

International

Cut in Iraqi supply lines aimed at

Allies isolating battlefield

IN EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA, Feb 10: Allied warplanes have shifted the focus of their relentless bombing campaign, in an attempt to isolate Iraqi forces on the battlefield in Kuwait ahead of a ground offensive, reports AP.

The U.S.-led coalition want to cut Iraqi supply lines and communications with Baghdad and deprive Iraqi troops of ev-

erything from sleep and food to life itself. The top guessing game in Saudi Arabia this week is when the ground war will start -- and the betting is sooner rather than later: perhaps this Thursday, on which there will be a moonless night, but may be in 10 days, two weeks or even a month. For U.S. President George

Bush, who wants to keep casualties as low as possible, the decision will likely hinge on Allied assessments of bomb damage to Iraqi forces dug in along the border.

This is a subject of some debate. Earlier this week, Maj. Bob Baltzer said the U.S. Air Force hopes to destroy 50 percent of Iraq's forces with saturation

bombing of ground offensive is launched. Privately, other U.S. officers have confirmed the figure.

British Defense Secretary Tom King said Friday the Allies would not launch a ground assault unless they were confident of having destroyed 50 percent of the Iraqi capacity. But Marine Brig. Gen. Robert Johnston said the United States had not established any percentage that would suffice to start a ground war.

Air strikes have shifted from strategic targets to Iraqi front-line troops in Kuwait and southern Iraq, King predicted that Allied air attacks will increase.

King estimates the Iraqis have lost 15 percent to 20 percent of their military might. At the higher end of the scale, Air Force Col. John McBroom has estimated that some Iraqi units have had their strength roughly halved.

Johnston said Iraqi supply lines into Kuwait have been cut by up to 90 percent. British military officials say half the strategic bridges from Iraq into Kuwait -- or about 40 by U.S. count -- have been put out of action.

The U.S. military command said Saturday that 750 tanks -- or about 10 percent of Iraq's total of 4,000 -- and 650 artillery pieces -- about 20 percent of its total of 3,200 -- had been confirmed destroyed.

The difficulty with assessing the effectiveness of the air war, however, is the absence of independent, on-the-ground confirmation of bomb damage.

"That magical figure -- that we must reduce Iraqi strength in Kuwait by 50 percent -- that's nonsense," said Francis Tusa, European editor of Armed Forces Journal International. "It's irrelevant. You'll never know."

He said the sheer number of bombing missions has to be taking a toll, but it might be on only the least protected targets, not the most entrenched. Last week, pilots said there were still plenty of targets, but prime targets were harder to find and they were trying to destroy Iraqi armor tank by tank.

Tusa said more than 1,000 air sorties daily are combat runs and if each aircraft caused only one casualty, that would mean more than 7,000 troop deaths every week.

Reports that Iraq's best-trained Republican Guards have lost 20 percent to 30 percent of their strength in two weeks, if true, would be impressive, he added.

Defense Secretary King said there may be mass surrenders of Iraqi troops within days. But U.S. military sources say Iraqi soldiers are abandoning Kuwait and heading home in greater numbers than they are deserting to Allied forces. Several famished Iraqi deserters this week complained of getting very little food.

Col. Andrew Duncan of the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies said the Americans will have to weigh other factors than bomb damage before deciding when to attack.

These include the readiness of Allied troops, the damage air strikes can still inflict, troop morale, growing anti-war sentiment in the Arab world, and the approaching hot weather, he said.

"I think it will be slightly sooner rather than later," he said.



Riyadh: General Powell, left, and General Schwarzkopf conferring in Riyadh on the status of the war.

BRIEFLY

40 P.C. Britons favour bombing:

Nearly 40 per cent of Britons would favour carpet bombing of Baghdad if Iraq used chemical weapons against Allied forces in the Gulf according to an opinion poll in the Sunday Times newspaper, reports Reuter. The National Opinion Poll (NOP) survey in London found that 15 per cent would favour a nuclear response to a chemical attack and 11 per cent said there should be retaliation with chemical weapons. Britain has no chemical weapons but the United States does. The NOP poll showed 37 per cent would favour carpet-bombing of the Iraqi capital by American B-52 Bombers. The poll of 1,000 people also showed support for the war in Britain already among the highest in Europe, and hardened since the conflict erupted on January 17.

