

International

Iran's 5-point peace plan

AMMAN, Feb 14 : Iran has brought up a 5-point peace initiative in its continued effort to find a solution to the Gulf crisis, the Jordanian news agency reported Wednesday reports Xinhua.

The 5-point plan was contained in a message from Iranian Parliament Speaker Mahdi Karubi to Abdul Latif Arabya, Speaker of Jordan's Lower House of Parliament.

According to the news agency, the Iranian plan includes:

—A ceasefire in the Gulf war.

—Termination of the UN embargo on Iraq.

—Simultaneous withdrawal of the US-led coalition forces from the Arabian Peninsula and Iraqi pullout from Kuwait.

—Formation of an Islamic Committee to supervise the withdrawal of both sides.

—And an end to the immigration of Jews to Israel.

The Iranian message was delivered by Mohamed Salamati, who is in Jordan on a visit at the head of an Iranian Parliamentary delegation.

Shamir wants Saddam's exit from power

PARIS, Feb 14: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said in an interview published on Wednesday that the Gulf conflict could not be settled unless Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was removed from power, reports Reuters.

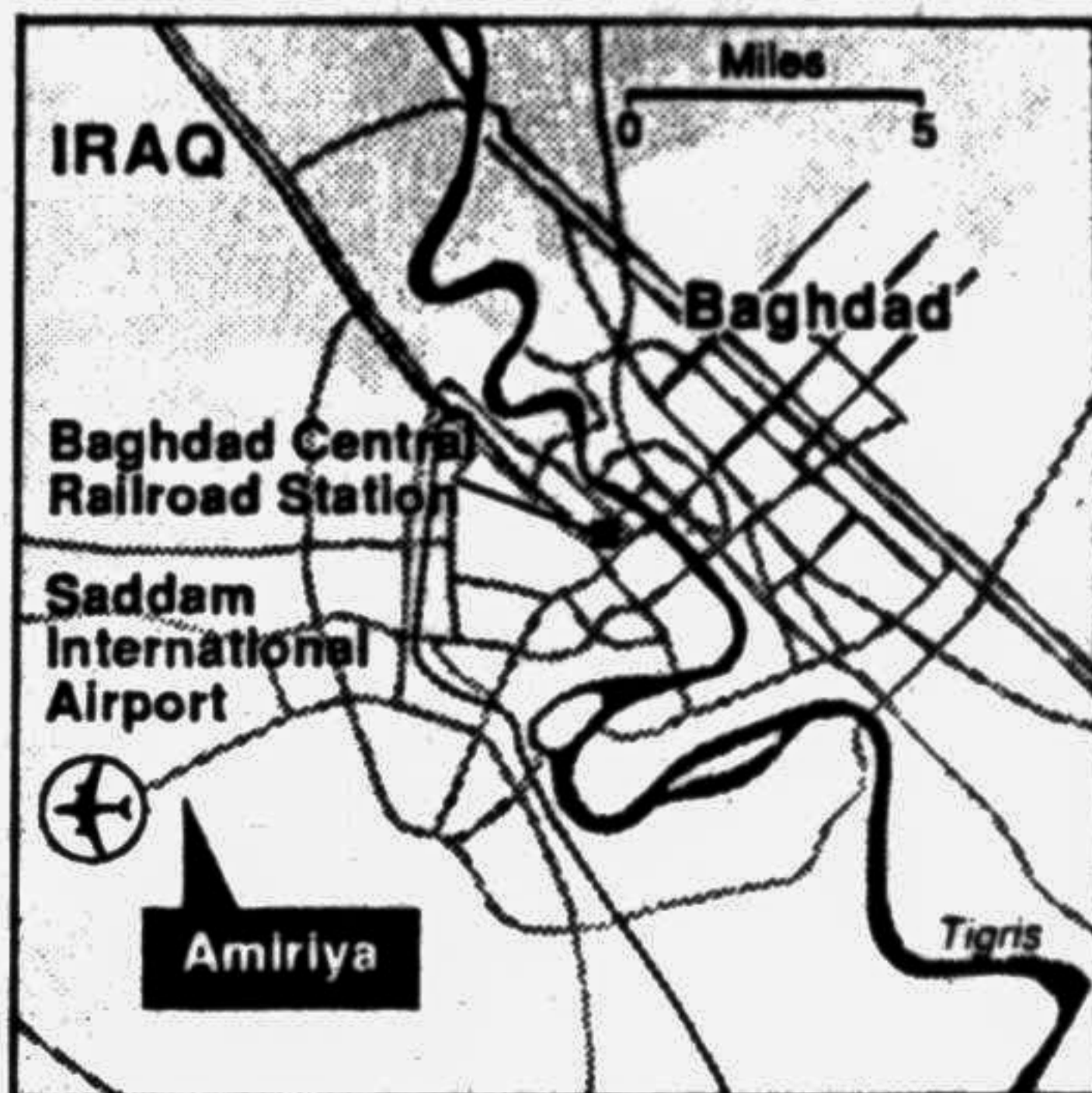
"It is not up to us to decide. But, as observers, we can say the crisis cannot be resolved without the disappearance from the scene of the Iraqi dictator", Shamir told the French weekly newsmagazine L'express.

