

Saddam injured : rebels get arms from US troops

US plans to resume air strikes if Iraq uses chemical weapon

UNDATED, Mar 10 : US officials have warned Iraqi leaders not to use chemical weapons to try and crush the revolt, reports AP.

"It's a real massacre," one person who left Iraq said of the fighting in the southern city of Basra, Iraq's second largest, "the deaths are in thousands. The houses have been leveled."

Anti-Saddam rioting was increasing despite a ruthless government crackdown, opposition sources and people leaving Iraq told The Associated Press on Saturday.

The sources and travelers said thousands of people have been killed as Republican Guard units that survived the war suppress the uprising.

The harshness of Saddam Hussein's crackdown

prompted Washington to warn him not to use chemical weapons against the rebels, as he did against a Kurdish uprising in Iraq several years ago.

US military leaders have drawn up a plan to resume air strikes against any Iraqi unit that unleashes chemical weapons on rebels. The New York Times reported in its Sunday edition, quoting anonymous Bush administration officials.

The Times reported the National Security Council on Friday recommended air attacks rather than a ground assault if chemical weapons were used. An administration official told the Times that US President Bush has not met with advisers to discuss the options.

In northern Kurdistan, large numbers of government troops have defected to the rebels, who have taken control of helicopter gunships, an ammunition depot and a missile installation, the opposition Patriotic Union of Kurdistan said.

Reuters from Nicosia adds: Syrian Radio quoted Iraqi refugees on Saturday as saying a gunman wounded President Saddam Hussein in the hand in one of several post-assassination attempts.

There was no way of verifying the report carried by the state-run broadcasting network in Syria, Iraq's chief Arab foe.

It added that bodyguards fired on the attacker, killing or wounding a number of people it said.

Since the Gulf war ended 10 days ago with Iraq's defeat by the US led allied coalition, uprisings against Saddam's leadership have been reported in the Kurdish north and Shiite Muslims south of the country.

In that time Saddam who has appointed a cousin as Interior Minister to oversee a security crackdown, has been seen one in a brief television newsreel film conference with aides.

Iraq's official media has carried regular reports of his activities. All foreign journalists have been ordered out.

The radio, monitored by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) quoted Iraqi refugees reaching Syria —

which sent thousands of troops to the Gulf allied force — as saying several assassination attempts had been made against Saddam since the war ended.

The accounts came from refugees who crossed into Syria on Saturday to be housed at a camp in Hasaka in the east of the country.

The arrivals asserted that the head of the Iraqi regime had been the target of several assassination attempts after the ceasefire in the Gulf — the radio reported.

They said that an Iraqi citizen opened fire at the leader of the regime when he was on a visit to the hill area in Babylon.

He was hit in his left hand and was treated by his guards, who opened fire at this citizen and others killing or wounding a number of them it said.

Another report from Kuwait City adds: Some American troops in Iraq are providing Iraqi rebels with ammunition and guns although US policy forbids it, US military intelligence officers said Saturday, reports AP.

The military intelligence officers also said reports that Iraq's Republican Guard had crushed the rebellion in Iraq's second-largest city, Basra, appeared to be premature.

"It's a very fluid situation there," one officer said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We know they are cracking down, but the rebels are fighting back."



PARIS — Italian actress Sophia Loren beams as she holds her Cesar award for her performing career at the Champs-Elysees Theatre. —AFP/UNB photo

