

International

Thousands of Allied troops move closer to fronts

BRIEFLY

Italy hails pullout offer: Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis welcomed Iraq's conditional offer to withdraw from Kuwait, saying it was a positive sign and contained new elements, reports Reuter.

De Michelis told reporters before meeting German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher in Paris: "It seems to be there are important new things in this offer. It is a very important and very positive sign."

He added, however, that the Iraqi proposals would have to be studied in greater detail.

Italy, France and Germany all support the US-led alliance in the Gulf.

Iraqis attack UN office: Pro Iraqi demonstrators attacked offices of the United Nations and foreign airlines in Algiers Friday when thousands of people marched through the heart of the Algerian capital in protest against the Gulf war, reports AFP.

Groups of youths attacked and looted offices of Egyptian, Syrian airlines, Alitalia and Air France. They also smashed a neon sign outside the Moroccan carrier Royal Air Maroc.

Egypt, Syria, Italy, France and Morocco are among the countries in the US-led force fighting to evict Iraq from Kuwait.

Shekhar: A hero to Nepalis: Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar is a hero to many Nepalis but a three-day official visit to Kathmandu starting on Wednesday is causing some trepidation analysts and commentators said, reports Reuter from Kathmandu.

Shekhar was one of the few Indian politicians who stood up publicly and praised the pro-democracy movement that took power last May and ended King Birendra's absolute powers.

Nepali officials said that as a result, Shekhar, Prime Minister for just three months as head of a shaky minority government, would be given an unusually warm welcome.

PLO backs Saddam's peace move: The PLO supports the Iraqi peace initiative which it believes "favours a just and balanced solution" to the Gulf crisis, the PLO information chief Yasser Abed Rabbo in Tunis said on Friday reports AFP.

Abed Rabbo, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's executive committee, said that if the war is not halted "the United States and Europe will show that their true goal is the destruction of Iraq."

Markets rally on pullout offer: European financial markets rallied briefly Friday following Iraq's offer to withdraw its forces from Kuwait, but the buying frenzy stalled as concerns surfaced over the terms of the pullout, reports AP.

Stock prices and the dollar staged a strong advance, and oil initially slid more than 2 dollars a barrel as euphoria swept the markets that the 30-day-old war might be drawing to a close.

A flurry of buying sent stock prices surging more than 3 per cent in Frankfurt in the final hour of trading, when news reached the trading floor that Iraq had agreed to a UN demand to leave Kuwait and called for an immediate cease-fire.

Iraqi offer unclear: NATO: NATO said today Iraq's offer to withdraw from Kuwait was unclear but it would be very good news for everyone if Baghdad's forces were to pull out unconditionally in line with United Nations demands, Reuter reports, from Brussels.

"We do not yet have a clear picture so it is too early to comment on it" said a spokesman for the 16-nation western alliance.

"If Iraq would comply fully and unconditionally with the UN resolutions, it would be obviously very good news for everyone. But, as yet, we do not know if this is the position of the Iraqi Government."

Earlier, Baghdad had made clear that any pullout was not unconditional, but linked to other issues, including an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Conditions concern Japan: Japan reacted with caution Friday to Iraq's statement that it was ready to quit Kuwait, saying it was concerned about the conditions attached to withdrawal.

"Our response is guarded", a Foreign Ministry official told Reuters. "We're concerned about the conditions Iraq is attaching and we're now trying to confirm them."

Government spokesman Misoji Sakamoto said Japan would only welcome Iraq's withdrawal along the lines specified by the United Nations Security Council.

"It would only be satisfactory if it met the UN conditions," he said in a televised news conference.

But he added: "This development could be a prospect (for peace) if an initiative does get under way."

Rebels kill 72 troops in Sudan: NAIROBI, Feb 16: The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels have killed 72 government troops and wounded 335 more in attacks on two army convoys in Equatoria and Bhar El Ghazal provinces, the rebels' radio SPLA claimed in a broadcast monitored in Nairobi Friday, reports AFP.

The radio said 15 trucks in the convoys were destroyed in the attacks carried out by SPLA fighters up to Thursday.

The radio said one convoy was travelling from the southern provincial capital of Juba to the besieged garrison town of Yei 140 kilometres to the southwest, while the other was moving from Wau, the administrative capital of Bhar El Ghazal.

'Iraq formidable threat to ME'

RIYADH, Feb 16: If the Gulf war ended tomorrow, Iraq would still be a formidable military power and present a threat to its Middle East neighbours, a senior US military officer has said here, reports AFP.

The officer told a background briefing here on Friday that more than four weeks of non-stop bombing by Allied warplanes had wrought "significant damage" to Saddam Hussein's military machine.

But he added that Iraq "still possesses a robust military capability" and remains a Middle East power despite the pounding it has taken in the campaign to force it out of Kuwait.

"If we were to stop the war tomorrow, he obviously is a force to be reckoned with and we should be concerned about that," said the officer, who asked not to be named.

