

Saddam prays to invoke God's mercy

Anti-Saddam rallies grip Iraq, pro-Iranian slogans chanted

BAGHDAD, Mar 4: President Saddam Hussein, visited a national war memorial on Sunday to pray for Iraq's dead — his first public appearance since the Gulf war ended, reports Reuters.

Baghdad radio said the President visited the martyr's monument where he prayed "to invoke the mercy of God on the souls of our righteous martyrs."

Iraq claims victory in the Gulf War which came to a halt on Thursday with the evicting of its troops from Kuwait and Baghdad's acceptance of all United Nations resolutions on its August 2 invasion of Kuwait. No figure has been announced for the Iraqi dead.

Saddam chaired a meeting of the ruling revolution command council on Sunday to discuss "political developments".

Iraqi television released film of a smiling Saddam meeting with three aides to discuss restoring public services — his first televised appearance since early in the war.

Iraq announced on Sunday it had accepted the latest UN Security Council resolution setting terms for a permanent ceasefire in the Gulf, including

a release of all prisoners of war and detained Kuwaitis.

Western correspondents based outside Iraq have reported serious unrest by anti-Saddam Muslim fundamentalists in the southern Iraqi city of Basra. Baghdad radio made no mention of disturbances in Basra.

On Sunday night, Baghdad Radio started playing non-military songs for the first time since August. Love songs and folk music were replaced during the seven-month confrontation by military marches and patriotic songs, mainly praising Saddam and Iraq's steadfastness.

Meanwhile, a loud blast rocked Baghdad yesterday (Sunday) in what Iraqi officials said was the detonation of an unexploded bomb.

A thick column of grey smoke rose into the sky from south of the Al-Rashid Hotel, home to foreign journalists, shortly after the blast shook the building.

A senior Information Ministry official said disposal experts had detonated an unexploded bomb dropped on the city during the Gulf war.

The precise location of the blast was not immediately clear.

AP adds: Also Sunday, Tehran radio quoted refugees fleeing Iraq as describing violent clashes between government forces and anti-Saddam demonstrators in the eastern Iraqi cities of Basra, al-Amarah, Nasiriyah and Kut.

Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan said in an interview with the US network CBS that the demonstrators in Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, carried pro-Iranian slogans. More than half of Iraq's population are Shiite Muslims, the dominant religion in Iran. Saddam, and nearly all high government officials are Sunni Muslims.

Baghdad Radio reported Sunday night that Saddam visited a "martyrs monument" and the tomb of the late Defence Minister Adnan Khayrallah.

The radio also reported Sunday that Saddam led a meeting to discuss restoration of the nation's communications. Iraqi television broadcast a film of Saddam meeting with his ministers.

Saddam has not addressed his people since Tuesday, two days before the cease-fire, and allied officials have said his whereabouts are not known.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi media reported that electricity was restored to some neighbor-

hoods in Baghdad late Saturday and early Sunday. Provinces in the north had power restored Saturday night.

Power generating stations and communications networks were major targets during the allied air offensive that began Jan. 17.

The official government daily newspaper, Al-Thawra, quoted a transportation ministry spokesman as saying efforts had been redoubled to restore public transportation in Baghdad with the help of military buses and drivers.

Most of the bridges over the Tigris river, which runs through Baghdad, were destroyed by allied bombing.

A message from Safwan (Iraq) says: Thousands of Iraqis staged anti-Saddam Hussein protests in several southern Iraqi cities on Saturday, storming prisons in the port of Basra and releasing inmates, eye-witnesses said.

An Iraqi policeman who crossed Allied lines on foot on Friday to urge US forces to come and liberate Basra said that armed groups were organizing the anti-government protests in the city.

Iraqis interviewed inside Iraq about nine miles beyond Allied lines reported anti-government protests in Basra and

other cities including Zubair, Samawa and Nassiriya.

