

BRIEFLY

18 killed in Mexico : At least 18 people were killed and more than 50 injured on Monday in a fiery crash on a highway in central Mexico, police said, reports Reuter.

Two speeding passenger buses ploughed into the back of a slow-moving lorry, highway police said.

The lorry, which was carrying paint and volatile industrial chemicals, burst into flames and engulfed the buses in a ball of fire, a police spokesman said.

Accord on US bases near : Negotiators are close to concluding an agreement on US military bases in the Philippines, Philippine Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus said in Washington Monday, reports AFP.

He told reporters that negotiators "are not too far apart" on a base agreement, but added that one issue still unresolved following his meeting with Secretary of State James Baker concerned the US payment schedule.

"It's not the number now that are bothering US. It's the question of regularity," he said.

Mr. Manglapus said he expected the base negotiations, which adjourned here last month without a settlement, would be concluded by the end of the month.

Bush, Mitterrand to meet soon : US President George Bush and French President Francois Mitterrand will meet on the French Caribbean island of Martinique on March 14, the French Presidency said in Paris on Monday, reports Reuter.

A statement from Mitterrand's Elysee palace said the two leaders would have informal talks and lunch together. It gave no other details.

Mitterrand, whose country was part of the Allied coalition against Iraq, proposed on Sunday that heads of government of members of the UN Security Council should meet to discuss restoring peace to the Middle East after the Gulf war.

Iran for Gulf security : Iran's President Hashemi Rafsanjani Monday called on France and other European states to help restore security in the Gulf, but earned them against "imposing" a regional arrangement, reports AP.

In a telephone conversation with French President Francois Mitterrand, Rafsanjani stressed that "regional problems should be solved in the region and by countries there," the Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

He added that "any plan to be dictated by outsiders is doomed to fail," said the news agency, monitored in Nicosia.

"France and other European states could make efforts for a speedy restoration of peace and tranquillity in the region," Rafsanjani said.

The news agency said Rafsanjani made similar comments in a telephone conversation Sunday with Italian Prime Minister Gioglio Andreotti Sunday.

Clashes kill 16 in Salvador : Bloody clashes between Government troops and leftist rebels left at least 16 dead and more than 10 wounded, officially announced in San Salvador Monday, reports AFP.

The Armed Forces Press Committee said eight rebels were killed and six others were injured in combat against the elite Atlacatl army battalion, in the northern province of Chalatenango.

One soldier lost his life and four others were wounded in fighting there, the committee's report said.

The fighting followed the army's location of a guerrilla camp. Rebels of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) declared a five day truce as of last Saturday in honour of the late leftist opposition leader Guillermo Ungo, but warned FMLN units would fight if the army moved into areas under their control.

Soviet plane hijacker dies : A man tried to hijack a Soviet aircraft to Sweden by threatening the crew with a grenade, but was thwarted and ignited the device at Leningrad Airport, severely injuring himself, the KGB security police in Moscow said on Monday, reports Reuter.

Soviet television said he later died. The KGB quoted by Tass news agency, named the hijacker as Alexander Dubovtsev, 32. Tass said the man threatened the crew of the AN-24 Aeroflot plane with an anti-tank grenade on a flight from archange in the Soviet far north to Leningrad.

After the captain landed the plane in Leningrad, the hijacker was persuaded to let the passengers leave.

Baker to visit ME, Europe : US Secretary of State James Baker will leave for a nine-day tour of the Middle East and Europe to "listen to" regional leaders about what they have to say on Post-War Security Arrangements in the Gulf, a senior US official said in Brussels at a NATO meeting Monday, reports AFP.

"Baker is going to listen, there is no American initiative," Raymond Seitz, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, told ambassadors of Allied nations in a briefing on the situation in the Gulf.

Mr. Seitz was speaking in the company of Henry Rowen, Assistant Secretary of Defence, and other Pentagon officials.

Powell getting status of Eisenhower

WASHINGTON, Mar 5 : The Gulf War could set General Colin Powell, the first black to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on the same path as a war hero from another war, former President Dwight Eisenhower, reports AFP.

Just as General Eisenhower helped lead the Allies to victory against Adolf Hitler, Gen Powell was a driving force in defeating the

troops of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, a man President George Bush has often compared to the German dictator.

A recent NBC television poll said one American in two would vote for Gen Powell as the country's next vice President, compared to about one in four who would back Vice President Dan Quayle for another term.

To date, Mr Bush has done nothing to indicate he would consider replacing his second-in-command with the 53-year-old military man, nor has Gen Powell shown any inclination for political life.

