

NORTHERN SAUDI ARABIA: Sergeant Susan Kyle peering down the barrel of her rifle as she cleans; troops in Saudi Arabia must clean their weapons regularly because of the climate.

## Baghdad forms execution battalions?

# S. Arabia holds 1,330 Iraqi prisoners so far

RIYADH, Feb 9: The Iraqi army has formed "execution battalions" detached from the elite Republican Guard to prevent desertions, the top Saudi General said today, reports AFP.

General Khalid Bin Sultan, Commander of Joint Forces along with U S General Norman Schwarzkopf, also said at a press briefing that the Saudi authorities now hold more than 1,330 Iraqi prisoners.

He said that 936 Iraqi troops had been captured or given the selves up since the war began. Another 418 had crossed into Saudi Arabia following the August 2 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and prior to the

start to the war on January 17, he said.

Prince Khalid said that the Iraqis were putting obstacles at the front, including spies, to keep their forces from crossing over.

"There is what they call execution battalions," he said, quoting reports from captured Iraqis. "It's for sure that they have them to execute any deserters."

Asked if he knew of any actual executions, Prince Khalid said: "No I don't, but my guess is the percentage is high that there have been some."

Prince Khalid stressed that all Iraqi prisoners would be treated in accordance with the

Geneva Convention and as "military refugees." Saudi authorities have said previously that Iraqi deserters will be treated as religious pilgrims performing the "hajj".

Prince Khalid also declined at a press briefing to flatly state whether Saudi or other Arab forces would take any ground campaign into Iraq itself.

He said that the objective was to free Kuwait. "The other coalition, and especially the Arab Muslim forces, will do exactly what is supposed to be done and they will do what the Saudi Armed Forces will do," he said.

Prince Khalid also insisted

that a main objective was to end the war so that "Iraq over time will be welcomed back in to the family of nations."

Some Arab countries have expressed concern that the United States was taking the coalition beyond the U N mandate to free Kuwait.

Jordan's King Hussein on Wednesday described the campaign as an attack "against all Arabs and all Muslims and not against Iraq alone."

Prince Khalid declined to comment on the Jordanian monarch's remarks, saying only: "If I can't say nice things about him, I won't say anything."

# Iraq pronounces curse till Doomsday as 100 killed

NICOSIA, Feb 9: Iraq pronouncing "a curse till doomsday" on Gulf Allied leaders, says bombers killed 100 civilians in a raid over the southern city of Nasiriyah this week, reports Reuters.

The toll announced by Iraqi radio on Friday, was the highest for civilians since the Gulf war began on January 17.

Previously Iraq listed a nationwide total of 367 dead and 400 wounded among civilians although some diplomats in Baghdad say civilian death may run into thousands.

Allied military spokesmen say great efforts are made to confine bombing raids to military targets but they acknowledge that some civilian may be hit in collateral damage.

Iraqi radio monitored by the British Broadcasting Cor-

poration said the 100 unarmed civilians martyred in Nasiriyah earlier listed among southern cities raided on Thursday included 35 children under 10 years of age.

It said they were buried on Thursday night as French President Francois Mitterrand told a Paris News Conference that a ground war was inevitable.

Hundreds of people were made homeless in the air attack.

Mitterrand, the radio said, had talked about the Allies launching their "devastating war for the sake of the human being. The commentary added. Is there a more disdainful empty bravado? Is there a more severe falsification of the facts than this?"

Earlier Baghdad Radio

monitored by BBC said US President George Bush and Saudi Arabian King Fahd would be held personally responsible for every drop of blood shed on Iraqi soil and they would be hunted down and punished in due course.

The curse will haunt them and their families until doomsday, the radio added.

Iraq said it shot down three Allied planes in 192 Allied air raids on its territory including residential areas and vowed to crush the heads of the aggressors.

The Iranian News Agency (IRNA) which has been reporting almost daily Allied air strikes near its borders with Iraq said on Friday that Nasiriyah was among several southern cities, including

Basra, Iraq's second largest, bombed on Thursday.

Eye-witnesses in the capital Baghdad said on Friday several people were killed or wounded when US and Allied planes knocked out a telecommunications building during overnight air raids.

The area around the telecommunications building is residential and many houses had their windows shattered.

Iraq said in radio broadcasts that weeks of Allied bombing had failed to break its will to fight and it would never make peace with the US led coalition trying to force it out of Kuwait.

It said that after Allied raids failed to "affect the Iraqi people's morale they began bombing homes, mosques, schools and scientific, cultural and art institutions.

