

Two senior Iraqi security officials executed

US fails to support rebel attempt to oust Saddam

WASHINGTON, May 3: Defections by senior officials in Saddam Hussein's army — and possibly a coup attempt against Saddam — were shelved in the United States failed to support the effort, according to a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff report issued Thursday, reports AP.



In early March, at the height of the rebellion in Iraq, the Iraqi army officials approached an Iraqi dissident group in exile with an offer of cooperation, said the report, written by Peter Galbraith, a senior aide to the committee chairman, Senator Claiborne Pell.

The would-be Iraqi defectors "contemplated bringing possibly decisive force to the side of the rebels" but first wanted "a sign that the sponsors of the rebellion had the support of the United States," the report stated, attributing the information to unnamed Kurdish and Arab opposition leaders.

The US State Department had declined to respond for the past two weeks to inquiries about the matter, and an official said Thursday, the department would probably save its answer for congressional hearings that are expected later on the administration's Iraq policy.

The Iraqi military officials were dealing with the Joint Action Committee, an alliance of Kurdish, Sunni, Shi'ite and other Iraqi dissidents formed in Beirut, the report said.

It said the group put aside its religious and ethnic differences to concentrate on a sole goal: the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, and the establishment of a more democratic Iraq.

But the United States "continued to see the opposition in caricature," fearing that the Kurds sought a separate state and the Shi'ite Muslims wanted an Iranian-style Islamic fundamentalist regime, the report contended.

Relying on a no-contact policy established in 1988, the State Department refused to meet with the opposition groups on several occasions, according to the report.

"The public snub of Kurdish

statements urging the Iraqi people to rise up and overthrow Saddam. And he had secretly signed authorizations for the CIA to aid Iraqi dissident groups, intelligence sources have told the Associated Press.

But US intelligence officials concluded that Saddam had the ability to put down the Kurdish rebellion in the north and the Shi'ite uprising in the south, and that the most serious threat to him was posed by the possibility of a coup from his own inner political and military circle.

AFP adds from Damascus: One of the largest Iraqi Shi'ite opposition groups, the organization of the Islamic Action, on Thursday claimed it had executed two senior Iraqi security officials in Baghdad on the previous day.

According to a communiqué released here by the office of the OIA's leader, the Ayatollah Mohammed Taghi Mufareh, the "popular forces of the uprising" killed Alwan Dillmi, the security official in charge

of the Baghdad Suburb of Rasafi, at his home.

"They also executed Daud al-Qaysi, who was in charge of security for Iraq's radio and television headquarters in Baghdad", the communiqué said.

The OIA also said the government was carrying out mass executions of dissidents in Karbala, Najaf and Amarah.

While their government prepares to bring them back, some Kuwaitis are reluctant to spend a long, blazing summer in their soot-covered country.

Looted and battered homes, noxious smoke from burning oil wells and a lack of some services have driven thousands of Kuwaitis from their freed country and prompted others to postpone their return.

"A lot of people are leaving Kuwait," said Amal Abdul Rahman, 19 who showed up in Hamad Town four days ago with 20 family members. "It is very difficult to live there."

Britain's top pop music awards

Elton John and Phil Collins between them collected three of Britain's top pop music awards on Thursday, including the prizes for best song and songwriter, reports Reuter.

John, a flamboyant pianist-singer whose previous hits include "Yellow Brick Road" and "Crocodile Rock" won the best song prize in the Ivor Novello Awards for his latest release "Sacrifice."

He also collected the award for best-selling a-side record for the same song, jointly written with lyricist Bernie Taupin.

Collins, a singer, drummer and one-time member of the group Genesis, pipped him for the best songwriter award.

Rolling stones Ronnie Wood and Bill Wyman won an award for outstanding contributions to British music.

The Novello Awards, in their 36th year, are presented by the British Academy of songwriters, composers and authors.

John Barry, who won a Hollywood Oscar last month, picked up the Jimmy Kennedy Award for services to music.



LONDON: Ronnie Wood (l) and Bill Wyman of the Rolling Stones present their awards for their outstanding contribution to British music at the Ivor Novello Awards at a London event May 2.

State Department okays visa for Bani-Sadr

WASHINGTON, May 3: The State Department has recommended that former Iranian president Abolhasan Bani-Sadr be allowed to enter the United States to promote his book charging that the Reagan presidential campaign struck a deal to delay the release of American hostages, a US official said Thursday night, reports AP.

The recommendation by Deputy Secretary Lawrence Eagleburger was sent to the Justice Department, which has expressed growing interest in reports of the alleged deal between the Reagan campaign and Khomeini.

The former Ford and Carter administration official most responsible for reviving interest in the case after a two-year investigation of his own said Thursday only a formal investigation offers any hope of finding out what happened.

