

BRITFLY

'War to last for weeks': French President Francois Mitterrand in Paris said the Gulf war would probably last weeks and its goal was the liberation of Kuwait, not the death of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein or the destruction of his country, reports Reuter.

Mitterrand said he hoped Israel understood the "extreme concern of the coalition fighting the war that Israel would not fall into the trap" set by Saddam's Scud missile strikes, aimed at drawing the Jewish state into conflict.

Iraqi stand on POWs: Iraq's senior diplomat in Western Europe said on Sunday allied prisoners of war would be treated humanely only if their governments officially recognised their capture, reports Reuter.

"Everything that I don't announce we are not going to recognise", Iraq's Ambassador to France, Abdul Rezak Al-Hashimi, told British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television in London.

Asked to give an assurance that prisoners would be treated according to the 1949 Geneva Convention, Hashimi said "after the governments admit they have such losses. If they admit later, two or three weeks from now, that they have lost a pilot two or three weeks ago, it might be too late".

US makes 102 sorties: US warplanes made 102 sorties from the Incirlik base in Turkey between 2300 GMT Friday and 1400 GMT Saturday to bomb Iraq, journalists at the base and witnesses in the broader region said, reports AFP.

The planes involved were F-15's, F-16's and F-111's, they said.

Thirty-five aircraft took off around 2300 GMT Friday, returning at 0250 GMT, followed by 38 that left at 0400 GMT and returned five hours later.

Residents contacted in the towns of Habur and Slop, near the border with Iraq, said that judging from what they saw and heard the planes bombed the Zakho region of Iraq.

A third group of 29 fighters and bombers took off at 1130 GMT and returned to the base around 1400 GMT, bombing targets near Iraqi villages along the Zap river, according to residents of Cukurca, near the Iraqi and Iranian border region.

Bush phones 4 leaders: US President George Bush Sunday had telephone conversations with four world leaders about the Gulf war, the White House announced, reports AFP.

Mr. Bush spoke with Saudi King Fahd, British Prime Minister John Major, French President Francois Mitterrand and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, said spokesman Bill Harlow.

Mr. Bush spoke with the leaders "to give them an update" on Operation Desert Storm against Iraq and "consult with them on the ongoing situation in the Gulf", said Mr. Harlow.

The White House also said recent reports that "Black Beret" commandos had attacked the Latvian interior ministry in the capital of Riga were "deeply troubling".

Missing airmen named: Britain's Defence Ministry in London Sunday released the names of six missing airmen, and one appeared to match that of a British airman whom Baghdad said it was holding as a prisoner of war, reports Reuter.

The Iraqi News Agency (INA) said six captured allied airmen had been shown on Baghdad television. INA named one of them as "Flight Captain Adrian John Nickle of the British Air Force" who had been flying a Tornado plane.

The Ministry said this was not sufficient evidence for them to confirm that Flight Lieutenant Adrian Nichol, 27, had been taken prisoner as they had not seen pictures of him.

But it said Nichol was missing.

The Ministry said five other airmen were missing, naming them as: Wing Commander Tom Elsdon, 39, and Flight Lieutenants Jon Peters, 29, Robert Collier, 42, David Waddington, 24, and Robert Stewart, 44.

Pindi fears terrorist acts: Pakistani authorities Sunday feared new terrorist acts after a bomb blast killed five people and injured 50 others in a cinema in nearby Rawalpindi city, reports AFP.

Security was tightened in public areas, and Western diplomats were not ruling out a link between Saturday's explosion and daily Pro-Iraqi protests taking place across the country.

Police refused to speculate on the cause of the blast at the Khurshid Cinema, where a Pashtu language film was being screened.

The time bomb, made with 2.5 kilograms (5.5 pounds) of explosives, had been planted under a metal seat, and at least 10 of the injured were in serious condition.

2 US soldiers die: Two US soldiers died when their bunker collapsed, military officials in Saudi Arabia announced Sunday, reports AFP.

The soldiers, who died Saturday, were identified only as members of Bravo company, 317th engineer battalion, 7th engineer brigade of the army's corps.

Military officials, who are investigating the accident, did not say whether the bunker was of the type dug deep into the desert sand.

Low voter turnout in Haiti: Runoff elections in Haiti for a National Assembly drew a sparse weekend, turnout nothing like the enthusiastic crowds who stood in line for hours last month to choose Haiti's first directly elected president, reports AP.

Independent Radio Metropole called Sunday's balloting "timid voter participation." Voters could breeze in and out of polling places within minutes.