But given the general's popularity following the Gulf War victory, analysts say a step into the Vice Presidency could put him into the shoes of the commander-in-chief himself.

This son of Jamaican immigrants is indeed holding a winning hand. His first ace in the hole, of course, is the decisive victory in the Gulf, though he has insisted the glory go to the commander of US forces in the Gulf, General Norman Schwarzkopf.

And though he won't reveal his political affiliation and has tried to stay out of the limelight, Gen Powell's tenure as National Security Adviser to Ronald Reagan showcased his political fitness as well as the military powers.

The general's impressive management style and humanity have been celebrated by comrades from his days in Vietnam and elsewhere, and his



Izzat Ibrahim asks rebels to show loyalty to Saddam

NICOSIA, Mar 5 : The Deputy Chairman of Iraq's ruling Revolution Command Council on Monday told officials from two eastern provinces which Tehran-based rebels say they control that they must show their loyalty to President Saddam Hussein, reports Reuter.

Baghdad Radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said Izzat Ibrahim told governors and officials from the eastern provinces of Maysan and Wasit they should rise to major challenges facing the government.

"You must raise your awareness and determination to the level that corresponds to the requirements of the phase of major challenges," he told a meeting.

"Firmness, honour and manliness require us as Iraqis to express our loyalty to, and deep belief in this great glory and deep-rooted tradition, and in its symbol — the leader of the march," the radio quoted

Unconfirmed rebel sources said on Tuesday Izzat Ibrahim and another Baath Party strongman Taha Yasin Ramadhan were killed by President Saddam Hossain.

Ibrahim as saying. Rebels trying to topple Saddam following the defeat of his army in Kuwait last week by the United States and its allies said on Monday they had seized Iraq's second city Basra and five southern Iraqi towns.

Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim told reporters in Tehran that the captured towns included Al Amarah, capital of Maysan, and Al Kut, capital of Wasit.

The radio said Ibrahim met the governors of Wasit and Maysan, the secretaries of regional Baath Party branches, the commander of the first army corps and officials in charge of internal security in the two governorates.

"I tell you 'that the state of great pride embellished by this grand victory achieved



Izzat Ibrahim against the most tyrannical forces of evil and crime in the world, is a great honour of us, but martyrdom for its sake is a greater honour," Ibrahim told them.

Monday he wanted to heal the wounds of the Gulf war and insisted US anger was aimed only at Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, who faces mounting unrest at home because of war losses.

"We are a generous nation and we've got a lot to do now... to heal the wounds", Bush said. "Our argument has never been with the people of Iraq".

He said Americans felt no bitterness with "those hapless Iraqi soldiers sent to a fate they did not even know was in store for them".

"Our argument has been with Saddam Hussein. Our argument has been with a dictator who created aggression against Kuwait". Bush told a gathering of veterans' groups.

Bush's remarks came shortly after White House spokesman Martin Fitzwater said internal opposition to Saddam has reached an unprecedented level.

Rebels trying to oust Saddam claimed on Monday they had seized Basra and five other southern Iraqi towns. Separate Kurdish opponents claimed they had seized a city 160 miles (260 km) northeast of Baghdad.

Fitzwater, who called the release of 10 allied prisoners of war, including six Americans, a positive development, said the United States had no role in directly fuelling the unrest.