US law bans the entry of Bani-Sadr because he was president of Iran when US diplomats were held hostage for 444 days in 1979, 1980 and 1981 by Iranian students in Tehran. The prohibition can be waived.

Bani-Sadr's book, "My Turn to Speak," alleges, among other things, that the 1980 campaign of Ronald Reagan struck a deal with Iran's revolutionary leader, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, to delay the release of the 52 American hostages in order to scuttle the re-election of President Jimmy Carter in 1980.

The hostages were released minutes after Reagan took over from Jan. 20, 1981. Later that year, Khomeini drove Bani-Sadr from office, and Bani-Sadr now lives in France.

On his US visit, Bani-Sadr plans to meet with several members of Congress, which has expressed growing interest in reports of the alleged deal between the Reagan campaign and Khomeini.

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Gary Sick, a Middle East scholar who was on Carter's National Security Council staff, met for 1-2 hours with 10 House Democrats who are considering whether to open such a probe into charges that Reagan aides delayed the release of American hostages until after the election.

"My cause... is to get the story out, to make people realize that something happened here that should not have happened," Sick told reporters after the meeting.

During two years of interviews and investigation, the

said, he found areas "that I simply can't find out. There are walls I can't break down... Obviously, a more formal investigation could get over that hump quite a bit."

House of Representatives Speaker Thomas S. Foley is mulling over whether to open a more formal investigation of the charges, which have been rumoured for more than a decade but never substantiated.

Ex-President Carter has called for an investigation, and there has been a flurry of calls on Capitol Hill for renewed attention to the matter.

Burma buying aviation fleet from USSR

BANGKOK, May 3: Burma is trying to update its aviation fleet by buying helicopters and passenger planes from the Soviet Union, Burmese State radio said, reports Reuter.

The Transport and Communications Minister Lieutenant General Tin Tun, met officials from the Soviet Aviaexport Aircraft Sales Agency this week to discuss replacing national carrier Myanmar Airways' planes with the Soviet Union's Antonov-32 and Tupolev-154 airliners.

The radio, monitored in Bangkok today did not say how many aircraft the deal involved. The Burmese also enquired about buying Mi-17 helicopters, the report added.

The military version of the Mi-17 has been used in combat in Afghanistan and central America.

The report did not say which version was sought by Burma's military government, which is fighting an array of guerrilla groups as well as confronting political unrest.

Tin Tun, a member of the ruling junta, also met South Korean businessman S. Y. Roh of Seoul Air International Ltd on Thursday to discuss the joint establishment of an aircraft spares repair centre in Burma, Rangoon radio said in a separate report.

Sweden to raise refugee quota

STOCKHOLM, May 3: Sweden proposed on Thursday to more than double its refugee quota and said other European countries should do the same, reports Reuter.

The government proposed raising the quota to 3,250 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, from 1,250 this year.

"Raising the refugee quota increases the possibility for Sweden to accept, among others, refugees from Iraq," the Swedish Labour Ministry said.

Through sharply increasing the quota, we should influence other European countries to also increase their quotas."

A Labour Ministry spokesman said the government had asked parliament for a quick decision.

Saddam to destroy summer palace

BAGHDAD, May 3: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein told his troops on Thursday to destroy a hilltop summer palace in an area where western troops are building "safe haven" refugee camps, official sources said on Thursday, reports BSS.

They said the order was given to stoop US, British and French troops setting up camps for Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq from using the palace as a base.

Western military spokesmen say they will not use the palace but will search in for heavy weapons and allow elite Republican Guards to continue to live there.

A government source said the palace, on the outskirts of Sarsank, would be demolished in the presence of foreign and local journalists on Friday evening.

AFP adds from Nicosia: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Thursday chaired a meeting of the Armed Forces General Command in his capacity as supreme military leader, Baghdad Radio Reported.

The meeting was attended by General Izzat Ibrahim, Vice-Chairman of the ruling Revolutionary Command Council, Interior Minister Ali Hassan Al-Majid and Defense Minister Hussein Kamel Hassan, the radio said, but gave no further details.

Hussein said late Thursday during a visit to the northern Iraqi town of Yaacoubie, the government would always seek ways to guarantee the unity of the Iraqi people.

Six women to contest from West Bengal

Kushwant under fire for whipping up anti-Muslim sentiment

NEW DELHI, May 3: A pre-election furore has broken out in Bombay over a well-known Indian columnist's comments on Hindu revivalist parties, prompting officials there to ban and burn the Magazine that carried them and call for the writer to be beaten, newspapers said Friday, reports AFP.

