

BRIEFLY

Iraq to join Arab League meet :

Iraq has decided to take part in an Arab League Foreign Ministers' meeting in Cairo, the official Iraqi News Agency (INA) announced Tuesday, reports AFP from Nicosia. The Director of the Foreign Ministry's Arab section, Saad Kassem Hammoudi, will head the Iraqi delegation for Saturday's meeting, INA said. It will be the first official contact between Iraq and Ministers from Arab countries that took part in the US-led military coalition that drove Iraqi troops out of Kuwait.

Israeli killed in West Bank :

An Israeli settler was killed in the occupied West Bank by unknown assailants on Tuesday, military sources said, reports AFP from Jerusalem. Six shots were fired at the settler's car while he was driving north of Ramallah around 10.00 pm (1900 GMT), the sources said. The man lost control of his vehicle and slammed into a wall, they said. The assailants then pulled the settler out of the car and killed him, the sources added.

Japan to send experts to Gulf:

Japan will send two teams of experts to combat the huge oil spills that poured into the Gulf from damaged terminals in Iraq and Kuwait, during the Gulf war, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry said in Tokyo on Tuesday, reports Reuters. The first team of 18 specialists and civil servants would take part in skimming operations to retrieve crude from Gulf waters, the spokesman said. The second team of 12 desalination plant experts will go to Saudi Arabia to help prevent oil entering the plants and to deal with oil already inside them.

Riots in Paris:

Riots erupted in a western Paris suburb after a young Arab was shot dead by a security guard on Tuesday evening, police said in Paris, Reuters reports. Police said about 100 young Arabs gathered near a shopping centre in the western suburb of Sartrouville after the man was killed. They threw bottles and stones and clashed with police by midnight (2300 GMT) more than 100 riot police were at the scene, confronting about 60 rioters.

Two hostages killed in Canada:

Two inmates who had taken hostages in a high-security prison in Prince Albert in Canada, Saskatchewan were shot dead by prison guards and a third was wounded after a 24-hour stand off, reports AFP. Guards stormed the area held by the hostage-takers after the knife-wielding inmates threatened to cut off the limbs of their two captives, a prison guard another inmate. Prison authorities believed the crisis would be resolved peacefully Monday night after a third hostage had been released, but the hostage-takers then increased their demands during ensuing negotiations.

UNESCO expedition soon :

An International UNESCO expedition, the great silk road, may be held soon after the National UNESCO Committee in the USSR and organising committees in central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan signed an appropriate agreement in Tashkent, reports IAN. The expedition will take place from April, 19 to June 18, 1991 on the territory of Turkmenia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and involve researchers from 25 countries, including Ethnographers, Historians, Archaeologists, Ecologists and Linguists. The programme of the expedition includes scientific seminars in Khiva and Alma Ata, folk festivals in Central Asian capitals and other arrangements.

Indo-Pak troops clash:

Pakistani troops suffered heavy casualties Monday when Indian soldiers repelled their attempt to cross the border into India, a senior defence official said in Nammu, India reports AFP. "Heavy casualties were inflicted on the Pakistanis. And on the Indian side some (soldiers) were injured the official, who did not want to be identified, said in this winner capital of the northern State. He did not give details of the clashes that took place in the district of Keran in northern Kashmir.

US troops in Gulf mailing arms home

JERSEY CITY (New Jersey), Mar 27 : US troops headed back from the Gulf are illegally mailing home weapons they picked up during the war, postal workers at a New Jersey Bulk Mail Facility reported, says AFP. "It seems as if some troops got a little carried away with their trophies of war," said John Leyden, Assistant Director of the customs service office. Dozens of Iraqi automatic rifles, knives and bayonets have been found by postal and customs officials in the duffel bags shipped through New Jersey, said a postal spokesman who added that no other mailing centre had reported the problem. The shipped weapons which began to be discovered two weeks ago, violate federal and military regulations which prohibit sending arms through the mail, and postal officials said troops could be prosecuted. "This usually happens after a war," said postal spokesman Frank Santora. "But sending weapons is out the question." Package from the Gulf are x-rayed upon arrival at the New Jersey centre, the largest of the 21 centres around the country. The weapons are confiscated and the packages are shipped on with a note outlining federal regulations and penalties. No accidents involving the weapons have occurred, but authorities are concerned about the potential hazards. "This place is full of them," said Tom Mallahey, a postal union leader. "I'm worried that something might happen. I'm worried about an explosion ready to happen."

US to deploy Army officers in Bahrain

WASHINGTON, Mar 27 : The United States said Monday it is discussing with its allies the possibility of stationing a few hundred army staff officers in the Gulf in what would be the first permanent US army presence in the region, reports Reuters. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said that under discussion is moving part of the US central command from its Florida headquarters to a Gulf site. The central command is headed by Allied Commander General Norman Schwarzkopf. "Our allies in the region and the central command are looking at the possibility of placing a portion of that staff in the Gulf area so that we may more easily facilitate training and coordination with our Gulf allies," Fitzwater told reporters.

