

Saddam faces danger

Iraqi troops join rebels

NIOSIA, Mar 8 : Nearly the entire Iraqi army and some units of the elite Republican Guard have joined insurgent forces in the country, a senior member of Syria's ruling party claimed Thursday in Damascus, reports AFP.

An Iraqi army division has rallied to the ranks of the fighters in Kurdistan to support Kurds in northern Iraq fighting for an independent homeland, said Fadel al-Ansari, a member of the Baath Party charged with Iraqi affairs, adding that almost the entire army has joined the revolution.

Units of the Republican Guard, right arm of the regime, have done the same, he said during a news conference organised by the Iraqi opposition based in Syria. He charged that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his loyalists will resort to using chemical weapons to crush the popular uprising.

Elsewhere in Damascus, Abu Bilal al-Adib, member of the Al Da'awa Islamic Movement, Political Bureau said that mustard gas has already been used by the Republican Guard against the Shiite Mus-

lim revolutionaries in Basra, Iraq's southern port city.

He said that the situation in Basra is worrisome and a division of the Republican Guard positioned in Zubair not far from the allied forces, is preparing to attack that city.

A spokesman for the leader of the Tehran-based Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Sairi), Mohammad Bagher Hakim, meanwhile told Agency France-Press there was no obstacle to a military operation by America or another government to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein.

But Ayatollah Hakim said such an operation should not take the form of meddling in Iraq's internal affairs.

In another development, the religious leader decreed a general amnesty for all soldiers and civilians sentenced for political and common law crimes, provided they joined the ranks of the insurgents in Iraq.

A Shiite Iraqi opposition group meanwhile called on the Lebanese to back by all means the uprising against Mr. Hussein.

AP from Washington adds : Iraqi President Saddam Hussein faces a more serious threat to his rule from his own inner circle than from Shiite Muslims in the south and Kurdish rebels in the north, according to US intelligence assessments.

In fact, the open rebellion from separatist groups in Iraq may be strengthening Saddam's grip on power — at least in the short term, according to the analysts.

There's going to be unrest, but he probably has the forces on the ground that have enough loyalty to crush any uprising," said Congressman Dave McCurdy, chairman of the Intelligence Committee of the lower house of Congress.

"He needs to be more concerned about the men in uniform closest to him," McCurdy said in an interview. "It's OK to have the Republican Guard encircle you. But you want to know whether the guns are pointing in or pointing out."

Other government sources said US intelligence agencies have picked up fragments of hard evidence that there is serious discontent among some of Saddam's closest political and military allies.

There are elements in the Republican Guard, Saddam's favoured military group, and within the leadership of his Baath party who now say they regret having allowed him to lead the country into a ruinous war against the United States and its allies, the evidence is

said to show.

AFP from London says : The Iraqi military engaged in crushing a revolt in Iraqi cities has asked the Iraqi leadership for authorisation to use chemical weapons members of the main Iraqi opposition coalition said here Thursday.

Mowaffak al-Rubai, a spokesman for the coalition known as the Iraqi Joint Action Committee, told a news conference that a colonel who defected from the elite Republican Guard informed Iraqi rebels that the army had made such a request.

Mr Rubai added that the Iraqi opposition, which has information relayed here from bored posts, had "intercepted a message" to Baghdad from the military in the field with the same request.

Delegates from the five groups forming the coalition said British Foreign Office Minister Douglas Hogg, at a meeting earlier Thursday, agreed to their request to seek a UN Security Council resolution to protect the Iraqi people from the possible use of chemical weapons.

A Foreign Office spokesman said Mr Hogg had made no such undertaking, but Britain would view with grave concern any use of chemical weapons by the Iraqi leadership.

AP from Damascus adds : Iraqi opposition leaders said Thursday that their 17-group movement was united in its campaign to topple Saddam Hussein.



NEW DELHI— A cartoon here show the Congress (I) President Rajiv Gandhi a few yards away from the pedestal of power.