"People think everything has been settled with the election of a president," said Elogé Zephir, a delegate at the Electoral Bureau in Petionville on the outskirts of the capital.

Roman Catholic priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a leftist who champions Haiti's poor, won the Dec. 16 national elections for president in a landslide.

However, 22 of the 27 seats in the Senate were being contested Sunday, as were 41 of the 83 Chamber of Deputies seats.

Fresh Soviet assault in Baltic: 5 killed

RIGA (USSR), Jan 21: Soviet commandos attacked and temporarily occupied Latvia's police headquarters Sunday night, killing five people and wounding nine in the assault, Latvian officials said, reports AP.

All Latvian police were ordered to take up arms and defend other local government buildings, but the Soviet commandos left the police headquarters about six hours after the assault began.

The elite "Black Beret" forces of the Soviet Interior Ministry began the attack at about 9.06 p.m. (1906 GMT), as red and white tracer bullets lit up downtown Riga. An automobile burst into flames next to the Latvian Interior Ministry, which controls the republic's police and is loyal to the separatist government.

The assault came a week after Soviet tanks attacked the main broadcast facility in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, killing 14 people and wounding 230.

The central government in Moscow has been pressuring the Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to nullify the independence declarations passed last year by their democratically elected parliaments.

In addition, pro-Soviet factions in the republics have urged the dissolution of the Baltics' parliaments and governments, calling on Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev to impose direct Kremlin rule there.

The Soviet military commander for the Baltic military district, Col. Gen. Fyodor Kuzmin, has demanded that Latvian police turn in their arms. Black beret units seized weapons at two other Latvian police facilities last week.

Subsequently, Latvian Interior Minister Alois Vanznis told the separatist parliament that the police were authorized to "use their weapons to defend government buildings.

Iraq fires 10 Scuds into Riyadh: 9 downed

RIYADH, Jan 21: Iraq fired 10 Scud missiles into Saudi Arabia overnight, aiming for the first time at the capital Riyadh, reports Reuter.

A US military spokesman said nine Scuds were shot down in the air by Patriot missiles and one ignored by air defence forces because it was off-target, fell harmlessly in the sea near Dhahran.

All four Scuds fired at Riyadh early today were destroyed in the air, the spokesman said. An earlier statement had spoken of up to six Scuds fired at the capital.

Dhahran, a key centre for the US-led military buildup against Iraq, was a target on Friday morning — when Israel also came under attack — and again both Sunday night and early today.

Missile alerts sounded repeatedly in both Saudi cities. Live broadcasts on Cable News Network showed the exhausts of Patriot missiles racing into the sky and flashes which appeared to be the destruction of Scuds high overhead.

Lieutenant Colonel Mike Gallagher, spokesman for the US Central Command, told reporters at a pre-dawn briefing: "We now believe 10 Scuds were launched and U.S. Patriot air defence systems shot down nine".

Gallagher said Patriot batteries decided not to engage the 10th Scud because it was headed into the Gulf.

"We have no reports of damage or injuries" he said.

A US military official, who was on guard duty outside the Dhahran International Hotel early today described how he saw Patriot missiles shoot down a Scud.

"We got the imminent danger alarm on while we were out on security detail. All of a sudden the Patriots took off. In the midst of it, I saw the contact explosion and a burst of light and debris raining down like fireworks."

A Saudi woman who watched the Sunday night attack on Dhahran said: "I heard two explosions and went downstairs with my husband and I came back upstairs to get the baby's cot. I heard four more explosions. Then I saw something like a comet going down and then it disappeared and I saw some light".

Debris from one of those explosions rained down on the street in Dammam some 15 km (nine miles) east of Dhahran but there were no reports of casualties, a nother Saudi witness said.



WASHINGTON: US President George Bush (second from right) receives a briefing on the situation in the Persian Gulf from his senior advisors. From left are Gen Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; US Secretary of State James Baker; Defence Secretary Dick Cheney; Vice-President Dan Quayle; National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft; and White House Chief of Staff John Sununu. This picture was released by the White House on January 19.

WASHINGTON, Jan 21: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is reported to be hiding in hotels and buildings "deep among civilians", knowing that he will be safe there from allied air strikes, the US Military Commander in the Gulf said Sunday, reports Xinhua.

General Norman Schwarzkopf stressed in US television interviews that Hussein "had not been personally targeted for attack."

A prime US objective has been to sever the Iraqi leadership from its troops, but that this would be too difficult to accomplish by hunting down one man, he said.

