

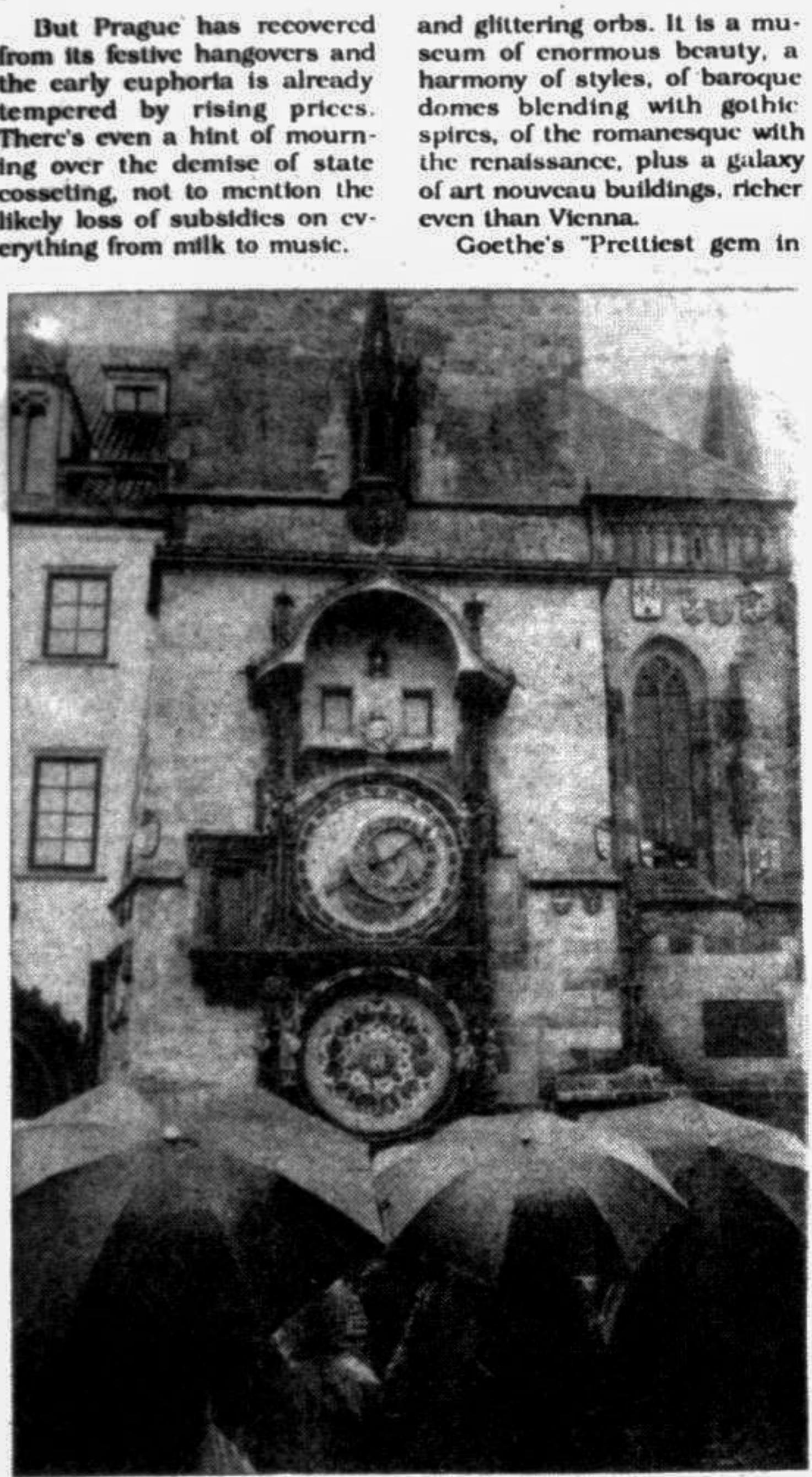
Feature

Prague: A Dazzling Jewel in the World's Crown

HALF expected Prague to be festooned in bunting, with nightly firework displays and beer steins clinking in the taverns in celebration of the city's return to Middle Europe, its citizens emerging like institutionalised liars, squinting at the sun, wobbly on their legs, their arms looped round playright, 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 cossetting, not to mention the likely loss of subsidies on everything from milk to music.