Kuwait offers aid to UK:

British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd arrived in Riyadh on Saturday with Kuwaiti assurances of help in paying for the Gulf war and with hopes that Saudi Arabia will also contribute, reports Reuter. In meetings in the Saudi resort of Taif, the Kuwaitis offered to pay Britain 660 million pounds (1.3 billion dollars) for its help in the campaign to drive Iraqi forces out of their country. Saudi Arabia's share of the costs will probably come up in talks today between Hurd and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, British Government sources in Riyadh said. The atmosphere is encouraging but we don't know what the results will be, one source said.

Gulf security system under way

Saudi Arabia's Defence Minister said on Saturday that Gulf Arab States might cooperate with foreign countries in post Gulf war security arrangements, reports Reuter. The countries of the Arabian Gulf know best about their from Nicotia security, Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz told reporters after a graduation ceremony in Riyadh for new military cadets. "But this does not mean that we don't cooperate with our Muslim and Arab brothers and every friend if the need arises. He said in reply to a question on long term Gulf security. His remarks carried by the official Saudi Press Agency SPA, followed reports that Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria were working on a new Gulf security system.

345 Allied raids on Iraq: Iraq said

Allied planes carried out 345 raids against civilian targets on Friday night and Saturday, reports Reuter. "The savage Americans carried out their aggression on our civilized country, targeting residential areas with 345 air raids," said Baghdad radio, quoting military communique 42 from Nicotia. The number of raids was 95 more than the figure given by a military spokesman earlier on Saturday for the same period. The communique gave no details of casualties or damage, but repeated charges that some Allied planes were reaching targets through Iranian airspace -- a charge consistently denied by neutral Tehran. Iraq said earlier on Saturday it inflicted "significant" losses in men and equipment on the Allies after firing rockets across the border with Saudi Arabia.

Egypt smashes Iraqi network:

Egypt said Saturday it had smashed a pro-Iraqi terrorist network that plotted to assassinate top Egyptian politicians, attack the US and Saudi Embassies in Cairo and trigger hostility with Israel, reports AFP. Interior Minister Abdel Halim Musa said eight cells comprising 17 members had been arrested and there were suspicions the network was linked to Abunidal, the Palestinian renegade, and Al-Jihad Muslim fundamentalists. He told the semi-official daily Al-Ahram that police had rounded up 10 Palestinians, four Iraqis, two Jordanians and a Tunisian, who had arrived in Egypt with fake Arab passports after the Gulf crisis broke out in August.

Syria against Saddam's killing:

A Syrian Cabinet Minister on Saturday said that it was not the government policy to suggest assassination of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to stop the war in the Gulf. Information Minister Mohammed Salman told Reuters monitored in Damascus that Syria, for years a bitter political foe of Iraq, did not believe assassinations could solve political issue. Salman was commenting on a front page editorial published by the Syrian official newspaper Al-Thawar on Saturday which urged that "the Iraqi army and the Iraqi people must liquidate him (Saddam) in cold blood so that the killing stops in our beloved Iraq."

Iran sends medicine for Iraq

NICOSIA, Feb 10: Iran sent 16 tonnes of medicine to Iraq from Iran Saturday under supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Iranian News Agency IRNA reported, reports Reuter.

Middle East analysts agreed on Friday that unless he makes a prominent appearance soon, his absence could threaten his grip on power.

"All roads lead to Saddam Hussein," said Philip Robins, Middle East research fellow with London's Royal Institute for international affairs.

He has to have a public profile and make regular appearances if people are to continue to fight... otherwise, the regime will start to collapse," he said in a telephone interview.

Saddam's last appearance before the world was an interview with the American Cable News Network in Baghdad on January 28.

He wore a well cut-dark lounge suit and appeared outwardly calm and relaxed. An Arab doctor who saw the film, however, said Saddam's eyes were blinking at an unusual rate suggesting inner tension.

Baghdad radio has said nothing of his whereabouts since, although official newspapers on Friday reported he had visited people in city shelters and on the streets.

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But the Arab doctor, who worked in Baghdad and knew the medical team treating

All roads lead to Iraqi President Saddam's whereabouts shrouded in mystery

NICOSIA, Feb 10: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is taking an unusually low profile as the Gulf war rages around him, creating a puzzle about his whereabouts and activities, reports Reuter.

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something up his sleeve," Koptetz said in a telephone interview.

"I would start getting worried if he doesn't appear by Monday."

Don Kerr of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London suggested Saddam might be dodging from place to place to avoid Allied attacks.

"He may be concerned that he might be individually targeted and is moving from one to another of his hideouts to escape."

