strike to protest the Federal government takeover of Tamil Nadu state, reports AFP.

Despite a reported 20,000 "preventive arrests" throughout the state which was placed under Federal rule last Wednesday, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said that the streets of the state capital Madras were deserted save for security patrols.

Flights, bus and express trains services to the city were suspended, schools and colleges closed, PTI said.

Security patrols covered railroad tracks to prevent protest demonstrations and PTI reported only one involving an overnight freight train travelling between Paduram and Madurantakam. It quoted railway officials as saying the cause was technical and there were no casualties.

New Delhi rushed 1,000 extra paramilitary troops to the state Tuesday to bolster security following the strike call by nine opposition parties and supporters of the dismissed Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government.

The southern state of Kerala, the western states of Bihar and West Bengal and the tiny union territory of Pondicherry all answered the call, with the Bihar government allowing Federal employees to join the action.

In Marxist-ruled West Bengal state, reports indicated that the teeming port city of Calcutta was at a standstill, with markets shops, businesses and factories shuttered.

Among parties backing the strike were the National Front of former prime minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh, of which the DMK had been a supporter, and four powerful leftwing parties.

Reuter adds: President Ramaswamy Venkataraman, who is a Tamil, authorised the sacking of the DMK government on the advice of Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, who ousted Singh in political fighting in November.

Off the Record

Swing the Gasmask way

WITH US FORCE (Saudi Arabia): The latest rage of the Gulf war combat discos is a dance called the Gasmask, reports Reuter.

US men and women soldiers at a frontline marine base have latched onto one of their biggest dreads, a chemical weapons attack, to make it swing.

How to do the Gasmask? To rap music, merely simulate donning a Gasmask: You bend over. You put your hands to your chin. You slip them up, putting on the mask chin first. You stand up straight.

You put your hands at shoulder level, and you move your fists in and out towards your head. The military signal for a gas attack.

The guys of MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture)-Level Four Disco in a bunker near Iraq-occupied Kuwait invented the Gasmask one night when a Level Four chemical alert—the highest alert—was sounded.

Corporal Neil Burke burst into the radio tent in a state of high excitement wearing his Gasmask.

Burke, from the Bronx in New York city, remembers: "I got my mask on but I was all sweaty and I couldn't get it to seal properly so I was bugging out a little."

Bush for pounding Saddam Hussein

WASHINGTON: More clearly than ever before, President Bush at his Press conference on Tuesday wished Saddam Hussein was dead, reports PTI.

Bush said, "I would like to think that somehow, some way, that (Saddam Hussein's death) would happen".

Analysts here note that the Gulf war has increasingly become a personal war between Bush and Saddam Hussein, not a war between the United States, its allies and Iraq.

Before his statement Bush had already dangled the possibility that dissatisfied Iraqis might take his hints and dump their President or kill him.

Bush had said: "I don't believe anybody other than Saddam Hussein is going to want to continue to subject his Army to the pounding they are taking, or his people to the pounding that is going on".

His reference to the pounding of "his people" is, to say the least, interesting, for the US claims that civilian targets have been spared.

"Now, would I weep? Would I mourn if somehow Saddam Hussein did not remain as head of his country? There will be no sorrow if he's not there."

Anti-Saddam passenger dropped on highway

JAKARTA: A taxi driver on the Indonesian island of Kalimantan told a passenger to get out of his car after quarrelling over the Gulf war and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the Bisnis Indonesia daily said, reports AFP.

The daily quoted the unnamed passenger as saying that during an argument with the driver on the role of Mr Saddam in the war, he had criticized the Iraqi leader as "too ambitious".

The infuriated driver dropped the passenger on a deserted country road some 50 kilometers (31 miles) from their starting point in Bangarmasin, south Kalimantan, and still 85 kilometers (55 miles) away from his destination.

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-populated nation with more than 80 per cent of its 179 million people following the faith.

Jakarta has kept neutral in the Gulf conflict but pro-Saddam feelings are wide among Indonesia's Muslim population.

A pepper pot present for Reagan

LOS ANGELES: A pepper pot sent to former US President Ronald Reagan as an 80th birthday present was blown up by his Secret Service guards because they feared it might be a bomb, police said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

"It wasn't a bomb — it was one large pepper pot", a police spokesman said. "And to Reagan's home in the exclusive Bel-Air district of Los Angeles on Tuesday, the spokesman said."

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Vice-President Dan Quayle and 600 other people attended a giant birthday party for Reagan at the Beverly Hilton Hotel on Wednesday night.

Dad, don't have more babies!

BEIJING: A town outside Beijing has adopted a new way of promoting family planning—children are writing to their parents and telling them not to have any more babies, reports AFP.

More than 2,000 pupils from 14 elementary schools have joined the letter campaign in the town of Pinggu, the Beijing Daily reported Wednesday.

The local government called on the children to study China's family planning policy and the local and national population condition and then pen appeals to their parents, the newspaper said.

One mother who received a letter from her third child reportedly said, "I am very moved and feel ashamed".

China gave up its two child policy in the countryside in the late 1980s, allowing rural families to have a second child if the first was a girl.

Officials say efforts to control the population are crucial now to deal with China's third baby boom since the communists came to power in 1949.



TEL AVIV: In Israeli mother and her son, equipped with two boxes of chemical protective sets, have a small picnic at the Tel Aviv beach. Tel Aviv residents usually leave the city afternoon and return for work only, following the risk of Iraqi missile attacks. — AFP/UNB photo.