## Bhutan asks rebels to shun terrorism

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Bhutanese Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dawa Tsering urged anti-government protestors in the Himalayan Kingdom Friday to abandon "terroristic activities" and open talks with the government, reports AFP.

Mr. Tsering spoke in Calcutta, where Bhutanese and Indian officials agreed to hold periodic meeting to help pre-

vent unauthorised crossings of their common border, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

"Our doors are still open for talks," Mr. Tsering said, urging ethnic Nepalese militants in Bhutan to halt their "terroristic activities," according to PTI.

Thousands of ethnic Nepalese who left their homes in southern Bhutan last year are living in camps in India's neighbouring West Bengal state where they have formed military groups demanding greater democracy in Bhutan.

Authorities in Thimbu, Bhutan's capital, accuse the militants of killing, intimidating and kidnapping civilians and of subversion.

Mr. Tsering's talks with West Bengal and Indian government officials in Calcutta, the state capital, included issue of the Bhutanese refugees, PTI said.

Indian Home Ministry Secretary Manish Gupta was quoted by PTI as saying the two sides had decided that district and village officials from areas on both sides of the border should meet every two weeks starting February 20.

## Delhi's bid to export jute bags to S. Arabia worries Jyoti

CALCUTTA, Feb 9: The West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, in a message to the Union Textile Ministry yesterday expressed serious concern over the centre's proposal to export jute bags to Saudi Arabia for defence-related purposes, reports PTI.

The message said, "such reports at this juncture of the Gulf war will cause serious misunderstanding about India's policy in West Asia", according to the chief secretary, Mr. T.C. Dutta.

## British copter destroys Iraqi gunboat

ABOARD BRITISH FRIGATE BRAZEN, Feb 9: A British Navy helicopter destroyed an Iraqi gunboat of Kuwait yesterday and military spokesmen said the missile attack reaffirmed Allied naval supremacy in the Gulf war, reports Reuters.

A Lynx helicopter from the British destroyer Cardiff hit the patrol boat with a sea Skua missile. The two-man crew said the vessel exploded and survivors scrambled overboard.

The attack took place about 15 miles east of the Kuwaiti port of Al Fintas, just north of the island of Jazirat Kubbar.

Navy officials said the gunboat was believed to be a Soviet-built Zhuk, one of five in the Iraqi Navy before the start of the Gulf war.

American forces on Thursday severely damaged another Iraqi fast patrol boat.

Allied spokesmen say almost all Iraq's small navy vessels have been sunk or damaged.

## Shekhar rules out early polls

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar on Friday ruled out early elections in India, which has had three governments in the last two years, reports Reuters.

"Don't see any possibility of elections immediately," Shekhar told the Press Trust of India (PTI) in an interview.

There has been speculation in Indian newspapers that former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's Congress party may withdraw crucial parliamentary support from Shekhar's minority government because of disagreement of several issues, including India's stand on the Gulf war.

The Congress Party has criticised the government for allowing refuelling facilities to American Military aircraft in India after war broke out in the Gulf.

Shekhar denied that relations were strained between his Janata Dal Socialist Party and Gandhi's Congress Party.

"I have seen no strain. I can understand that there may be some difference of emphasis on issues but there is not any major difference with the Congress," Shekhar said.

Shekhar came to power last November after splitting former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh's Janata Dal Party and pulling down the government with Gandhi's help.

# US turns down Sikh offer to fight in Gulf

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: The United States embassy in New Delhi has politely turned down a Sikh religious organisation's offer to send Sikh combatants to fight alongside coalition forces in the Gulf, reports AFP.

The US embassy thanked Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (Sikh temple management committee or SGPC) secretary C.S. Sandhu for offering to send "thousands of Sikhs" to join the coalition and donate blood to wounded U.S. soldiers in the battle zone, a U.S. embassy source said here.

"We have responded to a letter from the SGPC secretary with a letter. We thank him for his efforts supporting the coalition forces," the source quoted an official reply from the mission as saying. He said the embassy "ap-

preciated" the offer from SGPC, which manages the Golden Temple, a Sikhism's holiest shrine, located in northern Punjab state where Sikh militants are waging a bloody separatist battle for their own homeland.

The militants, trained in using the latest small arms, have often used Sikh temples called gurdwaras as strongholds in the Punjab.

The offer was made in mid-January and the letter said Sikhs, a martial religion, were willing to fight against Iraq "aggressors" of Kuwait.

The diplomatic source said the embassy's polite refusal saying the U.S. army could not draft non-Americans directed Mr. Sidhu to contact the International Society for the Red Cross for blood donations. India prohibits its national

from joining foreign forces as mercenaries or volunteers.