A 35-year-old Iraqi businessman said the tens of thousands of people took part in protests in Zubair.

"It's a big demonstration and we hope that by today or tomorrow Saddam no longer exists," he said, adding that "the soldiers are finished."

The policemen, who requested anonymity, said the army had not intervened so far in Basra, even after the demonstrators "opened the jails and released all the prisoners."

He said that among those freed were Kuwaitis, Saudis, Palestinians and Iraqis.

The Iraqi man, who was still carrying his police identification card, told reporters in this devastated Iraqi border town occupied by US troops that "some of (the protesters) are very scared."

"If this falls down they might be killed by the Iraqi government," he said.

All Iraq doesn't want Saddam. But we can't all rise up," he said, appealing for Allied help in toppling Mr Hussein.

After talking to reporters, the Iraqi policeman was taken away by a Kuwaiti serving with the US Army for interrogation. A report from Kuwaiti bor-

UN rushes babyfood, medicine to Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 4: The UN Security Council, after dictating tough terms for Iraq's surrender, softened its tone Sunday by ordering mercy flights to carry babyfood, medicine and water cleansing gear to help the war-damaged nation, reports AP.

The 15-member council did not lift the sweeping economic embargo against Iraq. But relaxed restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid and called for fast delivery. Previously, all requests for humanitarian aid deliveries had to be cleared by a sanctions committee.

A statement from the council president, Peter Hohenfelsner of Austria, noted UN agencies have said Iraq could suffer widespread epidemics and malnutrition because allied bombing destroyed water supplies and electrical generation.

The Iraqi people, the UN report said, are using the Tigris River for drinking water, bathing and as a latrine. It warned of outbreaks of cholera, typhoid, meningitis and dysentery.

The council rejected a resolution by India that would have lifted all sanctions. Sanctions approved by the Security Council last year prohibit some humanitarian shipments.

The council met Sunday evening, shortly after Baghdad Radio announced Iraq had accepted a UN resolution laying the framework for a permanent cease-fire.

On Saturday the council overwhelmingly passed a resolution dictating allied demands that Iraq must meet before a formal cease-fire is adopted in the Gulf War. The vote was 11-1, with three abstentions. Cuba voted against the resolution; India, China and Yemen abstained.

Under the resolution, the Baghdad government must return all prisoners of war, abducted Kuwaitis and stolen property; rescind its annexation of Kuwait and renounce claims to the emirate; accept liability for war damages and disclose the location of mine fields and booby traps.

Baghdad Radio, monitored in Nicosia, Cyprus, quoted a letter sent by Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to the United Nations saying that Baghdad had accepted UN Security Council Resolution 686.

The UN resolution says a formal cease-fire would be declared.

Iraqi Ambassador Abdul Amir al-Anbari said Sunday that Iraq had released 10 foreign prisoners of war, including six Americans. His report couldn't be immediately confirmed.

The resolution in effect, backs US President George Bush's insistence that Allied troops remain in Iraq until his terms are met, by affirming the right of the US-led coalition to attack again if Iraq reneges on any conditions.

BRIEFLY

Pak official accuses Arab embassy:

A senior Pakistani official accused that an embassy of an Arab country has been busy creating chaos and misleading people in the country under a master plan for the last two years, reports Xinhua.

Talking to newsmen at the parliament house cafeteria here Sunday night, adviser to the Pakistan Prime Minister on information Sheikh Rashid Ahmad said the government has substantial proof of that and will expose this plan at a proper time.

He noted that the plan was aimed at "Pressurizing the Pakistan government by using certain elements in the country to withdraw its troops from Saudi Arabia."

Pakistan has sent about 10,000 troops to Saudi Arabia since last August 2 when Iraq occupied Kuwait.

US troops to leave in 3 months:

Most American forces could leave the Gulf within three months, US military sources said on Saturday reports Reuters from Riyadh.

"We hope to be out within as early as 90 days. That's what we're looking at for the US military," one senior source said.

