

BRIEFLY

Space observation of war: Two Soviet cosmonauts have been watching the Gulf war from front row seats 200 kilometers (125 miles) above the earth in the space station Mir. Soviet Television reported Friday, reports AFP from Moscow.

From their perch, the cosmonauts can clearly see thick black smoke billowing up into the air above Kuwait and the outline of the oil slick spreading across the Gulf, as shown in a three-minute film taken from the station and broadcast along with the report.

"We see the signs of war. We see the oil burning and we see this unprecedented catastrophe taking place," said cosmonaut Musa Manarov.

B-52's allowed to fly over France: France agreed on Friday to allow U.S. B-52 bombers based in Britain to fly over its territory on Gulf war missions provided they carry only conventional weapons, reports Reuter.

"That decision has just been taken. France will allow the overflights of the B-52s over its territory and their refuelling at a French military base," government spokesman Louis Le Penet told French Television in Paris.

A Foreign Ministry statement spelled out conditions for the overflights.

Le Penet, who is a Cabinet Minister, said the measure was temporary. He added that the decision was taken after a meeting between President Francois Mitterrand and his inner Cabinet.

Anti-war rally in Nepal: Some 3,000 pro-leftist students and youths from a number of organisations took part in an anti-U.S. march in Kathmandu Friday to protest the Gulf war, witnesses said, reports AFP.

The Asia-Pacific Student's Organization, All Nepal Independent Students' Association, All Nepal Peasants' Association and the Muslim Community jointly organised the march to the U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu where they handed over protest letters.

The marchers chanted slogans like "US leave the Gulf region," "Iraq leave Kuwait" and "Israel leave Palestine."

The march was peaceful although riot police kept a close watch on it.

Call to end war: Iran and Algeria yesterday called for an "immediate" end to the Gulf war to make way for a political settlement, the official Iranian News Agency (IRAN) reported, reports Xinhua.

The appeal was issued by Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati and his visiting Algerian counterpart Ahmad Chouaib.

They called for "an immediate end to the war in the Persian Gulf in a bid to find a peaceful solution to the crisis," IRAN said.

Ghousali is heading an Algerian delegation to Iran, joining the arrival of Iraqi, Yemeni and French diplomats.

Velayati on Friday also met with Abd Al Aziz Al-Dallu, the Yemeni Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and discussed ways of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict, IRAN said.

Dallu arrived in Tehran Friday to discuss with the Iranian officials ways of seeking a settlement in the Gulf within a regional and Islamic context.

Sharif's meeting boycotted: Pakistan's main opposition bloc boycotted a meeting called by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Friday to discuss the Gulf war, snubbing him for his anti-Iraq policy, reports Reuter.

Sharif rejected their demands that Pakistan should withdraw its troops from the Gulf.

Sharif invited politicians in Islamabad to brief them about a Gulf peace mission he made to six Muslim countries last week. He told those who attended that Pakistan would keep its 11,000 troops in Saudi Arabia, where they are on the side of a U.S.-led multinational force trying to drive Iraq's army from Kuwait.

The four-party Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA), led by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, did not attend the meeting, saying it would serve no purpose.

Tunisian aid for Iraq: Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali decided Friday to send a medical team, medicine and other assistance to Iraq, officials in Tunis said, reports AFP.

The decision was taken following a meeting Mr. Ben Ali had with his close advisors on the Gulf war and Arab efforts to convene the U.N. Security Council to seek peaceful ways of ending the conflict.

Officials in Tunis said, Tunisia would coordinate the dispatch of doctors and medicine — allowed under a U.N. embargo of Iraq — with the international committee of the Red Cross.

China warns US newsman: China gave a "serious warning" Friday to a U.S. correspondent for reporting that Beijing tried to sell arms to Iraq in defiance of a United Nations embargo, the official Xinhua news agency said, reports AFP from Hongkong.

The Foreign Ministry rebuked James Tyson, Correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor in the Chinese capital, as it denied his despatch as "sheer fabrication," Xinhua said.

