

Feature

Travel and Leisure

Gulf War Casts Shadow Over Thai Tourism

As a prime destination for tourists and terrorists from the Middle East, Thailand stands to suffer from fear and lost receipts in a prolonged Gulf War, according to foreign diplomats and Thai police sources.

Officials said that efforts to locate potential terrorists thought to be staying in Bangkok at the moment were continuing, but they added that an alert will remain in effect until the threat dissipates. Interior Ministry and police officials said they were working with foreign intelligence agents.

Two Iraqis were detained as "security risk suspects," said Thai officials. Iraqi officials in Bangkok downplayed the detentions as mere cases of "expired visas," but the Iraqi ambassador said it was not his country's job to try to control anti-American sentiments throughout the world.

Iraq is not in a position to ask millions of Muslims and Arabs in the world to lessen or control their hatred of the Americans," said Ambassador Monir Shihab Ahmed.

But Filipino officials said that two Iraqi terrorists who accidentally exploded a bomb on their way to a US library in Manila had come from Bangkok and were due to return to Bangkok with explosives the next day.

Authorities in that country have expelled the Iraqi consul general, Muwataq al-Ani, who was accused of assisting the bombers by dropping them in a car.

An official said the two were relatives of a former Filipino embassy official and had plans to smuggle explosive components to Bangkok tucked into rubber shoes.

The botched terrorist attack and repeated warnings by the US embassy here in Bangkok, that "bad guys" are "up to something" has cast a shadow of the city's once vibrant tourist industry and raised fears of terrorism.

The warnings and visible security precautions of troops in combat gear carrying M16 machine guns threaten to curtail the country's booming tourist trade, according to tour agents and government officials.

Throughout Asia, the Gulf War has sparked protest, debate and fears of turmoil.

Foreign tourists dislike the searches but call them a necessity, Philip Gorton

These fears are not limited to predominantly Islamic countries, but are spread throughout the region near diplomatic headquarters and tourist havens.

Thailand's massage parlours and bars have long been the rest and relaxation centre for Middle Eastern men ever since the oil boom of the 70s and 80s increased their economic clout.

In 1988, the hijacking of the Air Kuwait jetliner was planned and initiated here. Weapons were loaded onto the plane at Bangkok's Don Muang Airport.

"Terrorists, like the rest of us, see Thailand as a free country," said a Western embassy official. Many feel they can move more comfortably amidst the vast foreign population of one of Asia's most cosmopolitan cities.

In this respect, Bangkok's dilemma is not unlike that of neighbouring Manila. Both cities have limited controls on foreigners entering the country and are known as "R and R" points for Middle Eastern tourists.

When suspected terrorists do arrive in Bangkok they are usually asked cordially to leave the country, according to Thai customs officials, who have begun to body search all incoming tourists since the outbreak of the war in the Gulf.

They said foreign tourists dislike the searches, but called them a necessity.

Movement is not restricted once a foreigner enters the country and in Bangkok, a city of seven million, there are many locations to plan an attack. Most international terrorists travel under false identification, making tracing all the more difficult, according to one analyst in Bangkok.

Tracking of terrorists is carried out at an international level by Interpol, an interna-

tional police information network which keeps member forces informed of the movements of suspects.

But the terrorist threat is not limited to suspects from the Middle East because Bangkok has many Thai "hit men" willing to exercise their profession for a few hundred dollars.

In addition, the Lebanon-

based Japanese Red Army is said to be wholly supportive of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and is suspected to have slipped some of its members into Thailand over the past few weeks.

International alerts and arrest warrants for at-large members of the Red Army have been issued by Japanese police.

HOW TO CASH IN ON TOYS FOR THE BOYS

An exclusively male collectors' market for the playthings of the past has emerged in the West.

LONDON: It's time to rummage about in the attic, to raid the old toy-chest. Yesterday's playthings have become today's collectables and premium prices are being paid for toys on the art market.

On January 19, the US embassy issued a travel advisory for all of Thailand, saying that "credible" threats of a possible terrorist attack had been received.

Over the weekend 80 sites around the city were given special security. The security measures covered residential areas, banks and embassies.

Meanwhile, tour agents and government officials warned that the visible signs of a security net could act to frighten tourists who have not already fled the country.

"People are buying tickets to go home and tourists are cancelling their reservations," said Manus Surapitsitachai, the managing director of OTC Tours in Bangkok. "They feel the war will not be over early."

-Depthnews Asia.

Auto Industry Embraces Recycling Ideas

They need to protect the environment and the conserve valuable resources have begun to eclipse the days of throwaway consumption. Germany's auto-omobile industry, too, has now embraced ways of systematically taking old vehicles apart with the aim of reusing select components or at least refurbishing them.

Volvo was the first step in this direction, and now the Bayerische Motorenwerke (BMW) has taken into operation the first facility for the large-scale and complete disassembly of aging vehicles. This pilot project seeks to recycle significantly more components than has been done to date.