"We have had many reports that he's taken to hiding in buildings and hotels and things of that sort that are deep among civilians with a sure knowledge that we are not going to go in there and kill a lot of people," he said in an interview with NBC television.

Iraq planned to kill Emir?

Xinhua adds from AP: Iraq planned to kidnap Kuwait's Emir during the invasion and bring him to Baghdad to be assassinated, a man identified as Saddam Hussein's former bodyguard said Sunday.

"He wanted to kill him," the bodyguard, who was identified only as "Capt. Kharim," said of Saddam's plan to eliminate Sheik Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah.

The man spoke in an interview broadcast Sunday on CBS's "60 Minutes."

The plot failed when the Kuwaiti leader escaped into Saudi Arabia after the invasion Aug. 2, and Capt. Kharim said Saddam had the would-be assassin killed when he returned from his failed mission.

Captain Kharim said he decided in September to flee Iraq because he was afraid he would be killed because he knew too much about the plot on al-Sabah.

Asked if he had ever killed anyone under orders from Saddam, Capt. Kharim said "I don't like to kill anyone, but one time I put the bomb in a

helicopter to kill the minister of defense, Saddam's brother-in-law.

The minister, Adnan Khairallah, who was married to Saddam's sister, died in a mysterious helicopter crash in May 1989.

"After two hours the exploded" killing seven in the helicopter crash," Capt. Kharim said.

Capt. Kharim said at one time, he considered killing Saddam himself. "I decided this minute to kill him - but I don't know why I stopped that. Maybe I am afraid."

Capt. Kharim contended that despite the allied bombardment of his country in the last several days, Iraq has many missiles and planes stored underground. Asked where the facility is located, he said, "That's very secret. That's not Saddam Hussein. That's my country."

Saddam hiding in hotels?

US Navy in action: 40 missiles rained on Iraq

ABOARD THE USS JOHN F. KENNEDY, Jan 21: Bombers have used a "stand-off" missile for the first time and submarine fired a Cruise missile for the first time in war, the commander of the Red Sea Battle Force said, reports AP.

Rear Adm. Riley D. Mixson on Saturday told reporters aboard his flagship that the first use of a Standoff Land Attack Missile came during an air raid against a major industrial target in western Iraq.

Mixson would not provide the details of the firing of the sub-launched Cruise missile nor give the sub's location, but noted that more than 40 had been fired by the US Navy from the Red Sea since the start of the conflict.

Cruise missiles can be fired from battleships, cruisers and submarines.

Bombers from the carriers Kennedy and Saratoga were the first given the SLAMs to use.

Mixson said the first two fired hit "a very important target. I would classify it as a well-defended industrial-type activity."

He would not give further description, but he said the

missile could be used against facilities in Iraq linked to producing nuclear, biological and chemical weapons — a major goal of the US-led attacks against Iraq.

A spectacular video shot from SLAMs became an instant hit "Special war channel presentation" on the carrier's in-house television channel.

Like many smart weapons of the video generation, the missile was built with its own camera that provides instant pictures of it hitting its target.

The SLAM video gave the view from the missile's nose as it honed in on what looked like a large research and development complex.

It crawled over a number of outlying structures, honing in on a large building. The ladders and windows were clearly visible as it slammed into a broad white wall and the transmission ended.

The video of the second firing two minutes later showed a cloud rising from the complex as the missile closed on the same building and then disappeared into the hole created by the first.

"My eyes were like this big

watching the second missile go into the first hole," said the pilot who guided both of them, holding his fingers in big circles in front of his eyes. He asked that his name not be used for security reasons.

The pilot said, the A-6 Intruder and A-7 Corsair pilots

War to last a few weeks, says Major

LONDON, Jan 21: British Prime Minister John Major said yesterday, he expected the Gulf war to last "quite a few weeks," reports Reuter.

Reporters asked him after he went to church near the official country estate at Chequers in southern England how long a war would last.

"It is impossible to say. I would imagine it would be a war of quite a few weeks," he said.

He said he was "delighted" that Israel had shown restraint over retaliating for Iraqi Scud missile attacks, calling it "an act of considerable statesmanship".



SAUDI ARABIA: Live firing of a MLRS missile on January 20 by the British Second Field Artillery, who are operating a multi launch rocket system in the Saudi desert.

Off the Record

A teddy bear in Gulf war

AN AIR BASE IN SAUDI ARABIA: A teddy bear sent by an American woman to "Any Service Member" has become the mascot of one of the high-tech stealthfighters flown by the US Air Force against targets in Iraq, reports AP.

