

Pilots tried to bomb Saddam's palace?

2 Iraqi fighters fleeing to Iran shot down

RIYADH, Feb 8: Two US F-15C fighters shot down two Iraqi SU-22 jets and possibly downed a third apparently fleeing to Iran Thursday US military spokesman said, reports Reuters.

He confirmed that American fighters shot down two Mig-21s as well as two SU-25 ground-attack jets on Wednesday.

The spokesman, Marine Brigadier-General Richard Neal, said Allied aircraft had shot down at least 33 Iraqi planes in aerial combat and three helicopters since the Gulf war broke out on January 17.

Two of the helicopters were reported to have been downed on Wednesday and one in northern Iraq Thursday.

Referring to the Soviet-built SU-22 attack and ground-support jets, Neal said "two were confirmed shot down and the third was a probable."

"The indications are pretty clear that the Iraqi aircraft in this engagement were heading for Iran", he said.

He said the latest count of Iraqi planes taking refuge in Iran was 134, of which 109 were fighters and 25 transports.

Iran, which has reported only 17 Iraqi planes landing there, has said it would hold aircraft from any of the belligerent nations landing on its territory until the end of the war.

The American spokesman said a US navy FA-18 Hornet jet was missing over the northern Arabian Gulf on its way back to its carrier base after a mission over Iraq.

Neal said the plane had apparently successfully completed its mission and there had been no indication it had been hit by anti-aircraft fire. A search was underway.

Six more planes enter Iran

Another report from Nicosia says: Six more Iraqi warplanes entered safely, the Iranian News Agency IRNA reported.

It did not say what hap-

pened to the others.

The United States said its pilots shot down two Iraqi AU-25 fighter bombers and two MIG-21s heading towards Iran on Wednesday.

The Allies put the number of Iraqi jets which have flown to Iran since the Gulf war started on January 17 at 110 Tehran by Tuesday had reported 13 Iraqi planes landing and four crashing on its territory.

A Washington message adds: The US military commander in Saudi Arabia said in a television interview on Thursday he had reports that some defecting Iraqi pilots had tried to bomb Saddam Hussein at his Presidential Palace.

Lieutenant General Norman Schwarzkopf also said in an interview on ABC Television that it was too soon to say if a ground war against Iraq would be necessary.

"We've had reports that some of the pilots that went over there (Iran) were in fact defectors. As a matter of fact, there have been some reports

that some of the pilots, before they went over there, actually bombed or tried to bomb the palace and tried to bomb Saddam Hussein," Schwarzkopf said.

Over 100 Iraqi planes have flown to Iran in the past two weeks. US military officers say they are sure if the pilots are defecting or if they are trying to keep their planes from being destroyed by Allied air raids.

Iran says it will keep the planes until the war ends.

Schwarzkopf also said he had reports that Saddam had been given tranquilisers because he was distraught.

"We've had a couple of reports that at one point quite some time ago he was so distraught about what was going on that he was falling apart and they had in fact brought in a team of doctors and those were treating him with tranquilisers," he said.

Schwarzkopf said these were among many reports the US command was receiving from various sources.

It's an attempt to kill me: Major

LONDON, Feb 8: The mortar attack on Downing Street on Thursday was an attempt to assassinate the British Cabinet, including himself, Prime Minister John Major said, reports AFP.

Mr. Major said it was clear from the timing and location of the attack that it was a deliberate attempt both to kill the cabinet and do damage to the democratic system of government.

Thursday attack would lead to no change in British government policy, he added.

US ground radar destroyed

IN NORTHERN SAUDI ARABIA, Feb 8: Military officials were trying to determine how a US Army truck-mounted ground surveillance radar for detecting enemy troop movements was destroyed, a pool report made available early today, reports AFP.

The two crew escaped with bruises and light injuries. There was speculation that a US Air Force pilot fired a missile at the radar Saturday, mistaking it for an Iraqi one. The Iraqis on the other side of the border have similar US-made ground radar systems which the US Air Force has targeted.