The aim of this major undertaking extends to the manufacture of the vehicle, where designers are to take its future processing into consideration. Environmental compatibility is the guiding concept here. The design engineer thinking of "tomorrow" is to also consider "the day after tomorrow" in light of the average vehicle life span, which may reach up to thirty years.

The major BMW project facility is now probing approaches to the proper sorting of materials in vehicles and how to recycle the components. One target is the reduction of the variety of different plastic materials used in car manufacture. The approximately 20 different kinds of plastic currently used—weigh-

ing on average about 100 kilograms—pose a sorting dilemma. For instance, the instrument panel would be easier to recycle if just one plastic were used instead of three. The pilot project will also examine time required and costs incurred in the assembly process and the earnings which can be

achieved through the refurbishment and the resale of the components.

A trial run of the procedure now involves the taking apart of the vehicle and the refurbishment of the motor unit, the rear-wheel transmission system, the ignition system, the lights, and the water pump. Following the dismant-

ling, the chassis is crushed and sent off for processing as steel.

All the remaining parts are sorted in various ways and re-conditioned. Customers for these parts range from individual buyers to industrial sectors ranging from the plastics industry to power utilities.

-INP.



A good measure of the interest of the German automobile industry in environmental protection is provided by this recycling pilot project run by BMW. Successful recycling depends on efficient ways to separate and sort distinct materials in a product. Only then is the cost-effective and meaningful re-use of components assured.

Saddam buying time for diplomatic success?

WASHINGTON, Feb 16: Iraq's proposal Friday to pull out of Kuwait amounts to a complicated bid to convert an impending military debacle into a diplomatic triumph for Saddam Hussein and Palestinian Arabs. President George Bush rejected the play.

"When I first heard the statement [of withdrawal], I must say I was happy", Bush said. "Regrettably, it seems it was a cruel hoax."

US officials were quick to point out that the offer, conditional like all previous overtures, followed many days of destructive bombing raids that led one US official to describe the Iraqi military situation as "precarious".

Rejecting the proposal outright, Bush called for "the Iraqi military" and the Iraqi people, to take matters into their own hands, to force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside.

Sen. Sam Nunn, chairman of Senate Armed Services Committee, said that "if there are conditions attached to the withdrawal, then I don't think it will go very far toward a cease-fire".

But the Iraqi offer puts pressure on Bush to keep Arab nations in the war coalition even while insisting again that their dispute with Israel over occupation of the West Bank and Gaza can be addressed only after the Gulf conflict ends.

By reiterating that Iraq must pull out of Kuwait unconditionally, the White House held fast to its refusal to link the war to Israel's hold on the territories and their Palestinian inhabitants.

"Not only was the Iraq statement full of old unacceptable conditions, but Saddam Hussein has added new conditions", Bush said.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the other Arab nations in the coalition are under pressures of their own. While diplomats try to keep the war and the Arab-Israeli dispute separate, Saddam has managed to link them in the minds of millions of Palestinians and other Arabs.

The Iraqi president has had considerable success in the streets and in the bazaars in converting his annexation of

AP News Analysis

Kuwait into a rallying cry for Israel to yield the territory to Palestinian control.

While US Secretary of State James A. Baker III has said repeatedly that no one believes Saddam invaded Kuwait to help the Palestinians, the logic of his argument is lost on the multitudes for whom the Iraqi president is now a folk hero.

They have forced King Hussein of Jordan to risk his strong ties with Washington by denouncing the allied war effort and espousing solidarity with Iraq. And they could make it very hard for king

Fahd of Saudi Arabia and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to keep fighting—and keep risking more Arab lives—now that Saddam has offered to pull out if Israel will do the same.

Saddam's other condition—that the United States withdraw its military forces from the area—could expose the region to a resurgence of Iraqi power despite the losses Iraq has suffered.

Allied bombardments have taken a heavy toll of Saddam's armories, especially his deadly Scud missile launchers. But he retains a powerful army and

more tanks than Britain and France combined.

Even so, the White House's abrupt dismissal of the Iraqi leader's initiative drew some dissent.

"This may or may not be the break we're looking for," said Democratic Sen. Paul Simon. "But we should be open to negotiate if Iraq is ready to negotiate."

And former Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy, a specialist in Arab affairs, said: "I think we have a big break in Iraqi policy here, as of today. Iraq has listed a number of things which it sees linked to their complete and unconditional withdrawal."

CBS crew held in Baghdad

NEW YORK, Feb 16: CBS News Reporter Bob Simon and his three-man crew, who disappeared in the northern Saudi desert last month, have been held in Baghdad for two weeks, CNN reported Friday, says AP.