Jeronomo, the tan, eight-inch-long stuffed bear has been riding in the cockpit map case of a radar-evading F-117A since the first flight over Baghdad early Thursday morning.

"I got it from a 34-year-old woman in mail addressed to Any Service Member," said Air Force staff Sgt. Brad Bowers. "So I thought I'd fly it around, then send it back to her when it's all over; let her know where it's been."

He didn't identify the donor.

Bowers is crew chief for Jeronomo's temporary home, stealthfighter No. 793, nicknamed "Invisible Thunder."

The teddy bear has helped ease the tension for crew members, said Bowers. "It provided a little bit of levity."

Purple Heart

IN NORTHEASTERN SAUDI ARABIA: A US Navy medic wounded by Iraqi shrapnel near the Kuwaiti border will receive the first Purple Heart of the Gulf war, military officials said, reports AP.

Navy Corpsman Clarence D. Conner, 19, of Hemet, California, was hit in the right shoulder by Iraqi artillery on Thursday evening, and was evacuated by helicopter to a military hospital.

He was reported recovering after surgery to remove a shell fragment.

"I'm damned proud of him," said Marine Brig. Gen. Thomas V. Draude. "We were standing by his bedside, and he said, please don't send me home. I've got to get back to my unit. They're depending on me."

Conner was assigned to provide first aid for a five-man Marine patrol. He was the first casualty among US ground troops since allied forces launched their attack on Iraq last Thursday.

The Purple Heart is awarded to soldiers wounded or killed.

British pilots trying to come to terms

BAHRAIN: Pilots of Britain's Tornado fighter-bombers have been trying to come to terms with the loss of four of their crewmates in combat with Iraq, reports AP.

Two Tornados were shot down in the first two days of combat and the four crewmembers have been reported as missing.

"We are fully aware of the risks, but when you lose someone it really brings it home to you that the risks are real," said Squadron Leader Gary Stapleton, a navigator.

"There is a constant awareness that in a few seconds time you may not exist," said Squadron Leader Pablo Mason, who observed his 17th wedding anniversary on Friday. "I hope I live to see my 18th."

Mason led a daylight raid on Thursday in which the two crewmembers of a Tornado ejected over the desert. Rescuers have been searching for them. A second Tornado crashed on Friday, and it was feared the crew may have been killed.

"You feel guilty that you have survived and they haven't," said Mason.

Tricycle saved



TEL AVIV: A homeless young girl tries to save her tricycle from the rubble of her house on January 20. The building was demolished by the last Iraqi Scud-shelling on Tel Aviv on January 19.

Children cry in Baghdad

RUWEISHED (Jordan), Jan 21: The children were crying all the time -- I thought they would die of fear, says Amira Kayed, a Palestinian woman who fled to Jordan from the thunder of US air raids on Baghdad, reports Reuter.

"The raids were ferocious," says Amira Saeed. "Any minute, we are feeling the house was going to fall on us. We were reciting prayers from the Quran all the time."

"We used to see such things in American movies but we never thought this could happen in real life," said Saeed, 38, who was squeezed with her husband and eight children into a station wagon.

Escape across the desert to Jordan through the deafening explosions of war was as terrifying as the day-and-night bombing in the Iraqi capital, according to refugees, mainly Jordanians and Palestinians, who reached this isolated border post.

Bye-witness Account

Fear, paranoia grip Baghdad

From AP Correspondent

BAGHDAD, Jan 2: Fear and paranoia gripped the Iraqi capital after repeated allied air raids, and many residents indicated they were even more afraid of possible Israeli retaliation.

The continued allied raids, coupled with worries about Israeli, drove many I met to the edge of panic by the time the few remaining Western journalist were asked to leave the country Saturday.

Officials told us they could no longer ensure our safety, although they have allowed three staffers of Cable News Network to remain.

Since the first bombs struck the city, most of us had been largely confined to the Al-Rashed hotel, but late Friday Newsweek photographer Andy Hernandez and I managed a five-kilometer (three-mile) walk through the city.

We told Ministry of Information officials we needed to go out to buy food.

Israeli night retaliation. The subject was at the center of every conversation, censored or not, the official news media did not report Israel's decision to hold off on retaliation.

Through Saturday, the allied air strikes appeared to have been largely confined to military and government targets. Many Iraqis, taught that Israel is their arch enemy, believe an Israeli attack would be savagely indiscriminate.