Italy hails pullout offer: Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis welcomed irag's conditional offer to withdraw from Kuwait, saying it was a positive sign and contained new elements, reports Reuter.

De Michelis told reporters before meeting German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher in Paris : "It seems to be there are important new things in this offer. It is a very important and very positive sign.

He added, however, that the traqt proposals would have to be studied in greater detail.

Italy, France and Germany all support the US-led alltance in the Gulf.

Iragis attack UN office: Pro Iragi demonstrators attacked offices of the United Nations and foreign airlines in Algiers Friday when thousands of people marched through the heart of the Algerian capital in protest

against the Gulf war, reports AFP. Groups of youths attacked and looted offices of Egyptian, Syrian airlines, Alitalia and Air France. They also smashed a neon sign outside the Moroccan carrier Royal Air Maroc.

Egypt, Syria, Italy. France and Morocco are among the countries in the US- led force fighting to evict frag from Kuwait.

### Shekhar: A hero to Nepalis: Indian

Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar is a hero to many Nepalis but a three-day official visit to Kathmandu starting on Wednesday is causing some trepidation analysts and commentators said, reports Reuter from Kathmandu.

Shekhar was one of the few Indian politicians who stood up publicly and praised the pro-democracy movement that took power last May and ended King Birendra's absolute powers. Nepalt officials said that as a result, Shekhar, Prime Minister for fust three months as head of a shaky minority government, would be given an unusually warm welcome.

### PLO backs Saddam's peace move:

The PLO supports the Iraqi peace initiative which it believes "favours a just and balanced solution" to the Gulf crisis, the PLO information chief Yasser Abed Rabbo in Tunis said on Friday reports AFP.

Abed Rabbo, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's executive committee, said that if the war is not halted "the United States and Europe will show that their true goal is the destruction of Iraq."

### Markets rally on pullout offer: European financial markets rallied briefly Friday following Iraq's offer to withdraw its forces from Kuwait, but the buy-

ing frenzy stalled as concerns surfaced over the terms of the pullout, reports AP. Stock prices and the dollar staged a strong advance, and oil initially slid more than 2 dollars a barrel as euphoria swept

the markets that the 30-day-old var might be drawing to a A flurry of buying sent stock prices surging more than 3 per cent in Frankfurt in the final hour of trading, when news reached the trading floor that Iraq had agreed to a UN de-

### Iraqi offer unclear: NATO: NATO said today Iraq's offer to withdraw from Kuwait was unclear but it would be very good news for everyone if Baghdad's forces were to pull out unconditionally in line with United Nations demands. Reuter reports, from Brussels.

mand to leave Kuwait and called for an immediate cease-fire.

"We do not yet have a clear picture so it is too early to comment on it" said a spokesman for the 16-nation western

"If Iraq would comply fully and unconditionally with the UN resolutions, it would be obviously very good news for everyone. But, as yet, we do not know if this is the position of the Iraqi Government.

Earlier, Baghdad had made clear that any pullout was not unconditional, but linked to other issues, including an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

### Conditions concern Japan: Japan reacted with caution Friday to Iraq's statement that is was ready to quit Kuwait, saying it was concerned about the

conditions attached to withdrawal. "Our response is guarded", a Foreign Ministry official told Reuters, "We're concerned about the conditions Iraq is attaching and we're now trying to confirm them".

Government spokesman Misoji Sakamoto said Japan would only welcome Iraq's withdrawal along the lines specified by the United Nations Security Council.

"It would only be satisfactory if it met the UN conditions," he said in a televised news conference.

But he add; This development could be a prospect (for peace) if an initiative does get under way."

#### Rebels kill 72 troops in Sudan: NAIROBI, Feb 16: The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels have killed 72 government troops and wounded 335 more in attacks on two army convoys in Equatoria and Bhar El Ghazal provinces, the rebels' radio SPLA claimed in a broadcast monitored in Nairobi Friday, reports AFP.

The radio said 15 trucks in the convoys were destroyed in the attacks carried out by SPLA fighters up to Thursday. The radio said one convoy was travelling from the southern

provincial capital of Juba to the besteged garrison town of Yeit 140 kilometres to the southwest, while the other was moving from Wau, the administrative capital of Bhar El Ghazal.

