

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 Reuters.

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

A Foreign Ministry statement spelled out conditions for the overflights.

Le Penec, 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-peace 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 (IRNA) reported, reports Xinhua.

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

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

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

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

Dali 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 Reuters.

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 14,000 troops in Saudi Arabia, where they are on the said 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 UN 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 UN embargo of Iraq — with the international committee of the Red Cross.

China warns US newsmen: 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 seen floating southwards.

Derek Brown, an environmental advisor for Bahraini refineries, 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 Reuters.

"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 Tutwiler 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 targetted

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 Reuters.

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 retake the emirate occupied by Iraq last August.

In the gunners' sights will be Iraqi armoured and mechanised infantry formations just across Saudi Arabia's northern border, already the target for relays of B-52 bombers.

The rippling concussions 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' and 'it's bloody good. But it was employed largely in supporting static lines of defence rather than in a war of manoeuvre."

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 off 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, reports Reuters.

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.

A Kuwaiti officer who interrogated the 35 prisoners-of-war told reporters they had abandoned the Iraqi naval base at Umm Qasr on orders from the highest levels of the Iraqi navy.

The orders said they should take the boats to Bandar Khomeini and Iranian port 110km (70 miles) east of Umm Qasr, said the Kuwaiti officer, identified only as Major Ibrahim.

The United States says 89 Iraqi planes, including some of Baghdad's best fighters and bombers, have fled to Iran. Tehran says it will impound the planes until the Gulf war ends.

Iran has denied any advance knowledge of the flights by the Iraqi aircraft.

The Iraqi naval base at Umm Qasr has been under

heavy Allied attack for the past week. The allies say they have sunk or damaged most of the vessels in the Iraqi navy.

"They know they cannot fight and they don't have the ability to defend themselves against the aircraft," the Major said.

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.

US airliner catches fire: 2 killed

LOS ANGELES, Feb 2: A US airliner coming in for a landing Friday struck an outbound commuter plane and caught fire at Los Angeles International Airport, killing at least two people and injuring 25, officials said, reports AP.

The Boeing 737 apparently collided with a Sky West commuter plane, Federal Aviation Administration spokeswoman Elly Brekke said, adding that they crashed on the ground.

At least two people died and 25 were hurt, Fire Department spokesman Jim Wells said, adding that there were dozens of survivors.

Allies bomb holy shrines: Baghdad

NICOSIA, Feb 2: The Allied forces have launched air attacks against Muslim and Christian shrines in Iraq killing "dozens of innocent civilians," Iraqi Religious Affairs Minister Abdallah Fadel said Friday, reports AFP.

He charged that "civilian objectives near the Imam Ali Mausoleum in Najaf were hit Allied air attacks and dozens of innocents were killed." The official Iraqi News Agency (INA) reported.

"The mausoleum was heavily damaged by several shrapnel rounds," he said.

Najaf in central 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 Kazimiya (a Baghdad suburb)," Mr. Fadel said.

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

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

This was also the fate of the Mar Touma Church in Mosul.

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 Sheikh 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.

Shekhar dines with Khashoggi, whips up storm in press

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: The Indian press Friday censured Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar for dining here with billionaire international arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi, with one newspaper advising him to choose his friends more carefully, reports AFP.

Several opposition politicians added to the storm in the champagne glass by calling the Tuesday night meeting during Mr. Khashoggi's four-day stopover in the Indian capital a "national disgrace" and a "national humiliation."

Said Congress (I) member and former Deputy Foreign

Minister K K Tiwari: "It is a clear indication that India is on sale."

Mr Tiwari however was silent over a widely reported separate meeting between his party chief, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. Khashoggi in Mr. Gandhi's house before the latter's departure Wednesday. The arms dealer reportedly took his two sons along.

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

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."

Off the Record

Do it while Scuds are fired

JERUSALEM: To combat stress from an Iraqi Scud missile barrage, a leading psychologist has suggested making love, eating and drinking and watching funny films, reports AFP.

Psychologist Zeev Wandrer told readers of the Yediot Aharanot newspaper: "The main thing is to do nice things to keep the tension down."

"When the threat begins as night falls, I take a shower and shave as if I were getting ready for a night out with friends," he said.

"Above all do not sit around passively waiting for the siren and the missile or act as if we are at war."

