

US Army car fired upon in Riyadh, 3 marines hurt

RIYADH, Mar 30 : An Arab fired shots at a US military vehicle as his car overtook them on a highway in eastern Saudi Arabia on Thursday, wounding three marines, a US military spokesman said on Friday, reports Reuters.

"The marines were shot by a lone male assailant appearing to be an Arab civilian who fired between three and six shots from a small calibre handgun as his sedan passed their vehicle on the highway," Major Keith Gillett said.

The marine driver of the vehicle, who was not hurt, took the three wounded to a military hospital in the Al-Jubail area, where the shooting occurred at 10.20 p.m. (1900 GMT).

One was treated and immediately released while the other two were reported to be in good condition, Gillett said.

Identities of the wounded marines were not revealed. Two other marine passengers in the vehicle also escaped unhurt.

Gillett said the incident was being investigated by both Saudi and US authorities. It was the second of the kind since American troops began to arrive in Saudi Arabia last August, after the Iraqi invasion of neighbouring Kuwait.

Zardari likely to get death penalty

KARACHI, Mar 30 : Asif Ali Zardari once cruised around Mercedes coupe and could be seen at all the polo matches today site in a Karachi jail cell and could be sentenced to death, reports AFP.

Benazir Bhutto's husband, whose release was demanded by the hijackers of an airliner this week, has fallen a long way since he was Pakistan's best-known playboy.

Kurdish rebels now better armed Uprising in Iraq to drag on for months: Allies

RIYADH, Mar 30: The uprising in Iraq could drag on for months with Saddam Hussein's defeated army proving unable to match the mobility of the rebels as they switch attacks from one end of the country to the other, according to Allied military sources, reports Reuters.

The sources, speaking in the Saudi capital Friday, described Iraqi statements that government troops had wrenched the northern city of Kirkuk from Kurdish rebel control on Thursday as dubious.

The Iraqi army routed in Kuwait by the United States and its Gulf war Allies at the end of last month, did not have the manpower to quickly crush the Kurds, who were relatively well-armed, they added.

The sources said Iraqi statements that the Shi'ite rebellion in southern Iraq was over were misleading.

Fighting throughout Iraq could drag on for weeks or even months with rebel resistance continuing the same way the Mujahideen fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, they added.

"It seems like the rebels are one or two steps ahead — the way the violence is moving around and the way the Iraqi forces are being moved from one end of the country to another to cope with it," one senior US military official in Riyadh said.

"This rebellion will drag on mainly because pressure points keep shifting from one place to another — the rebels will



NORTHERN IRAQ — Fighters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party look defiant and firm to bring Iraqi President Saddam Hussein down.

hold out for as long as they can, but if they have to bail out they will," he added.

"It's a bit like the kid trying to plug three holes in the dam with two fingers — when he moves one, another hold opens.

"They don't have much of an army left so they really have to

scramble", he said.

The sources said Saddam initially shifted several divisions of troops stationed at the border with Turkey, Iran and Syria to quell rebellions which broke out in the south after the bulk of his army was defeated in Kuwait.

"He seemed to be getting a

grip on it but when the Kurds got going he had to shift them (soldiers) all north. Then the fires started breaking out again in the south, "one senior western military source said.

The sources could not confirm whether Shi'ite Muslim groups in the south had recaptured the holy city of Karbala.

GNLFF may back Cong in West Bengal polls

NEW DELHI, Mar 30 : The ruling left Front in West Bengal would face its traditional rival Congress (I) in the ensuing elections with a renewed confidence boosted by its performance in last year's municipal elections in the state, reports PTI.

The rise of the leftists and the gradual decline of the Congress-I has marked the four Lok Sabha elections in the state since 1977.

The Congress (I), which was an undivided and formidable since 1952, has been marred by inner-party factional squabbles particularly during the last decade. But the appointment earlier this month of Siddharta Shankar Ray, former Punjab Governor and a former State Chief Minister has raised some hopes among the party ranks, political observers feel.

But even this appointment has led to some sparks in the state unit of the party with a senior leader and former Union Minister, A B M Ghani Khan Choudhury, opposing it through press statements.

The Congress (I) strength in the Lok Sabha from the state has steadily declined since 1977, barring a slight improvement, during the 1984 elections. The number of Lok Sabha seats of the party came down from 13 in 1971, to three in 1977, four in 1980 and four in 1989. In 1984, it bagged 16 Lok Sabha seats.

On the other hand, the Left Front maintained its position and improved it by winning 24 seats in 1971, 23 in 1977, 38 in 1980, and 37 in 1989. The only exception in the trend was in 1984, when the Front could bag only 26 seats.