Devi under pressure from son to join Rajiv's Congress

NEW DELHI March 8 : The deputy prime minister, Mr Devi Lal, is under pressure from his younger son, Mr Ranjit Singh, to quit the Janata Dal (S) and join the Congress(I) along with his supporters, reports (UNI).

Others who want Mr Devi Lal to switch sides include Mr Jagdeep Dhanraj, a former Union deputy minister in the V.P. Singh government, and Mr Chand Ram, an MP. This lobby claims to have got the signatures of 34 Lok Sabha members of the Janata Dal(S) in support of their move.

On the other hand, Mr Om Prakash Chautala, who is general secretary of the Janata Dal(S) and Mr Devi Lal's eldest son, is opposed to splitting the party and betraying the prime minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar.



We are all VIPs (very ignorant persons) in some way or the other. I cannot fly a plane and Rajiv Gandhi cannot wash a goat —Devi Lal

The Haryana chief minister, Mr Hukam Singh, and several of his cabinet colleagues who are now in the capital are also against move. Their main argument is that they had got a popular mandate, first in June 1987 and then in November 1989, by opposing the Congress (I) and would find it difficult to justify their decision to join the Congress (I).

However, the pro-Congress(I) lobby's claims of support may be exaggerated. The Janata Dal MP from Sonapat, Mr Kapil Dev Shastri, who is considered close to Mr Devi Lal, doubts if 34 MPs have signed the memorandum planned to be presented to Mr Rajiv Gandhi through Mr Devi Lal. For instance, he denies that he and Mr M.S. Lather have signed the memorandum. In fact, Mr Shastri is among those who prevailed upon Mr Devi Lal to publicly affirm that he was not walking into the Congress(I).

Mr Devi Lal concedes in private that farmers would not like him to join the Congress(I) though they are grateful to the Congress(I) for supporting the Janata Dal(S). In the same breath, he adds that the Congress(I) had no option but to support the Janata Dal(S) because the people in general were still with him and his party.

Sources close to Mr Chautala argue that despite reports in the press, Mr Rajiv Gandhi won't draw support to the Chandra Shekhar government because he does not want snap polls now. A Chautala aide said the 'if the Congress(I) withdraws support now, it would be the biggest loser'.

These sources argue that the merger of the Janata Dal (S) or the Devi Lal faction into the Congress(I) will benefit Congressmen like former Union agriculture minister, Mr Bhajan Lal, who will not allow the Tau a free hand either in running the organisation or in the next Lok Sabha and assembly elections, even in Haryana.

Others argue that the principal beneficiary if he joins the Congress(I) will be the former defence minister, Mr Banai Lal, who has been criticizing Mr Devi Lal and his family at his Haryana Vikas Manch (HVM) rallies.

The Ranjit Singh lobby, or the other hand, argues that the Congress(I) won't be able to side line Mr Devi Lal, as it did Mr Jagjivan Ram and Mr Y.B. Chawan, because Devi Lal is not Jagjivan Ram and Rajiv Gandhi is not Indira Gandhi.

BRIEFLY

Unrest in 12 Iraqi cities:

Anti-government disturbances in Iraq have spread to about two dozen towns and cities with most of the violence centered around Muslim holy cities, Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams said Thursday, reports AFP from Washington.

Mr Williams said the disturbances were occurring mainly in southeastern and central Iraq although there were also reports of unrest in the predominantly Kurdish north of the country.

The US government's information of the disturbances is somewhat limited, he said at a news conference adding that the situation appears essentially unchanged.

Iraq releases 2000 Kuwaitis:

Iraq has released as many as 2,000 former Kuwaiti detainees to the International Committee of the Red Cross, an administration official said, on Friday, reports Reuter from Washington.

"They're being turned over now" at a point seven kilometres north of Iraq's southern border with Kuwait, said the official, who asked not to be named.

The number of those already in ICRC hands could be as high as 2,000, the official said, citing reports from US military field personnel.

He said helicopters and buses were being sent from Kuwait to bring the former detainees home.

