

US, British troops enter into Iraq?

TEHRAN, Dec 19: British and US troops entered Iraqi territory last night across the Saudi border, the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported today, says AFP.

Citing informed sources in Khorramshahr, a town bordering Iraq in southwestern Iran, IRNA said the troops had advanced five kilometres into Iraqi territory.

The sources which were not further identified, were unable to say whether or not the troops had remained in Iraq.

An Iraqi Information Ministry official said Friday that Saudi armoured units had advanced to the Iraqi border the previous day on an apparent reconnaissance mission before pulling back.

In Riyadh, an official denied that armour had been moved to the border.

Air raids on Iraq dying away

BAGHDAD, Dec 19: US and British forces blasted Iraq for a third night, the raids dying away today as Iraq's Muslims started to observe Islam's holiest month of Ramadan with prayers for victory, reports Reuters.

Witnesses said the pan-Arab headquarters of Iraq's ruling Baath Party was hit by missiles in Baghdad in the pre-dawn assault, the fiercest in three days of bombardment.

US security advisers prepared to brief President Bill Clinton on the impact of the attacks, a Gulf television station reported that more than 50 people had been killed in the Iraqi capital since the US led missile and bombing blitz began.

Qatar's Al-Jazeera satellite channel said its correspondent in Baghdad also reported more than 200 people wounded. There

was no official confirmation of the figures and there has been no word on casualties in attacks outside the capital.

The night sky over Baghdad was iridescent with anti-aircraft fire and the thunderous impact of Cruise missiles. Reporters could hear ambulance sirens, but access to the scene of the strikes was restricted by Iraqi officials.

The US and British strikes could end soon, US officials said on Friday. "As early as Friday," one official told Reuters in Washington when asked about a new report that the raids could be halted soon.

The officials, who asked not to be identified, said a final decision was likely after an assessment of the damage to Iraq's military capabilities during the past three nights of strikes.

Iraq's press stepped up its

condemnation of the United States, bellowing defiance and appealing to Arab solidarity.

"Yes, you the people of a great

civilisation — we will fight and resist the aggression," the government newspaper Al-Jumhouriya declared.

British media asked which president would fall first.

"Doomed but who will be finished off first?" asked the tabloid Sun, Britain's best-selling newspaper in a splash headline framed by pictures of Clinton and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

The Guardian newspaper agreed under its headline: "Two presidents in peril — but which one will be toppled first?"

The latest round of attacks coincided with the end of a day-long debate by the US House of Representatives on impeaching Clinton. US officials insisted Clinton's problems at home

over his affair with Monica Lewinsky would not deter the US military from punishing Iraq for its alleged refusal to cooperate with UN arms inspectors.

More Cruise missiles had been fired in the 72-hour-long campaign than nearly 300 during the 1991 Gulf War, US officials said. Intelligence reports showed that the first two days of raids had damaged bases of elite Republican Guard units in Baghdad and Tikrit, Saddam's home town.

The US B-1 bomber, widely derided as a huge waste of the US taxpayer's money, was also in action for the first time.

The attacks have carried a diplomatic price, with Russia and China bitterly opposed. In Beijing, Chinese defence experts accused Washington and London of using military action as part of a broader plot to achieve

world domination. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright by telephone that Moscow-Washington relations could be seriously damaged if the raids continued.

Thousands of stone-throwing demonstrators attacked the US Embassy in Damascus today and US guards fired tear gas at the angry crowd.

In the West Bank, three

Palestinian protesters were injured when Israeli troops fired plastic-coated bullets at stone throwers. In Bethlehem, birthplace of Jesus, demonstrators scrubbed flagstones to erase all

traces of Clinton, who was given an ecstatic reception to the town just 72 hours earlier.

Malaysian youths protested outside the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur.



Indian Muslims shout slogans and burn effigies of US President Bill Clinton, right, and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, outside the Jama Masjid during a demonstration in New Delhi Friday. — AP/UNB photo

India, Pakistan among '99's "top 10 hot spots"

WASHINGTON, Dec 19: Iraq, Central Africa and Colombia are expected to be among the 10 most serious areas of conflict and political instability the world will face in 1999, a humanitarian organisation said Friday, reports AP.