In the 1989 parliamentary polls, the CPI (M), a leading Left Front constituent, which bagged 26 seats, retained 16 of

its own and wrested 10 seats from the Congress (I). However, the CPI (M) lost its Darjeeling seat to the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). Reports indicate the GNLFF might support Congress (I) leader, Buta Singh, in case he contested from Darjeeling.

The forward block and the Revolutionary Socialist Party, which bagged three and four seats respectively, wrested one seat each from the Congress (I).

The Congress (I), on the other hand, could win only four seats out of a total of 42 for the entire state.

Meanwhile, press reports say that S S Ray, after taking over as the WBPC (I) chief, has admitted that dethroning the Left Front from power would be a "very difficult task" but expressed optimism that has party would improve its strength in the coming polls.

3 hanged for violating caste taboos in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 30: Two young men and a 16-year-old girl were hanged when a village council decreed they had violated taboos segregating outcasts and higher-caste Hindus, newspapers reported Saturday, reports AP.

The 20-year-old outcasts, Brijendra and Ram Kishan, were bleeding from wounds, inflicted during a night of torture when they were dragged to the big banyan tree in Mehraana village and hanged in front of their families Wednesday. The Hindustan Times reported.

Roshni, the daughter of a family from a landowner caste called Jats, was brought to the hanging tree by her own brother and also lynched.

BRIEFLY

Sikhs allowed to visit Lahore : The government of Pakistan has allowed 3,000 Sikh pilgrims from India and other countries to visit their shrines in Lahore capital of Pakistan's Punjab province, in April this year, Xinhua reports from Islamabad.

According to a report reaching Islamabad this morning, the Sikhs will be allowed to visit their shrines from 16th to 18th and 19th to 20th April respectively.

6 leftists shot dead in Colombia: Colombian soldiers shot dead six leftist guerrillas and discovered an arms and ammunitions cache belonging to another faction of rebels, officials said in Bogota, reports AFP.

Army troops and Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) rebels clashed in the southern province of Caqueta Thursday, and five insurgents — four men and one woman — were killed.

Soldiers killed another rebel in a separate incident.

Meanwhile, army forces discovered a FARC weapons and ammunitions cache in the eastern province of Meta.

15 Filipinos drowned : Fifteen people were confirmed dead and three were still missing today after an inter-island ferry carrying vacationers to a resort island capsized, a coast guard report said in Manila, reports AFP.

The report quoting the captain of the tanker "Pioneer Spirit" said the ferry, Toroshita, capsized amid heavy waves Thursday while on its way to the resort island of Boracay, southwest of Manila.

The Pioneer Spirit rescued 30 people on board, all identified as Filipinos, Friday, the report said. There was no mention of any foreigners among the three missing or 15 dead.

Rajiv's car hit by stone : The Congress-I Friday said the last car in the one-km long motorcade of Rajiv Gandhi was hit by a stone during his visit to Madhepura in Bihar Thursday but there was no direct attack on the party President, reports PTI from New Delhi.

Asked by newsmen at his daily briefing about the sequence of events after Gandhi's visit to Harjan bastis Thursday, the party spokesman, M J Akbar said the Cong-I President had already stated that no untoward incident had taken place.

Fire at US Embassy in Moscow : A fire ripped through the top floors of the US Embassy in Moscow on Thursday but a spokesman said staff were evacuated and there were no reports of injuries, reports Reuters from Moscow.

A witnesses said the blaze appeared to have started in a temporary lift shaft built at the back of the building for use by construction workers. It then spread rapidly when flames ripped up through the shaft, driven by a draught of air. "We believe we made an orderly evacuation. There are no reports of injuries," Embassy spokesman James Bullock said.

161 damaged tubes in N-reactors : A total of 161 damaged steam generation tubes were discovered in regular inspections of two nuclear reactors in western Japan, officials said Friday in Tokyo, reports AP.

Japan's nuclear power industry has faced a series of problems since a steam generator tube burst in the No. 2 reactor at Mihama nuclear plant on Feb. 9 and released radioactivity in Japan's worst nuclear power accident.

The officials said 159 of the damage tubes were found in the No. 3 reactor at the Takahama nuclear power plant. Both are in Fukui prefecture, about 400 kilometers (250 miles) west of Tokyo.

Tamils kill 6 in Lanka : A 3-day ceasefire between Tamil guerrillas and government troops began Friday, but the military said the rebels almost immediately broke the truce by attacking a northern garrison and killing a soldier, reports AP from Colombo.

Other soldiers fired back and shot and killed five rebels, said military officials speaking on condition of anonymity. Both sides agreed to the temporary truce in their 8-year-old war to allow schoolchildren in rebel-held areas to take scholarship examinations.

