

# Bush orders Schwarzkopf to extend hammer blows

WASHINGTON, Feb 24: President George Bush announced late Saturday night that a massive ground assault had begun to oust Iraq from Kuwait, and said he was confident coalition forces would "swiftly and decisively accomplish their mission."

A well-placed Defense Department official said, "this is the end game."

The president said the decision to move into a new phase of the Gulf War came after extensive consultations with coalition leaders who have committed forces to reverse Iraq's Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait.

"Regrettably, the noon deadline passed with no hint of an Iraqi withdrawal, Bush said.

Bush, speaking in a 10 pm (0300 GMT Sunday) internationally-televised address, said he had directed Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf "to use all forces available, including ground forces, to eject the Iraqi army from Kuwait."

I ask only that all of you stop what you are doing and say a prayer for all the coalition forces... who this very moment are risking their lives for their country and for all of us," he said.

No details of the fighting were immediately available, and Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said such information would not be released "for many more hours."

"Everything we say about the operation from this point for war... would increase the likelihood that the military forces of Iraq could learn more about our operation," he said.

Cheney said the daily briefings by military officials in Washington and Saudi Arabia would be suspended until further notice.

Cheney said the "combined air, land and sea campaign" had been "carefully planned to force Iraq out of Kuwait with a minimum number of casualties." Just hours after the attacks began, he said he had no indication of the extent of Iraqi resistance.

But he added: "This is a major military operation against a well-equipped, well-fortified opponent. I would not want to underestimate the difficulty of the task at all."

Another Defense Department source said allied



ground units "crossed the starting line together."

In London, Paris and Riyadh, key allies confirmed the ground war was under way.

Arab military sources in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, said some 250 Iraqis surrendered in first hour and resistance by the Iraqis was not stiff.

The long-planned, long-awaited assault came 38 days after the United States and 32 coalition nations launched round-the-clock air attacks to weaken the 500,000-man Iraqi army.

There were quick cries of support from US lawmakers.

"I pray this will be a quick and decisive victory with as few casualties as possible," said Sen. Bob Dole, who lost use of an arm in World War II combat.

Outside the White House, where the president lives and works, about 100 demonstrators gathered. Their signs spelled out their position on the month-old war: "We're in - let's win" and, "No more Vietnams."

In the hectic hours after the deadline, hopes of a last-minute Iraqi withdrawal rose and then fell because of diplomatic maneuvering at the United Nations.

As the U.S. deadline neared, the Soviet Union told the

Security Council that Iraq's Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, had found "favourable elements" in U.S. proposals to end the war.

But after studying his remarks, the White House dismissed as meaningless Baghdad's last-minute comment on the Soviet peace plan and U.S. counter-proposals aimed at averting what may be the largest ground combat since World War Two.

