

BRIEFLY

200 Iraqi fighters in Tehran: The number of Iraqi combat and transport planes sent to neutral Iran has reached 200...

Mubarak back home: President Hosni Mubarak returned home Wednesday night after a brief visit to Saudi Arabia...

Major apprehends war in Iraq: British Prime Minister John Major said he would not rule out pursuit of the Gulf war into Iraq...

Perez denies Iraqi charges: UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar rejected on Wednesday Iraq's charges that he was personally responsible for the Gulf war...

16 mines discovered in Gulf: Allied naval forces have discovered 16 new mines in the Gulf, a Saudi military spokesman announced...

Fahd to restore ties with Iran: King Fahd of Saudi Arabia said Wednesday that diplomatic relations with Iran will be re-established...

Punjab violence claims 37: A total of 37 persons have been killed in an unabated violence in India's northwest state of Punjab since Monday night...

Iraq permits 15 journalists: Iraq on Wednesday gave permission for 15 western journalists to return to Baghdad to cover the Gulf war...

Iran wants regional security order: AMMAN, Jan 31: Iran wants a regional security order after the Gulf war to include Iraq and its Arab foes...

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Peace plan falls far short of ME solution: Iraq

STOCKHOLM, Jan 31: Iraq's envoy in Sweden said on Wednesday a U.S.-Soviet peace plan fell far short of the comprehensive Middle East solution sought by Baghdad, reports Reuters.

"We (Iraq) are looking for a comprehensive peace and we shall not yield under pressure", Charge d'Affaires Mohammed Said Hani told journalists.

He said he was expressing his own opinion about Tuesday's superpower proposal

calling for an "unequivocal commitment" by Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.

The proposal offered Iraq a ceasefire in the Gulf war if it leaves Kuwait, and held out the possibility of a wider settlement once the fighting stopped.

"If anybody should withdraw, it should include Israel withdrawing from the occupied territories," Said added.

He was earlier quoted by the Swedish news agency as saying: Our view is clear.

Kuwait is a part of Iraq...the main problem is Israel's occupation of Arab areas".

The U.S.-Soviet statement said stability in the Middle East would be a priority once fighting ended and that both superpowers would try to achieve peace between Arabs and Israelis.

But it fell short of endorsing an international peace conference on the Middle East, which Iraq has demanded as a precondition for negotiations.

A Washington report adds:

The White House on Wednesday appeared to back away from a joint U.S. policy and that President George Bush had not seen the proposal before it was issued late on Tuesday.

"If there is anybody that has any concerns we certainly will offer explanations because we are anxious that no one think that we are altering policy in any way", Fitzwater told reporters.

Bush and Baker, asked at the start of an Oval Office meeting with Greek Foreign Minister Antonis Samaras whether the president was angry with the Secretary of State, denied any differences.

"There are no differences," Bush said. "He's never been mad at me", said Baker of the president.

The statement, issued shortly before Bush predicted military defeat for Iraq in his State of the Union message to Congress, offered Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein another chance to end the war by withdrawing from Kuwait and also pledging to work for a comprehensive Middle East peace once the conflict is over.

The statement differed from previous statements in two key respects.



SOUTH-EASTERN TURKEY: Turkish tanks take position some 40 kilometres away from Northern Iraq's border. Hundreds of tanks, thousands of soldiers and other heavy war materials have been deployed near the border. - AFP/UNB Photo

Iran wants regional security order

AMMAN, Jan 31: Iran wants a regional security order after the Gulf war to include Iraq and its Arab foes from the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jordan's Foreign Minister Taher Al-Masri said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Masri, briefing Parliament on a two-day visit to Tehran, said Iran did not believe security arrangements would be made for the region as "a gift" from foreign powers.

"Iran believes there is no way to avoid an arrangement that would include Iran, Iraq, the GCC and later be extended to cover Arab and Muslim countries," he said.

Jordan and Iran restored diplomatic ties two weeks ago after a 10-year break. Masri, who ended his visit on Monday, said the two countries would exchange envoys soon.

U S marines capture second Kuwaiti island

OVER UMM AL MARADIM ISLAND, Kuwait, January 31: U S marines ended Iraqi control of a second Kuwaiti island they blew up anti-aircraft weapons and artillery the Iraqis had apparently stationed there, Reports AP.