"This is not to say we may not need to be there for longer but we're projecting 90 days," he told reporters.

Debate on Palestine conflict:

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, pressed by Hawks in his government, has agreed to hold a political debate on the Palestinian conflict before a visit by US Secretary of state James Baker next week, reports Reuters.

Government officials said that three ministers were pressing Shamir to formally abandon the government's May 1989 "peace initiative".

The initiative, hammered out under the pressure of US diplomacy and the Palestinian uprising, envisaged elections in the occupied territories leading to limited self-rule for Palestinians. It excluded territorial concessions.

4 US soldiers killed:

Four US soldiers were killed when their Chinook helicopter crashed accidentally in northern Saudi Arabia, the US military command said Monday, reports AP.

Spokesmen refused to give details of the accident, which occurred Saturday, and said names of the victims were being withheld pending notification of relatives. One crew member was reported injured.

A spokesman declined to say whether any of those on board were women.

There are 22 female pilots in the US Army's 101st Airborne Division, some of whom have been flying Chinook supply helicopters in support of troops engaged in the ground offensive against Iraq.

Iraqi planes in Africa?:

Some of Iraq's planes have been sent for safety not only to Iran but also to north Africa, the Washington Post has reported, says PTI.

In a dispatch from Paris, the newspaper said "when the American-led bombing raids began over Baghdad in mid-January, Saddam Hussein dispatched several civilian and military airplanes to friendly Magreb (Arab countries in north Africa) to take shelter from the Allied attacks."

"One of the Iraqi planes that landed in Nouakchott, the Mauritanian capital was rumoured to be carrying his wife and family."



SAFWAN (Iraq): US soldiers sit on a M1A1 Abrams tank, equipped with anti-mine ploughs on March 3, alongside a sign welcoming the delegations to the ceasefire talks. The 'Big Red One' is the US first Armored Division.

3 US Olympic men among 25 killed in plane crash

COLORADO SPRINGS (Colorado), Mar 4: The United States Olympic committee said two committee employees and a coach with the US Cycling Federation were aboard a United jetliner that crashed Sunday. There were no known survivors, reports AP.

The plane with 25 people aboard crashed in flames as it approached the Colorado Springs Airport on a flight from Denver.

Mike Moran, a spokesman for the US Olympic Committee, said that among those on board the plane were Dr Peter J Van Handel, 45, a senior sports physiologist; Dr Andrzej J Komor, 39, a sports biochemist; and Dan Birkholtz.

Command Council talks 'political development'

Iraq accepts UN terms, seeks end to sanctions

BAGHDAD, Mar 4: Iraq said on Sunday it accepted the latest UN Security Council Resolution setting terms for a permanent ceasefire in the Gulf, including a release of all prisoners of war and detained Kuwaitis, reports Reuters.

State-run Baghdad radio said "Iraq's acceptance was relayed in a letter from Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to the United Nations, which asked the Security Council to respond in an objective and honourable way."

The Iraqi government has reviewed UN Resolution 686 of 1991 and it accepts to carry out its commitments as per the mentioned resolution," the radio quoted the letter as saying.

The radio in a previous news bulletin said Iraq's ruling Revolutionary Command

Council, chaired by President Saddam Hussein met to discuss unspecified "political developments".

Hours earlier a senior general of Iraq's defeated army accepted terms dictated by the US-led coalition forces for a permanent ceasefire.

The agreement at a desert air base in southern Iraq heralded a swift release of Allied airmen captured by Baghdad and of thousands of hostages seized by Iraq during its seven-month occupation of Kuwait.

The United States and its Allies pledged to pull out of Iraq once a ceasefire was signed and halted the battlefield parley as a major advance toward peace.

The UN resolution combines conditions set by President George Bush last week when

he announced a suspension of combat with demands that Iraq immediately carry out all 12 resolutions adopted since its August invasion of Kuwait.