# 'Iraq formidable threat to ME'

RIYADH, Feb 16: If the Gulf war ended tomorrow, Iraq would still be a formidable military power and present a threat to its Middle East neighbours, a senior US military officer has said here, re-

ports AFP. The officer told a background briefing here on Friday that more than four weeks of non-stop bombing by Allied warplanes had wrought "significant damage" to Saddam Hussein's military ma-

chine. But he added that Iraq "still possesses a robust military capability" and remains a Middle East power despite the pounding it has taken in the

campaign to force it out of Kuwait. "If we were to stop the war tomorrow, he obviously is a force to be reckoned with and we should be concerned about that," said the officer, who

asked not to be named. His remarks came after the United States rejected an initiative by Baghdad to end hostilities. Allied military spokesmen said the peace feeler had no effect on their operations, which would continue unabated.

The senior US officer said that the world knew Mr Hussein was not to be trusted and "it would be foolhardy on any one's part to just say he's defeated and he won't come

around another day." "I think his husbanding of resources throughout the civilian community so they don't get destroyed, his flying of resources to Iran, is another indication that he has in the back of his mind that he might risc again as the phoenik bird out of the ashes."

Reuter adds from Paris: Tunisia's ambassador to France said on Friday he believed Iraq's offer to withdraw from Kuwait was serious and Baghdad had accepted the principle of retreat.

"I am very happy to hear of this overture. I think this is a serious overture which should be setzed and not allowed to go to waste," Ambassador Brahim Turki told French Radio.

He said the conditions in which Irag's leadership had expressed its willingness to implement UN Resolution 660, which calls for its withdrawal from Kuwait, should not serve as a pretext to reject the

These issues must absolutely not be allowed to compromise the basic problem the principle of retreat --

# Thousands of Allied troops move closer to fronts

DHAHRAN (Saudi Arabia). Feb 16 : Baghdad made its conditional offer of withdrawal from Kuwait as the United States and its Allies on Friday tightened the military screw on Irag's Armed Forces, reports Reuter.

Waves of aircraft were in the air, pressing home a round-the -clock blitzkrieg against front -line troops in Iraq and occupied Kuwait.

In the Saudi desert chequered by wheel and tank

### 8 killed as rival PLO men clash

SIDON, (Lebanon) Feb 16.: At least eight people were killed and 30 wounded on Friday as guerillas loyal to Yasser Arafat fought each other over budget cuts forced by the Gulf war, security sources said, reports Reuter.

They battled with heavy machineguns, rockets and artillery in south Lebanon over cash cuts ordered by the PLO

They said the fighting was concentrated near Miyeh Miyeh Palestinian refugee camp southeast of the port city of Sidon, 40 km south of

Battles began after Abu Mohammed Za'arourah, head of a guerilla battalion, kidnapped the commander of Arafat's fighters in Lebanon late on Thursday in a row over money. the sources added.

They said Za'arourah had complined about instructions from Arafat to cut expenses in Lebanon because the Gulf war had drained Arab funds to the Palestine Liberation Organisa-

Several oil-rich Arab countris in the anti-Iraqi coalition have cut donations to the PLO because of its pro-Baghdad stand.

tracks scores of thousands of Allied troops were moving closer to the fronts, preparing for what many call G-dayground offensive to break the

Iraqi hold on Kuwatt. "Hopefully this is the next to last move before we go home" . US Marine Major Karen Schultz said on Thursday as 80,000 troops their tanks and missiles were moved closer to the Iraqi and Kuwaiti borders.

"We expect the next one to

be Kuwait city". Schultz was speaking a few hours before world came from Baghdad that Iraq had offered to end its six month occupation of Kuwait as part of a negottated solution to the Gulf war linked to Middle East problems and other issues.

The reaction of soldiers at Allied front lines who will have to beat the brunt of a ground

offensive was not immediately

But at Allied information headquarters here a woman officer watching the news from Baghdad on television grinned widely and punched the air with a fist.

But US officials; treating the lraqi announcement with extreme caution, said the aif war, now in its 30th day, would proceed until ordered to stop by their Commanderin-Chief, President George

Bush said that study of the Baghdad proposal showed there was little new in it and that it was a cruel hoax".