USS Missouri

Commissioned: June 1944.
Armament: 9 x 16-inch guns with 25 mile range, 32 Tomahawk cruise missile launchers, 16 Harpoon surface to surface missile launchers, 4 Sikorsky helicopters.
Speed: 35 knots.
Maximum range: 15,000 miles.
Complement: 1,518 men (65 officers).
Displacement: 46,177 tons, 57,353 tons fully loaded.



U.S. battleship Missouri used its 16-inch guns Monday for the first time since 1953. It fired seven 2,000 pound shells at prefabricated concrete bunkers that the Iraqis were moving into Kuwait.

RIYADH: The battleship Missouri has used its guns in combat for the first time since 1953, aiming at concrete bunkers that the Iraqis were moving into place in Kuwait. The ship, which had been launching long-range Tomahawk missiles at Baghdad and other targets, fired seven 2,000-pound (905 kg) shells at prefabricated bunkers.

BRIEFLY

Japan accused of hypocrisy: Baghdad accused the Japanese government on Thursday of hypocrisy for its decision to provide an additional nine billion dollars for the Allied coalition fighting to drive Iraq from Kuwait, reports Reuters from Nicosia.

Baghdad radio quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying such a contribution assisted in the "murder and destruction" of the Iraqi people.

The radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said coalition forces had killed women, children and old people, knocked down residential buildings, and bombed mosques, churches, bridges, and several civilian installations which had been built by Japanese firms.

Charity auction for Iraq: More than 2,000 Jordanians took part in a charity auction for Iraq on Thursday, bidding for a piece of metal described as wreckage from a downed US fighter plane, reports Reuters from Amman.

Young men wearing black and white checkered headresses sang pro-Iraq songs and applauded as bidding went up at the auction in a sports hall in a Palestinian refugee camp in Amman.

Land battle inevitable: French President Francois Mitterrand in Paris said Thursday an Allied ground offensive against Iraq in the Gulf war was inevitable and would take place this month, reports Reuters.

Mitterrand told French television: "It is inevitable. The land battle... will start in coming days, perhaps a bit further ahead. Anyway it will take place this month". France, which has 12,000 troops in the Gulf, would not support allied forces using chemical weapons to oust Iraq from Kuwait, he said.

American shot at in Ankara: A gunman today shot dead an American working at a Turkish base used by US planes to bomb Iraq and a left wing group said it carried out the attack, reports Reuters.

Police in Ankara said Bobbie Mozelle 44, who worked at the Southern Inlet Air Base, was shot four times in the heart and stomach as he left home in the nearby city of Adana.

Anti-war rally banned:

Police have banned anti-Gulf war rallies near diplomatic missions in Bombay, the second Indian city to come under the curb, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported Thursday, reports AFP.

Bombay city police in an order Wednesday said the ban would be enforced between February 12 and 27 and warned people in the western Indian city not to gather near the US and British consulates, PTI in New Delhi said.

Rushdie's conversion cosmetic, say friends

LONDON, Feb 8: The conversion to Islam of British author Salman Rushdie is becoming as controversial as his book, the Satanic Verses, report IPS.



a surprise to the committee writers and human rights campaigners supporting him, causing a split in its ranks.

Francis Bennion, the author, barrister and former Oxford University Lecturer who spent several months defending Rushdie's right to publish, declared that "Rushdie is not worth defending" and resigned from the committee.

Bennion said Rushdie's decision not to proceed with the paperback and translated editions of his book was tantamount to "surrendering to would-be murderers".

"Worst of all, he has now confounded his supporters by embracing the bigoted creed that holds its followers entitled to defend a novelist for what he has written in a novel," Bennion said.

Another one of Rushdie's former supporters, playwright Arnold Wesker, also described Rushdie's conversion as a "victory for religious terrorists".

Coalition urged to be patient

Iraq won't be allowed to set terms of war: Powell

WASHINGTON, Feb 8: America's top military officer told Congress on Thursday the Gulf war is far from finished and said Iraq should not be allowed to set the terms for the conflict, reports Reuters.

"The Iraqis are feeling the effects of our combat power, but we must not delude ourselves that they will give up overnight," General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee in prepared remarks.