World Vision also cited Angola, Sudan, North Korea, Indonesia, the Balkans, Ethiopia/Eritrea and India/Pakistan in its listing of 10 "global hot spot." None of the nations or regions was ranked.

"Regrettably, we tend to view the future as projections of the past," said Dayton Maxwell, a senior policy advisor for World Vision, a relief and development organisation.

Maxwell also noted that more "interstate conflicts" are emerging. In Central Africa, for example, internal stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is compounded by the involvement of surrounding nations, such as Angola, Rwanda and Uganda.

World Vision also noted:

"In Colombia, there is civil strife that resembles civil war, the economy is faltering and nearly 800,000 people are unemployed."

The conflicts between India and Pakistan and between Eritrea and Ethiopia continue. In Angola, the civil war between the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola and the government has started again. In Sudan, the current ceasefire between the government and Christian and animist rebels is scheduled to end Jan 15.

North Korea's relations with the international community are strained because of fears about possible resumption of its nuclear programme and missile deployment. In Indonesia political divisions are increasing and in the Balkans, fears remain that worse fighting in Kosovo may break out in spring.

Missiles not aimed at real targets

WASHINGTON, Dec 19: When the dust settles in Iraq, the US government says Saddam Hussein will have lost some of his machinery for making nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

The matter is not weapons of mass destruction, he told a Baghdad news conference. "They know that all weapons of mass destruction have been totally destroyed," he asserts that the bombing campaign is intended only to "show that the United States is the sole superpower in the world."

President Bill Clinton says the main purpose of the airstrikes to diminish Iraq's capacity for producing the lethal weaponry that the United States and Britain contend is a threat to the world.

Why, then, are the hundreds of missiles and bombs in the attack not aimed at likely hiding places for weapons that Clinton claims Saddam would not hesitate to use?

That's a good question, I don't know the answer," said Brent Scowcroft, who was President George Bush's national security adviser when the issue of Iraq's illicit weaponry first arose in the 1991 Gulf War. If these weapons are the worry, why not bomb

Instead, US missiles and bombs are aimed at the facilities that support Iraq's weapons programme — a military research and development centre, for example, and a barracks for the Republican Guard military units that are responsible for weapons security. Also, a mis-

sile repair facility.

Defense Secretary William Cohen says the Iraqis can't be believed when they claim they have no weapons of mass destruction.

Saddam Hussein has claimed for eight years that he has no chemical weapons, that he has no biological weapons, Cohen said. "Only when confronted with the facts has he retreated and admitted he had been lying."

"So we don't take him at his word that he has none," Cohen added.

David Albright, a former UN nuclear weapons inspector and now president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, said US officials strongly suspect Saddam is still manufacturing nuclear weapons components and probably has some chemical and biological materials.

But who knows where they might be stored," Albright said.

Even if Iraq has such weapons stashed away, the US and British bombing → if suc-

cessful — would make it harder to use them or to manufacture more.

In the longer run, Saddam's ability to threaten the world with illicit weapons may depend on whether he puts out the welcome mat for the United Nations' beleaguered corps of inspectors and lets them work unhindered. If he does not, the United States will have to rely on two tools that Russia and some other countries oppose: indefinite economic sanctions and, perhaps, further military action.

Scowcroft, for one, does not believe that Saddam's weapons programme can be contained without inspectors on the ground.

"I don't think it can be done through sanctions alone," Scowcroft said. "The sanctions keep him from building up his overall military forces, but he gets enough income to apply it toward weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical and biological."

But that's over now and the money will be returned, he said.

"I am delighted that this issue has been satisfactorily settled," he said.

Delivery of the fighter aircraft was stopped after 1990 when the United States stopped all military and humanitarian aid to Pakistan to protest its nuclear programme.

The repayment of the money to Pakistan will be divided into a \$37 million cash payment before the end of December and a 140 million dollars payment in wheat and other commodities over the next two years, he said.

"As Pakistan must make annual purchases of wheat against cash, we deem this arrangement to be entirely satisfactory and as good as receiving cash payment," Sharif said.

Sharif, who met US President Bill Clinton in Washington earlier this month, said "in a statesman like manner, he (Clinton) has honoured his commitment."

Pak-US dispute over F-16 jets resolved: Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Dec 19: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said on Saturday Pakistan's long-standing dispute with the United States over the purchase of 28 F-16 fighter planes has been resolved, reports AP.