19,597 killed in Peru so far:

Rebel attacks killed 199 people in Peru in February, bringing the country's death toll since the insurgency began in May 1980 to 19,597, the Senate peace commission said Thursday, reports AFP from Lima.

Between May 1980 and last month, there have been 18,790 insurgent attacks with 973 in the last seven months, according to socialist left senator Enrique Bernaldes.

Mr Bernaldes, who also heads the local branch of the United Nations Committee on Human Rights, said since the armed struggle began in Ayacucho in the country's southeastern Andean mountains 19,597 people have been killed.

Indo-Pak ties improve:

Relations between India and Pakistan have improved but Pakistan remains unwilling to abandon a reported quest for atomic weapons, Congress was told on Friday, report AP from Washington.

State and Defence Department officials said US aid to Pakistan will remain suspended until and unless President George Bush is able to certify to Congress that the South Asian country does not possess or is not building a nuclear explosive device.

Military and economic assistance was suspended last October for lack of certification. The nuclear issue remains unresolved, the House Asian and Pacific subcommittee was told at a Thursday public hearing that followed a closed session on US-Pakistan relations.

US to observe victory day:

President George Bush on Thursday proclaimed April 5-7 as "national days of thanksgiving" for the allied victory over Iraq, reports AP from Washington.

His proclamation asks that bells across the United States country be rung at 3 pm EST (2000 GMT) on April 7 to celebrate "the liberation of Kuwait and the end of hostilities in the Gulf."

"I ask that Americans gather in homes and places of worship to give thanks to Almighty God for the liberation of Kuwait, for the blessings of peace and liberty, for our troops, our families and our nation," Bush said in his proclamation.

"We prayed for a swift and decisive victory and for the safety of our troops. Clearly, the United States and our coalition partners have been blessed with both. We thank the Lord for His favour and we are profoundly grateful for the relatively low number of allied casualties, a fact described by the commanding general as miraculous," Bush said.

Yeltsin dismisses warning:

Russian leader Boris Yeltsin on Thursday dismissed a warning by President Mikhail Gorbachev that a campaign by radicals against the Kremlin chief could spark a civil war, reports Reuter from Moscow.

Yeltsin, embroiled in a bitter power struggle with Gorbachev said in a radio address that Soviet leader was trying to divert attention from serious domestic problems.

"I am convinced that the country is not threatened with a civil war," said Yeltsin who demanded Gorbachev's resignation on live television two weeks ago.

Gorbachev said in the Byelorussian capital Minsk last week that radicals were resorting to demonstrations and hunger strikes in a bid to seize power and said these tactics could lead to civil war.

Hunger strike in Lithuania:

Lithuanian radio and television employees began a hunger strike Wednesday in front of the Baltic republic's broadcasting centre which has been occupied since mid-January by Soviet soldiers, the Baltfax news agency said Thursday, reports AP from Moscow.

The strikers plan to maintain the hunger strike in three-day shifts until the Soviet army returns the building to the Lithuanian government's control, the independent news agency reported.

Paratroopers seized the broadcasting centre and nearby transmitting tower on Jan 13 in a tank assault that killed 14 civilians and one soldier. The takeover marked the beginning of a Kremlin crackdown on the independence movements in Lithuania and the neighbouring Baltic republics of Latvia and Estonia.

Congress blamed for constitutional crisis

I quit to uphold dignity of Parliament: Shekhar

NEW DELHI, Mar 8 : Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar said yesterday his government resigned to protect the dignity of the country's President and Parliament, reports Reuter.

In a nationally televised broadcast Shekhar, whose government lasted barely four months, accused former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party of behaving irresponsibly and plunging the country into a constitutional crisis.

Shekhar depended on Congress support for his majority in Parliament, but Congress staged a walk-out from the Lower House on Tuesday after accusing the government of posting two policemen at Gandhi's house to keep a watch on him.

Shekhar, a firebrand socialist, said in his broadcast the Congress boycott meant he could not get a majority to pass a vote of thanks on the

President's address to Parliament.