With Defence Secretary Dick Cheney at his side, Powell said that after establishing air supremacy in the first three weeks of the war, US planes had begun to strike in earnest targets in and around Kuwait.

But he said "the fight is far from over," cautioning the coalition arrayed against Baghdad must be patient and "not allow Iraq to draw us into fighting the war on its terms."

As Cheney and Powell talked military matters, on the other side of Capitol Hill Secretary of State James Baker was discussing post-war problems with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

He proposed establishment of a Middle East bank for reconstruction to help repair war damage, saying it could be on the lines of a bank founded last year to help eastern European countries as they

emerged from communism.

But Baker said US proposals to rebuild Iraq after the war might be impossible to implement if President Saddam Hussein remained in power.

"There's no suggestion on our part that the rebuilding and reconstruction of Iraq, if the same leadership remained in power, would be to the same degree or effect that it

would be otherwise," Baker said.

He made clear, however, that the United States is "not at the point of enhancing our war aims and goals to talk about the removal of Saddam Hussein as a war aim or goal."

Reports from the war zone seemed to support Powell's testimony that air strikes had begun in earnest in and around Kuwait. Brigadier-General

Richard Neal told reporters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, that more than 2,600 air sorties were flown on the 22nd day of the war, 600 of them in the "southern" war theatre.

Cheney and Powell were due to depart later on Thursday for Saudi Arabia for a first-hand status report that is expected to allow them to advise President George Bush on the necessity for and timing of a ground war to eject Iraq from Kuwait, which it invaded on August 2.

In the more than three-hour hearing, Cheney heard members of the house panel express foreboding about the possibility of a US-led land campaign.

"I would encourage you not to any way prematurely ask America's children to walk across that sand," said representative Larry Hopkins, a Kentucky republican.

Court upholds Rajiv's '89 polls

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: An Indian court ruled in Thursday that former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1989 election to parliament was valid throwing out a case filed by his vanquished rival, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says AFP.

The Allahabad High Court in northern India handed down the verdict on a petition filed by Rajmohan Gandhi, who challenged Rajiv Gandhi's election on grounds that the poll had been rigged, PTI said.

Judge Syed Saghir Ahmad dismissed the petition, the news agency said, more details on the ruling were unavailable.

Rajmohan Gandhi, 54, a ex-journalist and author, stood against Rajiv Gandhi in the Amethi constituency.

Rajiv Gandhi won the election, marked by violent clashes between supporters of his congress (I) party and opposition workers, by a comfortable margin of about 195,000 votes. The Congress (I), however, bowed out of power.

"He hopes the missile will acquire the target using its own homing device. It's extremely inefficient and I know of no instances where a firing of that nature has done a US aircraft", he added.

US may launch blitz on civilian facilities

RIYADH, Feb 8: The US military said on Thursday it might attack civilian facilities which Iraq was using for warfare, reports Reuters.

Senior US military sources said Iraq was placing anti-aircraft batteries on the roofs of civilian buildings in what appeared to be deliberate policy.

General Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of US forces in the Gulf, earlier this week accused the Iraqis of moving command and communications posts into civilian areas and said he would not hit them for the moment.

The source said this policy was under review in the light of the anti-aircraft batteries, which could threaten US jets.

"We're just watching them move and trying to assess where are they. Does he (Schwarzkopf) want to deal with them or does he want to keep this policy? I'm sure he will be very consistent" source said.

"If the Commander-in-Chief feels like he's getting hurt he'll eliminate the threat" he added.

The sources said US attack planes could destroy the buildings without destroying the buildings but only by risking the pilots' lives.

"If the pilot doesn't mind hazarding his health substantially more, (he could) go in on a gun run at 1,000 metres (3,300 feet) instead of using a cluster bomb at 15,000 feet (5,000 metres)" he said.

depends on whether they keep their propane tanks on the roof" he said.

Apart from a few surface-to-air missiles, the 57mm and 23mm guns, which mostly depend on optical sighting, are the only air defences Iraq has left.

The missile crews are in most cases too frightened of attack to turn their radars on for any length of time so the missiles are going astray, the sources said.