A Saudi official said: "There is no ceasefire. There will not be a ceasefire until we get a guaranteed Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait".

Kuwaities here, exiled since the Iraqi army swept into their



SAUDI ARABIA: Members of the exiled Kuwaiti government jubilate on February 15 after hearing the news that Iraq was ready to withdraw from Kuwait. Iraq's announcement was followed by several conditions.

-Photo AFP/UNB.

the Kuwaiti Information Office.

Allted officials have been extremely careful to give no indication of when any ground offensive would be launched. Britain's military comman-

der, General Sir Peter de La Billiere, came closest when he said on Thursday that dates had been poposed. He refused to hint at them.

But there has been a sense here, where war correspondent's reports from the front lines are pooled, and in Rtyadh, where Allied headquarters is located, that the offensive was not far off.

Allied commanders are known to be concerned by the approach of the Saudi summer in March with its scorching heat and binding sand storms which could exhaust soldiers and interfere with delicated high-tech equipment on which modern forces rely.

U.S. -military authorities said on Thursday that Iraqi forces were in a precarious position after losing up to half their tanks in the unrelenting air strikes.

A U.S. military commander near the front said last week' the Ailtes would be ready to go when they had destroyed 50 per cent of Iraq's front line capability.

He said G-day would be heralded by a massive air onslaught on Iraqi troops. Massive is a relative term, but reporters aboard command-andcontrol AWACS planes over Saudi Arabia say the skies could hardly be more crowded with Allied aircraft. And in a demonstration of what might lie ahead if the Iraqi withdrawal proposal proves to be a mirage, the Allies have begun using fuel air bombs to clear paths across enemy minefields.

These weapons, one of the most fearsome in the Allied arsenals, burst in the air, destroying everything around in a volcanic eruption of flame and wind.

## Saddam seeks a base-free zone

# Kuwait no more the 19th province of Iraq

WASHINGTON, Feb 16: The US State Department said Friday that there was just one positive point in the peace proposal issued earlier in the day in Baghdad -- an apparent acknowledgement that Kuwait is not lraq's 19th province, reports AFP.

Spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler echoed President George Bush's description of the Baghdad offer for a conditional withdrawal from Kuwait as a cruel hoax."

"About the only good thing you could say about this statement is, by acknowledging US resolution 660, he (President Saddam Hussein) appears to be finally, publicly acknowledging that Kuwait is not the 19th province of Iraq", she said.

But the fact there is now something new, and one portion of it could be interpreted as positive, doesn't mean that it is acceptable, she added, noting that the statement not only contains old conditions, it adds new ones.

AFP adds from Nicosia: Iraq announced for the first time on Friday that it was prepared to withdraw from Kuwait in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 660 but it linked its offer to a string of conditions:

-All troops warships and weapons sent to the Middle East and Gulf by the anti-Iraq coalition "before and after August 2" must be withdrawn.

-The pullout must be completed within one month of the ceasefire. The Gulf must then be declared a base-free zone' with regional states left in charge of their own security. -- Israel must withdraw from

occupied Palestinian territories, from the Syrian Golan Heights and from Lebanon, in line with United Nations resoiutions. -Arms and equipment sent

to Israel 'under the pretext' of the Gulf crisis must be withdrawn, Israel has received Patriot anti-Scud missiles from the United States, the Netherlands and Germany, and antichemicals equipment. - Iraq's "historical rights"

on land and sea, must be guaranteed 'in their entirety.' - The exercise of democ-

racy must be guaranteed in Kuwait, from the will of the people on the basis of a genuine democratic exercise and not the ruling Al-Sabah family. -The UN authorised trade

embargo against Iraq and all other UN resolutions, must be scrapped. Measures taken by states individually or collectively must also be annulled. -The allies and their supporters must pay reparation to rebuild everything in Iraq that has been destroyed.

must be scrapped. Western analysts consider the debt to be around 70 billion dollar about half of which

is owed to France and to wealthy Gulf Arab states that are coalition members. Iraq also demands the cancellation of the debts of the region's states which were

harmed by the aggression, an apparent reference to Jordan and other political allies. AP adds from Washington:

overture as "nothing new," but it was President George Bush All Irag's debts to the allies himself who pointed out a clause that may raise hope for an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. With Allied ground forces

