

## Prague: A Dazzling Jewel in the World's Crown

**I** HALF expected Prague to be festooned in hunting, with nightly fireworks and beer steins clanking in the taverns in celebration of the city's return to Middle Europe, its citizens emerging like institutionalised livers, squinting at the sun, wobbling on their legs, their arms looped round playwright, liberator and president Vaclav Havel.

But Prague has recovered from its festive hangovers and the early euphoria is already tempered by rising prices. There's even a hint of mourning over the demise of state cosseting, not to mention the likely loss of subsidies on everything from milk to music.

For the visitor, however, matters of state are overshadowed by Prague "The Golden." In an all-cities, all-comers beauty contest, Prague would win all cups, laurels, crowns

### Czechoslovakia's capital city is a living museum of the Middle Ages.

and glittering orbs. It is a museum of enormous beauty, a harmony of styles, of baroque domes blending with gothic spires, of the romanesque with the renaissance, plus a galaxy of art nouveau buildings, richer even than Vienna.

Goethe's "Prettiest gem in

the stone crown of the world" sits in more than a time warp. It is a city frozen in history, unscarred by war, revolution or, as yet, developers from the West.

mouse-grey and mullet-red buildings make even a grey day colourful. It has all been recently restored, and the adjacent streets still smell of builders' dust and wet plaster. Don't miss the hourly parade of apostles on the astrological clock on the old town hall.

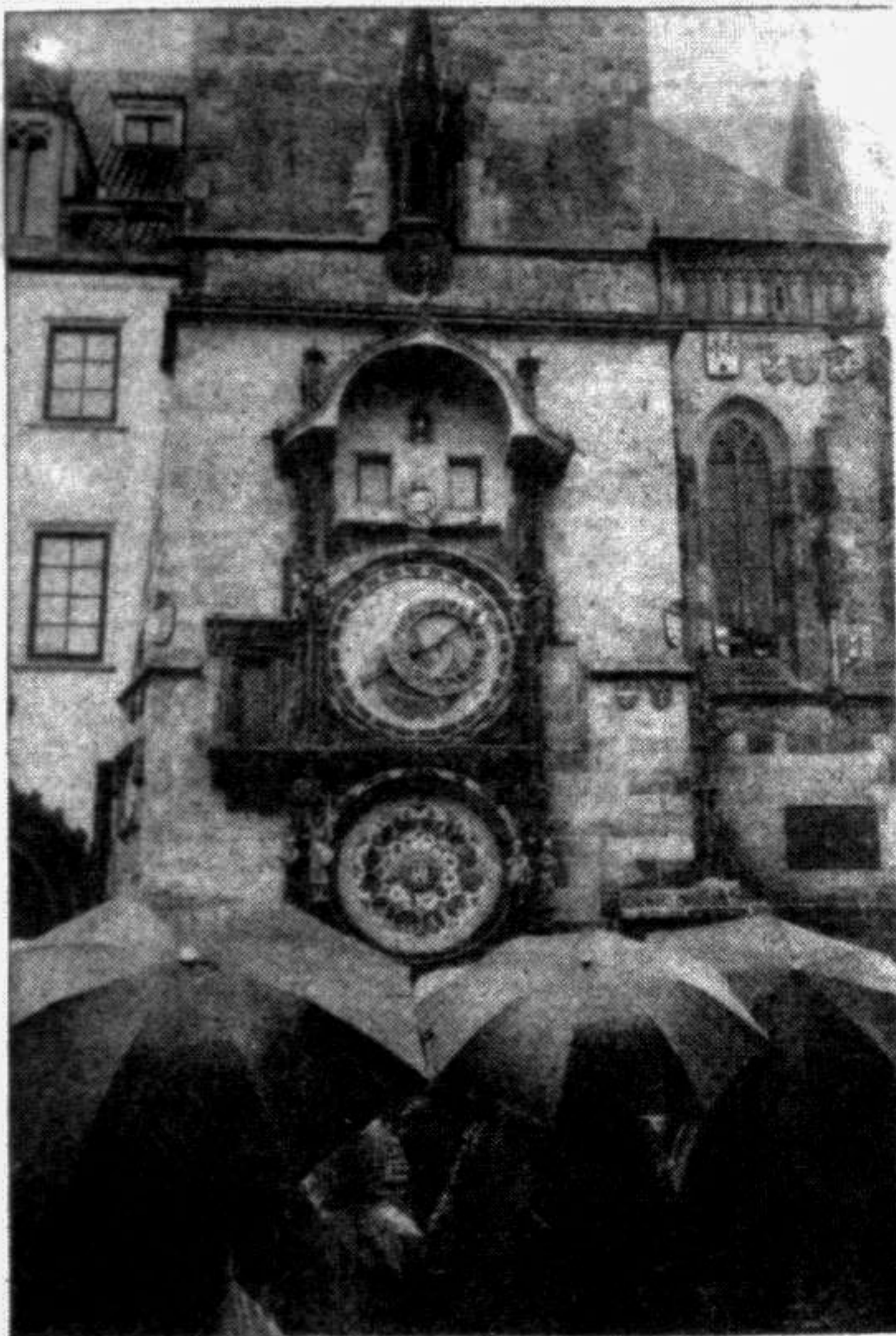
The gently humped Charles Bridge, lined with saints turned to baroque stone and with buskers and traders awakened by the claxon of free enterprise, leads to the misleadingly named Lesser Town, the Mala Strana, with its wealth of baroque palaces, many commandeered as embassies. The hugely ornate St Nicholas church all pink marble, gold trimmings and cherub statues, is dazzling to behold.

