

210 Palestinians killed in Kuwait

TUNIS, Mar 22: A total of 210 Palestinians have been killed in Kuwait, some after being tortured, since it was liberated last month, a senior Palestine Liberation Organisation official said here Thursday, reports AFP.

Bassam Abu Sharif, a senior advisor to PLO leader Yasser Arafat, said in a prepared statement: "Some were killed under torture, others shot with firearms and others hanged."

"Many Palestinians killed by Kuwaitis and others are buried in several mass graves," he said.

It was Mr Abu Sharif's first public statement since March 13, when his remarks to a British television interviewer were interpreted to mean that the PLO might reach a peace agreement with Israel even if Israel does not grant independence to all of the occupied territories.

Mr Abu Sharif denied meaning this after other PLO leaders protested.

On Thursday's statement, he claimed that "hundreds of Palestinians including young people aged 16 or 17, are undergoing savage torture in Kuwaiti police stations."

"The Palestinian revolution will take every step to protect the Palestinian people and the PLO will not remain silent on such crimes against Palestinians who have taken no part in any action against Kuwait or the Kuwaitis," he said.

Earlier on Thursday, the New York-based Middle East watch, a human rights group, said in a statement released in Kuwait that a post-war wave of vengeance was continuing in the emirate, and hundreds had been rounded up and tortured in recent weeks.

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 22:

The United States has distributed to UN Security Council members a draft resolution calling for the elimination of Iraq's war machine, reports Reuter.

The draft resolution, circulated on Thursday, also fixes the border between Iraq and Kuwait, sets up a UN observer force and demands monies for war damages from oil revenues.

When Iraq formally accepts all the conditions, a ceasefire goes into effect. But most economic sanctions remain until the council decides otherwise.

Under the threat of the trade embargo, the document requires Iraq to accept the destruction and removal of its ballistic missile systems and all "weapons of mass destruction," including chemical, biological and nuclear.

The destruction is to include "subsystems and components," including stocks of chemical and biological agents, nuclear weapons-grade material and all related "research, development, support and manufacturing facilities."

The proposals call for a permanent arms embargo and asks states to make sure they do not supply or sell or transfer any conventional military equipment, spare parts, components or technology for the production of weapons.

The 12-page document is

Draft resolution distributed among UN members

US seeks elimination of Iraq's war machine, reparations

undergoing intensive revision among the council's five permanent members — the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China.

It was also distributed to the other 10 member countries but will not be formally discussed until the five broadly agree on a draft.

Iraq is asked to accept its 1963 disputed border with Kuwait. The resolution asks for a UN military observer force to monitor a zone extending 10 km (six miles) into Iraq and five km (three miles) into Kuwait.

One point of controversy is expected to be provisions on easing sanctions for essential goods and services following a dramatic UN report saying Iraq had been bombed back

into the pre-industrial age. The report urged immediate emergency supplies, such as fuel, to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure.

Foodstuff sale to be permitted into the country with few restrictions and the trade embargo on materials for essential civilian needs will be eased after the resolution is adopted.

But the draft still maintains the sanctions committee has to be approved many of the shipments of donated goods to Iraq.

Another provision which may disappear is an invitation for states to use frozen Iraqi assets abroad to compensate themselves and their nationals. One western diplomat said this would set a unacceptable precedent.

To meet war compensation

claims against Iraq the resolution would set up a fund into which an unstated percentage of the value of Iraq's oil exports would be paid.

A commission would be set up to administer the fund and the Secretary-General would be asked to present recommendations within 30 days on ways of paying compensation.

Trade sanctions against some Iraqi exports, such as oil, would be lifted after the completion of these arrangements.

The curbs will be reviewed every 60 days over a four-month period to see if they should be modified further.

Continual US air umbrella over Iraq

Another report adds: Iraq has called on the United Nations to halt the flying of a "continual air umbrella" by

United States warplanes over its territory, which it said was terrorising Iraqi civilians.

"The truth of the matter is that this is a primitive form of behaviour in which advanced technology is used for vindictive purposes and for terrorising the Iraqi people," Iraqi UN representative Abdu Al-Anbari said.

In identical letters to the Secretary General and the President of the Security Council, he listed hundreds of sorties that he said had been flown over Iraq since the cessation of hostilities on February 28, saying they formed "a continual air umbrella during both day and night."

On March 16, he said "100 formations, including a group of 192 aircraft," flew over Baghdad and other parts of the country, while on March 18 he said that "67 formations, including a group of 148 aircraft" carried out other sorties.

Anbari said this caused "a great disturbance and considerable anxiety to the civilian inhabitants especially children, women, the elderly and the sick," causing unjustified terror.