"The President is the custodian of the Constitution. It is obligatory on the part of the government to see," he said. A situation was created where I could not pass it.

AFP adds : Caretaker Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar said yesterday his fledgling Janata Dal-socialist party would contest more than 500 parliamentary seats in the next general election.

"Go to the people as a midterm poll is around the corner," Mr. Shekhar said in a party parliamentary meeting, but did not disclose whether his party would seek alliances with others when elections are announced.

"There is no such discussion right now. We will go ahead with our plan right now," party Secretary Harmohan Dhawan quoted the Premier as saying in the meeting held a day after Mr. Shekhar resigned.

He was quoted as saying the party would contest 500 of Parliament's 545 seats whenever elections are announced by President Ramaswamy Venkataraman.

Mr. Shekhar, 63, flayed his embittered ally, former Premier Rajiv Gandhi's Congress (I) Party, for its virtual withdrawal of support in Parliament Tuesday which prompted him to quit and recommend fresh polls.

The veteran politician said he had "never imagined" the Congress (I) would make an issue out of alleged surveillance by policemen at Mr. Gandhi's home and added he was surprised the party abstained from Parliament.

Congress (I) MPs boycotted Parliament over the snooping row, stranding Mr. Shekhar's 1170-day government without the numbers required for legislative control and forcing his resignation.

Mr. Shekhar denied responsibility for ordering the surveillance, but the Congress (I) insisted it was done with his knowledge.

President Venkataraman is scheduled to announce either elections to Parliament or invite the Congress (I), the single largest bloc in the legislature, to form a government to end the political impasse.

BSS says : Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Parliament Speaker Rabi Ray met President Ramaswamy Venkataraman Thursday as India waited for a presidential verdict to end the uncertainty triggered by the Premier's sudden resignation.

The Parliament adjourned without transacting scheduled business in the face of the political crisis unleashed by Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar's surprise resignation Wednesday.

Upendra Chakma confirms exodus

Tribal refugees leaving Tripura for Hill Tracts

TAKUMBARI (Tripura), Mar 8 : Six refugee camps in south Tripura district, once sheltering over 74,000 Buddhist tribals from the troubled Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, no more throb with activities with about 20,000 of them leaving the camps and going back to their homeland, reports PTI.

The Buddhist tribals left their country in two batches once in May 1986 and thereafter in June 1989 after the bloody election to the Chittagong Hill Tracts district council in June 1989.

Many more Bangladesh tribals are preparing to leave Tripura, refugee leaders and government officials told a visiting PTI correspondent.

The Takumbari refugee camp, the biggest among the six, was left with only 15,554

inmates, with over 4,000 leaving the camps and shown as "missing," Balai Chakraborty, camp supervisor, said.

On an average, over a 100 refugees are leaving the camps since December last after the fall of president H M Ershad, camp officials said.

The Lebachara refugee camp, the smallest one, is almost half empty as also Pan-chakmapara, Kalboak and Silachare and more were preparing to leave as the elections were drawing closer, a camp official said.

Upendral Lal Chakma, former MP and president of the Refugee Welfare Association, admitted a large number of refugees are leaving and going back to their homeland.

"We are not opposed to anybody voluntarily leaving the camps," he said. But several

Bangladesh delegations, which visited the refugee camps have alleged that while the refugees are willing to come back, the leaders and guerrillas of the Shanti Bahini fighting for autonomy in the hills are holding them back.

While the allegation has yet to be substantiated, a large number of the remaining refugees are ready to go back of given a free passage, camp sources said.

The district level officials, who mediated talks between Bangladesh officials and the refugees, maintained that the government would not allow any sort of intimidation to keep the refugees back.

The refugees have been provided with free ration, clothes, shelter, besides essential commodities, for which the centre has till date

spent nearly Rs 100 crore per month expenses crossing over Rs 65 lakh, officials said.

The presence of the Chakma refugees has created socio-economic tension in the area as the camp inmates undertook work on daily wage basis violating the camp rules.

Besides the state government had received alarming reports of refugees merging with the local population, Chief Minister Sudhir Ranjan Majumdar said.