The restorers have also been at work on the cobbled streets wrought-iron street lamps and medieval cloistered pavements of Castle Hill, Hradsany, where the official residence of the president is situated. His guards sport new pale-blue uniforms designed by the man, a friend of Havel's who did the costumes for Amadeus.

Walk through the castle courtyard to St Vitus Cath-

The Europa is in Nové Mesto, the New Town-new, that is in the sense of only going back to the 14th century. It stands on Václavské náměstí, Wenceslas Square, which isn't a square at all but Prague's Champs-Élysées, minus the chic. It is also Czechoslovakia's political epicentre, an area of change, with flowers garlanding the statue of good King Wenceslas on horseback, and a constant crowd surrounding Jan Palach's memorial, where candles provide a parterre of melted wax.

Prague's old town is centred around the statue of religious reformer Jan Hus, burned at the stake in the 15th century, in the middle of Staroměstské náměstí, the old Town Square, an architectural wonder from the Middle Ages whose tangerine peppermint,



Visitors gather to view the hourly parade of the apostles on the old town hall's astrological clock.

dral, through the Ghiberti-style doors of its looming gothic facade. The treat of this fine building is the 10th-century chapel of St Wenceslas, a gothic marvel decorated with amethysts, jaspers and other semi-precious stones. A stroll away is the Golden Lane of medieval Munchkin houses, built into the original castle fortifications.

Much of Prague remains exactly as it must have looked in Mozart's day. In the Villa Bertramka, summer residence of the composer's patrons, the Duskovych family, I touched the keys of the clavichord on which Mozart completed his Don Giovanni just seven hours before its premiere in the Tyti theatre.

Mozart would have walked through Petrin Gardens, following the uphill path to Hradsany, past the apple orchards and hay bales which still stand in the middle of the city. Make sure you catch the view from the Nebozizek cafe's terrace, of the city's green domes, onion tops and cupolas edged with gold, a hundred prickly spires and damsel-in-distress turrets, huddles of red pantiles leading down to the river. But see it before free enterprise sinks its teeth into the fabric, before the high-rises cast their shadows and the city walls advertise news of cornflakes rather than concerts. The cranes are already flying. — D.W.