Goethe's "Prettiest gem in



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

PLO call to hit western interests

NICOSIA, Feb 9 : A senior PLO official on Friday called for attacks against the interests of the Arab world of members of the 28-nations, US-led coalition fighting Iraq to force it from Kuwait, state radio Baghdad reported, says Reuter.

It said PLO executives committee member Yasser Abed-Rabbo emphasised the need for confrontation with countries fighting Iraq, which should include striking at the interests of these countries throughout the Arab region."

Abed-Rabbo made his remarks during talks in Baghdad with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tareq Aziz. Iraq has repeatedly called on its supporters to strike western interests.

There was a discussion of the means of co-ordination, since the battle Iraq is currently fighting against the forces of injustice and tyranny is a joint battle", said the radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation views Iraq as its main backer. Baghdad insists that the Gulf crisis must be settled by linkage to other middle east issues, especially Palestine.

Mulroney for global summit to stop use of deadly weapons

OTTAWA, Feb 9 : Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney on Friday called for a global summit to stem the flow on high technology arms and weapons of mass destruction to countries such as Iraq, reports Reuter.

Mulroney said he would propose next week to UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar that a summit, with the possibility of one or more follow-up meetings, be convened soon.

The objectives is to convince world leaders in order to mobilise will and to re-energise international efforts that are under way to produce results urgently," Mulroney said in a address to the confederation Club, a national political affairs organisation.

Mulroney, who has strongly supported the war to drive Iraq from Kuwait, said one of the main lessons of the conflict is how destabilising and dangerous high-technology weapons are when they fall into the wrong hands.

He said Iraq, which has more combat aircraft than Germany, France or the United Kingdom has bought most of its arsenal from the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

17 saboteurs held

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 Reuter.

Minister Abdel-Halim Moussa said he and foreign minister Esmat Abdal-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.

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

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.

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 West German presence is already well established. Double Mercedes can be spotted in the lines of biscuit-tin Skodas, and the newspaper columns are full of "I buy your flat. Name your price. I pay in Deutsche Mark" ads. And there are not enough restaurant tables to go round, let alone hotel rooms. At the Europa Hotel, for example, you can't even make a reservation until five days before your visit, after the German tour operators have released their allocations.

The Europa is an art nouveau classic where, despite the "no vacancy" signs, you can at least enjoy breakfast served in a replica of the Titanic's grand saloon. The original owner wanted to buy a ship, but could only afford a hotel, so he compromised on a dining room with style.

The Europa is in Nove Mesto, the New Town now, that is in the sense of only going back to the 14th century. It stands on Vaclavské Náměstí, Wenceslas Square, which isn't a square at all but Prague's Champs-Elysées, minus the chie. 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,

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 commandered as embassies. The hugely ornate St Nicholas church at pink marble, gold trimmings and cherubine statuary, 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, Hradcany, 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-

edral, 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 Tyl theatre.

Mozart would have walked through Petrin Gardens, following the uphill path to Hradcany, past the apple orchards and hay bales which still stand in the middle of the city. Make sure you catch the view from the Nebozicka cafe's terrace, of the city's green domes, onion tops and cupolas edged with gold, a hundred prickly spires and damsels-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.

CEBU's January now-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 amazing. 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

HOW 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, however, maintain some decency in this regard. In Bengali or Hindi films one thing remain 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 imaginations.

As conscious parents we must realize 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

CEBUANOS, the small statue of the Sto. Nino was eventually regarded as a min 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 heartbeats 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 down-to-earth company, the Sinulog takes on a deeper, more personal meaning. — M. J.

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.

The vendor then performs a dance, featuring centuries-old

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

Greek George Kariakirikos, 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-Wihda area," said Kariakirikos who works with his father, a construction contractor.

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

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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 Reuter.

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 terrorist ranks.

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

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 Rehman Al-Awadhi said on Friday Iran's efforts to end the Gulf war were genuine and serious, reports Reuter.

"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 Ramaswamy Venkata Ram and Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and delivered letters to them from the Emir Shekhar.

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 Vidyasagar Shukla and asked for a meeting ahead of talks, which began 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.

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 Reuter.

It's a jungle there. Leaving Kuwait and the raids of death was a dream," said Jordanian Makram Najim 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 Iraqi 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.

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 Sawsan Adel, a 50-year-old housewife.

"It is tragic there. People are so tired they look like