Unless Saddam left the scene, he said, "then it would not be the end of the aggression. We would stay exposed to the same threats".

Shamir also said Israel wanted to retaliate against Iraq for firing missiles at its cities but would not do so without coordinating with the Allied coalition.

2,800 sorties flown overnight

Massive allied blitz on Baghdad continues



BAGHDAD: Seen in the map is Amiriya where over 1,000 Iraqi civilians were killed when allied forces bombed a shelter. The allies insist that it was a military bunker.

RIYADH, Feb 14 : Allied forces intensified their air campaign against Baghdad's troops on Wednesday, hitting rocket launchers, supply lines and Republican Guard positions, military spokesmen said, reports AFP.

Seventeen more Iraqis, meanwhile, gave themselves up to the US-led coalition battling for four weeks to dislodge Saddam Hussein's troops from Kuwait which they invaded on August 2.

On a day dominated by the Allied bombing of a shelter in Baghdad that killed hundreds of civilians, according to Iraqi officials, US Marine Brigadier General Richard Neal said the Allies flew 2,800 sorties overall.

Brig. Gen. Neal, Deputy Director of operations for the US central command, said the missions included 700 in the Kuwaiti theatre and 200 against the elite Republican Guards.

Among the targets, he said, were missile propellant plants, storage facilities, road, bridges and command and control centres, including the one where the mass civilian deaths were reported.

The Marine General said the Allies flew 170 sorties against Scud missile launchers and related targets, hitting one and perhaps two. Four Iraqi transports were also destroyed, two in northern Kuwait and two in Iraq and a helicopter was downed in maritime action.

Brig. General Neal reported little ground activity aside from sporadic fire across the Saudi-Kuwait border.

He also said that the Iraqis were setting oil facilities afire to mask their movements in thick clouds of smoke. He said

as many as 50 fires were spotted in the last week, including five in the border area of Al Wafra.

"We believe this is an integral part of the Iraqi war-fighting strategy," Brig. Gen. Neal said.

A Saudi military spokesman, Colonel Ahmed Al-Robayan, said a royal Saudi Air Force F-5 Tiger two went down during an attack against ground forces in Iraq. He said the pilot was missing but gave no other details.

It was the 26th Allied warplane lost in action. The Allies say Iraq has lost nearly half of its air force: 36 planes downed in aerial combat, more than

100 destroyed in the bombings and 147 which have fled to Iran.

Col. Al-Robayan said nine more Iraqis, including a Lieutenant, crossed the border and gave themselves up to Saudi and Syrian units. US officials said earlier that eight unarmed Iraqis had surrendered to American forces.

Group Captain Niall Irving, a British Military spokesman, said that clear weather over Kuwait had allowed for stepped up attacks on ground targets.

He said that British Jaguars destroyed five of Iraq's 18 Brazilian-made Astros II multi-barrel rocket launchers on

Tuesday.

"The good weather yesterday meant successful attacks of five of these rocket launchers," he said, adding, that they posed "a major potential threat" to Allied ground forces.

He said that eight GRIA Tornado fighter bombers had attacked a plant in central Iraq on Tuesday which made liquid propellant for Scud missiles. Pilots reported having caused "great damage" to the facility, he said.

Iraqi anti-aircraft artillery fire was so heavy during the attack that one aircraft had to "jettison its weapons to get out of a fairly dangerous situation."