Sinulog of Cebu

**Cebu is the second most important business centre in the Philippines after the capital Metro Manila and is the commercial hub for the Visayas and most southern half of the country.**

**C**EBU's January new-a-days is never complete without the celebration of the famous Sinulog festival. Every third Sunday of January, when the feast of the Holy Child is celebrated, the sight of the Sinulog, danced en masse by hordes of revelers is simply awesome. Local and foreign tourists alike flock to Cebu during January to witness this amazing show of pomp and pageantry, but the Sto. Nino's feastday is not the only occasion for them to witness this mesmerizing dance.

Anytime of the day, any day of the year, visitors are bound to see the Sinulog being

## Children and video films

Tulip Ibrahim

**H**OW does sex and violence of the video films affect our children? This is a common question among the parents and guardians of today.

There are plenty of video films available at the video clubs. As an indoor recreation, quite often we bring in video cassettes to spend our leisure hours. The whole family sits together: the young and the old to enjoy the film. Hindi films which are most popular usually contain scenes of raw violence and sex. They do more harm to children than the intended pleasure of the leisure hours. Some of these films are certainly unsuitable for the children.

Isn't it our duty to protect the children from watching something that may harm their emotional growth? We can avoid showing to our children the scenes of gruesome murders, half-rape, low-natured characters playing up to social vices and so on.

Perhaps the most controversial of such video films are the Hindi ones. Next come some of the English spy and thriller films. The Bengali films, however, maintain some decency in this regard. In Bengali or Hindi films one thing remains in common: the sly natured people playing up the social mishaps. Most Hindi

films have a somewhat smooth beginning, proceeding for violence and sex abuse to a happy ending. The message carried out on these films can be translated as such: Women as sexual objects to be used and abused by men and violence as effective ways to resolve conflicts.

A very small percentage of the Hindi and Bengali films have good stories to offer. We can bring these for our children. There are some English video films available which are much better in imagination.

As conscious parents we must realise how important it is to rear up our children. Besides their physical health they also need a good emotional care. We should help them recognise and accept what is good for them and what is not.



Members of a family watching a video film

## Wave Dancing through the Centuries

For the pre-Spanish era Cebuanos, the small statue of the Sto. Nino was eventually regarded as a rain god, and for him, they came to perform the ritual dance previously reserved for their own divinity.

In 1983, this ritual dance was parlayed and packaged into an island-wide affair, an explosion of colour, sound and pageantry called the Sinulog festival, which has never failed to attract hordes of visitors to the island every January.

The Sinulog dance then becomes a spectacle, but during ordinary days, when you want a heartfelt communion with religion and native folklore, search for the answer amid clumps of old women selling candles in the churches. In the simplicity of their dance and in their down-to-earth company, the Sinulog takes on a deeper, more personal meaning. — M.J.

danced in almost all churches in Cebu. More often than not, the church of the Sto. Nino in Cebu City is where you'll find this graceful, swaying dance being performed by mostly elderly women. A group of these old women, many of them widows, thrust candles at visitors, enjoining them to buy. The sale of a candle from one of them eventually ushers a quick round of questions. For whom is the candle? For what intent?

The vendor then performs a dance, featuring centuries-old routine swaying, fluid motions in a four-count, three-step beat. The old, wizened vendor dances the graceful Sinulog waving the candle (or candles) in her hand and murmurs a prayer to the Sto. Nino for the visitor's well-being and good intentions.

The Sinulog, showing a flowing, wave-like motion, is probably taken after the word "sulog", the Cebuano word for flow, current or wave. Graceful forward and backward motions vividly picture the ebb and flow of waves.

## Gulf crisis

### An Eye-witness Account

## Coffins on Iraqi taxis haunt fleeing refugees

**RUWEISHED (Jordan), Feb 9:** Haunted by images of coffins carried on Iraqi taxis, refugees arrived in Jordan saying their escape from the "raids of death" in Kuwait and Iraq fulfilled a cherished dream, reports Reuters.

