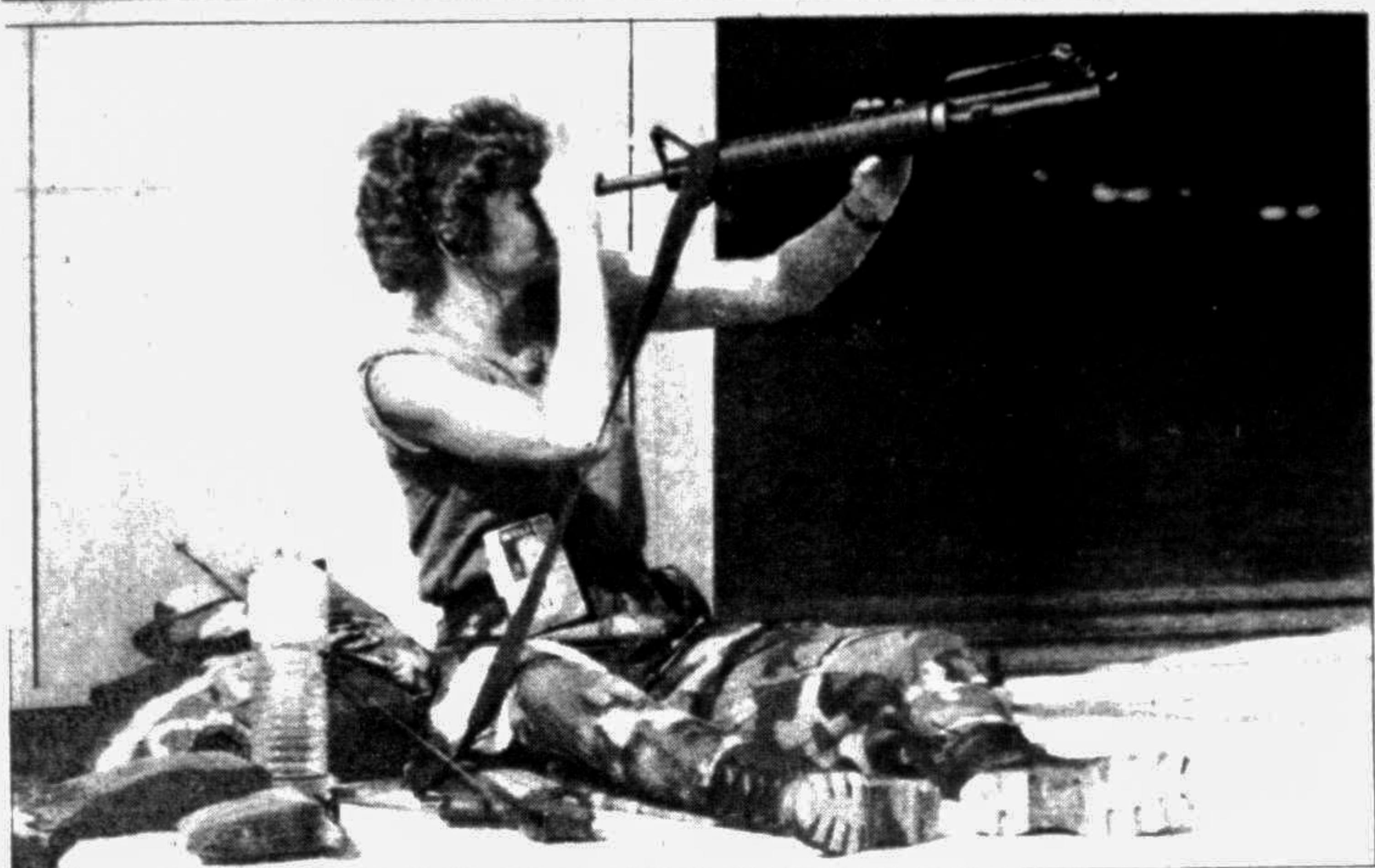


## International



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 US 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 themselves 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 to the family of nations."

Some Arab countries have expressed concern that the United States was taking the coalition beyond the UN 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 is can't say nice things about him, I won't say anything."

## British copter destroys Iraqi gunboat

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

A Lynx helicopter from the British destroyed 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 Fawas, 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.

American spokesman 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 Reuter.

"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.

"Everything is difficult . . . foreign policy, at home the economy is in a total mess," Gandhi said in the interview on Thursday night.

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.

Gandhi said he was particularly unhappy with Shekhar's decision to give more jobs to lower castes.

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

# 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 AP.

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. Futter.

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 refuel 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



NEW DELHI: Rajiv discussing a secret point with Dhawan, confidante of Indira Gandhi and Fotedar, 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 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," he 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.

# Iraq pronounces curse till Doomsday as 100 killed

NICOSIA, Feb 9: Iraq pronounces "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 Reuter.

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.

Alleged 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-

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 Alito 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 telecommunication 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.

## Off the Record

### And now Operation Desert Rats

NORTHEAST SAUDI ARABIA : Desert rats are making life hell for British troops in Saudi Arabia, reports Reuter.

Soldiers of the Queen's company, Grenadier Guards, say the raiding rodents have gnawed their way through webbing straps, personal stereo leads, rolls of film, sweets and chocolates.

The troops sleep in sand dug-outs lined with chemical-resistant material and canoes. But the defences don't worry the rats.

"Last night despite a new barricade and every hole filled in, they came back and raided a soldier's packet of indigestion tablets", a reporter said in a pool despatch.

Britain's Seventh Armoured Brigade, nicknamed the Desert Rats, is serving with the multinational force in the Gulf.

### Nothing wrong in dining

NEW DELHI : The Prime Minister, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, sees nothing wrong in his attending a dinner hosted for controversial international arms dealer Mr. Adnan Khoshoggi, reports PTI.

There were about hundred people at the dinner hosted by Dr. J.K. Jain, BJP MP, whom he had known for a long time. Mr. Chandrababu Naidu said during an interview.

"Dr. Jain invited me. Should I see his guest list" Mr. Naidu said, adding he had no hesitation in meeting any type of people.

"Some people are pious people. They do not meet questionable personalities. I do not go into the details of every individual", he said.

### A nap in the afternoon

ST. PETERSBURG, (Florida) : Writer James Michener, who turns 84 on Sunday, says the passage of time doesn't mean he's put out to pasture. It does, however, make him a little tired, reports AP.

"I don't feel like an elder statesman," said the author of works such as "Hawaii", "Chesapeake", "Centennial", and "Texas". "I am working very diligently. The only change in my life is that I take a nap in the afternoon".

Michener and his wife, Mari, plan to spend each October through February at Eckerd College here as part of the school's Academy of Senior Professionals.

Much of Michener's time is spent writing and working as a teaching assistant for a creative writing class of 12 students.

These were very able students with potential talent, he said.

The author spends spring at the University of Texas, where Michener is a professor emeritus, and summers in Brunswick, Maine.

### Poor Siberians

NOVOSIBIRSK : The living standards of the Siberians do not at all correspond to the share they contribute to the national product in the USSR reports IAN.

This conclusion was drawn by Soviet economists from the Institute of Economics and the Organization of Industrial Production of the Siberian branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

According to studies carried out by them, the per capita national income in areas in Siberia is 40-42 per cent above that of the Soviet Union as a whole but the living standards in Siberia are lower by approximately the same percentage.

Experts believe that the reason for this is that raw material branches account for a quarter of Siberia's industry with the state continuing to deliberately keep their prices at an unnaturally low level thereby trying to patch up the rents in its own budget.

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