Another report says: The US attack on a Baghdad shelter that killed hundreds of civilians may have drawn howls of protest, it also underscored Allied determination to knock out Saddam Hussein's stubbornly resistant communications network.

US military officers say non-stop Allied bombing has severely disrupted command and control between Iraqi forces but commanders were still getting orders to their men with a patchwork communications system.

If Iraq accused the United States of blasting a civilian bomb shelter early Wednesday, US officials insisted it was one of Iraq's command and control facilities and thus a military target.

We have been systematically attacking these bunkers since the beginning of the campaign, said Marine Brigadier General Richard Neal, Deputy Director of operations for the US central command.

US military officers who requested anonymity said they would like to sever all of Mr. Hussein's broadcast capabilities.

It's not a military bunker

LONDON, Feb 14 : No signs show that an air shelter in Baghdad bombed by US bombers was a military bunker BBC correspondent Jeremy Bowen in Baghdad reported yesterday, says Xinhua.

I have got no evidence that it was a military target. I saw no communications dishes. I saw no aerials nothing like that, said Bowen.

His remarks on BBC television news contradicted what US official allegation that the air raid shelter was a camouflaged military bunker.

Mr Bowen who had visited the wrecked shelter where about 400 civilians were killed by the Allied bombing.

He also contrasted with the US argument that the installation was a military command post and civilians had taken refuge inside when it was attacked.

I didn't see any military casualties which were recognisable as that, he said.

The BBC correspondent had sent footage back to BBC showing charred bodies from he packed shelter, and a BBC newscaster said some of the footage were 'too grim to show'.

You should know that many of the pictures from Baghdad of the burnt bodies of the victims were considered too grim to show you, he said.

Mr. Bowen speaking live from Baghdad said that Iraq registered genuine shock about what happened. It's affected people in a way that none of the other raids has done.

Off the Record

Pirates too on rampage in Gulf

NICOSIA : Armed pirates attacked a small Danish ship in the central Gulf overnight. Lloyd's shipping intelligence reported, says Reuters.

Lloyds, quoted Bahrain Shipping Radio as saying it received an urgent call from the American tanker Rover saying the pirates, dressed in black and wearing red Arab scarves, attacked the Danish ship, Arkis Sun, with machineguns at 7.15 p.m. (1615 GMT) on Tuesday.

The radio report said money and "all secret documents" were taken from the 1,557-tonne Danish vessel.

A navy vessel in the vicinity responded and took care of the situation, the radio call reported, without elaborating.

The Arkis Sun's position at the time of the attack was given as 25 03 north, 53 36 east, placing it in the central Gulf about 120 miles west of Dubai, hundreds of miles south of recent naval battles between US-led allies and Iraqi gunboats.

Honeymoon with gas masks

MGUYZRN (Saudi Arabia) : Captain Angus McLeod and Captain Tina Fenton had a Gulf war marriage and spent their honeymoon night in gas masks, reports Reuters.

Three Scud missile alerts meant they quickly had to don protective chemical warfare clothing after their wedding on the Gulf coast of eastern Saudi Arabia three weeks ago.

"It was not quite what I had expected," said McLeod, 27, of Britain's Royal Scots Regiment.

McLeod and Fenton had to be given special permission to marry while on active duty.

Their wedding was believed to be the first to be approved under Britain's Wartime Marriage Act since World War II.

The couple have been separated since their wedding night. McLeod serves with an armoured reconnaissance unit near the Kuwaiti front, 250 miles (400 km) from this bride.

Magic indeed

JAKARTA : A man who sold magic pencils to students who felt they needed more than luck to pass exams appeared in an Indonesian court Wednesday charged with fraud, reports Reuters.

"Just write whatever you want and the computer will correct your answers with the help of the electronic wire on the pencil," he told customers, according to a court official.

The official in the West Java city of Bandung said the pencils cost up to 850,000 rupiah (445 dollars) each. The average annual per capita income in Indonesia is 500 dollars.

The salesman was arrested when customers complained to police after failing entrance exams to a leading technical college.

BRIEFLY

Pope's appeal to end war : Pope John Paul urged the world's Roman Catholics to pray during lent for an end to what he called a massacre of lives in the Gulf war, reports Reuters.

"Peace needs our personal contribution," the Pope said during his general audience on Wednesday, "start of the 40-day Christian period of lent in Vatican city. He urged Catholics to make personal contributions to help search for "all the ways still possible to put an end to the massacre of human lives... in the war."