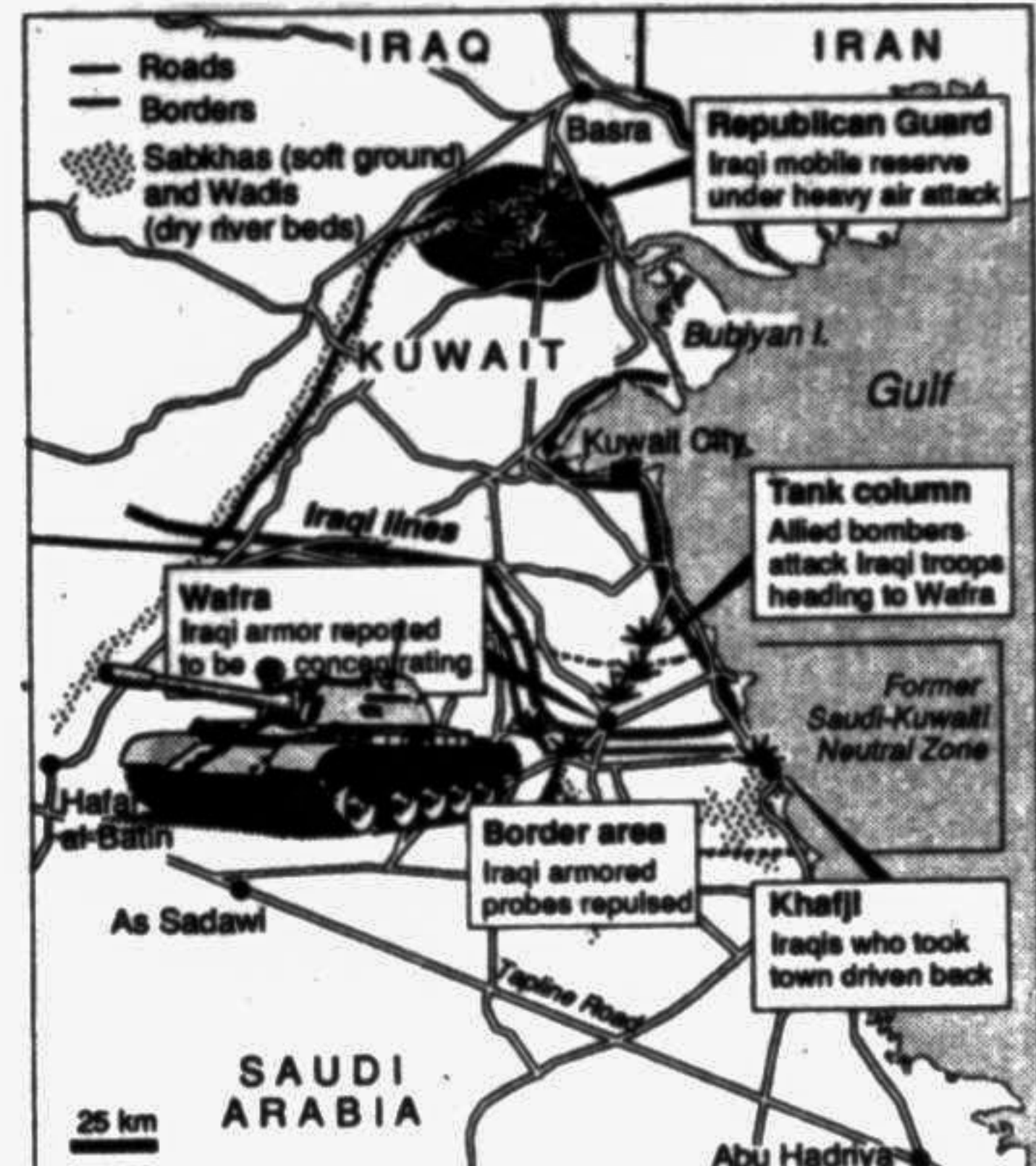
The Soviet plan was unacceptable because it did not constitute an unequivocal commitment to an immediate and unconditional withdrawal as required by U.N. Security Council Resolution 660, Stephen Hart, a White House spokesman, said.

Within minutes of the White House rejection, senior Pentagon officials said authorization had been given to commanders on the ground to launch at their discretion a massive ground offensive to oust Iraq's troops from Kuwait.

"The way is certainly clear for the military to take whatever... options they feel are necessary," said one senior Defense Department official, who asked not to be identified.

But the defence official and the White House refused to say when the U.S.-led coalition might launch a ground war that would involve more than one million allied and Iraqi forces.

Bush was monitoring devel-



opments at the presidential retreat at Camp David with Secretary of State James Baker and was in contact with several world leaders, including Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The president set the 1700 GMT Saturday deadline on Friday, demanding that Iraq start pulling out of Kuwait unconditionally under threat of an allied ground assault and complete its withdrawal within a week.

## Iraqi army chief a political man

NICOSIA, Feb 24: General Hussein Al-Rashid Al-Takriti, named Chief of Staff of the Iraqi army last November, is considered a "political officer," unlike his predecessor who had made his career in the military, reports AFP.