The state government, which was constant touch with the centre for an early repatriation of the refugees, also received reports of tribals destroying surrounding forests, selling extra ration and carrying on small trades in violation of the rules.

The change in the political atmosphere in Bangladesh now has encouraged the people and the administration to favour the repatriation of the refugees.

While earlier, one or two refugee families used to arrive from the hill tracts everyday, no influx has been reported since the last three four months. The refugee leaders have not complained about any major fresh atrocities by the Bangladesh security forces or resettlers and there has been no reports of Shanti Bahini guerrillas' ambush or raids in recent times.

The refugees were given shelter on humanitarian grounds following atrocities on them in the hill tracts by the security forces and non-tribal resettlers," local resident of adjacent Jatanbari said. "There is no logic for them to stay here anymore."

Leaders of several political parties also feel that the refugees should go back and take part in the democratic process.

The new-found peace notwithstanding, refugee leaders are, however, adamant about return.

Though no fresh major atrocities have been committed on the tribals in the Chittagong hill tracts, the army continued to open new camps.



KUWAIT CITY: A woman passes on a bag of pita bread at a distribution point in Kuwait, the Palestinian neighbourhood. Electricity, water and phone lines are still cut in Kuwait City, hampering the distribution of food. —AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Bush had time for a chat

NASHVILLE (Tennessee) : Gospel singer Michael W. Smith says he's amazed US President George Bush had time for a White House chat hours after announcing a cease-fire in the Gulf War, reports AP.

Smith, who was in the Washington area for a concert, met with Bush for about 15 minutes last Thursday. Bush announced the cease-fire late Wednesday.

"To actually sit and talk with the president at such an historic moment — the day of the cease-fire — just blew my mind," Smith said Tuesday.

Smith, whose latest album is "I 2 (Eye)," first met the president when he performed in a 1989 TV special, "Christmas in Washington."

Movie on Kennedy's assassination

DALLAS : Filmmaker Oliver Stone's move about US President John Kennedy's assassination will probably include scenes filmed in the former Texas School book Depository, reports AP.

But don't expect the cameras to roll on the sixth floor, where Lee Harvey Oswald is said to have taken aim. That floor houses an assassination exhibit run by the local historical society. The building now houses country offices and courts.

Dallas County commissioners tentatively agreed Tuesday to allow filming on the seventh floor. A final vote is expected next week.

Camelot Productions, which will produce "J.F.K.," wants to restore the red, seven-story building to how it looked when Kennedy was killed on Nov. 22, 1963, and will pay the county 5,000 dollars a day for its use, said company spokesman Clayton Townsend.

Stone, whose movies include "The Doors," "Born on the Fourth of July" and "Platoon," is expected in Dallas next month to begin work on the film.

Cub needs bear lessons

CORNING (California) : A black bear cub that someone apparently tried to domesticate and then dumped near Lassen National Park needs some "bear lessons," reports AP.

"How can you teach a bear to hibernate? I'm sure not going to crawl back in a cage and go to sleep with him," said state Department of Fish and Game warden Warren Duke, who reacted the cub about 10 days ago.

The cinnamon-colored bear was mooching food from passing motorists and campers, and "showing no fear of human beings," Duke said earlier this week.

Zoos in several cities, including Sacramento and San Francisco, were contacted to see if they wanted the bear, but none did.

So wildlife officials decided a private refuge in Oregon was the place to rehabilitate the cub into a wild animal.

Game warden Tyler Young and his wife, Linda, cared for the bear at their ranch in Corning before Young drove the cub to Oregon.

The bear showed signs of mistreatment, he said. The animal, which is about 1 year old, was small for its age, weighing only 25 pounds.

The bear's home for the next year is the Wildlife Images preserve near Grants Pass, Ore. Older bears will teach the cub how bears are supposed to behave, including how to hibernate and forage for food, said wildlife filmmaker and writer Dave Sidkon, who runs the preserve.

Duke and Young plan to bring the cub back in a year for release in the area where it was found.