The columnist, Kushwant Singh, whose partly-humorous comments carried by the country's widest circulation news Magazine, India Today, promptly apologised for causing "hurt and offence," the front page reports said.

The most violent reaction came from Bombay, where the regional Shiv Senna (Shiva's Army) controls the municipal corporation, and from the right-wing revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which is making a determined bid to take power in India's national elections later this month.

The Indian Express said several thousand copies of the Magazine were burned publicly by Shiv Senna activists in Bombay, and a newspaper de-

livery van battered while Sena chief Bal Thackeray called in print for followers to "beat Kushwant Singh with chappals (sandals)" if he did not apologise.

Kushwant Singh in comments made in an India Today-organised seminar on secular-

ism had referred to an incident in which the Hindu God Shiva (a hero of Maharashtra state of which Bombay is the capital) stabbed a Muslim protagonist.

"I was only referring to a historic episode in the context of the communal (Hindu-Muslim)

divide. No disrespect was meant for Shivaji, I hold him in high regard," Singh said in his apology.

Leaders of the Maharashtra branch of the BJP, which is allied with the Shiv Senna in its bid to take power in Delhi in the May 20-23-26 elections, were more restrained, the newspapers reports said.

They called for the apology, but refrained from burning copies of the India Today, whose Editor Arun Purie bowed out of the controversy by saying the remarks reflected the "personal opinion" of the columnist not of the Magazine.

Another report from Calcutta adds: Altogether, six women candidates are contesting the Lok Sabha polls in the state this year, of which three have been fielded by the Congress (I), two by the CPI(M) and CPI and one by the BJP.

The toughest contest is likely to be faced by the prominent Congress (I) leader and former MP, Ms Mamata Banerjee, at the Calcutta (South) seat where she is pitted against 11 candidates, including Dr Biplob Dasgupta of the CPI (M).

Next in the order is Dr Malini Bhattacharya of the CPI (M) at the Jadavpur Lok Sabha seat where she takes on nine candidates, including the former Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, Dr Santosh Bhattacharya, fielded by the Congress (I). From the Panskura seat, veteran CPI leader, Ms Geeta Mukherjee, is pitted against eight candidates.

10 cops killed in Serbs-Croats fighting

BELGRADE, May 3: At least 10 Croatian policemen have been killed in fighting with Serbs as tensions between Yugoslavia's two largest ethnic groups grew more violent, reports AP.

Franjo Tudjman, president of the Croatian republic, said on television early Friday that nine policemen were killed and three missing in eastern Croatia.

Off the Record

Bush's son got \$1.6 lakh salary from a company

WASHINGTON, May 3: President George Bush's son Neil drew a salary of 160,000 dollars a year as a partner in his second money-losing oil company, in which he invested less than 3,000 dollars, an internal report by a House of representatives committee shows, reports AP.

The report by the staff of the House Small Business Committee examines the relationship between Neil Bush's second oil business, Apex Energy Co. of Denver, and two venture capital firms that financed it.

A copy of the report, which concluded there is no evidence of illegal or improper conduct in Apex Energy's financing, was obtained Thursday by The Associated Press.

The venture capital firms invested 2.3 million dollars in Apex Energy in May 1989. At the time, they were controlled by Louis Marx Jr., an investor who is a big Republican contributor and a longtime friend of President Bush.

The firms, Wood River Capital Corp. and a subsidiary, Bridger Capital Corp. — were able to draw on federally guaranteed money.

Rep. Pat Schroeder, a Colorado Democrat, called the investment in Apex "a 2.3-million-dollar embarrassment."

Schroeder said in a statement that the report, which she had requested in December, indicates "a shameful abuse of a small business assistance programme."

Because of the two companies' serious financial difficulties, the Small Business Administration recently asked Wood River and Bridger to sell all their assets, including their stakes in Apex Energy, within 30 months. The proceeds will be used to pay back the agency for the loan guarantees.

Gen Powell was against Gulf war?

WASHINGTON: A new book by Bob Woodward of Watergate fame says General Colin Powell, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, pushed hard for sanctions against Iraq to avoid war, the Washington Post said in its Thursday editions, reports Reuter.

Woodward, now an editor of the newspaper, wrote that Powell and to a lesser extent Secretary of State James Baker led an unsuccessful campaign to persuade President George Bush to rely on sanctions rather than military options after Iraq invaded Kuwait last August.

Powell told Bush late in October before the decision was made to double the number of US troops in the Gulf that containment would take time, maybe as long as a year or two, but it would work, Woodward wrote.

Bush replied: "I don't think there's time for that strategy," said the book. The Commanders to be published on Friday by Simon and Schuster.