China sold arms to both sides of the Iran-Iraq war, but declared after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August that it would abide by the U.N. embargo.

Oil slick breaks up: A huge oil slick floating off the Saudi coast has broken up into several sheets because of winds and tides, a Canadian officer said in Manama Friday, reports AFP.

Major Jy Forcier said the latest observations by Allied forces of the massive spill showed that over the past few hours it had disintegrated into three or four sheets that had been floating southwards.

Derek Brown, an environmental advisor for Bahraini refiners, said this development was to be expected and did not alter the pollution problem facing the region.

He said that although the slick threatened a wider area its impact would be lessened.

Jordan violates UN embargo: The United States said on Friday that Jordan is importing oil from Iraq in violation of the U.N. embargo designed to punish Baghdad for its invasion of Kuwait, reports Reuter.

"Although we admit that Jordan has been heavily dependent on oil imports from Iraq, such imports are a clear violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 661, and the (U.N.) sanctions committee has never approved an exception for Jordan," state department spokeswoman Margaret Tintwiler told reporters in Washington.

She said, she did not know if this meant that the United States felt free to attack oil tank trucks travelling from Iraq to Jordan.

Jordan has taken measures to reduce fuel consumption after accusing Washington and its allies of bombing Jordanian tanker trucks ferrying crude oil along the Baghdad-Amman highway, killing five drivers.

Major hails Klerk's decision: British Prime Minister John Major Friday welcomed the announcement by President F.W. De Klerk of South Africa to abolish the last pillars of apartheid within months, reports Xinhua.

In a statement in London Major said, the plan to scrap key apartheid laws would remove the remaining traces of apartheid in South Africa.

He said President De Klerk has kept his promise and fundamental change has come to South Africa.

The international community's response should measure up to this, Major said.

Major also called for lifting of economic sanctions against South Africa to help De Klerk in his plans to create a new South Africa.

International

Iraqi formations to be targeted

Massive Allied ground offensive in the offing

WITH BRITISH FORCES IN SAUDI ARABIA, Feb 2: The crash of British artillery will signal the start of an Allied ground offensive to drive Iraq from Kuwait, military commanders said on Friday, reports Reuter.

They told reporters the 24 155mm self-propelled Howitzers of 40 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, would unleash the first barrage to mark the start of the ground battle to re-take the emirate occupied by Iraq last August.

"Two of our shells are equal to the warhead of a single Scud," said the Regimental Commander, Lieutenant-

nised infantry formations just across Saudi Arabia's northern border, already the target for relay of B-52 bombers.

The rippling concentrations of B-52 strikes could be clear felt early on Friday as the Howitzers rolled into position.

The three batteries, each of eight artillery pieces, will fire the equivalent of 12 Iraqi modified Scud-b missiles every 20 seconds over a range of about 20 km.

"Two of our shells are equal to the warhead of a single Scud," said the Regimental Commander, Lieutenant-

Colonel Rory Clayton. A single 155mm high explosive shell weighs 96 lbs (44 kg).

The first round kills, and the second and third keep their heads down, in other words, suppress enemy fire," he added.

"What I want to make sure is that (Iraqi) artillery in the vicinity is taken out of the equation, so it does not affect the course of the battle," said Clayton, a former rock band drummer.

"Asked about the effectiveness of Iraqi artillery, Clayton said there was "plenty of it."

However the sources insist that what they call Iraq's "spoiling attack" on the Saudi Arabian border town of Khafji this week will not draw the allies into an assault before air strikes have sufficiently crippled Iraq's command and control of its own forces on the front line.

They described the Khafji battle as a feint designed to throw the allies of balance and to encourage U.S. and British forces along the border to react, giving away their positions.

"They seem to be following the classic Soviet doctrine of fighting for information," said one source.

Asked how he felt about firing the opening shots of what could be a gruelling ground war lasting several weeks, Sergeant Garry Brunn from Devon said, "It's not a particularly nice thing to have to do, but it's a job that has to be done."

But many men in the 11-member Howitzer crews were impatient.