Who's Who in Iraqi opposition

- DAMASCUS, Mar 10 : Iraqi opposition groups will meet in Damascus today to coordinate political and military action aimed at ousting President Saddam Hussein, reports Reuter.
- The meeting is organised by the Iraqi National Joint Action Committee, an alliance forged in Damascus in December.
- It comprises 17 secular and religious parties, all of which are expected to take part in the talks. They are:
- 1 - The Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, a Tehran-based Shiite Muslim group led by Sheikh Mohammed Baker al-Hakim.
 - 2 - The Islamic Dawaa Party, Shiite group based in Tehran led by Sheikh al-Astf.
 - 3 - The National Kurdish Union led by Jalal Talabani.
 - 4 - The Democratic Kurdish Party led by Masoud Barzani.
 - 5 - The Iraqi Communist Party led by Aziz Mohammed.
 - 6 - The Islamic Action Organisation, a Tehran-based Shiite group led by Sheikh Mohsen al-Husseini. Its mentor is Ayatollah Mohammed Taqi al-Mudarrisi.
 - 7 - The Islamic alliance, a Saudi-based Sunni Muslim group led by Abu Yasser al-Ahmed.
 - 8 - The Baath Party, sponsored by the Syrian-based rival wing of Saddam's ruling party, led by Mahdi al-Obaidi.
 - 9 - The Democratic Gathering, a leftist group led by Saleh Daughlah.
 - 10 - The Islamic Movement in Iraq, a Shiite group led by Sheikh Mohammed Mahdi al-Kahlisi with branches in Tehran and Damascus.
 - 11 - The Iraqi Mujahideen (holy fighters) Movement, a Tehran-based group led by Sayed Mohammed al-Haidari.
 - 12 - The Iraqi Socialist Party led by Mubder Alwais.
 - 13 - The Independent Nationalists, led by former Iraqi Army General Hassan al-Nakib (Jaktb, based in Saudi Arabia, is not scheduled to attend the Damascus meeting).
 - 14 - The Kurdish People's Party led by Sami Abdullah.
 - 15 - The Socialist Kurdish Party led by Rasoul Mamand.
 - 16 - The Jund al-Imam (Imam soldiers) Movement, a Shiite group led by Abu Zaid, based in Tehran.
 - 17 - The Islamic Scholar's Group, a Shiite Party led by Sheikh al-Nasiri.

BRIEFLY

Nine killed in Sri Lanka : Three soldiers and six Tamil separatist rebels have been killed in fighting in Sri Lanka's North and East, military sources in Colombo said Saturday, reports Reuter.

Three soldiers were killed on Thursday when members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ambushed a foot patrol in the eastern Amparai district, they said. Four militants were killed in the attack. In the Northern Vavuniya district on Friday, troops fired at rebels attacking a roadblock, killing two.

Rebels fired small arms and mortars at two army camps in Elephant Pass and Kankesanthurai on the northern Jaffna peninsula Friday night, the sources said. There were no casualties.

Albanian troops block escape : Troops with guns and teargas stormed a ship stranded in Durres Harbour with refugees trying to flee Albania and 10 people were wounded, the official news agency ATA said, reports Reuter.

An opposition leader said there were "many" injuries as troops cleared the Partizani, which ran aground with an unknown number of refugees. "There could be as many as 1,000 on board," said Gramoz Pashko, of the fledgling democratic party.

"The people who were aboard the Partizani and who did not agree to leave voluntarily were taken away by force," ATA said.

Soares sworn in for 2nd term : Mario Soares was sworn in Saturday for his second five-year term as resident of Portugal, in a ceremony in the Portuguese Parliament, reports AFP.

Mr. Soares, 66, won election in the first round of Presidential poll on January 13 after gaining 70.4 per cent of the vote. He is not eligible to seek a third term.

His new mandate opens up a fresh phase of political cohabitation for the Socialist President with the centre-right government of Prime Minister Anibal Cavaco Silva.

Mr. Soares declared that the "modernization of Portugal is the next national objective" on the country's route towards integration into Europe.

Australian soldier shot dead : An Australian soldier was shot dead outside his home in Port Moresby in the early hours of this morning, Australian Associated Press reported, says Reuter.

Police said warrant officer Gregory Dowsett, 42, may have been the victim of a group of "Rascals, a criminal gang that roams the streets of the Papua New Guinea capital. AAP reported from port Moresby.

Dowsett, from new south Wales, had been in Papua New Guinea since March 1989, attached to the Australian defence force that was involved in a cooperative programme with the Papua New Guinea defence force.

Walesa's call for polls defied : In President Lech Walesa's first major legislative defeat, parliament on Saturday rejected his call to dissolve quickly and delayed Poland's first postwar free parliamentary elections until the fall, reports AP.