An explosion that produced a mushroom cloud was witnessed at 3:15 P.M. (12:15 GMT) Tuesday by reporters flown over the island -- a collection of two communication towers, 13 tents and buildings and brush lying 12 miles off the coast of Kuwait.

The U. S. army and navy on January 24 recaptured Kuwait's Qurah Island from the Iraqis.

It's another step in the continuing effort to free Kuwait," said Captain Michael J. Coumatos, commander of the U.S. S. Okinawa, from which the marines departed. "I think every square inch of liberated Kuwait is important to the Kuwaitis."

Before the explosion, two marines climbed to the

shorter communication tower and planted a Kuwaiti flag.

The marines decided to storm UMM Al-Maradim because they thought Iraqi soldiers might be there, according to Colonel John Rhodes, Commander of the 18th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

But unlike Qurah, no one was on the island when at least 50 marines were flown to it at noon, and there was no resistance from Iraqi forces on the mainland, according to Lieutenant Colonel John Flinn, who led the marine onto the island.

"In the 29 minutes, we declared the island safe and we set about confiscating equipment and deciding what to destroy and what to bring back" Col. Flinn said. "It was a quiet place."

The marines blew up the weaponry to prevent the Iraqis from using it against the thousands of U. S. Arab and European jets that regularly fly up the coast of Kuwait. Col. Rhodes said.

Thousands of Asians to flee S. Arabia

ABU DHABI Jan 31: Thousands of Asian expatriates are expected to flee eastern Saudi Arabia by road in the absence of air services as the Gulf war escalates, airline officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

They quoted diplomats as saying that up to 10,000 nationals of India and other Asian states including Bangladeshis were likely to undertake in coming weeks a 750 kilometre (450 mile) road trek to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for onward flights to their countries.

A group of 134 Indians in-

cluding 48 children, flew to India on Tuesday from Abu Dhabi where they arrived after a 22-hour journey from Dhahran, said Krishna Sivaraman, Air India Manager in Abu Dhabi.

"There will be a regular movement of at least 100 Indians a day from Friday," he said quoting diplomats.

Mr. Sivaraman said the Dubai-based travel agency Net Toura had arranged a regular bus service for those wishing to travel from Dhahran to the UAE airports of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Saudi Arabia was closed to civilian traffic ahead of the assault launched January 17 by US led multinational forces against Iraq to evict it from the oil-rich emirate of Kuwait.

Large numbers of expatriate residents from western and Asian countries left the region before that date, but some stayed on.

Iraq has fired more than two dozen missiles at Dhahran and other Saudi cities, and western countries have offered military flights to their nationals wishing to leave.

Saddam's bunkers as big as Baghdad

BELGRADE, Jan 31: A bunker complex housing troops, command centers and other installations near the Iraqi capital is "as big as Baghdad," a Yugoslav weekly said Wednesday, reports AP. "The drive from one side of the site to the other takes more than half an hour," a Yugoslav engineer told Zagreb's Danas newsmagazine in an exclusive interview. He requested anonymity.

The engineer, who said he worked on the giant project during the Iran-Iraq War, said its main entrance is located 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the city near the main road south to the port of Basra; but that very few Iraqis have any idea about its existence or size. Foreign workers and experts employed on the project including Italians, Germans and Yugoslavs were frequently shifted from one facility to another to prevent them from gaining detailed knowledge about them, the Yugoslav said.

"According to my estimate, the area covered by the complex is roughly as big as Baghdad," the engineer declared. Danas said he had spent one year on the site.

Iraqi colleagues reportedly told the Yugoslav that heavily fortified circular openings marked "ventilation shafts" on the design plans were in fact intended to serve as missile silos that would presumably be loaded from the bunkers below.

Numerous bunkers were built deep underground and were protected by several 70-centimeter (2-foot) deep layers of reinforced concrete interspersed at regular intervals with hard packed soil, the engineer said.

"I can't imagine what could destroy all that, what kind of nuclear blast could dig it all up," the builder said.

