

## International

Iraq closer to unconditional pullout: Primakov

# 5 lakh Iraqi troops, entrenched in Kuwait, on the move

IN SOUTHWESTERN SAUDI ARABIA, Feb 20: Iraqi convoys keep moving south toward the frontline despite Allied pounding of Iraqi ground forces. US military officers said Tuesday, reports AP.

With Allied forces poised for possible ground offensive, Air Force Col. Tom Lennon said long-range F-111F fighter-bombers are knocking out Iraqi tanks, artillery, ammunition storage areas and airfields in Iraq and occupied Kuwait.

He said the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing, which he commands, has destroyed more than 200 hardened aircraft shelters. He said this was higher than the official Air Force figure because of differences in interpreting photographic evidence.

"I think he's hurting. I think he's hurting very badly," said Lennon.

But he predicted Allied forces can still expect to encounter significant resistance in a ground campaign against Saddam Hussein's forces.

"I think there's a battle up there because the Republican Guard is still in existence. There are patriots in Iraq just as there are patriots in every country," Lennon said.

Lennon said his F-111 pilot, Capt. Brad Robert, said he had

been doing battlefield preparation sorties.

"In the last week, it has intensified. We've been sending more and more aircraft specifically against the Republican Guard," he said.

Another F-111 pilot, Lt. Dave Bristol, said: "we've been taking out tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery pieces, in some cases multiple rocket launchers — anything that could change the fate of the ground war right now."

"That's what everybody's looking at right now — the ground war — and that's what we're doing. We're taking out the things that are going to fight the (allied) army," he added.

Preparing to leave on a mission Tuesday evening, Bristol said, "There's plenty of work available for us and every night we go out, we take out quite a few."

However, another F-111 pilot, Capt. Steve Luxon, said it is already getting considerably more difficult to find targets than it was when the war started.

"The targets are getting less and less as we go up there," Luxon said. "It was really easy the first few nights and now you have to hunt around a lot... we think we've

done a real good job on their tanks."

Reuter adds from Moscow: Soviet Gulf envoy Yevgeny Primakov said in an interview broadcast on Tuesday evening that Iraq was closer than ever before. Primakov told Soviet television.

Primakov said he had gained this impression during talks on Monday between President Mikhail Gorbachev and Iraqi Foreign Minister Tareq Aziz, during which the Soviet leader proposed the last-ditch

peace plan to avoid a land war in the Gulf.

"I think Iraq is closer to withdrawing its troops unconditionally from Kuwait than ever before," Primakov told Soviet television.

The interview had clearly been recorded before US President George Bush said on Tuesday that the Soviet peace plan did not go far enough.

"Now I can say with greater reason that I am in an optimistic mood, but it is not blind

optimism. It is a sort of limited optimism," he said.

Azz left Tehran for Baghdad on Tuesday after briefing Iranian leaders on the Gorbachev Plan. Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh said the Iraqi Minister "must return to Moscow in the shortest possible time."

Israeli officials have vowed eventual retaliation for the missile attacks but have held off so far in a bid to avoid further alienating Arab countries in the US-led coalition.

Lankan mothers wants govt to find missing sons

COLOMBO, Feb 20: Nearly 2,000 Sri Lankan women gathered in Colombo Tuesday to demand that the government find their missing sons and husbands victims of the island's political turmoil, reports Reuter.

The women of the Mothers Front are pressing for an independent commission to investigate the disappearance of thousands of people since 1987.

The Mothers Front was formed as a spontaneous response to the killing and disappearances which are the order of the day, opposition leader and former Prime Minister Bandaranaike told the meeting.

## Allied troops await order for ground war

NICOSIA, Feb 20: Half a million US and Allied troops awaited the order to go into battle with Iraq's army in Kuwait, with one slim hope for peace resting on a journey to Moscow by Iraqi Foreign Minister Tareq Aziz, reports Reuter.

President George Bush underlined the frailty of peace hopes by saying an 11th hour Soviet peace plan did not go far enough.