The crew was reported missing at the Kuwaiti border on Jan 21, four days after the war started. Cable News Network quoted what it called "reliable sources" as saying the fate of the crew would be decided by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

The four were picked up by an Iraqi military jeep patrol in a remote part of the Kuwait border, said CNN correspondent Peter Arnett, reporting from Iraq. They "are still being investigated by the Iraqi intelligence service to determine the full circumstances of their capture," he said.

Arnett said that, "apparently, there are three categories they can fall under: innocents who could be released, prisoners of war or spies."

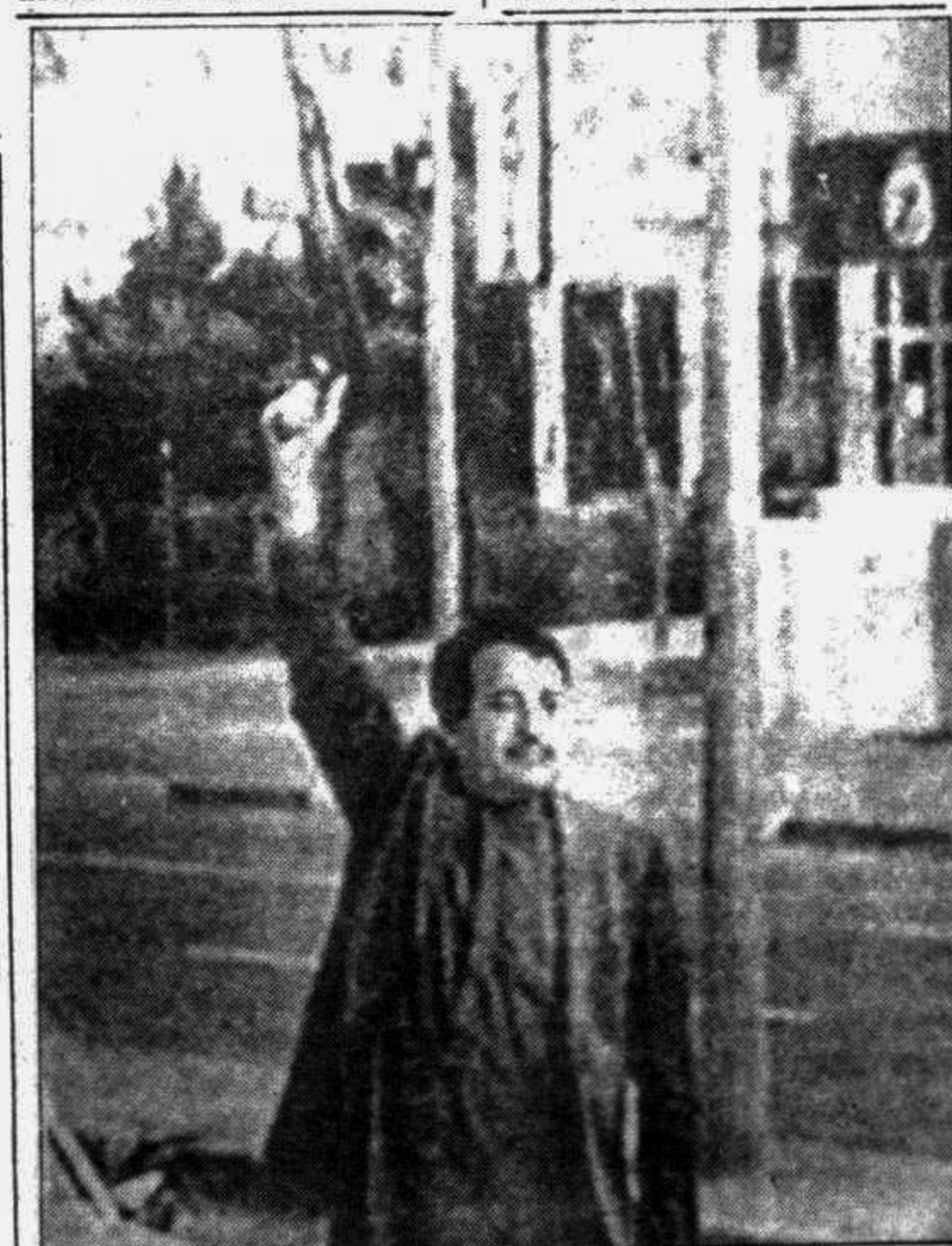
"I am told that President Saddam Hussein will personally determine the outcome of the cases. He has apparently been forwarded the many appeals sent to Baghdad on behalf of the CBS staffers."

Three of the crew were wearing military uniforms to pass by Saudi checkpoints in the guise of American soldiers, Arnett said he was told.

"They said they wanted to get closer to Kuwait than was permitted at the time," the crew told investigators, according to Arnett.

Along with Simon, the missing crew members are producer Peter Bluff, cameraman Roberto Alvarez and soundman Juan Caldera.