Off the Record

Judge refuses to allow Bush's son to go scot free

DENVER (Colorado): A Judge has refused to dismiss a 200-million-dollar lawsuit brought by the U.S. government against President George Bush's son Neil and other officers and directors of the defunct Silverado Banking, Savings and Loan Company, reports Reuter.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp (FDIC) filed the suit in September against Bush, 36, a Denver investor, and 10 other Silverado officials alleging they were grossly negligent in the 1988 failure of the savings and loan, also known as a thrift.

Bush and another former director, car dealer Florian Barth, tried to have the suit dismissed, saying the FDIC did not have enough evidence to support the charges.

U.S. District Judge Sherman Filtzwater, in a 15-page ruling issued on Tuesday said the suit was "replete with well-placed facts" and showed the involvement of Bush and Barth.

Bush, 36, also faces a complaint by the office of thrift supervision that he violated conflict-of-interest rules while on the Silverado board. In that case Bush is charged with failing to disclose his interest in bank transactions with two of his associates.

Bush was an outside Director of Silverado from August 1985 until August 1988. The failure of the federally insured thrift in December 1988 is expected to cost taxpayers one billion Dollars.

Thieves do it again

LONDON: Thieves broke into the car of a British naval officer in Athens and stole a briefcase, the second embarrassing theft of defence-related documents involving the British military in two months, reports Reuters.

The Foreign office said the theft occurred on Wednesday when Commodore Christopher Morgan, a British representative of NATO at the Greek Ministry of Defence, parked his car in Athens.

"Thieves stole a briefcase from Morgan's car in Athens. It has been reported to the police who are now investigating", a spokesman said.

No sensitive papers were reported taken but the theft is certain to cause concern following an incident in London last month when a briefcase and a computer were taken from the car of a senior officer.

The stolen items were recovered but theft caused an outcry in Parliament about security.

Clue to Parkinson's

NEW YORK: Experimental drugs prevented brain cell death in rats that is linked to Parkinson's disease in humans, suggesting a possible approach to fighting the disease, scientists say, reports AP.

The drugs blocked the toxic effects of a substance that produces Parkinson like symptoms in people and kills the same brain cell circuitry that Parkinson's affects.

But scientists cautioned that nobody knows what role, if either before or substance called glutamate from binding to brain cells at sites called NMDA receptors.

Bush seeks divine blessings

President George Bush on Wednesday invoked the memory of another wartime president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and said the goal of the Gulf war is the triumph of a new "moral order" in the world, reports AP.

"We ask God to bless us, to guide us and to help us through whatever dark nights we still may face", the President told lawmakers at the Capitol.

Bush made no mention in his brief speech of the deaths of 12 allied soldiers in a battle with Iraqi troops in Saudi Arabia near the Kuwaiti border. Bush was "very saddened" by the deaths, spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said afterward.

Fitzwater said the fighting did not represent the start of the ground war. He indicated that Bush has not ordered U.S. forces to launch that effort yet.

He said Bush on Friday will visit three bases that deployed troops in the Gulf: Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station in North Carolina, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina, and Fort Stewart in Georgia.

War casualties

UNATED Jan 31: Losses announced in the Gulf war as of 2300 GMT Wednesday, reports AFP.

Military losses: Allies: By Allied count: 24 planes, 2 helicopters lost, 1 airman killed, 27 airman missing including 10 confirmed POWs. 12 U.S. troops killed on Saudi-Kuwaiti border.

Iraq: By Allied count: 54 planes, 46 ships, 52 tanks, and 178 trucks, 9 Iraqi troops killed, and "substantial losses in men and equipment" at Khafji. Between 100 and POWs.

Allies: By Iraqi count: 284 aircraft or missiles, 12 airman captured (one captured air-

man killed in bombing of strategic site where he was held).

Iraq: By Iraqi count: 39 soldiers killed.

Allied breakdown: By Allied count:

United States: 15 planes and 2 helicopter

Britain: 6 aircraft

Italy: 1 aircraft

Kuwait: 1 aircraft

Saudi Arabia: 1 aircraft (for technical reasons)

Others: 2 aircraft, 1 nationalities not given.

Civilians losses by Allied count:

Israel: 5 dead, 273 injured.

Saudi Arabia: 1 dead, 42 injured.

Iraq: By Iraqi count: 123 civilians dead, 327 injured.