Gen Takriti was appointed to head the Iraqi army last November, following the sudden removal of General Nizar Abdel Karim Al-Khazraji, who had distinguished himself in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988.

Iraqi authorities provided little information on the background of Gen. Takriti, although it is known he had commanded the country's elite Republican Guard Troops, charged with protecting President Saddam Hussein, along with Baghdad and its suburbs.

The nomination of the head of the guards, who operates under direct orders from President Hussein, to the leadership of the regular army is likely to have come at the expense of traditional officers.

## Baghdad Radio ignores war

NICOSIA, Feb 24: Baghdad Radio's news bulletin today made no mention of the start of the Gulf ground offensive, three hours after it began, reports Reuter.

The lead item in the 7 a.m. (1000 BST) bulletin was a statement on Saturday night by Izzat Ibrahim, Vice-Chairman of the Revolution Command Council.

## War of words at UN

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 24: Kuwait's UN Ambassador said he hoped that the ground war launched by the US-led coalition today in the Gulf would be short and his people would "feel the taste of freedom" once again, reports Reuter.

The envoy, Mohammad Abul Hasan, told reporters late on Saturday in New York he had not been in touch with the Kuwaiti leadership for several hours, but his last information was that the Iraqis were destroying public buildings and killing civilians in Kuwait.

Coalition forces launched the ground war after Iraq ignored a 1700 GMT deadline to get its forces out of Kuwait. Abul Hasan said of the ground war: "I hope it is a short one... I have a feeling of relief that we will finish this episode. The people of Kuwait at least will feel the taste of freedom once again."

A spokesman for Iraq's embassy to the United Nations, in Baghdad's first reaction to the start of a ground war in the Gulf, said his country would never surrender.

"Iraq will never surrender. A lot of Americans will die also," the spokesman told the Cable News Network.

Abul Hasan on Friday and on Saturday sent letters to Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar charging that Iraqi forces were setting fires and explosions in the Kuwait city centre.

He said the Iraqis were arresting people in the streets and taking them to unknown locations and that some young people had been murdered.

Abul Hasan was at the United Nations for discussions with Security Council President Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, who was seeing ambassadors in preparation for late-night council consultations.

## Saddam keeps his army entrenched in Kuwait

BAGHDAD, Feb 24: President Saddam Hussein defied an American ultimatum on Saturday, keeping the Iraqi army entrenched in conquered Kuwait. Baghdad insisted milder, Soviet-sponsored terms were the only way to end the Gulf war, reports Reuter.

Iraq launched a fresh missile attack on Israel. It said its frontline troops were ready to "strike where it hurts" and send their enemies tumbling "into the great crater of death."

With the United States and its Allies pounding the Kuwait war zone in preparation for a ground assault that could be hours away, President George Bush's 1700 GMT deadline elapsed with the Baghdad area rocking under bomb blasts.

Citizens of the capital, who have endured 38 days of America's high-tech air war, crouched in bomb shelters, listening to radios for news from a full meeting of the country's leadership.

About two hours after the deadline, Izzat Ibrahim, Vice-Chairman of the ruling Revolution Command Council, told the Iraqi news agency: "The American ultimatums are aggressive and we don't heed them."

"We are at war and the air and land aggression continues, there is no way for whoever wants to stop the war except to support the Soviet initiative."

Bush demanded that Iraq announce by mid-day Washington time that its troops would leave Kuwait within a week. The Soviet terms offered 21 days and would have lifted a UN Security Council blockade when Baghdad complied.

Nothing announced in Baghdad explained a last-minute flutter of excitement at UN Headquarters in New York when the Soviet Union reported what seemed a new concession from Iraqi Foreign

## 65,000 troops to guard Nepali elections

KATHMANDU, Feb 24: Nepal's Election Commission is preparing to deploy more than 65,000 security personnel, policemen and civilians to keep the peace during the country's May 12 general elections, officials here said, reports AFP.

