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World & Nation

Page 10

The Battalion

'We're not going to pull the plug'

U.S. brings aid to refugee Kurds

SAFWAN, Iraq (AP) — The U.S. military presence in southern Iraq shrank to a narrow buffer zone along the Kuwait border Wednesday.

For the first time, meanwhile, U.S. soldiers entered northern Iraq to look for sites that will serve as camps for Kurdish refugees. The Pentagon said U.S., French and British troops would build tent cities and provide food and medical care for the Kurds.

At the southern buffer zone, the field commander in charge of the 18,000 soldiers of the 3rd Armored Division said they would feed and protect refugees in the area until relief agencies can take over the work.

"We're not going to pull the

plug until people can take care of themselves or until there's somebody else here to take care of them," said Lt. Col. John Kalb, who runs a sector of the Kuwait border zone that includes the U.S. Army-run refugee camp in Safwan.

An estimated 40,000 Iraqis are in the zone, seeking refuge from civil unrest in southern Iraq, where Shiite Muslims rebelled against Saddam Hussein. About a fourth of them are fed and treated for medical problems at the Safwan camp.

The zone, which was created under the cease-fire implemented by the United Nations Security Council, stretches six miles into Iraq and three miles

into Kuwait.

Iraqi and Kuwaiti military units are barred from the zone, but the Iraqi part of the zone is to return to the civil control of Saddam's government once U.N. peacekeeping troops are deployed. Many refugees who deserted from the Iraqi army or supported anti-government uprisings fear the changeover will give free reign to Iraqi police to exact revenge.

Kalb said the refugees would be safe as long as U.S. troops were there. "If an Iraqi policeman shows up with a gun, I'm taking the gun," he said.

He said that no regular Iraqi police had returned to Safwan, but that several secret police

agents had been arrested by the Americans. They were seeking information on the U.S. military and the names of Iraqis working with the Americans, he said.

Kalb said American soldiers might stay on to run humanitarian programs even after the 1,440-member United Nations peacekeeping force begins patrolling the buffer zone. No deployment timetable has been set and relief agencies have not announced plans to take over the Army's humanitarian work.

U.S. military strength in the Persian Gulf theater dropped under 270,000 men and women Wednesday, just under half the peak at the war's end, the U.S. Central Command in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, said.

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One Soviet mine resumes operations; other industries threaten to join strike

MOSCOW (AP) — The nation's largest coal mine resumed operations Wednesday free from Kremlin control — a small crack in a crippling strike but a victory in the fight by republics to gain control over Soviet industry and natural wealth.

Meanwhile, workers in other industries threatened to join miners who continued the 7-week-old strike.

The strike was backed by a veteran dissident who returned to Moscow this week after more than 15 years in exile.

Vladimir Bukovsky urged protests and said a general walkout "is the only solution" to force Kremlin reforms and to oust President Mikhail Gorbachev. He was in Tokyo seeking Japanese investment for the crumbling Soviet economy.

Some hard-liners also have demanded Gorbachev's resignation, saying he has not acted firmly enough to end ethnic and labor strife.

Next week, the party Central Committee is scheduled to meet in Moscow to review the work of its leaders, including Gorbachev.

"On one hand, it's wonderful that they have resumed work. On the other hand, it's damaging to the workers' movement."

—Vyacheslav Sharipov,
coal basin strike committee
member

The mine strikes have battered the Soviet economy and posed a strong challenge to Gorbachev's authority as party chief and government president. The miners started the strike on March 1 demanding pay raises, but Gorbachev's resignation has become

their main goal.

Miners at the Rospadskaya mine in western Siberia returned to work Wednesday after the republic of Russia agreed to take control of the operation from the national government, said mine officials and strikers.

"The country's largest coal mine is now flying the (Russian) flag instead of the Soviet one," said the independent Postfactum news agency. The mine formerly was run by the national Coal Ministry, meaning all decisions about production and sales were made in the Kremlin.

Tass quoted the Rospadskaya mine director, Alexander Yevtushenko, as saying coal shipments from the mine would resume Thursday. It said the mine is capable of producing 20,000 tons of coal a day.