"This leads one to wonder about the aim of the United States Armed Forces in carrying out these continuous air sorties over Iraq after having inflicted upon the Iraqi people devastation and widespread suffering that have shaken the foundations of their existence and deprived them of the essentials of daily life."

The United States said one of its jet fighters shot down an Iraqi warplane on Wednesday near President Saddam Hussein's home town of Tikrit because it had violated terms of a temporary ceasefire requiring Iraqi aircraft stay grounded and not be used against rebel forces battling Saddam's government.



KUWAIT/IRAQ BORDER: Women refugees queue for water at a Red Crescent refugee camp at the Kuwait-Iraq border 21 Mar. The camp houses Arab families including Iraqis who fled southern towns of Iraq. —AFP photo

'Iran amasses 20 divisions to help Iraqi rebels'

WASHINGTON, Mar 22: Iran has sent more than 20 divisions and brigades to its border with Iraq to back revolts against President Saddam Hussein an Iranian opposition group said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

The group called the People's Mujahedeen, said Iran was also raiding into Iraq to try to crush the so-called National Liberation Army of Iran, formed four years ago by anti-fundamentalist Iranian expatriates.

The Mullahs ruling Iran hope to kill two birds with one stone, Alireza Jafarzadeh, a

spokesman told a news conference.

Iran has long sought to avenge itself against Saddam, a member of Iraq's Sunni Muslim minority, for the devastating eight-year Iran-Iraq war, which Saddam launched in September 1980.

Jafarzadeh said more than 20 Iranian Republican Guard Corps divisions and brigades were poised along the length of the Iran-Iraq border to carry out planned attacks.

The Guard Corps Command has been shifted from Tehran to a base close to the border near Kermanshah called the

Ramazan Garrison, he said. Nearly 90 per cent of the Guard Corps commanders are stationed at Ramazan Garrison or at bases along the border.

The reports were impossible to verify independently. The dissidents said Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani had toured Ramazan Garrison and others close to the border on March 13-16 to coordinate preparations.

The regime's forces are entering Iraq at 14 operational axes along the length of the border, Jafarzadeh said. He added that tactical bases had been set up all along the bor-

der and three Boeing 747 aircraft were being used to ferry forces to the border.

In addition, the Iranian dissidents said 50 Mullahs from the Iranian holy city of Qum had been sent to the Iraqi city of Basra scene of one of the Shiite uprisings against Saddam.

US experts on the area say there may have been some small raids into Iraq to support the Shiite dissidents trying to topple Saddam.

"But I doubt the buildup or the planned operations are on the scale that the Mujahedeen are painting there," said Kenneth Katzman a former US government Gulf intelligence analyst and author of a forthcoming book on Iran's revolutionary Guards.

BJP alleges Rajiv's secret parleys

'Congress, Janata Dal wooing Muslims for vote bank'

NEW DELHI March 22: The Bharatiya Janata Party made a frontal attack on Congress-I and Janata Dal for what it called "aiding and abetting" communalism in the country, reports PTI.

In a statement, BJP spokesman, Mr J.P. Mathur, spoke of a recent "secret meeting" of the Congress-I President, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, with Aligarh Muslim University student leaders and Professors in New Delhi and said "this is the Congress-I way of secularism-wooing communalism."

"No less sinister is the presence of Mr Khurshed

Alam Khan at this secret conclave," Mr Mathur said adding that Mr Khan is Governor of Karnataka and the President, Mr R Venkatraman, should take note of this "impropriety and do the needful".

Such meetings vitiated the atmosphere and the whole approach was "wrong" Mr Mathur said.

He criticised Janata Dal the leader and former Prime Minister, Mr V.P. Singh, for 'wooing Muslims' for the sake of 'vote bank'.

In another statement, BJP Vice President, Mr Sunder Singh Bhandari, accused Mr

Singh and his Janata Dal colleagues for starting "caste war" in Bihar and claimed it was Mr L.K Advani's Ram Rath Yatra that brought all castes together in the "holy name of Rama".

He said the Janata Dal remained one of a "radio-active metal, with unstable atoms, with their neutrons all the time becoming either electrons or protons."

The Janata Dal top leaders were pulling each other's leg, he said adding "How can such an unstable party give a stable government", he asked.



NEW YORK: Imelda Marcos leaves the Philippine Consulate Mar 21 after applying for a new passport. Marcos, the wife of former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, was told she would not be issued a new passport yet. President Corazon Aquino said Marcos will be issued a new passport as soon as the government files suit against her. —AFP photo

Off the Record

No more a club-wielding Revolution

NICOSIA: Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said that Iran had persuaded the world that its Islamic Revolution was not a violent and "club-wielding movement", reports Reuters.

Rafsanjani, in a message marking the start of the Iranian new year or Nowruz, said Iran had raised its profile in international organisations and improved ties with several other countries.