The commission had also approved the election symbols of the country's 44 political parties and was to name election officers for the poll for the 205-member house of representatives officials said.

Political analysts here said Nepal's largest democratic party, the Nepali Congress, faced a two-pronged attack from Rightist parties and the United Left Front.

The analysts predicted the greatest threat to the Nepal Congress would come from the recently merged Marxist and Leninist faction of the Nepal Communist party.

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## US suspends assistance Thai polls within 6 months under caretaker govt

BANGKOK, Feb 24: Thailand's coup leaders said today they would hold national elections within six months and appoint a caretaker government to supervise the polls, reports Reuter.

Army Chief General Suchinda Kraprayoon told a news conference the day after ousting Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan in a bloodless coup that the armed forces had no intention of retaining power.

"We decided to take over because we could not allow large-scale corruption to drag on," Suchinda said.

AFP adds: A powerful Thai military commander said on Sunday that the junta which seized power in a military coup here Saturday was planning to step down within six months.

"We plan to return power to the people as soon as possible. I hope we can do that within six months," General Suchinda Kraprayoon told a press conference.

Gen. Suchinda, 57, who as army commander is believed to be the most powerful military chief among generals who seized power on Saturday, pledged that ousted Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan would not be harmed.

He confirmed that 71-year-old Chatichai was being held "under protection in a safe place."

"We are not going to harm him. We have known each other for a long time," Gen. Suchinda said.

Questioned on whether Mr. Chatichai, whom military leaders have accused of corruption, could go on trial, he said: "We don't know at this point. That remains to be discussed."

Gen. Suchinda said the military was "in full control" following the coup.

He said a new constitution was to be put together, with measures "to prevent vote-buying and stop corrupt politicians from coming to power."

The general said there were no plans to abolish political parties.

He said Thailand's constitutional monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, was "very kind" during a meeting with the coup leaders Saturday.

The leader of the junta, supreme commander Sunthorn Kongsompong, Gen. Suchinda and other military chiefs flew to the northern city of Chiang Mai to meet the monarch there on Saturday, a few hours after seizing power.

The king, who has been instrumental in efforts to set Thailand on the path to quasi-democracy "told us not to disappoint the people," Gen. Suchinda said.

Another reports says: The United States suspended economic and military aid to Thailand on Saturday following a military coup there.

State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler in Washington said in a statement the decision was designed to express US opposition to and condemnation of the overthrow of a democratically elected government.

## Off the Record

### And now a breast milk bank

BOMBAY: For many babies in this western Indian city the country's most affluent and industrialised, the wet nurse is a bank, reports Sharmila Joshi of IPS.

India's first breast milk bank is located at the government run Lokmanya Tilak Hospital in East Bombay where over 7,000 babies are born every year.

Most of the babies who are born premature or whose mothers are too weak to breastfeed are given milk from the bank instead of powdered baby foods which large numbers of urban Indian women mistakenly believe is the modern way of feeding.

"We make sure every baby born here gets mother's milk," said Dr Armida Fernandez, Professor of Neo-Natology, who started the bank a little over a year ago.

Over 30 lactating women, some of whose babies are not feeding, donate milk to the bank daily.

"If a child needs milk and another woman has some extra, she rarely refuses," said Fernandez.

She added that when the bank first started, they were able to collect only one litre of milk a month. Today they get the same amount in 24 hours.

The milk is stored either at room temperature for a maximum of six or kept refrigerated for 24 hours. Some milk is also frozen so its shelf life is prolonged for three months.

The bank maintains stocks of 15 litres of breast milk in different categories.

### Readers' credulity taxed

SYDNEY: With vampirism, mind control, satanism and multiple personalities, the story of the death of Edward Baldock might have taxed readers' credulity - if it had been fiction, reports AP.