But the resolution does not call for a permanent ceasefire as several Non-Aligned countries had demanded. Instead, it lays the groundwork for an eventual ceasefire.

Aziz said in his letter that Iraq hoped the security council would vote for a resolution announcing "an official ceasefire, an end to all land, sea and air military operations and the withdrawal of all foreign forces present with no due reason in some Iraq areas".

Following is a letter from Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to the President of the UN security council, Peter Hohenfelsner of Austria, and UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar.

Origins of the man who jolted the Gulf

CHICAGO, Mar 4: General Norman Schwarzkopf, who commands the Allied forces in the Gulf, says that he spends a lot of time trying to get inside Saddam Hussein's mind to figure out what kind of a man he is. Saddam's official biography, which came out 11 years ago, said that his birth in 1937 wasn't a happy one. Relatives passed him back and forth during his childhood. He ran away from home at 10 to seek his fortune. The rest is history, reports UNI.

Now more light is being shed on those formative years of the life of Saddam Hussein. It comes from a 73-year-old woman called Nezima, who moved in 1950 from Baghdad. Last week, a Wall Street Journal reporter and two Israeli academics, one a psychiatrist and one an Iraq

watcher, spoke to Nezima about how a pregnant woman stayed with Nezima's family in Baghdad for four nights in the spring of 1937. Nezima says the woman was Subhah Talhah al-Mussallat, Saddam Hussein's mother.

Nezima's story is fascinating. (Remember this is an old woman talking about something that took place 54 years ago.) She says that Subhah came to Baghdad in March 1937 from Tikrit, Saddam's hometown which is 100 miles to the north and was recently bombed by Allied warplanes. She was brought there by Nezima's brother-in-law Salim Zilka, son of Tikrit's one of two Jewish families. The family was well-known and respected by the majority Sunni Muslims, because they helped others in times

of need and had founded the town's first school for girls.

Subhah's 15-year-old son was dying of cancer and when he became terminal, Salim Zilka brought him and his mother to Baghdad. She was from the "Zamiyya quarter" of Baghdad. Salim stayed with his in-laws, with Subhah where she kept watch over her dying son. At night, he would tell Nezima about Subhah and Nezima remembers that they would both weep late into the night for the distraught woman's plight.

On the fourth day, the boy died. Subhah broke down, pulling clumps of hair out of her head and beating her abdomen with her fists. She also tried to commit suicide by throwing herself in front of a moving car but Salim pulled her back. "Why are

you punishing the baby inside you?" Nezima says Salim asked Subhah. Subhah is said to have answered: "After losing my husband and my child, what good can this baby do for me?"

Salim drove Subhah back to Tikrit and that was the last Nezima saw of her. One of Salim's daughters, Rayah, told a small Israeli newspaper much the same story last year. She also added that Subhah's family was



surprised when she called the baby Saddam, an uncommon name that means shock or jolt in Arabic.

After that, the story of Saddam's boyhood gets fuzzy. His mother had married his father's brother. Apparently Subhah rejected him for some years after his birth and he was sent off to an uncle, with whom he lived for many years. At the age of 10, writes his official biographer, Amir Iskander, he asked his mother and stepfather to send him to school. He was, so the book says, "brusquely rejected."

So he set out, "strong as always" to face his destiny. Can Nezima be believed? "I'm only telling you things I know," she told the three men who interviewed her. "Things I saw with my own eyes or heard with my own years." Haifa university his-

torian Amaazia Baram has written a book about modern Iraq and agrees with Nezima.

"She mentioned several names and families in Tikrit whom I already knew from my research," says Baram. "Even her description of the town fit my previous understanding."

In support of her story, Nezima pulls out a dog-eared black-and-white picture of a boy scout troop. She points out her husband. A few scouts to the right, she points out Khair Allah Talhah, Saddam's maternal uncle — the man who ultimately sent him to school and whose daughter became Saddam's wife.

