

U. N. Secretary-general optimistic, cautious

The Associated Press
Freedom proved elusive Thursday for thousands of foreign women and children promised safe passage out of Iraq, and diplomacy took center stage as the U.N. secretary-general arrived in Jordan to try to mediate the Persian Gulf crisis.

The crisis was entering its fifth week today, and the world seemed wary of false hopes for a peaceful settlement. The U.N. chief, Javier Perez de Cuellar, expressed optimism -- but also warned that the situation in the region was "explosive."

The United States, meanwhile, was looking for help in bearing the financial burden of its \$1 billion-a-month military buildup in the Persian Gulf. President Bush said he was soliciting funds from several countries to help defray the cost of the deployment.

In Baghdad, more than 200 foreign women and children gathered at a hotel Thursday, hoping to leave the country. Some had been held by the

Iraqis at military and other installations, serving as "human shields" against attack.

One British woman, Karen Taylor, said she was held with other Britons at a site 300 miles from Baghdad. "We were treated well but some children were sick," she said.

Iraq had said foreign women and children would be allowed to leave beginning Wednesday. But State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said no exit permits had been issued to Americans as of Thursday.

Tutwiler said Iraqi authorities were insisting on a variety of arcane paperwork, including a letter requesting permission to go, translated into Arabic and affixed with a stamp from authorities certifying that all local taxes had been paid.

"This emotional roller coaster is inhumane and disgraceful," the spokeswoman said.

The State Department has said about one-third of the 3,000 Americans who

have been barred from leaving Iraq and Kuwait are women or children age 18 and under. The Americans are among about 21,000 Westerners trapped since Iraq took over Kuwait on Aug. 2.

Iraq's ambassador to the United States denied reports from diplomats in Baghdad that Iraq had demanded that any planes arriving to pick up hostages bring in food and medicine. Iraq's supplies have been all but cut off by the global embargo imposed since the invasion.

While the families and friends of hostages hoped for a homecoming, U.S. soldiers' loved ones were saying their good-byes. In rural Allendale, S.C., a town of 4,500 about 80 miles south of Columbia, Ima Jean Rooker fought tears as she prepared to see off her son James, an Army guardsman who turned 20 this month.

"I just wish that it didn't have to happen like this, that things could have been settled through negotia-

tions," she said.
Talks were under way on several fronts.

Perez de Cuellar, arriving in the Jordanian capital of Amman for talks today with Iraq's foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, told reporters: "I believe that the government of Iraq is as eager as we all are to find a just and lasting solution of the problem."

The U.N. chief said the discussions would be within the framework of a series of U.N. resolutions passed since the invasion. Those resolutions included demands for an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and the imposition of economic sanctions against Baghdad.

In Cairo, the Arab League convened an emergency meeting Thursday. But only 13 of its 21 member states were represented, reflecting the Arab world's deep divisions over the crisis.

At that summit, the 12 nations condemned the invasion of Kuwait;

said they viewed the Kuwaiti royal family as the emirate's legitimate rulers; and -- in their most controversial move -- agreed to send troops to Saudi Arabia.

Egypt, Syria and Morocco have since sent contingents to Saudi Arabia, where tens of thousands of U.S. troops are deployed.

Moscow, meanwhile, indicated it considered Arab action the key to resolving the crisis. Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze sent an urgent message to his Arab counterparts urging them to work together "at a critical moment" to prevent war, Tass reported Thursday.

Jordan's King Hussein, in Madrid said he believed there had been a slight easing of tensions in the region. "I believe that we've halted ... this very dangerous rapid escalation. I hope that is the case," the monarch said. But he said war was still a looming threat.

Former hostage calls for talks

DUBLIN, Ireland - Former hostage Brian Keenan on Thursday urged negotiations for the release of remaining captives in Lebanon, with whom he formed an "enduring and unbreakable bond" during years in tiny basement cells.

Keenan, a teacher released last week after being held 4 1/2 years, said he often spent weeks in dark chambers, suffered repeated beatings and rarely spoke above a whisper.

"It's time to talk. It's obviously time to talk. There is a willingness. Why not talk?" Keenan said during a 75-minute news conference.

Keenan, 39, said he saw two of the six remaining American hostages, Associated Press journalist Terry Anderson and university professor Thomas Sutherland, about 11 months ago. At the time, both

were well, he said.
Extremist groups believed linked to Iran still hold 13 Western hostages -- six Americans, four Britons, two West Germans and an Italian.

Keenan, a native of Belfast, Northern Ireland, who holds dual Irish-British citizenship, was handed over to Irish authorities in Syria on Saturday. He was released from Mater hospital in Dublin on Thursday.

He was teaching English in Beirut at the time of his capture on April 11, 1986.

Appearing pale and thin, Keenan periodically fought back tears while describing his captivity.

"Hostage" is crucifying loneliness. There's a silent screaming slide into the bowels of ultimate despair," Keenan said, reading from

a handwritten statement.
"Hostage" is a man hanging by his fingernails over the edge of chaos and feeling his fingers slowly straightening."

Keenan described 42-year-old Anderson, the AP's chief Middle East correspondent, as pacing the floor in tattered socks with a "voracious appetite for intellectual conversation."

He said Anderson sometimes kept him awake for hours with conversation.