Saudi Arabian King Fahd and other leaders of the Alliance fighting since January 17 to drive Iraq from the Emirate stressed the need for an unconditional withdrawal.

"No settlement can be accepted finally unless Iraq withdraws fully and unconditionally to Iraqi territory, leaves Kuwait and bears responsibility for the losses, damage, plundering and usurpation in it," King Fahd said, adding that Riyadh would also make demands on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein for damages.

But the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations, Yuli Vorontsov, said Moscow expected Aziz to arrive from Baghdad on Wednesday and said a ceasefire or pause in the relentless month-old air assault on Iraqi troops and other strategic targets would them to regroup.

## 3 PPP deputies picked up on terrorism charges

KARACHI, Feb 20: Pakistan's leading opposition leader Benazir Bhutto charged Tuesday that her party officials were tortured in jail as police arrested three more deputies on terrorism charges, reports AFP.

Mrs Bhutto told reporters many of her activists were "tortured" by police seeking to extirpate confessions and to implicate my family and the party in false cases.

She demanded an enquiry by the superior court into the allegations of police torture and urged the Chief Election Commissioner to investigate the "arrests and kidnappings" of her party deputies before the elections.

The PPP activists and parliamentarians are also being held for their alleged involvement in the August 22 firing

## Off the Record

### Snow in Sahara!

ALGIERS: Snow has fallen in Algeria's Sahara desert for the first time in more than 30 years, Algerian television reported on Monday night, says Reuter.

It showed expanses of snow-covered sand and dramatic contrasts of snowy rocks rising behind dunes and palm oases in the region of Bechar, 965 km (600 miles) southwest of Algiers.

Heavy snow has covered mountains of northern Algeria during the coldest winter in several years.

### Smooth as Thai silk

BANGKOK: Police have arrested 11 employees of the Thai airline Thai Airways International (Thai) suspected of using their family privileges to send that women abroad as prostitutes, a senior police officer said.

The women were sent to Germany and Japan, Colonel Anan Upaphant, Chief of Crime Suppression, told Reuter.

The men were usually paid by syndicates between 5,000 and 7,000 baht (200 and 280 dollars) for each woman.

The men are accused of using the names of their wives and children in applying for visas for the women. Thai endorses visa applications for its staff families.

They were also able to get free or reduced air fares.

The employees, who worked in the airline's head office or as ground staff, were charged with falsifying documents and violating anti-prostitution laws.

It was the second criminal case implicating Thai employees in recent months.

Two cargo handlers at Bangkok Airport were arrested in December trying to load 42 Kg (92 pounds) of heroin on to a plane. They told police they were working for a Thai official who had masterminded several other drug scams.

### Grains of Guinness stolen

NEW DELHI: An Indian painter said thieves on Tuesday stole six grains from his collection of rice on which he had inscribed portraits to earn an entry last year in to the Guinness Book of World Records, police here said, reports AFP.

Painter Dipak Sayal said thieves made away with his briefcase containing the rice on which he had painted portraits of many Indian statesmen. The collection was recently put on display in a tourism carnival near New Delhi.

However, Mr. Sayal told the police that the thieves had missed his best piece of work, a single grain on which he had painted 813 characters.

Mr. Sayal's briefcase was taken from his parked car in the city, police said, adding that a search was on for the thieves as well as the six grains of rice.

Mr. Sayal, a college student from northern Haryana state, has painted portraits of world leaders on rice and vertically-balanced coins, and drawn the world map on egg shells without missing any detail.

His latest attempt is to copy holy Hindu scripts on a single strand of hair.

### Rarest fly going extinct

WELLINGTON: The bat-winged cannibal fly, believed to be the world's rarest fly, is in danger of extinction, local media reported, quoting the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, reports Xinhua.

The fly, found only in New Zealand, had only been spotted three times this century. It was first discovered in 1901 at Milford Sound in southern South Island and 10 years later one was seen eating a caddis fly, commonly used for trout fishing. The most recent sighting of the fly was in 1989.