"We can't wait. Let's get it over with," said 21-year-old Gunner Paul Barlow from Cornwall.



LONDON: Royal Navy helicopter crew members give the "V" sign after a successful strike against Iraqi gunboats in the Gulf. — AFP/UNB photo

Iraq has no spare barrels for tanks: Soviet official

MOSCOW, Feb 2: An official at the Soviet Embassy in Baghdad said in an interview that the Iraqi army had no spare gun barrels for its predominantly Soviet-made tanks force, reports Reuter.

The official, identified only as Gleb D, told the latest issue of the independent business weekly newspaper Megapolis Express that international sanctions had prevented Iraq from receiving the gun barrels and other spare parts.

The barrels of Soviet tanks were out after firing 100 rounds and have to be changed... Iraq does not have any spares. They didn't manage to get them from the Soviet Union," he told the paper.

Asked whether he was sure about this, Gleb D, who said he was one of a group of specialists and embassy workers who

left Iraq just before the first Allied attack, replied: "Yes, I know it for a fact."

Until Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, Moscow was Baghdad's main ally and arms supplier and kept a large number of military advisers in Iraq.

The Iraqi army has around 5,500 main battle tanks, the vast majority of them Soviet-built, according to figures published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Moscow now backing the allies diplomatically, says all military advisers have been withdrawn from Iraq and no weapons or spare parts have been delivered since August 2.

Iraqi sailors whose ships were sunk by Allied helicopters and warships said they were taking their boats to Iran at the time of the attack.

They want to keep their ships in Iran until the war is over.

The Iraqi vessels were attacked by U.S. and British navy helicopters as they crossed the northern Gulf. The survivors were picked up from the sea in two groups, 20 on Wednesday and 15 on Thursday, and are now aboard the US frigate Curtis.

They were cold and tired but otherwise appeared to be in good health.

Sharif's 2nd peace move to end war

ISLAMABAD, Feb 2: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is planning a second peace mission later this month aimed at ending the Gulf war, according to spokesman, reports AP.

Sharif plans to visit Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and possibly Yemen, spokesman Sherif Rashid Ahmed said Friday. No firm date was announced, but Rashid said the trip would most likely be Feb. 9-10.

The Prime Minister returned Monday from a whirlwind tour of Iran, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Sheikh's visit to the Mar Thoma Church in Mosul, Iraq, is one

of Islam's holiest sites because it houses the shrine of Imam Ali — the first Shi'ite Imam.

The savage enemy has also

destroyed a large number of houses near the mausoleum of Imam Kazim (the 7th Shi'ite Imam) in Kazimiyah (a Baghdad suburb) Mr. Fadel said.

Several mosques were destroyed in Basra and five in Baghdad, as well as in other parts of the country, he said.

According to Mr. Fadel, the Mar Korkis Church located in Al-Haditha, western Iraq was also destroyed in air raids.

"This was in the air of the

Mar Thoma Church in Mosul, Iraq.

Arab investments in front of Mr. Shekhar's government.

Mr. Chandra Shekhar, now in the country's north for a ruling party convention, has made no comment on the meeting, but colleagues have brushed it off in private, saying the Prime Minister never snubs old acquaintances.

"Even the Prime Minister is not an exception to the rule that one is known by the company one keeps," the Hindustan Times said in an editorial on the dinner, calling the welcome extended to Mr. Khashoggi in Delhi "an index of the moral bankruptcy that is affecting our public affairs."

Since Mr. Khashoggi's arrival in a private DC-9 over the weekend, the press had carried front page speculation that he was dangling billions in

A great virtue of our Prime Minister is that he does not ditch his friends, but he can carry this tendency too far," it said.

Nor did the dinner host, Dr J K Jain, a controversial member of the Upper House from the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), get off lightly from the press or his own party.

A BJP meeting Thursday, widely reported Friday, resulted in the members noting in their minutes that the party expressed strong disapproval of Dr Jain's actions.

Mr. Khashoggi, who stayed in a private hotel here, left New Delhi Wednesday without talking to the press.

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