Primakov sees rays of light : Soviet envoy Yevgeny Primakov in Moscow said Wednesday he saw "rays of light" in the position of the Iraqi leadership that inspired optimism the Gulf war could be stopped, reports Reuters.

Asked whether a ceasefire was possible, he told Soviet television: "I would be incorrect if I said categorically that such hopes prevail."

"But there are rays of light which enable us to think more optimistically."

Primakov was answering questions at Moscow Airport after returning from talks in Baghdad with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

'Saddam responsible for deaths': Britain Wednesday expressed regret at reports that hundreds of Iraqi civilians were killed in an Allied bombing raid on Baghdad but said the responsibility for the deaths lay squarely with President Saddam Hussein, reports AFP.

A foreign office spokesman in London Britain was still awaiting confirmation of reports that some 400 civilians were killed when a shelter was hit by two bombs, but said any civilian deaths were "gravely regretted."

Conference centre damaged: The Baghdad Conference Centre — built by President Saddam Hussein as a symbol of pride for the Iraqi people has gone up in smoke in an Allied missile attack, reports AFP from Baghdad.

The "Palais Des Congress" was built for a Non-Aligned summit in Baghdad 1982 at a cost of 85 million dinars (Around 270 million dollars). After being hit by four missiles Tuesday evening, it was reduced to a mass of smouldering rubble. "We expected an attack on the palace, but at no time did we think it would be so hard," told Agence France-Presse, almost in tears.

Air raids claim 40 Jordanians: Forty Jordanians were killed when Allied warplanes attacked a bus travelling between Kuwait and Baghdad, Jordanian travellers arriving in Baghdad said Wednesday, reports AFP. "Allied planes fired missiles on the bus, which was coming from Kuwait to Baghdad carrying around 60 passengers, all Jordanian," said one of the travellers, who was not aboard the vehicle. The attack occurred on Tuesday afternoon.

India won't boycott Hajj : Indian Muslims are unlikely to follow Iraq's example and boycott the annual Hajj pilgrimage to the Saudi city of Mecca, a top Muslim preacher in New Delhi said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"Hajj is such a major event that just on one man's or one nation's appeal it cannot be boycotted," said Nab (deputy) Imam Ahmed Bukhari of New Delhi's Jame Masjid, India's most famous mosque.

India is home to about 100 million Muslims, its largest minority and one of the biggest Muslim concentrations in the world, some 25,000 Indian Muslims make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

Iraq to owe 200 b. dollars : Iraq will come out of the Gulf war owing dollar 200 billion, between war reparations and loans that will be needed to rebuild the country, according to a study made public Wednesday by the Japanese external trade organisation, reports AFP from Tokyo.

Before the Gulf crisis began last August with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Baghdad government owed dollar 80 billion to its foreign creditors, of which dollar 14 billion was lent by Kuwait, the report said.

After its sovereignty is restored, Kuwait could demand 50 billion dollar to compensate for the destruction of its oil facilities and sacking of medical equipment and other goods.

'Fires in Kuwait won't stop Allied invasion'

NEAR SAUDI/KUWAIT BORDER, Feb 14 : General Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander of Allied forces in the Gulf, said on Wednesday that smoke from oilfield fires raging in Kuwait would not delay an invasion of the conquered Emirate, reports Reuters.

"Smoke really isn't that much of a problem," he said during a flying visit to the US second Marine Division on the front.

"They (the Iraqis) talk about the smoke they're going to create, but look over there. It's overblown," he said.

More than 50 fires are burning in Kuwaiti oilfields either set ablaze by Iraqi forces to deter air attack or by errant Allied bombs, US Defence Department officials have said.

"Whatever difficulties it's going to cause are going to be neutral, as much of a problem for them as for us," Schwarzkopf told reporters.

His helicopter touched down within sight of the smoke and for nearly three hours he talked with

Lieutenant-General Walter Boomer, commander of U.S. marines in the Gulf.