No figures were immediately available on how many miners work there or how they arrived at the decision to return to work.

Japanese leaders doubt security of Soviet economy, deny requests

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's elite toasted and cheered Mikhail S. Gorbachev on Wednesday but turned a cold shoulder to the Soviet leader's frank plea for aid and investment.

Gorbachev, in a speech to Parliament, urged Japan to join the "new spirit in Soviet-U.S. relations" that began with the end of the Cold War and promised that the Soviet Union would never attack Japan.

He also claimed broad Soviet military reductions in Asia and said he did not intend to interfere with Japan's most important relationship, its security treaty with America.

Yet midway through Gorbachev's historic four-day visit, deep-seated Japanese doubts about their giant Soviet neighbor and its economic stability were proving more difficult to overcome than Cold War hostility.

Accompanied by his wife,

Raisa, the 60-year-old Soviet president entered the wood-paneled main chamber of the Diet, or parliament, to a standing ovation. He received another when he finished speaking 45 minutes later.

In his most plain-spoken request to date for foreign aid, Gorbachev warned that "the development of a new peaceful world order will largely depend on the outcome of perestroika. ... We are counting on support for our efforts, particularly now as we go through this critical stage."

"If we let the new social processes get out of hand, the country may really be thrown into the chaos that gives birth to dictatorship," he said in a speech interrupted seven times by applause.

At a luncheon meeting earlier, Gorbachev was blunter about asking for aid. He threw out most of a prepared text in trying

to persuade 600 business leaders he was serious about reforming the crumbling Soviet economy.

"Our Far East and Siberia have resources, but they lack the infrastructure to develop them," Gorbachev said, adding that the Soviet Union has much to learn from Japan's experience of converting military industries to commercial use.

Gorbachev stressed he was aware of the need for the Soviet Union to deal with its outstanding debts.

"This year has been especially difficult because our oil exports have declined due to the Gulf War," he said. "But we have the resources to resolve the problem. Your understanding would be appreciated."

But Japan's hard-nosed business elders, whose savvy built this country into the world's No. 2 economic power, said political and economic problems must be resolved before they can invest.

U.S. justices dismiss suit by passengers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday made it more difficult for some airline passengers to sue over emotional distress from near-crashes.

The justices unanimously threw out a lawsuit by passengers who said they endured 11 minutes of sheer terror when engines temporarily failed on an Eastern Airlines flight from Miami to the Bahamas in 1983.

The decision said passengers on international flights may not invoke a key 1929 treaty to sue if they suffered no physical harm.

The ruling has no direct bearing on psychic injuries incurred on domestic U.S. flights. State judges increasingly are permitting financial recovery for emotional distress unaccompanied by physical harm in a variety of personal injury suits.

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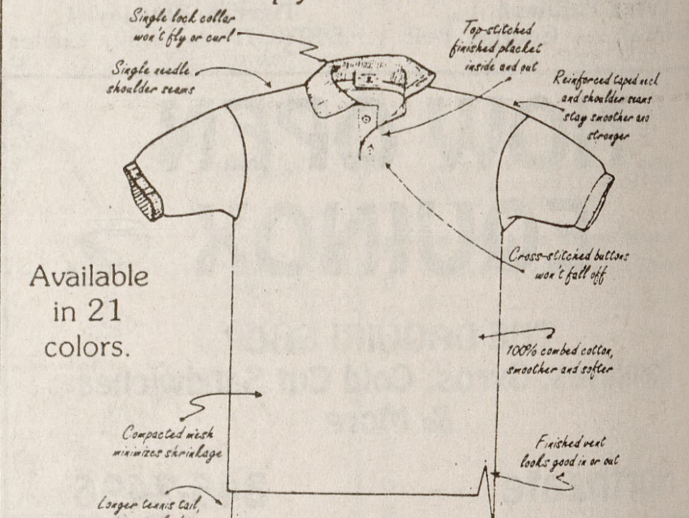
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