Military officials said the rebels broke the truce by attacking the army camp at Thandikulam, about 220 kilometers north of Colombo.

US-Iraq body for MIAs : The United States and Iraq agreed Thursday to set up a subcommittee to account for troops missing in action and to arrange for the return of the remains of Gulf War dead, the US Central Command said in Riyadh, reports AP.

The allied side also agreed to increase the number of Iraqi prisoners of war returned daily from 1,000 to 5,000 starting April 2. During a four-hour meeting at Riyadh Air Base, the US representative, Marine Brig. Gen. Paul A. Fratarangelo, provided the Iraqis with detailed information on four Americans missing in action.

An American official also handed the Iraqi representatives a list and the locations of sites where Iraqi war dead were interred by US forces, the command said.

Iraq asked to free Kuwaitis : Kuwait on Friday urged Iraq to release all Kuwaitis it still holds captive and said efforts were underway to ensure their speedy return home, reports Reuters from Kuwait.

The call came in a statement by Under-Secretary of Justice Abdel-Aziz Al-Dukhail, who chairs the Kuwaiti Human Rights Committee.

KUNA, the official Kuwaiti news agency, quoted Dukhail as saying: "There are a number of prisoners still held in detention by the Iraqi authorities. Those who have been released so far do not comply with the full list of names presented by the International Committee of the Red Cross," he said.

US Security Adviser's secret mission to Middle East

WASHINGTON, Mar 30 : President George Bush's National Security Adviser, Brent Scowcroft, spent two days in the Middle East this week, the White House said on Saturday, on a trip that was not announced at the time, reports Reuters.

The White House declined to provide details of the trip.

Scowcroft went to the Middle East to consult on the Middle East situation, particularly the post-war situation in Iraq," said a White House official who asked not to be named.

He declined to comment on speculation that Scowcroft's unannounced trip was possibly connected to negotiations to free western hostages held in Lebanon.

The White House would not say what country or countries Scowcroft, accompanied by the national security council's top Middle East specialist, Richard Haass, visited or with whom he held talks.

'I put on a tie for several days'

'Common sense' now will hound Major right up to next polls

LONDON, Mar 30: A remark by British Prime Minister John Major that common sense was more important than academic qualifications sparked a row on Friday which could hound him right up to the next general election, reports Reuters.

Major, who turns 48 today, confessed in a television interview that he was "pretty idle" at school — he left at the age of 16 and was unemployed before getting a job in a bank.

He said he believed intelligence and common sense were more important than a string of academic qualifications and he himself was schooled in "the university of life."

"I know an awful lot of people who have an armful of academic qualifications and they are wholly useless, most of them," he said in

the interview to be screened on Monday.

Opposition members of parliament immediately rounded on Major saying his view made a mockery of his own declaration to his Conservative Party a month ago that education would top his political agenda for the 1990s.

"On wonder Britain is slipping down the economic and educational leagues if this is the attitude of the Prime Minister," said Labour Party Education Spokesman Jack Straw.

"To say that qualifications do not matter makes a mockery of the government's educational policy."

Matthew Taylor, education spokesman for the centrist liberal democrats, said: "We now know why the Conservative Party has so underinvested in education. They

do not think it matters."

Major's father was once a circus trapeze artist and Taylor added: "Presumably the Prime Minister will be recommending next that children run away to the circus if they want to get on."

Politicians said Major's remarks gave ammunition to the opposition to attack the government during campaigning for the next general election, which must be held by mid-1992 but which many believe could be called this year.

Major also said he called Granada television interview that he hated the intrusions into his privacy that being Prime Minister entailed and he vowed never to resort to an "image-maker" to change public perceptions of him as dull.

What's behind the figures in Soviet referendum?

from V Reznichenko

MOSCOW, Mar 30: So, the choice was made. 147.5 million people, or 80 per cent of the registered voters, took part in the March 17 referendum, according to the figures announced in the USSR Supreme Soviet. Of them, 112.1 million, or 76.3 per cent, answered in the affirmative the question formulated in the ballot papers: "Do you believe it is essential to preserve the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a revamped Federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and liberties of every individual will

be guaranteed irrespective of nationality? 32.2 million answered negatively, and 2.7 ballots were recognized null and void.

The voting took place against a very tense and intricate political background. The country is waiting for major retail price hikes. Meanwhile, store shelves are empty. Miners are on strike in coal-production regions of the country. In addition to economic demands, they are putting forward political demands. Central squares of major cities are venues of public rallies at-

tended by many thousands. Not infrequently, such demonstrations are accompanied by calls for overt confrontation. Inter-ethnic tensions are running high, claiming new and new victims, as is the case in the Transcaucasian region.