Costner bags 7 Oscars, says he'll let kids touch them

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Rabbits' rampage

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Bid to stop anti-Gorbachev stir

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One lakh Iraqi troops killed in war: US to down copters

LONDON, Mar 27: Kurdish rebels said they overran an Iraqi airfield south of the northern oil city of Kirkuk on Tuesday, capturing two combat aircraft and burning others, reports Reuters. A spokesman for the Iraqi Kurdistan front, an umbrella group for Kurdish organisations, said he had been given the news by veteran Kurdish guerrilla leader Jalal Talabani, who has returned to Iraq after years of exile. The spokesman said "Kurdish forces have established control of Khalid airport, and a number of Iraqi jets have been burned. One Mig and one Sukhoi are in the hands of the Kurds in full working condition." The report could not be independently verified. Another message from Riyadh adds: About 100,000 Iraqi soldiers, one-tenth of the army, are believed to have been killed in the six-week Gulf war, Allied military sources said on Monday. They said it was impossible to be more precise. Most of the Iraqis would have died during the five weeks of relentless Allied air attacks on troop positions and supply lines which preceded the four-day ground war to oust Iraq from Kuwait. These would have been buried in the desert long before Allied ground troops reached their positions. Nor was it known for sure how many Iraqi soldiers were on the battlefield to start with, the sources said. Estimates just before the war of more than 500,000 massed in Kuwait and southern Iraq were now seen as inflated. There might have been a total of about 100,000 Iraqi soldiers who died that is

roughly the closest we can come to saying how many form the information we have pieced together, a senior western military source said. "It's almost impossible to know how many were on the battlefield to begin with because so many deserted during the war", said the Riyadh-based source. Report from Washington says: The United States has no intention of becoming directly involved in the unrest in Iraq but will down helicopter gunships attacking rebel positions if they threaten Allied troops, the White House said on Tuesday. "We don't intend to involve ourselves in the internal conflict in Iraq," spokesman Marlin Fitzwater told reporters in discussing unrest threatening the government of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Fitzwater said the use of helicopters against insurgents violated the spirit of the order by President George Bush stopping the fighting but was "not covered by the terms of the ceasefire" reached by Iraqi and Allied commanders. Bush has publicly denounced Saddam for using helicopters against rebelling Kurdish and Shi'ite muslim

strongholds in Iraq, but Fitzwater said there was no direct violation of the ceasefire now in effect. The Presidential spokesman said the understanding on helicopters "was a side oral discussion, nothing in writing." The remarks by Bush spokesman signalled, in effect, that the United States would not enter the turmoil that erupted shortly after the Gulf war ended last month. Some Kurdish leaders had publicly called for American assistance, but Fitzwater said no formal requests had been received. The United States has downed two Iraqi jets flying missions against the insurgents, but has been vague about what it would do about helicopters. "We made it clear that we do not believe that they should be flying helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft over the country, that we intended to shoot down fixed-wing aircraft because of the direct threat that they posed to our forces," Fitzwater said. He said armed jets were considered an immediate threat to Allied forces, but that helicopters did not generate the same concerns. "Fixed-wing aircraft fly several hundred miles an hour," he said. "They carry bombs that could threaten coalition forces." "Helicopters, they fly slower. It's easier to detect. We would apply the same kind of judgement," Fitzwater said. "If they threaten US forces or coalition forces, they'll be attacked."

Defence Department spokesman Pete Williams told reporters the Iraqi government continues to consolidate control in the southern part of the country, but that the situation remains fluid. Rebels control the oil city of Kirkuk in the north, Williams said, but there is evidence that Iraqi forces are regrouping there. Fitzwater said the withdrawal of US combat troops from the Gulf was not related to unrest in Iraq. But would be based upon the implementation of a permanent ceasefire now being drafted at the United Nations. "We have carried out the mandate of the United Nations," Fitzwater said. "We have acted on behalf of the interests of our country."

Troops arrest President of Mali as riots continue

DAKAR, Mar 27 : Mali's armed forces and police have seized power and formed a National Reconciliation Council, radio Bamako monitored here reported, quoting an official communique, reports AFP. The National Reconciliation Council (CNR), headed by a Lieutenant-Colonel, has suspended the constitution and dissolved the government and the ruling single party, the Malian People's Democratic Union (UDPM), the communique said. Earlier report adds : Mali President Moussa Traore was arrested by soldiers from his own army amid widespread rioting and heavy gunfire in the capital Bamako, witnesses said Tuesday, reports Reuters. "The President has been arrested — it was soldiers who arrested him," said one witness who declined to be named. Another said he was Traore taken early Tuesday in a heavily armed military convoy from

the presidential palace towards a military air base. Traore, who seized power in a 1968 coup, has been fighting for his political survival against a powerful pro-democracy movement which launched an indefinite general strike on Monday. The movement was demanding the President's resignation and an end to one-party rule in this vast but impoverished West African country. Three days of clashes between demonstrators and security forces over the weekend left at least 150 people dead and a thousand wounded, according to western diplomats. In official broadcasts, Traore put the death toll at 276. "He has been arrested," said Bakary Karambe, head of Mali's only trade union and President of the Pro-democracy Coordinating Committee, adding that the President was being held by paratroopers.

Off the Record

I'm scared: Sophia Loren

LOS ANGELES: Italian film star Sophia Loren was awarded an honorary Oscar by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on Monday "as one of the genuine treasures of world cinema," reports Reuters. Loren, holding back tears as she held her second Oscar, said she was still scared to face the awards ceremony 30 years after receiving her first award. She is the only performer to have won an Oscar for appearing in a foreign language film, the Italian "Two women" in 1961. "Tonight I'm still scared," Loren told the star-studded awards ceremony at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. "But I am not alone and I will share this eventful evening with the three men in my life. My husband Carlo Ponti, without whom I wouldn't be the person who I am today, and my two sons..." Loren said. The academy said Loren, who has appeared in 59 films since starting as a film extra in the Italian production of "Quo Vadis" in 1949, had in a career rich with memorable performances, added permanent luster to our artform. Loren first arrived in Hollywood in 1958 and starred in such films as "Boy on a Dolphin," "Desire under the Elms," "El CID" and "Arabesque."

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HOLLYWOOD: U.S. actor-director Kevin Costner stands with presenter Barbara Streisand after she presented him with his Oscar as Best Director for the movie "Dances With Wolves" at the 63rd annual Academy Award presentations. —AFP photo