"It is a jungle there. Leaving Kuwait and the raids of deaths was a dream," said Jordanian Makram Najm Osta, 38, who was with her husband and five children in car crammed with suitcases, books and dolls. She and the children said they saw dozens of coffins on Iraq's Basra-Ramada highway on Tuesday during long flight from Kuwait.

The coffins apparently bore bodies of those being carried home for burial by relatives. "We saw coffins carried on top of Iraq taxis and civilian cars. Some were wrapped in white pieces of cloth and others in Iraqi flags," Osta said. She said some of the flags read "martyr" for those

ghosts. "You don't see a sign of life in Kuwait at night. Whole apartment blocks are empty. People are either crammed in a shelter or in a floor together," she said. Some travellers said they had killed in Allied raids on Iraq.

Osta said life in Kuwait had become torture. "The whole residents of my building would come running to my screams when the raids started. I could not live with it. My six-year-old son kept on asking me 'are we going to die, Mum?' She said, 'It is tragic there. People are so tired they look like

to hide all night in their cars under bridge on the main Baghdad-Amman highway to wait for a round of Allied bombing to stop.

"We thought we will die on the road. We were thinking that no one would even discover our bodies under that bridge", Osta said.

Refugees said that unlike in Iraq there were no sirens in Kuwait to alert them to air raids. "We wake up on the thud of bombardment and on our houses shaking beneath us. These are our alerts," said Sawassan Adel, a 50-year-old housewife.

**300 Afghans start for S. Arabia:** A first batch of about 300 Afghan Mujahideen guerrillas left Pakistan for Saudi Arabia Friday to help to defend the muslim holy places, a Mujahideen source in Islamabad said, reports Reuters.

He said, the first of several groups was sent on a special Saudi flight from Islamabad by the Afghan government-in-exile at Riyadh's request. "It is certain that more such batches will soon be leaving," he said.

Wednesday's travellers said, the Allied forces had been concentrating their bombardment lately on bridges in Iraq. Most said they saw many bridges destroyed or heavily damaged.

Osta said, they saw four fires raging in oil fields in Ramadi and Hilla, west of Baghdad. "The sky was blackened with clouds of smoke. The acrid smell of oil filled the air. It was suffocating," she said.

Some refugees said many Kuwaiti residents had to travel to Basra to buy vegetables, trying to avoid air raids on the way.

Three Palestinians from the Abdalei area Kuwait died on the journey to Basra during an air raid. They were buried in the Emirate last week.

Greek George Kariakirakos, 24, and his mother George said a family of seven, including a three-year-old girl, died in their Baghdad neighbourhood when a missile hit their houses 10 days ago.

It was at 3.30 in the afternoon. They were bombarding the Air Force Tower some three km (one mile) from street 52 in Al-Widha area," said Kariakirakos who works with his father, a construction contractor.

He said, two other family members, a brother and sister with her five-year-old son,

## Syria got American intelligence reports?

**WASHINGTON, Feb 9:** The Senate Intelligence Committee said on Thursday it will investigate a report that the United States passed intelligence information to Syria, possibly causing the deaths of two or three undercover agents working for Israel, reports Reuters.

Committee Chairman David Boren said in a statement that if the charges reported in Thursday's New York Times were true, "they would represent a tragic and indefensible compromise of our intelligence resources and a breach of faith with those who have risked their lives on our behalf."

According to the newspaper, several Bush administration officials said they believed terrorists obtained intelligence information given to Syrian leaders and used it to track down the agents within the terrorists ranks.

It said that by one account, the agents killed were two or three Palestinians who had

penetrated the group on behalf of Israel's intelligence service, Mossad.

Other officials refused to disclose the number of agents or their sponsor, but said they worked either for Mossad or a western intelligence service, the newspaper said.

It said the United States has first learned of the agents' deaths in November or December. The United States took steps last year to improve relations with Syria after the Syrians agreed to join a military coalition opposing Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

"Boren, an Oklahoma Democrat, said that the Middle East had been a source of weakness in U.S. 'human source' intelligence."