Several Indians, including Sikhs, have mailed similar offers to the Iraqi embassy in New Delhi, but it is not known if Baghdad, formerly a close ally of New Delhi, has responded to their letters.

AP from Colombo says: Two opposition parties on Friday denounced the government's decision to refuse allied warships enroute to the Gulf to join the war against Iraq.

"The Sri Lanka government has become an accomplice to the massacre of the Iraqi people," said a statement from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the largest of the 23 opposition parties in this Indian Ocean island nation.

The Freedom Party, headed by former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, supports the United Nations resolution.

# Rajiv ready to attempt a comeback

airports on their way to and from the Gulf.

Earlier, in a statement weighted against the US-led multinational forces, he called for a ceasefire in the Gulf and the use of an economic embargo to force Iraq out of Kuwait.

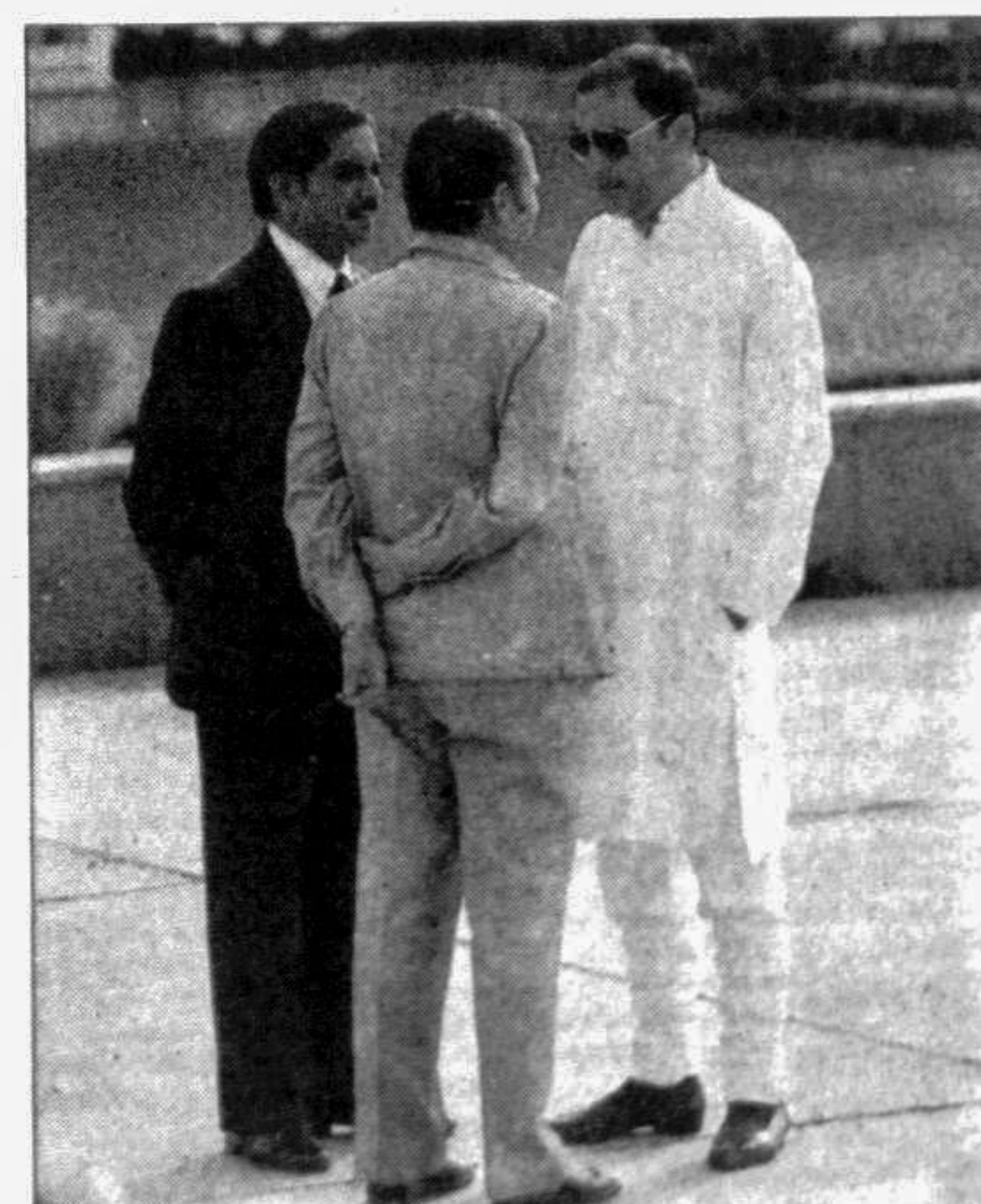
Gandhi's opposition to the refuelling and Shekhar's other policies on the Gulf appeared to stem from swelling support for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein among India's 120 million Muslims — whose vote is crucial for any would-be prime minister.