"The plot hatched by the enemies of Islam to misportray our revolution as a violent and club-wielding movement was foiled, he said in remarks carried by the state news agency IRNA.

"The Islamic Revolution has been raised in the world as a revolution with a pleasant face, clear logic and certain revolutionary ideals.

Iran has been gradually emerging from its Muslim fundamentalist isolation, at least in its foreign policy, since the death in 1989 of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who launched the Islamic Revolution.

Rafsanjani, watched by Iran's vociferously anti-American, surviving radical Islamic politicians, has steered a delicate course towards a policy of opening to the outside world.

The past year saw a formal end to Iran's 1980-1988 war with Iraq.

Doctor fondles patient

LONDON: A doctor who fondled a woman patient's breasts after they were enlarged with implants was given a stern warning on Friday reports AP.

Dr Ian Chisholm, 41, was found guilty of serious professional misconduct by the General Medical Council. The previous day, he was also found guilty of indecent and improper behaviour.

But Sir Herbert Duthie, chairman of the committee, said it was thought Dr Chisholm would never repeat his "deplorable" behaviour. "We are prepared to believe that you will heed the stern warning these proceedings will have conveyed to you," Sir Herbert cautioned.

Dr Chisholm, a married man with two children, was found to have behaved improperly in January last year when Mrs X, aged 24, went to see him.

She alleged that he started pinching her nipples. She complained to the police about the incident and they fitted a tape-recorder in a packet of cereal which she took to the surgery on March 22. She said he rubbed her breasts, told her he loved her and tried to kiss her breasts enlarged.

The hearing was told that last December her husband, from whom she is now separated, was convicted on false charges of threatening to kill the doctor.

Nicola Davies, speaking for Dr Chisholm, said that during the second incident the doctor had been led on by Mrs X.

She said he had suffered by losing his job and having the frightening experience of being threatened by Mr X.

Vanishing breed

BEIJING: One of the world's last rubber-stamp Parliaments is to meet in Beijing next week in a show of unanimity that masks continued rift in government and society, reports Reuter.

While most other communist and formerly communist governments in the world wrestle with questions of reform or dance at the edge of chaos as their societies deal with new freedoms and problems, China's Communist Party presents a stable, unified face to its 1.1 billion subjects and the world.

Nearly 3,000 members of the National People's Congress (NPC) will gather in Beijing, Great Hall of the People on Monday for their annual meeting, expected to last about two weeks.

As in previous years, they will cast unanimous votes on most issues and politely applaud reports from Premier Li Peng and other senior officials.

But diplomats and analysts said the unanimity masks continued rifts in the government and society, many of them deepened two years ago when army tanks crushed a pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square, just outside the NPC meeting hall.

"The whole emphasis is on stability, a display of national unity," one diplomat said. "But people's real feelings are hunkered down deep inside."

Pak provinces agree to share Indus water

ISLAMABAD, Mar 22: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Thursday that his government had solved a decades-old feud over water rights in Pakistan's fiercely chauvinistic provinces, reports AP.

The thorny issue of distribution of the ancient Indus River water predates the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and the creation of Pakistan as a home for almost 100 million Indian Muslims.

Sharif announced the hard-fought agreement on distributing water in existing reserves at a news conference in the capital of Islamabad.

He called it "a grand moment in history."

"Finally the country has been able to solve its most complicated problem," he said. Observers, however, said the real fight will come when additional reservoirs are contemplated.

The formula establishes an Indus Water Authority and allocates distribution from existing storage facilities.

The Indus River snakes its way through Pakistan's four provinces of Northwest Frontier, Baluchistan, Punjab and Sindh. The world's oldest civilisations dating back to 5,000 BC rose from the banks of the Indus.

The ownership of its water has been a contentious issue. Each province claims it as its own.

The rivers running through Pakistan, with the exception of the Indus, are controlled by India, its often hostile neighbor to the east.

Maldivian Minister quits: dissident returns home

COLOMBO, Mar 22: Minister of Trade and Industries Ahmed Mujuthaba resigned Tuesday from his cabinet post and from two of three top government positions in the Indian Ocean atoll nation of Maldives, Maldivian officials said yesterday, reports AFP.

The Maldives High Commission here said in a statement that he resigned after expressing his wish to vacate his public offices on receiving the government pension given to public servants who complete 20 years service.

It said Mr. Mujuthaba also resigned from the posts of Managing Director of the State Trading Organisation (STO) and Director of the Maldives Ship Management (MSM).

The statement said Mr. Mujuthaba's resignation was accepted by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who thanked him and paid special tribute to his long and dedicated service to the country.

Mr. Mujuthaba, who previously held the portfolios of Transport and Shipping and Tourism, trade and Industries Minister in May after his predecessor Ilyas Ibrahim fled the country amid a corruption scandal.