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India won't promote Bhutanese rebels

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: India assured Bhutan on Wednesday that Indian territory would not be allowed to be used by agitators in Bhutan, local press reported on Thursday, says Xinhua.

The assurance was given by Joyti Basu, Chief Minister of India's eastern state of West Bengal to a visiting six member Bhutanese government delegation led by Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dawa Tshering.

The report noted that the two sides held a lengthy discussion at the state secretariat in Calcutta, capital of West Bengal, on the problems created by these agitators both in Bhutan and the districts of West Bengal.

Lyonpo Dawa Tshering, who

arrived in Calcutta on Tuesday night, will again meet Basu on Friday.

The root cause of the current unrest in Bhutan is the ongoing attempt to create a "Bhutan of Bhutanese". The movement affected some illegal residents from Nepal, who constitute 40 per cent of the Himalayan kingdom's 1.3 million population and more than 10,000 of them have infiltrated to India and sought refugee status, according to official estimates.

The agitators have not only caused irritation and anxiety to the Bhutanese government, but also created some administrative problems in West Bengal over the past few months, local press said.

Off the Record

Teddy bears, panties in the desert

IN NORTHERN SAUDI ARABIA: Some American soldiers are carrying death cards-- the ace of spades -- to put on the bodies of Iraqis they kill, reports Reuters.

Others carry photos of loved ones, teddy bears, the Bible, pinups from saucy magazines, even panties from the girl back home.

Being a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne means traveling light as you cross the endless sand. But not that light-- everyone has a moment to remind them of home or war.

James Alexander, 24, from Atlanta, Georgia, has five aces of spades in his helmet. They are for work. "I'm a killer. We are supposed to tuck them behind their ears", he said.

Another platoon also uses the ace of spades as a calling card to be placed on dead Iraqis. Their card also has a slogan: died like the pig you are".

Many men carry photographs of their family and even locks of their children's hair.

Sergeant Gary Warshaw, has his son's teddy bear, an anointed cloth from a baptist church and a rattlesnake skin-- all good-luck charms.

Private Christopher Bolnar used to carry a pair of his girlfriend's perfumed crocheted panties in his helmet. He sent them back. It was just too much, he said.

Now he carries pinup magazine centrefolds, for him the only reminders of the opposite sex in an Islamic kingdom with strict rules on pornography and contact between men and women.

Exploitation of the desperate

NEW DELHI: When a vacationing foreigner pestered an Indian doctor for a tonic to boost his flagging sex drive, the doctor gave him baby food, pretended it was an aphrodisiac and told him to eat three spoonfuls daily, reports AFP.

After the patient--who had an obsessive fear of falling potency-- returned home to the Middle East, he wrote the doctor asking for more of the magic medicine, saying it had worked wonders for his sex life.

That is a story that sexologists many of whom distrust sex tonics and pills sold across the country to eager customers, recount to back arguments that aphrodisiacs are all in the mind.

A panel discussion at the world's first conference on orgasm here concluded that sex tonics and potency pills with little or no therapeutic value thrived the world over in what some participants called "exploitation of the desperate".

"It is always the picture of a bull or a horse on the bottle that works, not its contents," said JV Bhat, a Bombay-based sexologist on the mainly Indian panel that met on the conference's concluding day Wednesday.

Dr Bhat said he had not yet come across a tonic or drug that really helped, but confessed that he often prescribed them nonetheless because "if I don't, somebody else will".