According to the department, that little was known about the life cycle of the fly which was in danger of being wiped out. Larvae of the flies have never been found.

The fly gathers heat from the sun with its large wings and, when strong enough, it preys on other smaller insects and sucks its victim dry of all its bodily fluids.

## Who's Who in Iraqi Command

From A Correspondent

BAGHDAD, Feb 20: In Iraq there is no pretence of separating party from government. The entire power structure is controlled by the Baath Party and in many ways the system resembles that of the former East European communist regimes. However, there are differences. For example, the domination of the supreme leader, Saddam Hussein, in this case, is much greater. The bureaucracy is generally kept out of the party's control but more than two-thirds of its members are believed to be Baathists.

In the armed forces it is considered a crime to become a member of any political organisation other than the Baath Party. The party's hold at the grassroot levels is maintained through its large membership, at least a million and half. If the average size of an Iraqi family is taken to be five it means that half the population is directly affiliated to the party. The party itself runs on a very tight cellular system.

The supreme decision-making body is the seven-member Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) headed by Saddam Hussein. In a way it is modelled after the communist politburos, but unlike the systems in China and the Soviet Union, rarely does an RCC member gather the courage to even question Saddam.

Most of his aides tend to be in the same age group as him — 50 to 55 years — and came up with him through the party structure and the various revolutions. He also happens to hold both the post of President and that of prime minister. It is believed that power is controlled by the troika of Saddam, his Vice-President Izzat Ibrahim and first deputy Prime Minister Taha Yasin Ramadhan. So controlled is the Iraqi system that even biographical details on the key leaders are rarely published.

A list of the key power people in Baghdad:

**IZZAT IBRAHIM**, 55, Vice-Chairman of the RCC and Vice-President. He is an old party cadre who specialised in agrarian policies. A law graduate from Baghdad University, he is said to control the

intelligence organisations. He is believed to be seriously ill — some

diplomats believe that he is suffering from leukaemia.

**TAHA YASIN RAMADHAN**, 55, first deputy prime minister. He was a former major in the army from where he was ousted before the revolution. He has been minister of industry.

**TARIQ AZIZ**, 53, Foreign Minister and the smooth, suave, urbane face of the regime. A graduate from Baghdad University, majoring in English Literature, he rapidly rose through the ranks of the

Baath as a prominent writer and ideologue. He founded the party newspaper Al Thawara along with Naji Al Hadithi, who is the Government's current chief spokesman. He also has the distinction of being the only Christian in the power structure.

**SADOUN HAMADI**, Deputy Prime Minister and a specialist in economic affairs. He has the additional charge of inter-Arab affairs. A graduate of the American University in Beirut, his role is not very well defined but he is however believed to have a major say in matters concerning agriculture and foreign policy.

**TAHA MAHIUDDIN MAROUF**, 60, is the only member of the RCC who is not a member of the ruling Baath Party. He belongs to the minority Kurd tribe from the north and was also an ambassador to Italy.

**HUSSAIN KAMIL HASSAN**, around 40, and widely believed to be the possible heir-apparent to his father-in-law, Saddam Hussein. He is a former army officer and one of Saddam's most trusted aides. Given the most vital portfolio of military industry besides those of general industry and oil, he also serves as the co-chairman of the Indo-Iraqi Joint Commission.

**SADI MEHDI SALEH**, 54, Speaker of the National Assembly and the chief of the Popular Army, a large militia dominated by party cadres. A Secretary General of the Baath Party, he is a childhood playmate of Saddam from his hometown of Tikrit and is believed to be on the rise.

**IT IS A CONSPIRACY OF THE US TO MAKE TWO MUSLIM NATIONS FIGHT**

SADI MEHDI SALEH, Speaker, National Assembly

"If the Americans attack it will be the most suicidal thing"

IZZAT IBRAHIM, Vice-Chairman, RCC

"Muslims all over the world must fight American infidels"

TAHA YASIN RAMADHAN, First Deputy Prime Minister

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