Mr. Ibrahim, who was stripped of both his Ministerial post and that of STO Managing Director after he fled the Maldives, was allowed to return home.

Mr. Mujuthaba figured in the international media when he was taken hostage by Sri Lankan Tamil mercenaries when they made an attempt to overthrow Mr. Gayoom's government in November 1988.

The coup bid financed by Maldivian dissidents was crushed with assistance from Indian troops who rescued a seriously wounded Mr. Mujuthaba from the mercenary boat that was trying to escape with several hostages.

UN Secy-Gen's special envoy to ME named

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 22: Switzerland's Ambassador to Washington Edouard Berner, was formally named on Thursday to be the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Middle East, reports BSS.

He succeeds Gunnar Jarving, a Swedish diplomat as pointed shortly after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war,

BRIEFLY

Iraq frees 1,150 Kuwaitis: Iraq freed 1,150 Kuwaitis on Thursday and they were traveling home via Saudi Arabia, a spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross said, reports AP.

In the Saudi capital, a four-man Iraqi delegation began talks with allied officials on a speedier repatriation of Iraqi prisoners of war, in the first such meeting away from Iraqi soil.

Buses were carrying the Kuwaitis across the Iraqi-Saudi border near the remote Saudi border town of Arar, 550 miles (880 kilometers) northwest of Riyadh, said Red Cross spokesman Roland Huguentin.

The Kuwaitis would then be flown to Kuwait in chartered airplanes, Huguentin said. He said he had no information about the returns, such as how many were civilians and how many military.

2 US planes collide: 20 missing:

Two US Navy submarine-hunting planes collided early Thursday during a training mission off the southern California coast, and 26 crewmen were missing, Navy spokesmen said, reports AP.

Search and rescue teams in helicopters found some debris but located no bodies or survivors, Navy spokesman Mike Krcis said.

Navy air controllers lost contact with the two planes at about 2:30 am (10:30 GMT), Navy spokesman Bob Howard said. A Navy SH-60 helicopter crew taking part in the exercise spotted a fireball at sea at about the same time, the Navy said.

Twelve crew members were on one P-3 Orion plane and 14 on the other, Krcis said. The planes were on a training mission from Moffett Naval Air Station in Northern California.

SAARC team invited to Lanka:

President Ranasinghe Premadasa has invited a team from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to observe forthcoming local government elections in Sri Lanka, officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

A statement from the president's office here said Mr. Premadasa had directed that a SAARC team be invited to observe the polls to 10 municipal councils, 33 urban councils and 272 village councils.

It said that Mr. Premadasa asked Foreign Minister Harold Herat to request SAARC Secretary-General K.K. Bhargava to use his good offices in mobilising a team of eminent persons drawn from SAARC countries to observe the polls.

Election offices Thursday began receiving nominations for the polls which are to be held within six weeks after nominations close on March 28.

Powell, Schwarzkopf awarded:

Senate Thursday approved awarding congressional gold medals to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General, Colin Powell, and the Commander of Operation Desert Storm General Norman Schwarzkopf for their leadership in the Gulf war, reports AFP.

The Senate agreed by voice vote to two measures awarding the gold medals and to ordering bronze copies to be minted for sale as commemorative coins. The House of Representatives is expected to approve the measures.

Epidemics threaten Iraq:

A top UN envoy reported Thursday that serious epidemics threaten Iraq, and recommended food and fuel be sent immediately to avert a human catastrophe, reports AP.

"There needs to be a major mobilization and movement of resources to deal with all aspects of this deep crisis in the fields of agriculture, food, water, sanitation and health," sources quoted the report as saying.

Meanwhile, Iraq's UN ambassador said saboteurs from Iran have plundered food warehouses in southern Iraq, worsening the "severe food crisis" in a region racked by rebellion against President Saddam Hussein.

Ambassador Abdul Amir al-Andari's letter to the Security Council did not name Iran but cited damage in Iraq's 12 southern districts, where Baghdad claims Iran is promoting a Shiite insurrection.

Hizbollah Party scholar held:

Lebanon's pro-Iranian Hizbollah Party accused Iraqi President Saddam Hussein Thursday of arresting the highest-ranking Shiite Muslim scholar, grand Ayatollah Abolqasem al-Khoi, reports Reuter.

Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, spiritual mentor of Hizbollah, said in a statement Khomeini and other clerics had been transferred to Baghdad from the holy city of Najaf, an early centre of an anti-Saddam revolt in Iraq's Shiite south.

"We have confirmed information that he was arrested and transferred from the holy city of Najaf to Baghdad with other clerics to show the support of the religious authorities for the regime by force," Fadlallah added.