But it unfolded over nearly three weeks in Brisbane Supreme Court.

Three women were accused of being accessories to the 1989 murder of Baldock, a 47-year-old road paver and father of five. The purported vampire, 25-year-old student Tracey Wigginton, pleaded guilty to murder two weeks before the trial started and is serving a life sentence.

On Friday, her lover, Lisa Ptashinski, was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison. Kim Jervis, a 25-year-old phototechnician, was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to 18 years. Jervis' lover, Tracey Waugh, 23, was acquitted.

According to friends, videotaped statements to police and interviews with psychiatrists, what started as a night sipping champagne at a club ended with the four women cruising in Wigginton's car, looking for a victim.

They picked up a drunken Baldock - his blood-alcohol level was 0.31 percent, six times the legal driving limit - and drove him to a deserted Yacht Club.

Wigginton took a knife and made her three companions wait behind as she went with Baldock. She returned shortly and said she needed help. Ptashinski took a knife from Jervis, but said she could not stab Baldock, who was sitting nude on a river bank.

Wigginton then took both knives and ripped into the man. Pathologist Dr. Charles Naylor testified Baldock suffered 15 wounds to the back of the neck, a 15-centimeter (six-inch) cut across the throat and chest wounds.

Although no one saw Wigginton "feed," Waugh later told police she smelled blood on her breath.

Jervis described Wigginton as looking "almost satisfied... like a person would look if they had just sat down to a three-course dinner."

### An incredible fish

SYDNEY: A small fish which survives hot Australian summers by digging into the ground and waiting for rain has been discovered in western Australia, reports Reuter.

Doctor Gery Allen, Senior Curator of Fish at the West Australian Museum, said the fish, which he believed to be unique, had extraordinary survival techniques.

As its pool of water evaporates, the tubular fish adapts to very acid water and water temperatures of up to 32 degrees Celsius (90 degrees Fahrenheit).

When the fresh water starts to disappear completely, the salamander fish - which unlike the salamander amphibian does not have lungs - burrows into the detritus at the bottom of the pool, going deeper as the moisture above it disappears.

"It's an incredible fish," Allen said by telephone from Perth. "We were studying three pools which had completely dried out and there were no fish to be seen. We were not sure whether they had been eaten or what."

"We went down again within 24 hours of it raining and the pools were teeming with fish."

### Journalists to get pension

NEW DELHI: All India Newspaper Editors' Conference (AINEC) on Saturday welcomed the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to grant pension to retired journalists above the age of 60 and other benefits to working journalists at district level, reports PTI.

In a statement, the AINEC said that this being a long standing demand of journalists all over the country, the central government and other state governments should take similar steps.

### Iraq sets 179 Kuwaiti oil wells on fire

RIYADH, Feb 24: Iraq has set ablaze more Kuwaiti oil wells and satellite pictures show at least 179 burning, the U.S. military said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

"One hundred and seventy-nine wells was what our count was this morning. The smoke is obscuring some of the others. The truth is there are probably more than that burning," a senior U.S. military source said.

U.S. President George Bush accused Baghdad on Friday of starting fires among Kuwait's 950 oil wells as part of a scorched earth policy.

He set a 1700 GMT deadline for Iraq to start withdrawing its occupation force or face an allied ground offensive.

Iraq has denied sabotage and called for a United Nations backed investigation.

U.S. military spokesman Brigadier General Richard Neal said on Friday "well over 140 oil wells had been set ablaze, most in the previous 24 hours. He said Iraq was systematically destroying other oil facilities.

"We're as certain as we can be those are 179 wellheads that are burning, with technical analysts looking at the satellite imagery," one military source said.

Pentagon officials said the fires were mainly in the southern part of Kuwait but extended all the way north to the disputed Rumailah oil field near the border with Iraq.

British and U.S. pilots said the smoke was hampering their ability to pick out Iraqi targets.