Saddam made one highly emotional appeal to Iraqis shortly after the war broke out, saying the full weight of the "US conspiracy" was bearing down on the country and promising "the mother of all battles."

Kerr, like other analysts, said if Saddam remained out of sight too long, rumours would undoubtedly start, possibly even suggesting he was dead. If such rumours spread through the Army, Kerr added, it could easily disintegrate.

The United States has denied specifically targeting Saddam in its air raids, but Bush has made it clear "there would be no sorrow if he was not there."

Fred Halliday, Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, suggested he could be lying low for various reasons.

Stalin used similar techniques during World War Two as a psychological weapon, making his reappearances more dramatic, Halliday pointed out.

limits on Thursday, after telling the nation to brace itself for a hard land battle to free Kuwait.

He said, there would be no French retaliation against Iraq use of chemical weapons, no use of nuclear weapons, no occupation of Iraq, and no peace settlement other than agreed by the United Nations.

The United States and Britain prefer to keep Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein guessing about how far they would go.

President Francois Mitterrand spelled out France's war

as a favour to Iraq. The report added that a satellite telephone left behind in a Baghdad hotel by the French television channel La Cinq had also been used by Iraq.

"Late in the evening not only members of the Information Ministry but also countless Iraqis, some in uniform, used the equipment, the report said.

It added that officials from La Cinq, who said they had believed their telephone had been disconnected earlier, closed the line immediately after learning of its abuse.

The report said Iraq seemed keen to maintain contact with users of satellite telephones and had given visas to all journalists with such equipment.

Off the Record

Phantom indeed

LOS ANGELES Michael Crawford, who won hearts on two continents as the brooding, masked "Phantom of the Opera", is an expensive date.

It cost one woman 22,500 dollars. Randa Guy made the highest bid at a charity bachelor auction for the British-born stage actor, getting a date that includes -- what else? -- a ticket to "Phantom".

Miss Guy "told us she had saved for a year to bid for a date with Crawford, after she saw him at last year's auction", said Nancy Dufford, a spokeswoman for the auction.

Crawford starred in the blockbuster British musical, for which he won a Tony, for 3 1/2 year before bowing out last April, citing exhaustion. He returned to the role New Year's Eve, saying he would stay through the end of March.

A date with KNBC-TV news anchor John Beard drew the second-highest bid, 6,000 dollars.

Thursday night's bachelor auction, attended by 800 women, raised 78,800 dollars for Big Brother of Greater Los Angeles.

Beware of British intentions: Deng

HONG KONG -- Senior Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping has counselled Beijing authorities to beware of British "bad intentions" in the run-up to 1997, according to a local pro-Beijing newsmagazine Wide Angle, reports AFP.

Mr. Deng, 86 said the most important issues during the transitional period was to deter British "bad intentions" which would leave Hong Kong saddled with a "heavy burden" after it reverts to Chinese rule, the magazine said.

Wide Angle said Mr. Deng -- who has ostensibly retired from public life -- made the remarks in a recent meeting with Communist Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin, Premier Li Peng and other leaders.

Sino British relations have been strained over Hong Kong plans to build a 20-billion -- dollar US airport and port complex, the financing of which would stretch well past 1997.

Caller is scared

SAN ANTONIO -- Usually the caller is scared, scared that a loved one somewhere in the Gulf isn't coming home, reports AP.

"If you can't handle anyone crying on the phone, this is not the job for you", said Sgt. Terrence David O'Brien. The job is answering the telephone at the Air Force casualty hot line. Hot lines also were set up by the other military services to take calls from relatives and friends of people sent to the Gulf War.

The hot line at Kelly Air Force Base opened Jan. 16, the night the war broke out. More than 43,000 calls have been logged. The Army said it received 10,000 calls an hour on its hot line the first day of the war.

The 45 military and civilian operators have computer access to casualty information. Caller can learn whether a friend or relative is listed by the Air Force as killed, injured, missing or a prisoner of war. Immediate family members already would have been notified.

Often the person the caller asks about is not on one of those lists.

In the name of goddess

BANGALORE -- Police arrested 34 girls who tried to dedicate themselves to a Hindu goddess under an ancient practice that actually drives them to prostitution, an official said Saturday, reports AP.

Five girls were released after they agreed to marry men chosen by government officials who then supervised the weddings, Deputy Commissioner Gollerkeri Gurucharan said.

The arrests were made during the last month in Belgaum district in the southern Karnataka state, Gurucharan, the district's top administrator, said.