His remarks came after the United States rejected an initiative by Baghdad to end hostilities. Allied military spokesmen said the peace feeler had no effect on their operations, which would continue unabated.

The senior US officer said that the world knew Mr Hussein was not to be trusted and "it would be foolhardy on anyone's part to just say he's defeated and he won't come around another day."

"I think his husbanding of resources throughout the civilian community so they don't get destroyed, his flying of resources to Iran, is another indication that he has in the back of his mind that he might rise again as the phoenix bird out of the ashes."

Reuters adds from Paris: Tunisia's ambassador to France said on Friday he believed Iraq's offer to withdraw from Kuwait was serious and Baghdad had accepted the principle of retreat.

"I am very happy to hear of this overture. I think this is a serious overture which should be seized and not allowed to go to waste," Ambassador Brahim Turki told French Radio.

He said the conditions in which Iraq's leadership had expressed its willingness to implement UN Resolution 660, which calls for its withdrawal from Kuwait, should not serve as a pretext to reject the offer.

These issues must absolutely not be allowed to compromise the basic principle of the principle of retreat

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Schultz was speaking a few hours before word came from Baghdad that Iraq had offered to end its six month occupation of Kuwait as part of a negotiated solution to the Gulf war linked to Middle East problems and other issues.

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offensive was not immediately known.

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But US officials, treating the Iraqi announcement with extreme caution, said the air war, now in its 30th day, would proceed until ordered to stop by their Commander-in-Chief, President George Bush.

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Off the Record

War casualties in

Israeli homes!

TEL AVIV, Feb 16: The tensions created in Israel by Scud missile attacks and the enclosure of entire families in sealed rooms and shelters have led to an increase in sexual aggression within family groups, according to experts here, reports AFP.

"Over the past month, women have been less likely to be raped by a stranger out in the street or in a car park at night, than at home, by someone in the family circle, as is happening in 70 per cent of cases" said Ramon Lusky, Director of a Tel Aviv hostel for raped women.

L. aged 17, was raped by her uncle, she sat prostrate in a chair in the hostel. The aggression took place a few minutes after the end of a Scud missile alert earlier this week in Jerusalem. Her family had taken refuge in her uncle's home after the destruction of their Tel Aviv home some weeks earlier.

"Her parents had shut themselves away in one of the rooms and L. was preparing to sleep on the sofa in the living-room", Mrs Lusky explained.

Psychologist Rina Ben Zvi described the case of a husband raping his wife in a hotel room a short while after the destruction of their home in Tel Aviv.

"This is the first war in which the men have had to stay at home instead of going out to the front", she said.

"He's stuck at home with the radio, instead of getting out there where the action is. This does nothing for his virility and he gets frustrated and irritable. All his aggressiveness is directed out onto his family group", she said.

Try Bush under

Islamic law'

BRADFORD (England): A British Muslim leader called here Thursday for US President George Bush and other allied leaders to be tried under Islamic law following the bombing of a site in Baghdad that killed Iraqi civilians, reports AFP.

President Bush and all the perpetrators of this ghastly act must be brought to justice for their actions, said Ishaq Hussain, President of the Council for Mosques in Bradford.

Some 75,000 Muslims live in this northern English city. It has the largest Muslim population in Britain.

"We demand an international Muslim court be set up and these people be tried there according to Islamic law, or Sharia," Mr Hussain said.

He described Wednesday's bombing in Baghdad as an international crime but nonetheless appealed to British Muslims to remain calm and not to retaliate against westerners.

Separately a group identifying itself as an Iraqi opposition party said Thursday that 12 Iraqi men and women were in the second day of a hunger strike at a London mosque in protest at the bombing.

They line up like

safeway on payday

OVER SAUDI ARABIA: Dozens — sometimes hundreds of little green symbols flash on a computer screen. Some inch forward toward red flashes on a map of Iraq and Kuwait; others hand back, awaiting their turn, reports AP.

Away from the swarm, to the north and west, other green symbols move about freely in more open spaces — airspace deep inside Iraq.

The computer screen, which could easily be mistaken for a fast-paced video game, is aboard a US Air Force AWACS plane high above Saudi Arabia. From this high-tech vantage point, the Air Force directs a daily ballet of sorts, tracking an allied air siege that often includes more than 200 planes airborne at one time.

On this night, as on most since the opening days of the war with Iraq, the Air Force's traffic cop in the sky is policing a crowded, but one-way, street. "All we're doing is going up there, dropping bombs and breaking all of his toys," Col. Gary A. Voelger, commander of an Oklahoma-based AWACS wing, told a visitor. "Welcome to the friendly skies."

They know bombed

'bunker' intimately

RIYADH: US intelligence has long known that the Baghdad bunker where Allied bombs killed civilians was a command and control center, American officers said Thursday, reports AP.

"We know who built it, when and what for, when it was modified," said one of the officers, who spoke on condition of anonymity.</