"It would be tragic indeed if, at a time when we are attempting to rebuild our human intelligence capabilities,

any one in the government would have acted to endanger any of our agents," he said. Boren said he hoped the charges were not true.

## Iran's peace efforts genuine: Kuwait

**NEW DELHI, Feb 9:** Special Kuwaiti envoy Abdul Rahman Al-Awadhi said on Friday Iran's efforts to end the Gulf war were genuine and serious, reports Reuters.

"Iran's peace initiative is sincere and genuine," Awadhi told a news conference after two days of talks in New Delhi on the Gulf war.

"Iran is very clear in demanding total withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and we are in agreement," he said. Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on Monday offered to mediate in the war, saying he was ready to meet Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and talk to the Americans about peace.

Awadhi, special envoy to the Emir of Kuwait, said Iran was Iraq's neighbour and had no stake in the conflict.

He met Indian President Ramaswami Venkataraman and Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and delivered letters to them from the Emir Sheikh

Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah and crown prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdulla Al-Sabah.

He said he hoped Indians would return to Kuwait after the war. There were an estimated 170,000 Indians in Kuwait when Iraq invaded the emirate in August.

Foreign Ministers of the non-aligned group of nations, of which India is a leading member, are due to meet next week in the Yugoslav capital Belgrade, where they are expected to formulate a peace proposal to end the Gulf war.

An Indian Foreign Office spokesman said Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati had telephoned Indian External Affairs Minister Vidyacharan Shukla and asked for a meeting ahead of talks, which begin February 12.

Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev arrived in Delhi on Thursday on a three-day visit and is expected to discuss proposals to bring about an early end to the conflict.

## 17 saboteurs held in Egypt

**CAIRO, Feb 9:** Egypt's Interior Minister was quoted Saturday as saying that 17 people had been arrested and had confessed to planning sabotage and assassination operations guided by Iraqi intelligence, reports Reuters.

Minister Abdel-Halim Moussa said he and foreign minister Esmat Abdel-Maguid were among the targets for "hit and run" killings. The semi-official Al-Ahram newspaper quoted Moussa as saying that those arrested included four Iraqis, two Jordanians and a Tunisian.

Their aim was to create the impression that Egyptians were carrying out the attacks, he said.

Egypt, fearing Iraqi-backed sabotage acts, has tightened security since the Gulf crisis erupted in August. A key member in the Anti-Iraq coalition, it has sent some 35,000 troops to the Gulf to help liberate Kuwait.

In another interview, with the Mass-circulation Al-Akhar, Moussa said a maximum of 20,000 people were being detained under Emergency Laws introduced in 1981 after Muslim Fundamentalists killed President Anwar Sadat.

Most of these were being held for drug or financial offences with a small number for political reasons.

"Is there any evidence, interrogations..." Moussa said.

Magdi Hussein, Deputy Editor of the opposition Al-Shaab newspaper, has been detained without trial since January 25 for criticising the Gulf war at a mosque, colleagues said.

On Friday, the Egyptian Organisation for human rights said psychiatrist and human rights activist Mohammed Mondour had been picked up at dawn in a crackdown on opponents of the Gulf war.

At least 22 university students were also detained, the organisation said. Security officials said a number of students known to stage demonstrations had been picked up as part of "preventive and precautionary measures."

Moussa warned in the Al-Akhar interview that trouble makers at universities—to reopen Saturday and Sunday after a two-week closure for fear of demonstration—would be dealt with firmly.

"Universities are a place for science and learning not for political activity," he said. "We will take action strongly and firmly against anyone who tries to cause unrest or block the learning process."

Legal political channels existed for students to vent their opposition, such as in the opposition media, he said, adding that no demonstrations would be allowed.



TANAJIB, Saudi Arabia: An oil spill worker walks along the intake canal of a desalination plant February 6 as protective oil booms line the inlet. Oil from several war-related spills has struck the Saudi coastline just north at Safaniya. — AFP/UNB photo.