He said 42 other persons were arrested for aiding the proposed, dedications to Yellamma, the goddess of fire, Gurucharan was interviewed by telephone from Belgaum, 600 kilometers (370 mile) north of Bangalore, Karnataka's capital.

This was the first crackdown on the dedication system since it was banned eight year ago. Those arrested are of ages between 6 and 20 years and face two years in jail with a fine of 2,000 rupees (120 dollars) if convicted, Gurucharan said.

After the so-called dedications, the girls come to be known as "scavadasis" or servants of god, and are forced into spinsterhood, supposedly in service of God.

Burma to buy \$1b arms from China

BANGKOK, Feb 10: Burma has agreed to buy arms worth nearly one billion dollars from China, one of the few countries to maintain close ties with Rangoon's army government, diplomats said at the weekend, reports Reuter.

They said the two countries signed a long-term deal late last year for equipment ranging from jet fighters to small arms. Burma would repay at least half the 900 million dollar debt in rice and wood.

"This deal takes Burma into the space-age. It completely refurbishes their armed forces," one diplomat said.

Since taking power two years ago the ruling army council has faced an almost total block on Western and Japanese aid.

Government accused it of killing more than 1,000 protesters when it crushed a

major uprising in 1988 and say thousands more dissidents have been jailed since.

To secure income Rangoon has tried to improve relations with neighbours China and Thailand. It has also launched intensive dry season offensives to dislodge ethnic rebels along its borders with those countries.

Diplomats said Beijing was one of the few government to forge closer ties with Rangoon since the uprising. There has been a steady stream of delegations between the two capitals.

In the last year China has given aid for infrastructural projects including a huge bridge across the Rangoon river and a satellite earth station. Cross border trade has transformed sleepy towns in northern Burma into rich commercial centres.

Allied victory to be dangerous for Arab allies: Paris

PARIS, Feb 10: Allied victory in the Gulf war would be very dangerous for parts of the Arab world friendly to the West, French sources said on Friday, reports Reuter.

They said, westerners could not do much about the violent reaction an Iraqi defeat would probably unleash, except avoid political errors.

But they suggested it might help to define clearly the limits of the war's aims and means, and start to prepare now for the uneasy peace that will follow.

9 Bangladeshis arrested in Hungary

BUDAPEST, Feb 10: A group of 35 immigrants from southern Asia were arrested after attempting to enter Hungary illegally from Romania, official sources said Saturday, reports AFP.

The immigrants 26 Pakistanis and 9 Bangladeshis had paid 400 dollar each to Romanians who had brought them in taxis to the frozen Maros river, between the two eastern European countries, with instructions on how to walk across, border guards told Hungarian radio.

The immigrants had been hoping to cross illegally into Austria, the border guards at Apatfalva, in southeast Hungary, said.

"There is a very dangerous moment coming and that's when the Iraqi army is defeated -- and it will be defeated -- which will set of an explosively violent reaction," said one source familiar with government thinking.

Some Arab governments were not threatened, other faced degrees of risk, he added. He named Jordan, sandwiched between Iraq and

Israel, as the most worrying case.

Allied bombing of Iraqi roads leading to Jordan, in which Jordanian tanker truck-drivers have been killed, may have worsened the predicament of King Hussein, and Saudi Arabia's denial of oil to Jordan did not take sufficient account of Amman's problems.

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It added that officials from La Cinq, who said they had believed their telephone had been disconnected earlier, closed the line immediately after learning of its abuse.

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Iraqi officials using CNN satellite phones

VIENNA, Feb 10: Iraqi officials in Baghdad have been using satellite telephones to the US Cable News Network (CNN) and a French television channel to make international calls, Austrian radio reported Saturday, says Reuter.

It said CNN had barred most other reporters from using their satellite telephone in the Iraqi capital, which is cut off from normal phone communications with the outside world.

But CNN had allowed Iraqi Information Ministry officials to use the phone to call Jordan's capital Amman to arrange visas for journalists, the radio said.

It quoted a CNN reporter in Baghdad, Peter Arnett, as saying the US television station had allowed the calls

as a favour to Iraq. The report added that a satellite telephone left behind in a Baghdad hotel by the French television channel La Cinq had also been used by Iraq.

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BEIRUT: Lebanese President Mr Elias El Harawi receiving Bangladesh Ambassador Mr MM Rezaul Karim recently in Beirut seated beside them are the Prime Minister of Lebanon and Honorary Consul of Bangladesh.