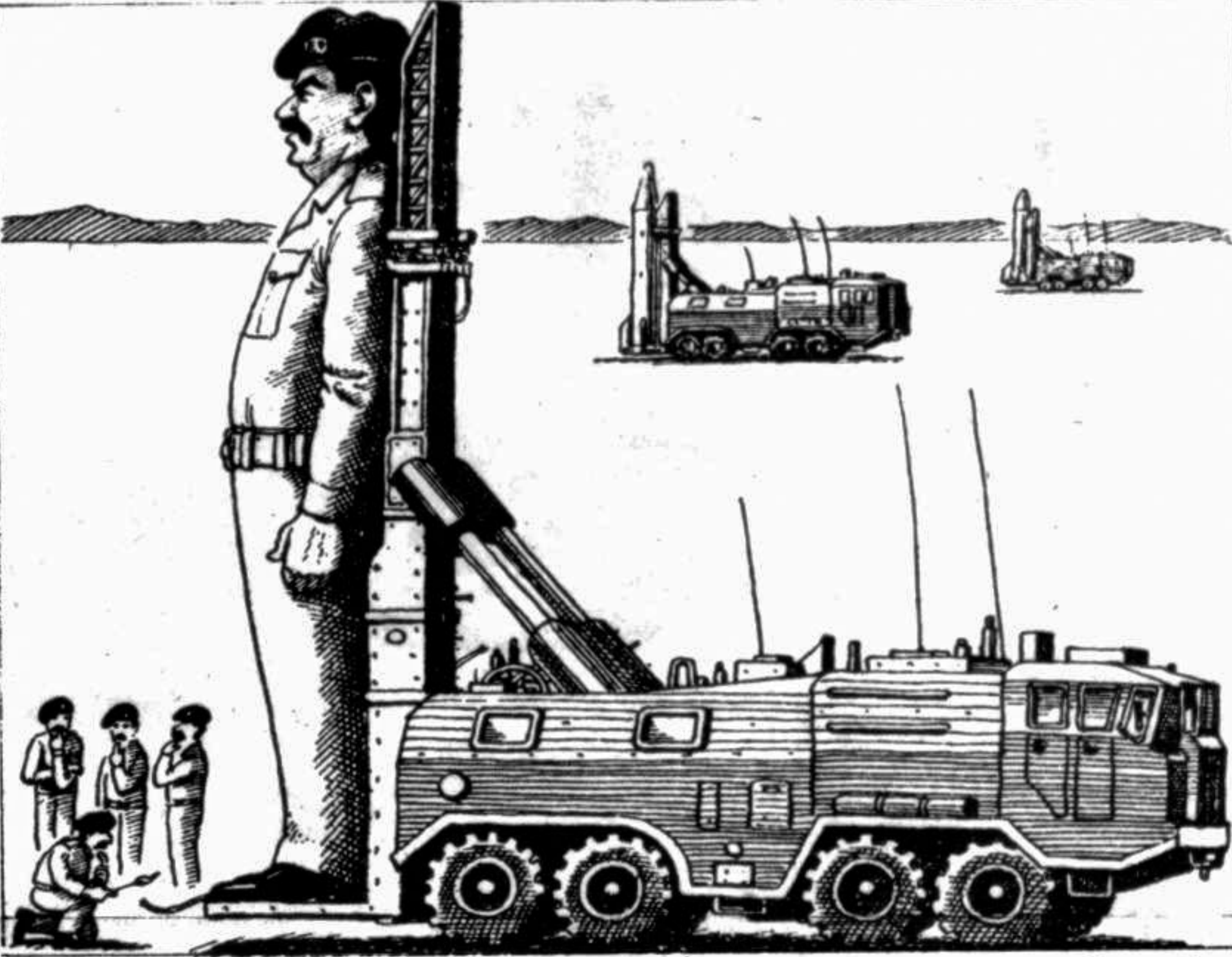
"It obviously represents a degree of opposition and public response to Saddam Hussein that we have not seen in the past", Fitzwater told reporters.

"We, of course, have often said we would not weep if the people of Iraq decided Saddam should no longer be in power", the presidential spokesman said.

Bush has called upon the Iraqi military and its people to overthrow Saddam.

Iraqi opposition leader Mohammed Baqer al-Hakim told reporters in Tehran that retreating soldiers and low-ranking officers of Saddam's army had joined the rebels after Iraq's defeat by US led allies in the Gulf war.

Hakim, a Shiite Muslim cleric, said an entire Republican Guard regiment had surrendered to rebels in Al Amarah.



LONDON — Iraqi President Saddam Hossain is a favourite of cartoonists here. The cartoon shows Republican Guards measuring the size of Saddam in terms of his control over the Baath Party.

Kuwait's cabinet first meet since Iraqi invasion

LONDON, Mar 5 : Kuwait's cabinet in Monday held its first meeting in the Emirate since the Iraqi invasion last August, reports Reuter.

"It was a rather emotional atmosphere. We are so glad, so happy, that we are all together," Kuwaiti Planning Minister Salman Abdul-Razek al-Mutawa told Britain's channel four television news as he emerged from the session.

warmth and directness during briefing on the Gulf War have won him America's confidence.

Confronted with racism while stationed in the southern United States early in his career, Gen Powell insists that blacks face few barriers in the armed forces today and has countered charges that blacks were disproportionately represented in the Gulf War by saying that it is an honour to serve one's country.

An ardent admirer of Martin Luther King and his doctrine of non-violence, the top US military officer says he is proud to be black and that his tough climb to the top was eased by the efforts of blacks before him.