"Terry and myself would sit through those long nights and speak with great pain and remorse and longing for his first daughter, Gabrielle. With many tears he would elaborate his plans when he was finally back in the states to help her to shape and discover her future.

Authorities fight rumor mill over Gainesville murders

GAINESVILLE, Fla. - Authorities struggled to keep up with the rumor mill Thursday in this college town panicked by five murders, while police searched for a "lust killer" who reportedly stole body parts of some victims.

University of Florida President John Lombardi said the school was operating normally and would not be "held hostage to lunacy." But flags on campus flew at half-staff, and the city was being combed by an army of 600 local police, state investigators and FBI agents.

"We're trying to put a security blanket over this city," said Police Chief Wayland Clifton.

Despite efforts by police and school officials to provide a safe and sane environment in the opening week of classes, the discovery of five murdered students on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday released a virus of fear.

The fear was fed by published reports that the killer stole flesh from some of the mutilated victims and left the head of a decapitated victim sitting on a shelf.

Police have given few details about the mutilations. But the St. Petersburg Times reported that pieces of flesh from the first three victims were missing. The Orlando Sentinel reported that the nipples of the first two victims had been removed and had not been found.

Clifton said it was the work of a "lust killer."

Fear affected at least one school assignment. Anne G. Jones, an English professor, said a class chose to put off reading "Paris Trout," a novel by Pete Dexter about a psychotic murderer stalking a small town.

"They decided they didn't want to

See GAINESVILLE on 3

S. African violence continues

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa - Police clashed for a second day Thursday with students protesting black factional fighting, and the government said the conflict was forcing it to spend money on security instead of social services.

Witnesses in Cape Town said students hurled stones at police, who fired birdshot in return and injured at least two protesters. The students were demanding an end to battles between Xhosas, who mostly support the African National Congress, and Zulus, who back the conservative Inkatha movement.

Officials of the Transkei homeland, where many Xhosas are from, complained Thursday that South African authorities had left bodies of victims of the fighting to rot outside Johannesburg area mortuaries.

They said people who traveled to

the city to identify the dead were unable to recognize their relatives because the bodies had decomposed.

"One is bound to ask why are the corpses of the people who died in such a violent manner further desecrated in this way," the Transkei statement said. "Is it because they are black?"

Inkatha and the ANC both oppose apartheid but differ on the shape of a future South Africa. Inkatha has accused the ANC of terrorizing other black groups in a bid to consolidate power.

Zulu and Xhosa tribal leaders met Thursday and agreed to make a joint plea for an end to the fighting. At least 500 people have died since the factional fighting broke out on Aug. 12 in the townships around Johannesburg.

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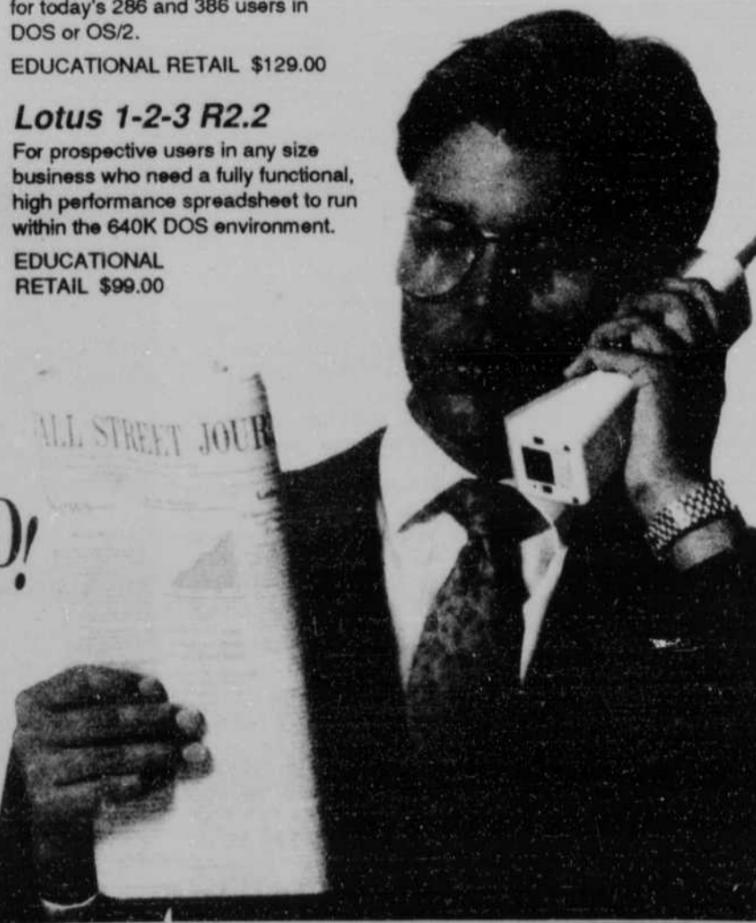
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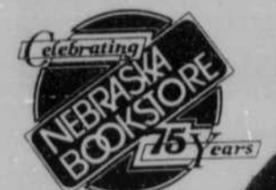
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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE. Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by phoning 472-1763 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The public also has access to the Publications Board. For information, contact Bill Vobejda, 436-9993.

Subscription price is \$45 for one year.
Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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