He brushed off Iraq's peace

massing ominously in the Saudi desert, attention will now focus on an Iraqi diplomatic mission to Moscow. Bush staked out high

ground on Friday. He dismissed the mixture of new and old conditions for withdrawal as a "cruel hoax" by Saddam Hussein against people who

## World must not reject offer: Primakov

TOKYO, Feb 16: Soviet envoy Yevgeny Primakov said the world must not reject outright Iraq's conditional offer to withdraw from Kuwait a spokesman for the Japanese Socialist Party said today, reports Reuter.

In a meeting with party Chairwoman Takako Doi, Primakev said he thought the offer was a first step in a process, the spokesman said.

Primakov, who travelled to Baghdad this week to meet Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, also said he had high hopes for Iraqi Foreign Minister Tareq Aziz's trip to Moscow on Sunday for talks with President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Primakov called on Japan, China and other non-combatant countries to take a leading role in efforts to end the Gulf

Asked by Doi what he thought of Iraq's conditions, Primakov said the Iraqi leadership probably had no choice but to include them in the statement, the spokesman

Iraq on Friday linked withdrawal from Kuwait to a total ceasefire, removal of all foreign troops from the Gulf, an Israeli retreat from occupied Arab territories and Lebanon and the repeal of UN sanctions and anti-Iraq resolutions.

Primakov said he may travel to the United States soon for talks on the Gulf war. He arrived in Tokyo on Friday and will leave for home later in the

hoped the Gulf War would end without a bloody ground fight. Confident of victory on the battle field, U S military offi-

cials said they were keeping up the air bombardment against Iraqi troops. Some discerned a ray of

hope for a cease-fire. If Saddam is trying to concoct a recipe for surrender, there will be enormous pressure on Bush to go the extra mile. Clearly. Friday's proposal from Iraq fell short.

"If there are conditions attached to the withdrawal, then I don't think it will go very far toward a ceasefire," said Sen Sam Nunn. But, the senate Armed Services Committee chairman added:

"This could be the opening bid in Saddam's move toward diplomacy. In the Arab world you always have to be prepared for bargaining and this may be the opening gambit."

Senate Republican leader Bod Dole said the Iraqi offer "might be a slight crack" in Baghdad's intransigence, but said the Allied air war should not let up. "There should be no pause, no cease-fire, no time outs."

Soviet President Mikhail S Gorbachev said he looked for ward to meetings early next week with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz "with impatience." In a statement, the

Soviet leader said "the positive report from Iraq was received with satisfaction and hope in Moscow."

## 122 killed in Thai dynamite explosion The 10- wheeler trailer-

BANGKOK, Feb 16: Police Saturday said 122 people were killed and 99 were injured when a lorry loaded with dynamite crashed and later blew up in southern Thailand on Friday, reports Reuter.

'Legs and limbs of the victims were sacttered as far as 500 meters from the original site, a police officer said.

belonged to whom," he added.

least four police officers.

The explosion triggered a huge fire that burned down about 50 houses". Among the dead were at

"Its' hard to identify which

lorry had fatled to negotiate a sharp bend in Phang-Nga province, 850 km south of Bangkok, and over turned. Police said hundreds of cu-

rious villagers were attracted to the crash. An hour later there was a tremendous explosion which police suspect was caused by

cigaretted.

police said.

Some of the victims were passengers on a provincial bus which was passing at the time of the explosion.

Most of the onlookers had been attending a local market.

an onlooker dropping a lighted

The vehicle, escorted by a highway police, car, had loaded the dynamite imported from India at the port of the resort town of Phuket and was taking it to central Saraburi

province. Police said local officials had tried but failed to cordon off the crash site.

The injured were rushed to five provincial hospitals in Phang-Nga and nearly

provinces. Provincial officials said prime minister Chatichai Choonhavan was due to inspect the blast site Saturday.

## Off the Record

### War casualties in Israeli homes!

TEL AVIV. Fcb 16: The tensions created in Israel by Scud missile attacks and the enclosure of entire families in scaled rooms and shelters have led to an increase in sexual aggression within family groups, according to experts here, reports AFP.