Though Americans have never elected a black president, Douglas Wilder became the first black governor in 1989. His record as chief executive of the former slave state, Virginia, has been good enough so far to put him on the long list of democratic contenders for the 1992 presidential race.

Finally, Gen Powell has earned his stars in an area vital to a political career in America. He is a good husband and a father of three.

UN mission to assess needs in Iraq, Kuwait

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 5 : A United Nations mission to assess humanitarian needs in Iraq and Kuwait could leave for the area on Wednesday or Thursday, Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar said, reports Reuter.

Plans to send the mission, representing a number of UN agencies and headed by under Secretary General

Iran to foment trouble in Iraq: Reza Pahlavi

PARIS, Mar 5 : Iran will foment trouble in Iraq and across the Gulf unless the international community steps in to remove the cancer of the Islamic Republic, the son of the late Shah of Iran said on Monday, reports Reuter.

"So long as there is a continuation of the present regime in my country I cannot see the chance of the existence of a new order in the region, Reza Pahlavi said.

Tehran was behind Shiite Muslims reported in revolt against Iraqi President Saddam Hossain in Basra and other towns and would step in if there were a power vacuum.

He said. The Islamic Republic may not focus on Iraq alone but will continue its policy of destabilising the area, he said it is truly a cancer in the area which will keep growing until it becomes terminal.

The 30-year-old son of the former Shah of Iran, who was toppled in 1979, ridiculed a widespread western belief that President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was a moderate seeking to steer Iran away from the hard-line fundamentalist course set by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

He said Rafsanjani's overture to the international community simply aimed to save a regime beset by economic ills.

The Gulf crisis had shown the danger of the anti-western rhetoric used by both Saddam and Iranian leaders, Pahlavi said it had fired demonstrations in countries like Morocco or Algeria by people with no inkling of life under Saddam.

"We will be back to square one at the end of this crisis and the world will have to confront the same problems even without Saddam Hussein," he said.

Former elected Thai PM won't be freed

BANGKOK, Mar 5 : The military junta on Monday rejected suggestions that it would soon release the elected prime minister it ousted, reports AP.

The junta leader, armed forces chief Gen. Sunthorn Kongsompong, said Chatchai would be freed at some point, but it was not an urgent matter.

Junta officials were responding to Interim Prime Minister Anand Panyarachum's weekend statement that Chatchai Choonhavan would be freed right after the interim Cabinet was formed. The Cabinet is expected to be completed this week.

Chatchai has been detained since he was taken off a plane by air force officers Feb. 23 as he was about to fly to the northern city of Chiang Mai to see King Bhumibol Adulyadej. A few hours later, the junta announced it had taken over power.

Also detained are Arthit Kamlang-ek, a deputy prime minister, and a few other Chatchai aides. The radio station of the newspaper The Nation said Monday that one close adviser reportedly has been released for health reasons.

The junta, and not Anand's caretaker government, will decide when Chatchai will



released, said the junta's No. 2 man, army chief Gen. Suehinda Kraprayoon.

The statements raised new questions about the clout of Anand's administration. The junta appointed Anand on Saturday.

The junta also said Monday it would be working jointly with the Cabinet in making national policy. It earlier announced an interim constitution that gives it dominance over Anand's caretaker government, whose main task is to lead the country to new elections by the end of April 1992.

Anand said he was completing his Cabinet on Monday and would seek approval for his choices from the king. Assent of the constitutional monarch is required for all major political changes.

Anand, a 58-year old businessman and former diplomat, has said security-related posts would go to military men. He has said Thailand would continue the Chatchai administration's conservative economic policies at home, as well as its foreign policy — essentially pro-West.

The junta said it seized power because Chatchai's government was corrupt, tried to destroy the military and protected enemies of the monarchy. The coup was the ninth in Thailand's six decades as a constitutional monarchy, but the first since 1977.

The United States, Australia, France and New Zealand all have criticized the coup. The United States suspended economic aid, and Japan said some new loans may be delayed.

Chatchai's government had been widely criticized for corruption since coming to power in August 1988, but the military had the same reputation.

5 tankers with drinking water leave UAE for Kuwait

ABU DHABI, Mar 5 : Five giant tankers left here today carrying drinking water from the United Arab Emirates for its war-ravaged neighbour Kuwait, a source of the shipping company said, reports Xinhua.

Another tanker leaving the Port of Doha would haul a total of 260 tons of water needed by Kuwaiti people whose water facilities were crippled by the war, Abdul-Rahman Khalid al-Hamoud of the United Arab Shipping Company, added.