The official biography has another view. His childhood problems are said to have "taught him certain basic virtues which

Off the Record

Life begins at 68!

NASHVILLE (Tennessee): At age 68, award-winning folk-country musician Doc Watson isn't discussing retirement, reports AP.

"I'm not going to talk about that," he said recently. "When I retire, everybody will know it. It could be next week, it could be next year, or whenever. We've got a few shows to do."

Watson, who's blind, won a Grammy last month for his album "On Praying Ground."

"My heart was really in this one and I guess it showed," he said about the album, which is gospel music-oriented. "It meant a lot to me to do a record I believe in, and that's the important thing."

Watson has been performing since the early 1960s. He's best known for his guitar playing and his repertoire of old-time country music.

It strains credulity

BISMARCK (North Dakota): Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist A.B. Guthrie said he writes about the wild West to show an honest picture of what life was like then, reports AP.

Guthrie, whose manual for fiction writers is due out this month, said he admires the work of Jim Welch, author of "Indian Lawyer." But he is unimpressed with Larry McMurtry's popular "Lonesome Dove."

"It strains credulity," he said, pointing to a passage in the book about throwing rattlesnake meat into a pot to cook.

"They would have shot the cook," the 90-year-old Montana native said. "Plausibility is the morality of fiction."

Powell's daughter likes to be famous

NEW YORK: Gen. Colin Powell's daughter is a struggling actress who hopes she makes it big before anyone gets her dad interested in the White House, reports AP.

Linda Powell, 26, said her father has no desire to be Vice President. As for higher aspirations, she said with a laugh: "Oh, President? I hope I become famous first."

In the movie "Reversal of Fortune," Miss Powell played one of the law students who helps Alan Dershowitz win Claus von Bulow's case.

On Thursday, Miss Powell opens at the Samuel Beckett Theater in "Judgment Day." She plays Anna, a flirt in a small German town in the 1930s.

She says her father doesn't talk a lot about his work as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "He guards his privacy and his opinions," she said. "We're allowed to have our opinions and he has 'em."

And what is her opinion about the Gulf War? "I'm glad it's over. I think we did what we had to do."

Profusion of yellow ribbons

BEVERLY HILLS (California): The profusion of yellow ribbons across America in support of soldiers deployed in the Gulf has inspired Tony Orlando to record a sequel to "The Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree," reports AP.

Yellow ribbons have shown up on trees, doors and lapels since US forces were sent to the Gulf.

The 1973 song was about a man returning home from prison, and the ribbons became associated with Vietnam War POWs and the Americans taken hostage at the US Embassy in Iran. In the Gulf War, the act of tying a yellow ribbon was a statement of love for the troops, not just POWs, he said.

The new song, called "With Every Yellow Ribbon," redefines the yellow ribbon phenomenon to incorporate the new sentiment, Orlando said.

Final curtain on Las Vegas Strip

LAS VEGAS: Showgirls and showgoers wept and cheered as the final curtain closed on a 32-year fixture on the Las Vegas Strip, with 400 former dancers sharing in a poignant farewell for the Lido de Paris, reports AP.

The variety show, imported from Paris in 1958, was performed 22,000 times for an audience totalling 19 million people. A duel over its artistic content, alongside high production and licensing costs, prompted the Stardust Hotel to opt for a new musical production that opens in July.

As the Lido took its final bow Thursday night and a band played "Thanks for the Memories," showgirls wiped away tears, blew kisses and flashed thumbs-up signs to the audience, some of whom first saw or acted in the show a generation ago.

Former showgirls applauded and cheered various dance segments that have been a part of the show since it opened on July 2, 1958. Among the opening-night crowd were Bob Hope, Harold Lloyd and the McGuire Sisters.

The show was an offshoot of the original Paris production, which opened in 1928. The first cast was flown directly from Paris and consisted entirely of foreign performers. Over the years, Americans have taken over the roles.