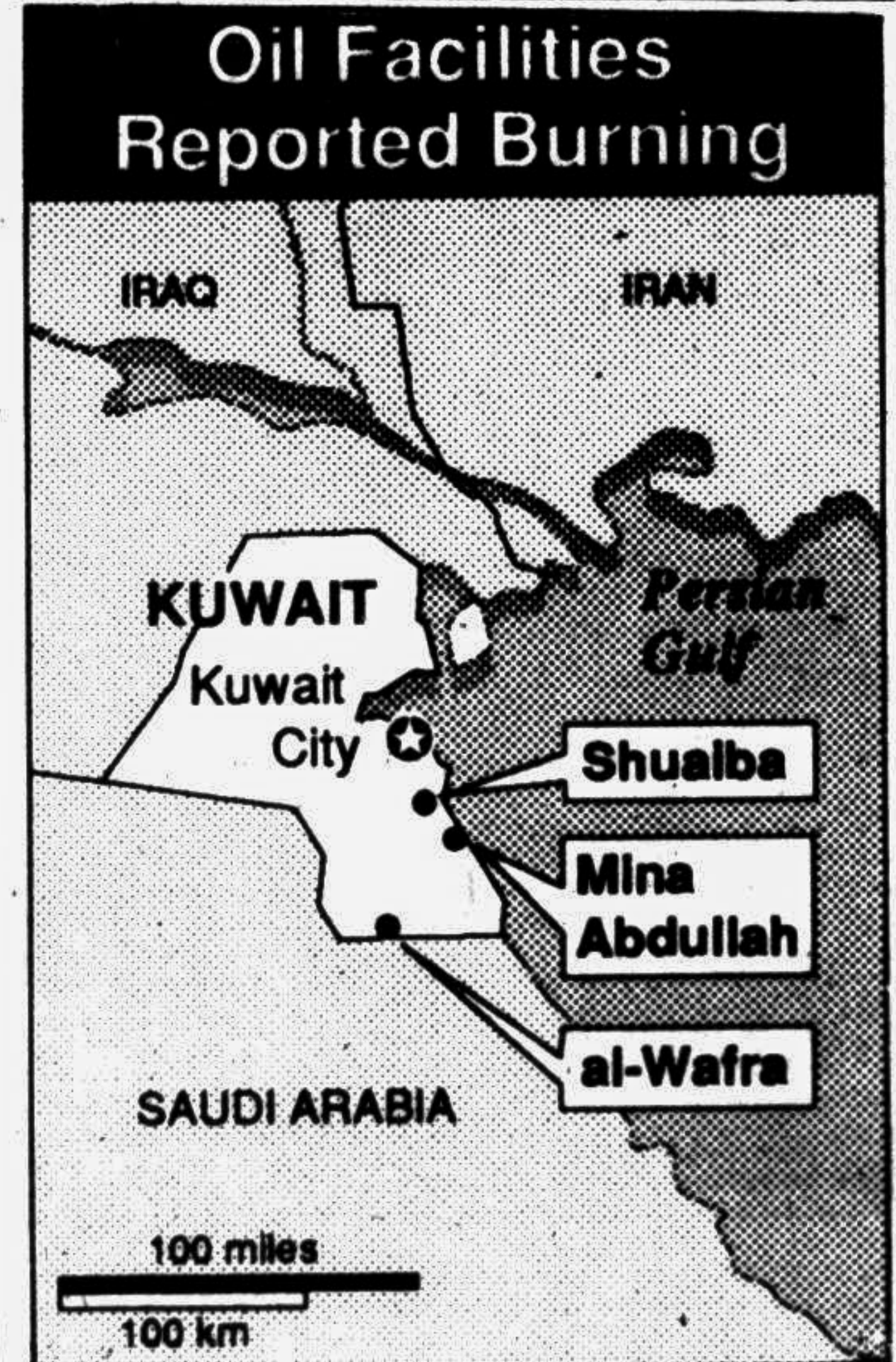
Schwarzkopf said they discussed general operations as well as amphibious attacks the marines might launch when a full-scale offensive begins to oust the Iraqis from Kuwait, which they invaded on August 2.

The leader of Desert Storm dismissed as "overblown" concern about fighting during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan which begins on March 17.

Schwarzkopf said he believed Muslims would fight during their holy month and that dispensations for military operations could be given by Islamic authorities.

As he has since the start of the war, Schwarzkopf spoke positively about the readiness of the Allied troops who will be going into Kuwait should a land invasion be ordered.

The supply problems of the massive military deployment "are being solved every day," he said.