"Over the past month, women have been less likely to be raped by a stranger out in the street or in a car park at night, than at home, by someone in the family circle, as is happening in 70 per cent of cases" said Rama Lusky, Director of a Tel Aviv hostel for raped women.

L. aged 17, was raped by her uncle, she sat prostrate in a chair in the hostel. The aggression took place a few minutes after the end of a Scud missile alert earlier this week in Jerusalem. Her family had taken refuge in her uncle's home after the destruction of their Tel Aviv home some weeks

"Her parents had shut themselves away in one of the rooms and L. was preparing to sleep on the sofa in the living-room", Mrs Lusky explained.

Psychologist Rina Ben Zvi described the case of a husband raping his wife in a hotel room a short while after the

destruction of their home in Tel Aviv. "This is the first war in which the men have had to stay at

home instead of going out to the front", she said. "He's stuck at home with the radio, instead of getting out there where the action is. This does nothing for his virility and he gets frustrated and irritable. All his aggressiveness is directed out onto his family group", she said.

### Try Bush under Islamic law'

BRADFORD (England): A British Muslim leader called here Thursday for US President George Bush and other allied leaders to be tried under Islamic law following the bombing of a site in Baghdad that killed Iraqi civilians, reports AFP.

President Bush and all the perpetrators of this ghastly act must be brought to justice for their actions, said Liaqui Hussain, President of the Council for Mosques in Bradford. Some 75,000 Muslims live in this northern English city. It

has the largest Muslim population in Britain. "We demand an international Muslim court be set up and these people be tried there according to Islamic law, or Sharia," Mr Hussain said.

He described Wednesday's bombing in Baghdad as an international crime but nonetheless appealed to British Muslims to remain calm and not to retaliate against westerners.

Separately a group identifying itself as an Iraqi opposition party said Thursday that 12 Iraqi men and women were in the second day of a hunger strike at a London mosque in protest at the bombing.

### They line up like safeway on payday

OVER SAUDI ARABIA: Dozens - sometimes hundreds of little green symbols flash on a computer screen. Some inch forward toward red flashes on a map of Iraq and Kuwait; others hand back, awaiting their turn, reports AP.

symbols move about freely in more open spaces - airspace deep inside Iraq. The computer screen, which could easily be mistaken for a fast-paced video game, is aboard a US Air force AWACS plane high above Saudi Arabia. From this high-tech vantage point, the Air Force directs a daily ballet of sorts, tracking an allied

Away from the swarm, to the north and west, other green

air siege that often includes more than 200 planes airborne at one time. On this night, as on most since the opening days of the war with Iraq, the Air Force's traffic cop in the sky is policing a crowded, but one-way, street. "All we're doing is going up there, dropping bombs and breaking all of his toys," Col. Gary A. Voellger, commander of an Oklahoma-based AWACS wing. told a visitor. "Welcome to the friendly skies."

### They know bombed **bunker** intimately

RIYADH: US intelligence has long known that the Baghdad bunker where Allied bombs killed civilians was a command and control center. American officers said Thurs-

day, reports AP. "We know who built it, when and what for, when it was modified," said one of the officers, who spoke on condition of

He said modifications included the installation of coaxial cables and fiber optics cables for use as a major communications link.

The US military command says the bunker was relaying messages to Iraqi forces in Kuwait and that it was not aware that civilians were using it as a bomb shelter.

### Donkey's fate

NEW DELHI: A donkey turned inexplicably savage and bit a man in a town in central India, then died, the United News of India (UNI) said in a report published here on Friday, reports

The victim, an employee at a health clinic in the town of

Datia, survived to nurse his injuries and was reportedly under

medication.

In what the press agency called an "incredible but frue" story, the donkey bit the man at a temple in Datia on Wednesday. "This ass, however, died soon after the act," it added giving no reason for the otherwise placid beast's savage



PALATKA, Florida (FILES): Carrie White, listed in the Guinness World Book of Records as the world's oldest living person, died February 15 at the Putnam Memorial Nursing Home. Born Carrie Joiner on November 18,1874, she is shown celebrating her 116th birthday in this recent file photo from November 18,1990. -Photo AFP/UNB.