Pakistan will get 467 mil-

lion dollars from Washington,

the outstanding amount of the

money it paid for the fighter

planes it never received.

Earlier Pakistan had received 157 mil-

lion dollars as partial repay-

ment.

The F-16s issue has been a

long-standing and a persistent

irritant in our bilateral rela-

tions with the United States,"

Sharif told a news conference.

"For almost a whole decade now

this issue has been hanging fire

between the two countries be-

cause, in all these years, the US

refused to give us the planes as

well as our money."

But that's over now and the

money will be returned, he said.

Off the Record

Greetings war

LUCKNOW: Politicians in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh are fighting a greetings war to mark the New Year, reports AP.

Lawmakers and members of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, which is in power in Uttar Pradesh, are preparing to mail thousands of greeting cards with pictures of a mushroom cloud, representing India's successful nuclear tests this May.

The BJP said the tests were the biggest achievement so far this year. The party is also in power in India, with the help of 18 regional parties.

The Congress Party, the main opposition group in India's federal legislature and the party which ruled the country for most of its 51 years of independence, designed cards showing onions — whose sixfold price hike in recent weeks was among the reasons for the BJP's rout in three crucial state legislative elections recently.

The socialist Samajwadi Party, too, is designing a card showing the BJP's alleged anti-Muslim attitude and the reported connection of BJP lawmakers with criminals in Uttar Pradesh. The independent Election Commission has said in the past that dozens of lawmakers in Uttar Pradesh have criminal records. The BJP has repeatedly been blamed for increasing Hindu-Muslim tension in India over the years.

The Bahujan Samaj Party, which represents low-caste Hindus, is also planning to print cards highlighting what it calls rampant corruption in the state administration.

Mighty mice!

BANGKOK: They've infiltrated, overrun and occupied the once impregnable corridors of Thailand's Ministry of Defence, reports AP.

Now Thailand's top brass has pledged to exterminate them. Are they the Myanmarese, Japanese, Chinese, Laotians or Vietnamese?

No. They're mice. Thousands of the furry pests have infested the ministry, said Gen Theeradet Meephan, Permanent Secretary of Defence, according to Saturday's Bangkok Post newspaper.

They've chewed through telephone lines and computer cables, bitten into official documents and virtually occupied many offices, he said.

As is the case with many of Thailand's oldest ministries, the defence ministry buildings were built more than a century ago.

While its 19th-century low-rise European style buildings, replete with columns and verandas, are pleasing to the eye, when it comes to rodents its defence capabilities are suspect.

In fact, Gen Theeradet said his ministry is at a loss of how to beat back the invaders and so is seeking help from an ally that is legendary for its ability to confound all those who attempt to penetrate its inner sanctums: the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, the capital's city hall.

Longest scroll painting

LUCKNOW: A retired Indian arts professor has made it to the Guinness Book of Records for the world's longest scroll painting on silk.

"I received the certificate from the Guinness Book of Records on Wednesday," Lucknow-based Sanat Kumar Chatterjee, 63, who retired as head of the Department of Fine Arts at the Himachal Pradesh, Shimla in Himachal Pradesh, told India Abroad News Service. The award-winning painting measures 100 ft by 11 ft (about 30m by 3.3m) and weighs just 2.5 kg.

Prof Chatterjee already figures in India's Limca Book of Records for his three previous paintings.

"Synchronisation of nuclear physics and Indian mythology" is the common theme he has given to each of these. Chatterjee proposes to put up his entire work on giant size scrolls at an exhibition in New Delhi.

Jiang vows to continue one-party rule

BEIJING, Dec 19: China's move to crush a would-be opposition party has gathered force.

President Jiang Zemin vowed

one-party rule would not be

shaken, key opposition organi-

sers went on trial for subver-

sion and a rights group said

Saturday another organiser

was sent to a labour camp, re-

ports AP.

The developments were the

latest in a campaign against the

China Democracy Party that

began three weeks ago. Activists

around the country in June

started to form what they hoped

would be communist China's

first opposition party.

Xu Wenli, a veteran dissident

who was the opposition group's

adviser and a leading organiser,

faced trial Monday for subver-

sion. Two other leaders, Qin