The six water tankers, which will deliver a total of 226,000 tons of drinking water, will reach Kuwait within two days.

The Board of Directors of the company has informed the Kuwaiti government that all the company's potential will be placed at their service for reconstructing Kuwait and providing Kuwaitis with their most urgent needs of water and other goods," Hamoud said.

The company is run by Iraqi and the six members of the Gulf Co-operation Council — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates. However the board voted to suspend dealings with Iraq on February 27 to show solidarity with Kuwait.

The UAE also has organised relief aid convoys for Kuwait to provide rice, flour, powdered milk, vegetables and fruits, said Mohammed al-Musharki from the special committee supervising the operation.

The food is meant to feed the member of Kuwait's resistance groups and the armed forces.

Off the Record

Tale of a POW

NEW YORK : US Navy Lt Jeffrey Zaun was first seen on television six weeks ago, looking dazed and stiffly reciting anti-war statements as Iraq paraded POWs before the cameras. This week, Zaun was on TV under happy circumstances: He was released, reports AP.

"He was thin but he had all his senses," his father, Calvin Zaun, of Cherry Hill, New Jersey, said on NBC television's "Today" programme.

"He looked good," added Marjorie Zaun, the serviceman's mother.

The Zauns learned from a military liaison officer that their son was one of 10 allied soldiers freed Monday. They then waited until they had seen him on television before making a public comment.

"The first couple of days and the last couple days have been the worst. Because the last couple of days, you don't know what's going to happen," said Calvin Zaun.

Zaun, whose A-6 Intruder apparently went down on the first day of the war, had been among POWs shown on Iraqi and US television after their capture.

Riot in varsity

HARTFORD (Connecticut) : Troopers and police from four towns were needed to quell a riot at a University of Hartford party that left at least nine students and seven officers injured and resulted in 13 arrests, reports AP.

"It was total mayhem," said Darren Champion, a 22-year-old student. "Basically none of this would have started if the police didn't show up. If the police didn't come wielding billy clubs, it would have been over quickly."

Police said they were confronted with a full-scale riot early Sunday as hundreds of students pelleted them with rocks and bottles when they tried to break up the party.

"They were met by a very large, angry crowd out there," said Sgt. Cary Gilbert of the Hartford police department. "It was definitely a riot."

The two-hour rampage began with about 40 students and eventually involved as many as 1,000, police said.

The big love

NEW YORK : Tracey Ullman is a true chameleon, a quirky actress of enormous charm and skill, able to immerse herself completely in the characters she portrays.

Unfortunately, "The Big Love," a one-woman show which opened Sunday at Broadway's Plymouth Theater, doesn't give her much chance to go beyond any surface exploration.

The play by Brooke Allen and Jay Presson Allen is only skin-deep in its depiction of Florence Adland, one of Hollywood's more notorious stage mothers. It's gossip-column prattle stretched into two hours of fitful comedy and half-baked drama.

"The day she met Errol Flynn, my baby was a virgin," insists Adland to the audience within the first few minutes of the evening. She's referring, of course, to her pretty 15-year-old daughter, Beverly, a long-legged youngster who caught the eye of the aging matinee idol on the backlot at Warner Bros.

Their liaison started the Los Angeles movie community, earning Florence the title "mother procuree" and her daughter "novice slut" in fan magazines of the late 1950s. The affair — and the abuse — lasted two intense years until Flynn's death at age 50 after a heart attack.

Operation Welcome Home

NEW YORK : New York will welcome troops returning home from the Gulf war with the biggest ticker-tape parade in its history despite financial woes, Mayor David Dinkins announced on Sunday, reports Reuter.

"It will be a massive effort," Dinkins said at a news conference. "It will be the greatest ticker-tape parade that this city or any city has ever seen."

The parade, on a date in May, will be part of a week of festivities in New York. There will be home-coming celebrations all over the United States in the coming months as the huge US force in the Gulf region is dismantled and the bulk of its members are sent home.

The Mayor had earlier indicated that New York City, facing a budget gap that may be more than two billion dollars, could not afford the clean-up and security costs of a parade.

A parade for South African anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela last July cost the city 1.2 million dollars.

The city did not hold a parade for the New York Giants football team after it won the super bowl in January. New York is cutting costs and 400 city workers have been laid off.

Dinkins said he had formed Operation Welcome Home to raise funds by donation and plan the celebration. "We're taking donations of anything from five dollars to 50,000 dollars to 500,000 dollars — whatever they want to give," said Lee Jones, a city press spokesman.