In conditions of the growing political polarisation, the expression of people's will often assumed very emotional forms. The intensifying conflict between Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and his ideological opponent Boris Yeltsin, Chairman of Russia's Supreme Soviet, led to the sit-

uation where the alternative "for or against a revamped federation" was viewed by many people as an alternative "for Gorbachev or for Yeltsin", although it certainly was not the aim of the referendum. Whereas some citizens went to local polling stations to express their views on the country's future, others evidently did so only to express their dissatisfaction with the current situation.

Consequently, the results of the voting were to a certain extent contradictory — a factor which enables opposing political forces to interpret them differently. For instance, in the Russian Federation, the largest republic in terms of territory and population, 70.9 per cent of those who voted in the all-union referendum came out in favour of preserving the union, roughly the same percentage supported the idea of instituting the Presidency in Russia — the subject of the republican referendum held simultaneously with the national one. Meanwhile, the only candidate with realistic chances of being elected President of Russia's Yeltsin, whose views on the future of the union differ radically from those of Gorbachev.

In the Ukraine, 70.5 per cent of those who went to polls said "yes" to the union. But there, too, a republican plebiscite was held in parallel. Its question was formulated differently: "Do you agree that the Ukraine should be part of a union of Soviet sovereign republics in accordance with the principles enshrined in the declaration of state sovereignty of the Ukraine?" Over 80 per cent answered in the affirmative.

Moscow's idea of "a revamped federation of equal sovereign republics" rallied the most impressive support in Central Asia. —IAN

Off the Record

Only disgruntled bear in Kuwait now: 'Bear'

RIYADH : US General Norman Schwarzkopf, who stirred up a furor in Washington with his televised Gulf war comments, joked to reporters on Friday that the only disgruntled bear in the area was in Kuwait City zoo, reports Reuters.

Schwarzkopf, nicknamed "The Bear" for his burly build and prickly temper, said he had apologised to President George Bush for comments which suggested he disagreed with the decision to halt the Gulf war.

He said Bush had told him to "forget" the widely-publicised incident in a telephone conversation of Thursday.

To underline that the episode was over, Schwarzkopf told the reporters — who questioned him in a hotel lobby — that he was going to give them a "real scoop".

He began by saying the Iraqis in Kuwait city had killed "an awful lot" of the animals in the zoo and wounded many others. "Well Jesse Johnson, the Commander of my Special Forces reported the following to me today," he said.

"There was an elephant up there that had a bullet wound in the shoulder. We went over the elephant with metal detectors and we removed the bullet," he said.

"There was a monkey that was badly shot in the hip and we have taken that monkey to a hospital and it's being treated," he said.

"But there's a bear up there that was shot in the rear end. It is being most uncooperative at the present time — further action will have to be taken," he said.

"So I guess what I want to tell you is if you're looking for a disgruntled bear you won't find him here, you'll find him in Kuwait," he said.

US military officials in Riyadh confirmed there was a bear in Kuwait City zoo. Parallels between the bear and Iraq's badly beaten army could not be drawn from the General's remarks, they said.



Himalayas still charm Hillary

KATHMANDU : Sir Edmund Hillary, explorer and conqueror of Mount Everest, is currently here to study the problems of children of the Himalayan kingdom with the help of the UNICEF, reports PTI.

Sir Edmund, who arrived here on Thursday told the Nepal television at the Tribhuvan International Airport that it had been a very great honour for him that he had been chosen as UNICEF's Special Representative for the children of the Himalayas.

He said for years, he had been working with the people, specially the children, of Solukhumbu district at the foothills of the world's tallest mountain, Everest and it had been a great deal of satisfaction that "we have been able to make progress in the sphere of education and render help in many other things. Now, I am going to learn what other problems UNICEF tackled and see what we can do to work with them in helping the young people of Nepal," he said.

In addition to serving as New Zealand's High Commissioner to India, Nepal and Bangladesh, the 72-year-old Sir Edmund will continue the work he has undertaken for over 30 years to benefit the lives of children in the Himalayas. Since his first climbing expedition to 8848-metre Mount Everest with the late Tenzing Norgay, in 1951, he has been instrumental in building schools, hospitals, bridges, water supply pipelines and airstrips for the people of the Himalayan region.



MOSCOW: Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin glances at a bell next to him during the second-day of the Extraordinary Congress of Russian Deputies. The Russian Parliament resumed its special session after thousands of militia and troops deployed by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev withdrew from the capital. About 100,000 Yeltsin supporters defied Gorbachev's ban on demonstrations. —AFP/UNB Photo