A major Congress goal is to win back Muslim support after losing it in anger at Gandhi's handling of their dispute with Hindus over a religious site in the northern town of Ayodhya.

Muslims switched support to Vishwanath Pratap Singh, a major factor in the failure of Congress to retain its majority in 1989 elections and ending Gandhi's five years as Prime Minister.

The dispute spawned violence in which hundreds of people were killed. That followed violence over Singh's decision to give more jobs to lower castes.

The troubles convinced senior Congress men an early election would benefit only the



NEW DELHI: Rajiv discussing a secret point with Dhawan, confidante of Indira Gandhi and Poteadar, a trusted political guide in the backyard of power?

Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which led the Hindu campaign over Ayodhya and was prominent in opposing Singh's caste policies.

So when Shekhar split Singh's party last November, Gandhi threw Congress support behind him to delay elections.

But Gandhi said he no longer saw a threat in BJP which emerged as the third biggest group in parliament in 1989 largely because of the Ayodhya dispute.

"Its strength was built up on only one violent movement," he said.

"These two issues now appear to be overshadowed by the economic crisis and Rajiv has always shown himself to be a good manager of the economy, said one politician close to him.

"The time is ripe for taking over," she added.

The Congress sources said a split appeared a distinct possibility in Shekhar's party with the rebels then deserting to Congress and paving the way for Gandhi to form a government.

"We won't be dropping the government. If he fails that his problem," said Gandhi.

## BRIEFLY

**Prize on Saddam withdrawn:** Geneva University is to withdraw a 250,000-dollar science prize conferred annually in honour of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein after scientists protested at its existence, university official in Geneva said Friday, reports AFP.

The prize was set up by Iraq's official Council of Scientific Research in 1987 and had been awarded every year since then on April 28, Mr. Hussein's birthday.

It was officially described as a "sign of recognition" for what the Iraqi President "accomplished and for what he would like to undertake in the service of scientific progress and humanity."

**US coalition destroys 600 tanks:** Allied forces have destroyed at least 600 Iraqi tanks since the Gulf war began, US army Lieutenant General Thomas Kelly in Washington said Friday, reports AFP.

Before the war, western experts estimated that Iraq had about 4,200 tanks in their arsenal.

**3 Allied fighters downed:** Iraqi gunners shot down three warplanes in the past 24 hours as the Allies mounted 192 raids on residential areas and military positions around the country, the Iraqi News Agency INA said late Friday, reports AFP.

"Our armed forces promise the Iraqi people and its leader to avenge the holy places (of Islam) that the aggressors have soiled in Saudi Arabia and Palestine," the Agency said, quoting a military communique.

"Our soldiers will trample on the heads of the Americans, the Zionists and their allies and slaves," INA said in a dispatch monitored in Nicosia.

**Iraq's refusal angers US:** The White House said Friday it was outraged by Baghdad's refusal to allow the International Red Cross to visit Allied prisoners of war held in Iraq, reports AFP.

We just want to point out once again that this demonstrates the total disregard that (Iraqi President) Saddam Hussein has for international law, for human life and civilized behavior, said White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater in Washington.

Responding to press reports that Baghdad has barred the Red Cross from visiting the prisoners Mr. Fitzwater said that it was an outrage to the international world that...Iraq was a party to the Geneva Convention but is not co-operating with the Red Cross in this matter."

**Bombing raids kill 14:** Allied bombing raids on the highway connecting Amman and Baghdad have killed 14, wounded 26 and destroyed 50 trucks, Jordan's Ambassador told the United Nations Friday, reports AFP from New York.

Ambassador Abdullah Salah sent a letter to UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar detailing the results of the assault on trucks and tankers owned by Jordanian companies between January 29 and February 5.

**Bush commends Major:** President George Bush called British Prime Minister John Major on Friday to discuss Thursday's mortar attack near 10 Downing Street, the White House said in Washington.

"The President found him in good spirits. He (Bush) said the American people have total admiration for him and his Cabinet," said Presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater.

Fitzwater said the President commended Major "for the calm and courageous manner in which he has responded to the IRA attack."

Major was meeting with his Cabinet on Thursday when the mortar round, fired from a van, exploded in the back garden of the Prime Minister's residence.

The Irish Republican Army claimed responsibility for the attack.

**'US can't veto Israel's right':** The United States has no veto over Israel's right to retaliate against Iraqi Scud missile attacks, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said in Jerusalem Friday, reports AFP.