Greasy, black smoke blotted out the sun over the Emirate and spread south to parts of Saudi Arabia.

### Tareq Aziz's son named after Saddam

BAGHDAD, Feb 24: Iraq's messenger of war or peace, Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz is a Westernised intellectual and shrewd diplomatic negotiator, regarded as unquestioningly loyal to President Saddam Hussein, reports Reuter.

In contrast with the Muslim party officials and military officers who dominate Iraq's ruling circle, Aziz is Christian, speaks fluent English, has an ironic sense of humour and prefers to wear smart civilian suits. He is fond of Havana cigars.

But diplomats say that while Aziz, 54, is at ease among Westerners he is more a suave envoy of his President than a foreign policy strategist in his own right.

The third of Aziz's three sons is named Saddam.

## BRIEFLY

### 'Iraq's position changing':

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's spokesman in Moscow said on Saturday that Iraq's position on demands by the US-led coalition for an immediate withdrawal from Kuwait was changing, reports Reuter.

The differences between the US and Soviet positions on the issue were not great, spokesman Vitaly Ignatenko told a news briefing after a 1700 GMT US deadline for the start of an Iraqi pullout expired unheeded.

### Major-Bush talks :

British Prime Minister John Major and US President George Bush had a 20-minute conversation by telephone shortly after the deadline for Iraq to start withdrawing from Kuwait passed 1700 GMT Saturday, Downing Street said, reports Xinhua from London.

A Downing Street official gave no details of the Bush-Major telephone conversation and refused to comment on whether the two leaders discussed the timing of a possible ground war.

### US free to continue war :

US Secretary of State James Baker told Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh on Saturday that Iraq had not complied with a US ultimatum to leave Iraq and Washington therefore felt free to continue the war, reports Reuter.

Bessmertnykh called Baker at the US Presidential retreat a few hours after the ultimatum expired, a US State Department official in Washington said.

They spoke for less than half an hour. To the official's knowledge, Bessmertnykh did not ask the United States to delay a ground offensive against Iraqi forces in Kuwait.

### UK voters to continue war :

Seventy one per cent of British voters believe the Gulf war should be pursued until Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is either killed or overthrown, according to a Sunday newspaper opinion poll, reports Reuter from London.

But only 37 per cent of people surveyed for the independent on Sunday wanted a ground war to start at once, while 51 per cent wanted peace talks to continue.

The National Markets Research Poll said 73 per cent thought the Allies were right to reject a Soviet peace plan to end the war, while 17 per cent believed it should have been accepted. The remaining 10 per cent did not know.

### Bid to blow up UN office:

Militants made an abortive attempt to blow up the United Nations military observers' group office in Srinagar by firing rockets on it and killed two more persons, while 31 suspected subverters, including nine Pak trained militants were arrested in Kashmir valley during the last 24 hours, reports PTI.

The Muslim Education Trust at Sopore, a state road transport corporation vehicle, a structure in Badgam, the Congress (I) office at Baramulla and a house suffered extensive damages in acts of arson and bomb explosions during the same period, official sources said Saturday.

### Thatcher to quit Commons :

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who was forced to resign after a revolt from within the Conservative party last November, will retire from the House of Commons at the next General Election, the Sunday times newspaper says, reports Xinhua.

The Sunday newspaper quotes close aides to Mrs Thatcher as saying that they were convinced that she will tell the Annual Meeting of her Conservative Association that she is standing down after 31 years as an MP.

Mrs Thatcher was the Conservative Party leader for 15 years and the Prime Minister for 11 years.



A FLASHBACK: Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan (L) poses with Supreme Commander Gen Sunthorn Kongsompong (C) and army Chief General Suchinda Kraprayoon at a luncheon hosted by Gen. Sunthorn Jan 15, 91. Supreme Commander Sunthorn Kongsompong announced on television Feb 23 that Thailand's Armed Forces had staged a coup to topple Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan. - AFP/UNB Photo