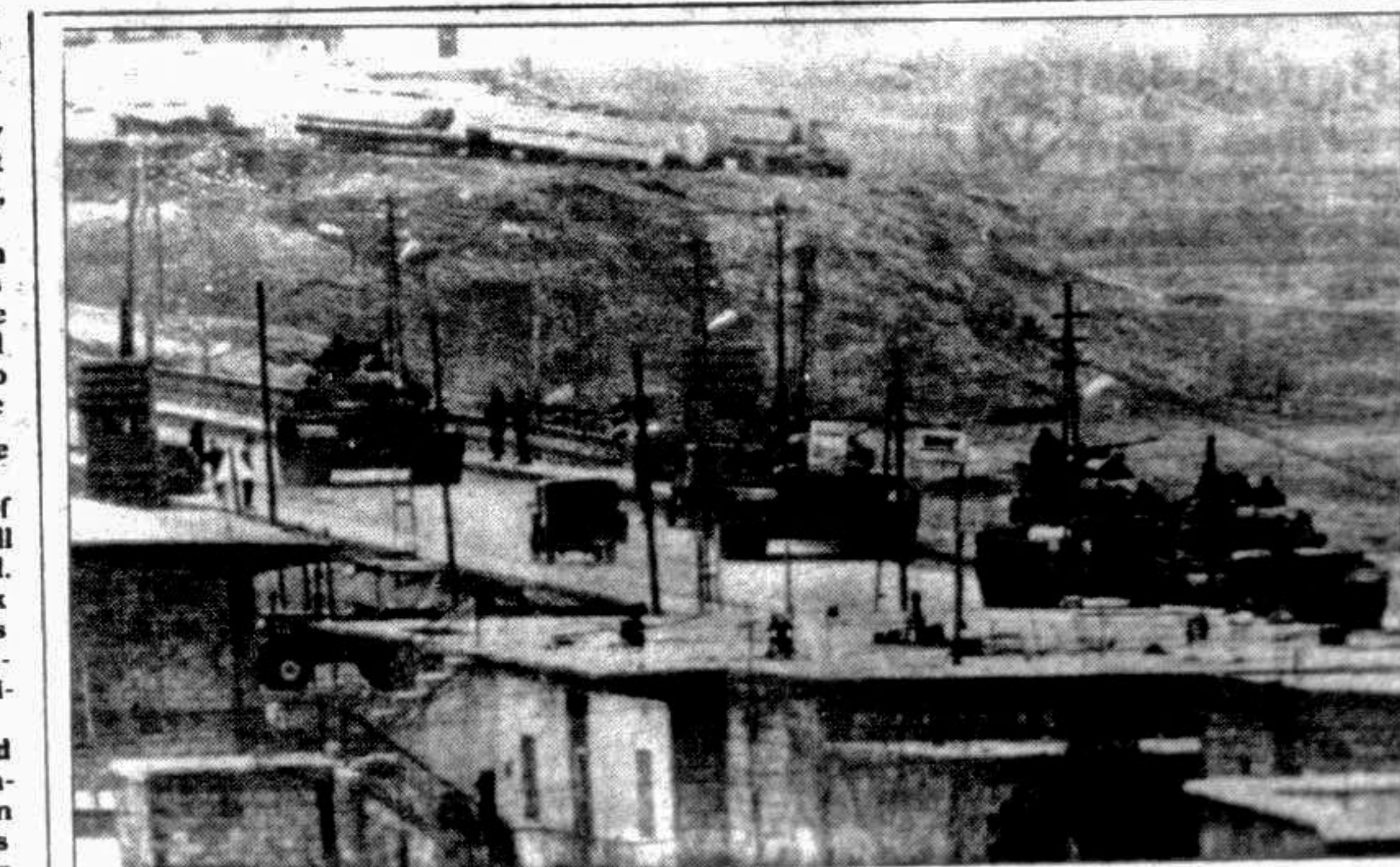
Sexologists say a belief in the existence of a food or potion to stimulate and enhance sexual pleasure is as old as civilisation and common to almost all cultures.

No drug barons in USSR, but....

MOSCOW: Over 34,000 crimes related to drug trafficking were recorded in the Soviet Union in 1990, according to the USSR Ministry of the Interior, reports IAN.

Almost 100,000 illegal fields sown to narcotic-containing plants over a total area of more than 450 hectares have been found and destroyed.

In 1989, the areas so abolished amounted to some 300 hectares, Colonel of the militia Alexander Bergiyev, head of the anti-drug squad of the USSR Ministry of the Interior noted that so far no drug barons exist in the Soviet Union but there is a real threat of criminal groups that produce and sell drugs developing into a mafia-like structure.



TURKEY: A column of Turkish tanks crosses a bridge during manoeuvres near the border with Iraq February 6. Turkey has deployed combat troops and armour in the tense border region. —AFP/UNB photo