Once the decision was made, Powell supported it. Woodward, who gained fame for reporting the Watergate scandal that led to President Richard Nixon's resignation in disgrace in 1974, says even though the US Defence Intelligence Agency knew two days in advance that Iraq was to invade Kuwait, no warning was sent to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Schwarzkopf gets death threats

LOUISVILLE (Kentucky): General Norman Schwarzkopf, head of the US forces in the Gulf, said on Thursday he has received death threats since his return home from the Gulf war and has been placed under increased security, reports Reuter.

Schwarzkopf made the disclosure at a news conference prior to the annual Kentucky Derby parade. He was Grand Marshal.

"Yes, my life has been threatened," Schwarzkopf said in response to a question about the heavy security at the news conference. He did not elaborate but parade officials said they had been told not to disclose in advance where in the line of march the war commander would appear.

An estimated 300,000 people lined the streets in downtown Louisville for the parade, an annual event held in advance of Saturday's run for the roses. The parade included 125 Desert Storm veterans and nine military units.

BRIEFLY

Afghan FM to solve conflict: Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil asked UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar Thursday to accelerate negotiations to find a political solution to his country's civil war, reports AFP from New York.

"The only way to restore peace is to hold talks," Wakil told reporters after meeting with Perez de Cuellar. "Afghanistan stands ready to improve relations despite Pakistan's aggression."

"Hopes exist for a political solution" to the 12-year-old conflict and Kabul officials "are hopeful" the UN coordinator for Afghanistan will "take the necessary steps," he added.

Rafsanjani back home: Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani flew home after a four-day visit which Turkish officials said produced joint views on Iraqi refugees and economic cooperation, reports Reuter from Ankara.

"President Rafsanjani and I have agreed on the need for more efforts by the international community on the matter of Iraqi refugees and to act jointly on the matter," President Turgut Ozal told reporters while seeing Rafsanjani off at Ankara airport.

Agreement for peace in Angola: Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar welcomed on Thursday an agreement in Lisbon to end 16 years of civil war between Angola's leftist government and United States-backed UNITA rebels, reports Reuter from United Nations.

"The Secretary General wishes to take this opportunity to congratulate the parties for their statesmanship which made possible the finalisation of the agreement," a statement issued by a UN Spokeswoman said.

"He urges all concerned to cooperate fully in order to expedite the implementation of the agreement to ensure a lasting peace in Angola."

Bush meets Shevardnadze Monday: President George Bush will meet former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze next week for the first time since Shevardnadze resigned in December.

Shevardnadze is to meet Bush on Monday as well as US Secretary of State James Baker and to address the Brookings Institution Think Tank, Reuter reports from Washington.

White House Spokesman Marlin Fitzwater told reporters that Shevardnadze had requested the meetings.

Shevardnadze, who had a key role in warning US-Soviet ties in recent years, quit the government of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, warning the country was plunging towards dictatorship.

He is to deliver the commencement address at Boston University on May 12 on the topic, "the Soviet Union and the new world order."

Israeli copters blast PLO camp: Two Israeli helicopter gunships fired four rockets into the Palestinian refugee camp of Rashidiyeh on the outskirts of this southern Lebanese port city Thursday, police said, AP reports from Lebanon.

Police said they had no immediate word on casualties or damage from the Cobra helicopter attacks, which took place at 9.45 p.m. (1845 GMT). In Jerusalem, the Israeli army command said warplanes attacked a guerrilla target near Rashidiyeh.

It said the aircraft returned safely to their base after hitting the target, which the command said served as a launch site for attacks on Israel. The brief announcement had no further details.

USSR removes computer disks from US embassy

WASHINGTON, May 3: The United States said on Thursday it has protested to the Soviet Union over the removal of computer disks from its Moscow embassy by Soviet personnel during a fire last month, reports Reuter.

"These were not in the secured areas and though we consider the material and equipment compromised, we do not believe it was national security sensitive," Tutwiler said.

"A number of computer disks were taken from open offices, most of which were unclassified. All equipment throughout the building, however, will be thoroughly examined and tested before it is used again," she said.

Tutwiler said there was no evidence to support reports that cryptographic or secure communications equipment was removed from the building.

The Washington Times newspaper reported earlier this week that four KGB officers dressed in protective suits and posing as firemen went into the embassy building

along with firefighters. They pulled out secure telephones and communications equipment and took passports and personal items of embassy workers, the daily said.

The report said that at one point during the fire, a KGB agent tried to exit the building carrying a briefcase belonging to the second-ranking U.S. diplomat, John Joyce, but that an embassy official spotted it and recovered it.

Tutwiler gave no details on such reports, but asked whether she was talking of missing papers as well as computer disks, replied: "We could well be."

Even before the fire, the State Department regarded the Moscow embassy as an insecure, overcrowded and unsafe.