5 Iraqi planes destroyed

AFP from Riyadh says : US air forces destroyed an Iraqi helicopter and four transport planes on the ground but a Saudi F-5 Tiger went down during an air strike on Iraq, military spokesmen said.

"The logistical situation is absolutely superb," he said. "There are no logistical problems out there that will be show stoppers."

Shelter bombing a tragic mistake, says UK

LONDON, Feb 14 : The reported Allied bombing of a civilian air raid shelter in Baghdad which may have killed hundreds of civilians was a "tragic mistake," a British military spokesman said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Group Captain Niall Irving, interviewed on British television, said he could not confirm the reports of the bombing but stated that the shelter "was certainly not an intended target."

"If this is true, something did go wrong," Group Capt. Irving said, expressing "great regret" at reports that as many as 400 civilians including women and children had been killed in the attack.

He reiterated that civilian areas were not being targeted by Allied forces but said that military installations "remain bonafide targets."

He also confirmed that no British pilots had taken part in the raids on Baghdad.

Reuter from Washington says : Allied air power is systematically destroying Iraq's military power four weeks into the Gulf war, but significant gains can be made by further bombing before any ground attack is launched, US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

He said the focus of air attacks was shifting southwards from Baghdad where Iraqi officials said on Wednesday that hundreds of civilians were killed in the US bombing of an air raid shelter.

To date I think we've done very well, Cheney told the Chamber of Commerce of the USA noting in a speech that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's ability to make nuclear,

chemical and biological weapons had been destroyed for a long time.

"We've seen with respect to his air force, that it has been virtually totally ineffective against Allied forces... his air defence system has been pretty well destroyed as an integrated system... his navy has been virtually destroyed," said Cheney.

"We currently are in a posture where we will continue the air campaign for an additional period of time because we think there are significant additional gains to be derived from that in terms of reducing

the threat to our own forces."

Cheney said "US air power was now in a situation where we can increasingly shift our attention from those strategic targets inside Iraq and focus increasingly upon the ground forces that he has deployed in southern Iraq and Kuwait—the army of occupation that currently is in Kuwait."

But Cheney said that the US-led coalition was preparing for a ground war which would minimise Allied casualties.

At the appropriate time when the President makes the decision, we are prepared to bring to bear all of the forces

at our disposal to achieve our objective, specifically to drive Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait.

Cheney said that two US bombs were dropped intentionally with great precision on a reinforced Baghdad command and control bunker, which Iraq charged was a bomb shelter in which hundreds of civilians were killed.

He repeated statements by the White House that the United States regretted any civilian casualties but said the underground bunker was a legitimate target.

British planes hit Iraqi fuel plant

LONDON, Feb 14 : British warplanes have hit an Iraqi plant producing fuel for the deadly Scud missiles, a British military spokesman said Wednesday, reports Xinhua.

Group Captain Niall Irving told a British military briefing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, that Tornados had attacked the fuel plant in central Iraq.

The pilots' reports give us hope of great damage, he added. Irving said that Jaguars, aiming at command post, artillery and rocket launchers, had hit five Multi-barrel rocket-launchers.

east Iraq had been the target of Tornados in the past 24 hours.

British pilots claimed nine direct hits with 1000-pound laser-guided bombs on hardened shelters overnight.

Irving said that almost two-thirds of the British aircraft's sorties were equipped with precision bombing equipment.

Meanwhile, a US military spokesman said that Allied jets had destroyed four Iraqi transport planes on the ground in eastern Iraq.

Brigadier General Richard Neal said that pilots had reported possible destruction of another mobile Scud missile-launcher.

He said that raids also continued on Iraqi Republican Guard positions.

Pak PM, Saudi, Iranian FMs in Geneva

GENEVA, Feb 14 : The Prime Minister of Pakistan and Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia and Iran arrived in Geneva Wednesday for separate talks on the Gulf war, diplomatic sources said, reports Reuters.

Iran and Pakistan are each pushing a peace plan, and Saudi Arabia wants to ensure that Iran remains neutral while hearing reactions to these plans, the sources said.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal and Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati met officials from their own diplomatic missions Wednesday.

Diplomats said talks for meetings between the ministers were still being finalised but were likely in the next 24 hours.



KATHMANDU — Visiting Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar (R) hugs Ganesh Man Singh (L), the supreme leader of Nepali Congress in a courtesy call at the latter's residence — AFP/UNB photo