Arnett said he was told the crew was being held in a district of the city near the former residence of the U.S. Embassy Marine guards.



WASHINGTON: In this still frame taken from a Cable News Network (CNN), television broadcast, an unidentified Iraqi citizen fires a gun into the air on February 15 as people in Baghdad celebrate an announcement that Iraq is prepared to withdraw from Kuwait according to UN Security Council Resolution 660. The Iraqi announcement linked the withdrawal to a number of conditions. -Photo AFP/UNB.

Gulf crisis

Iraqi offer a step towards peace: Iran

NICOSIA, Feb 16: Iran's Foreign Ministry said Friday that the Iraqi proposal to resolve the Gulf War was "a step towards peace," the Iranian news agency reported, reports AP.

The agency also said Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, Saoudun Hammadi, was to arrive in Tehran late Friday to discuss the proposal with Iranian officials.

In a communique issued in Baghdad, Iraq's ruling Revolutionary Command Council said for the first time that it was prepared to abide by the United Nations demand to withdraw from Kuwait. But the council listed a series of conditions which it said should be met as part of the deal.

American analysts say

Saddam's offer to demoralise Iraqis

WASHINGTON, Feb 16: Iraq's conditional offer to withdraw its troops from Kuwait is seen by experts and diplomats here as a sign of weakness, reports AP.

"It is most likely a sign of weakness", Marvin Feuerwerker, an analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said.

The offer was designed to split the 28-nation coalition seeking to drive Iraqi forces from Kuwait, he said, expressing surprise that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had not resorted to such a ploy earlier.

However, key Arab members of the anti-Iraq coalition—Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia rejected Baghdad's proposal as unacceptable.

The Soviet Union a former close ally of Iraq reacted more favorably to the initiative.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev expressed "satisfaction and hope" at Iraq's offer, which the Iraqi news agency said was a response to Soviet diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful settlement to the month-old war.

"They [Soviets] don't want to jeopardise their relations with US, said Mr. Feuerwerker. "They cannot make us stop bombing. They cannot stop the war."

A State Department official said in Moscow: "I don't think they can do anything."

The conditions Baghdad attached "were so outrageous", said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Mr. Hussein was acting "as if he'd won the war", he added.

Iraq offered to quit Kuwait in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from its occupied territories and the pullout, within a month, of all foreign forces from the Gulf region.

Among other conditions, it insisted on the payment of reparations by the allies for the destruction of Iraq.

draw from Kuwait immediately. However, that resolution states that any withdrawal must be unconditional.

"It could be a sign of potential greater weakness", said the State Department official. In addition, it "could be demoralising for the people of Iraq" who would wonder why their country was again at war after a fruitless eight-year conflict with Iran.

Baghdad surrendered all the territorial gains it had achieved in the 1980-1988

conflict in a bid to curry favour from Tehran when it became apparent the US-led coalition would fight.

One western diplomat said Iraq's reference for the first time since the August 2 invasion to a possible withdrawal from Kuwait signalled that Iraq was in trouble.

But, said the diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity, it is too early to tell if Baghdad aims to win over the Soviets, divide the allied coalition or simply cut a deal.

Bomb hurled at Egyptian embassy:

LIMA, Feb 16: Leftist rebels protesting the Gulf War hurled a home-made bomb at the Egyptian Embassy in Lima on Friday, causing significant damage to the building but no casualties, police said, reports AP.

Authorities blamed the Tupaca Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and said it was the 12th attack carried out by that group since the war broke out January 17.

In the latest incident a bomb was thrown from a moving car at the Egyptian mission in the well-to-do San Isidro District of Lima. The blast damaged the front of the building and shattered windows in neighbouring ones.

The MRTA, one of Peru's two main leftist insurgent groups, has declared support for Iraq as it fights off the US-led coalition.

Iraqi offer outcome of Allied pressure: Israel

JERUSALEM, Feb 16: Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens said Iraq's conditional offer on Friday to leave Kuwait showed President Saddam Hussein was starting to feel pressure from the Gulf allied forces, reports Reuter.

"I don't want to give a reaction until I read what is there and what isn't there, but I think it should be clear that Saddam Hussein has begun to understand that his condition is difficult", Arens told Israel Television.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said earlier there was broad international agreement that Saddam and his war machine had to be removed to ensure Middle East peace.

"I understand that there is no difference of views about it," Shamir said.

"Everybody who is involved in this confrontation realises that if they are really interested in bringing peace to this area, all this war machine and its masters have to be removed from the area," he said.

Shamir spoke in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation hours before Iraq offered to withdraw from Kuwait in return for a series of concessions by Israel and the US-led coalition.

The Iraqi statement linked its withdrawal from Kuwait with an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Golan Heights and South Lebanon.

Former Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin said the Iraqi announcement was no different from conditions set 10 days after its invasion of Kuwait last August.