A dietitian advised not stuffing your face during periods of stress and not eating sweets. "It is better to eat healthy things such as bread and brown rice."

"Pop corn is much better for the children than chocolate."

Sailors ordered to flee!

ABOARD THE USS CURTS: Captured Iraqi sailors have told an interrogator they were ordered to flee to Iran with their boats and wait until the end of the war, reports AP.

"They (got) a special order that they should leave the area immediately to (go to) Bandar Khomeini port which is in Iran to save all their boats," said a Kuwaiti naval officer who identified himself as Maj. Ibrahim.

Ibrahim, a liaison officer to the US Navy, interrogated 35 Iraqi sailors whose vessels have been sunk over the past two days. He was told the special order to flee to Iran came to captains by special messenger.

The story from the prisoners held on the Curtis, a missile frigate, seemed to indicate Iraq was trying to do with its navy what it did with many of its best warplanes — sending craft to Iran for storage during the war.

Ibrahim said most of the crewmembers aboard the collection of Iraqi patrol boats and landing craft initially were told they were going to the Iraqi port of Basra. The new destination was announced only after the boats left the Iraqi port of Umm al Qasr, devastated by air strikes.

He said the sailors were told to stay in Iran until the war ended.

"They know they cannot fight and they don't have the ability to defend themselves against the aircraft," Ibrahim said. "They want to keep their ships in Iran until the war is over."

Pricking thieves' conscience

TOKYO: Japanese postal officials appealed publicly for the first time to thieves to return stolen mail, following a theft of registered letters, reports Reuters.

"We appeal to your conscience," read an advertisement in five Tokyo newspapers from the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications.

"Please pitch the mail back into any post and return them as soon as possible," said the notice next to rock concert advertisements.

"We don't know if this is going to work but we decided to go ahead," a Ministry spokesman said.

On January 26, a total of 1,541 pieces of registered mail were stolen from a post office delivery truck in Tokyo. They included money orders, a writer's manuscripts and entrance applications to colleges, the spokesman said.

Chocolate nation

BERNE: The Swiss staunchly defended their record as the world's biggest chocolate eaters last year, consuming a record 11.3 kg (25 pounds) per head, the Trade Association Choco Suisse said on Friday, reports Reuters.

The Swiss produced 108,882 tonnes of chocolate worth 910 million dollars in 1990 and ate two-thirds of it themselves.

Bush for 'new order', Perez confused

LIMA (Peru), Feb 2: UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar said on Friday he was unsure what US President George Bush meant by a "new world order" following the end of the Gulf war, reports Reuters.

But the Secretary-General, in an interview with Peruvian radio, said his ideas of a new world order would include social justice for poorer countries and better relations between the developed and worlds.

"I still have not seen a definition, so to speak, of what the President of the United States means in this respect," Perez de Cuellar said in the interview, taped in New York.

"I have heard him speaking of the new international order, but in reality, I still do not have a clear idea of what is meant by the new international order," he added.

Bush, in a speech the night war broke out, said a successful solution to the conflict would open the possibility of a "new world order" in which a credible United Nations can use its



peacekeeping role to fulfil the promise envisioned of the UN's founders.

To me, the new international order means democracy on an international level, with all countries having the same access to international justice and social justice, that all countries have a right to well-being which unfortunately is not the case in Third World countries," he said.

Perez de Cuellar, who met Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in a last gasp peace effort only days before war broke out, said he believed Saddam was not at all imbalanced.

Western report a big lie: Arafat

NICOSIA, February 2: PLO Chief-Yasser Arafat has dismissed as a "big lie" a Western Media report that he received orders from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to open a new front against Israel, reports Reuters.

The U. S. Cable News Network said Western Intelligence had intercepted orders from Iraq to the "Palestine" Liberation Organisation headquarters in Tunis, received in Nicosia.

Stressing that he was in direct contact with his Embassy

in Baghdad, Arafat said: "We are the leadership and we are not receiving orders from any side."

Israel on Friday threatened tougher retaliation after pro-Iraqi Palestinian guerrillas fired Katyusha rockets north of the Israeli border for the fourth straight day.

Since the latest Rocket barrages began, the Israelis have shelled areas in South Lebanon from where the Rockets were launched.

Asked by CNN whether he was surprised Israel was not retaliating for Iraqi Scud attacks, Arafat repeated PLO assertions that the Jewish State was secretly taking part in Allied operations against Iraq.