By a vote of 314-18, with 40 abstentions, the lower chamber, or Sejm, decided to continue working through the summer and hold the elections by Oct. 30.

"The Sejm missed its chance and thus its credibility ended," said leaders of a pro-Walesa party, the Center Alliance, in a statement issued after the vote.

"Poland should not be the last country in Europe without free elections," the statement said.

Tories yet have lead : Britain's ruling Conservative Party, which suffered a by-election upset this week in a rural stronghold, has a clear lead over opposition parties in the country as a whole, opinion polls said in London on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The polls, issued ahead of publication in Sunday newspapers, said the conservatives' surprise defeat on Thursday did not reflect the national trend and the party could still expect to win a general election on its current rating.

A Harris poll for the observer newspaper put support for Prime Minister John Major's conservatives at 47 per cent of the electorate, one point more than a month ago and eight points clear of the opposition Labour Party.

10 killed in Johannesburg : Ten people were killed — one "necklaced" with a flaming tyre — and more than 30 were wounded in fierce fighting between black groups in a Johannesburg township Saturday, reports Reuter.

Hundreds of police and troops were rushed to Alexandra, which adjoins the city's exclusive northern suburbs, to separate fighters armed with rifles, spears and clubs who clashed in a dawn battle around a workers' hostel.

The violence pitched the mainly-Zulu hostel residents, many of whom support the Inkatha Freedom Party of chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, against township residents broadly allied to Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC).

Four killed in Honduras : Two gunmen, one wearing police uniform, burst into a nightclub in the Honduran capital on Saturday and opened fire, killing four people and wounding nine, authorities said, reports Reuter.

The pair stormed the Copacabana nightclub in central Tegucigalpa at about 2.30 a.m. (0830 GMT) spraying bullets at some 30 revellers, police spokesman Captain Cesar Somoza said.

Israeli troops kill, hurt 80 Palestinians

JERUSALEM, Mar 10 : Israeli troops shot and wounded 80 Palestinians in violent clashes Saturday in Rafah refugee camp in the occupied Gaza strip, Arab sources said, reports AFP.

The clashes erupted when soldiers entered the camp while residents were praying in the mosque.

Demonstrators hurled stones at the Israeli troops, who ordered closure of the mosque and dispersed the crowd by opening fire and using tear gas, the sources said.

Eighty people were shot and wounded, including 20 in the mosque compound, the sources said. Another 150 were suffering from tear gas inhalation, while troops arrested 50.

Israeli military sources said that 20 Palestinians were wounded, as well as an Israeli

officer and soldier injured by rocks.

Earlier in the Gaza strip, troops shot and wounded another 15 Arabs as a general strike in support to the outlawed Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) paralysed the occupied territories, Arab sources said.

It was the first general strike since before the Gulf war, and correspondents said roads were deserted and shops closed throughout the West Bank and Gaza strip, where 1.7 million Palestinians live under Israeli rule.

The army clamped a curfew on the town of Gaza and the cities of Hebron and Nablus in the West Bank.

Leaders of the anti-Israeli uprising, or intifada, had called the strike last week and "warned against attempts to

Iraq disbands five army divisions

NICOSIA, Mar 10 : Iraq on Saturday disbanded five more of the army divisions formed after its Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait, and demobilized reservists between the ages of 31 and 34, a military spokesman said, reports AP.

In a statement on Radio Baghdad, the unidentified spokesman said the decision was made on the basis of a decree by the ruling Revolutionary Command Council dated March 6.

That decree had stipulated that new divisions formed after the invasion be disbanded "because circumstances have now changed". It ordered the immediate dismantling of 10 divisions and the release from service of soldiers between the ages of 35 and 38.

An Iraqi division normally comprises 10,000 men. But the divisions formed to confront the US-led Allied onslaught were believed to be smaller.

bypass" the PLO in the search for a Middle East peace settlement.

Arab partners in the US led coalition, as well as Western countries, say the PLO lost much credibility by strong support for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

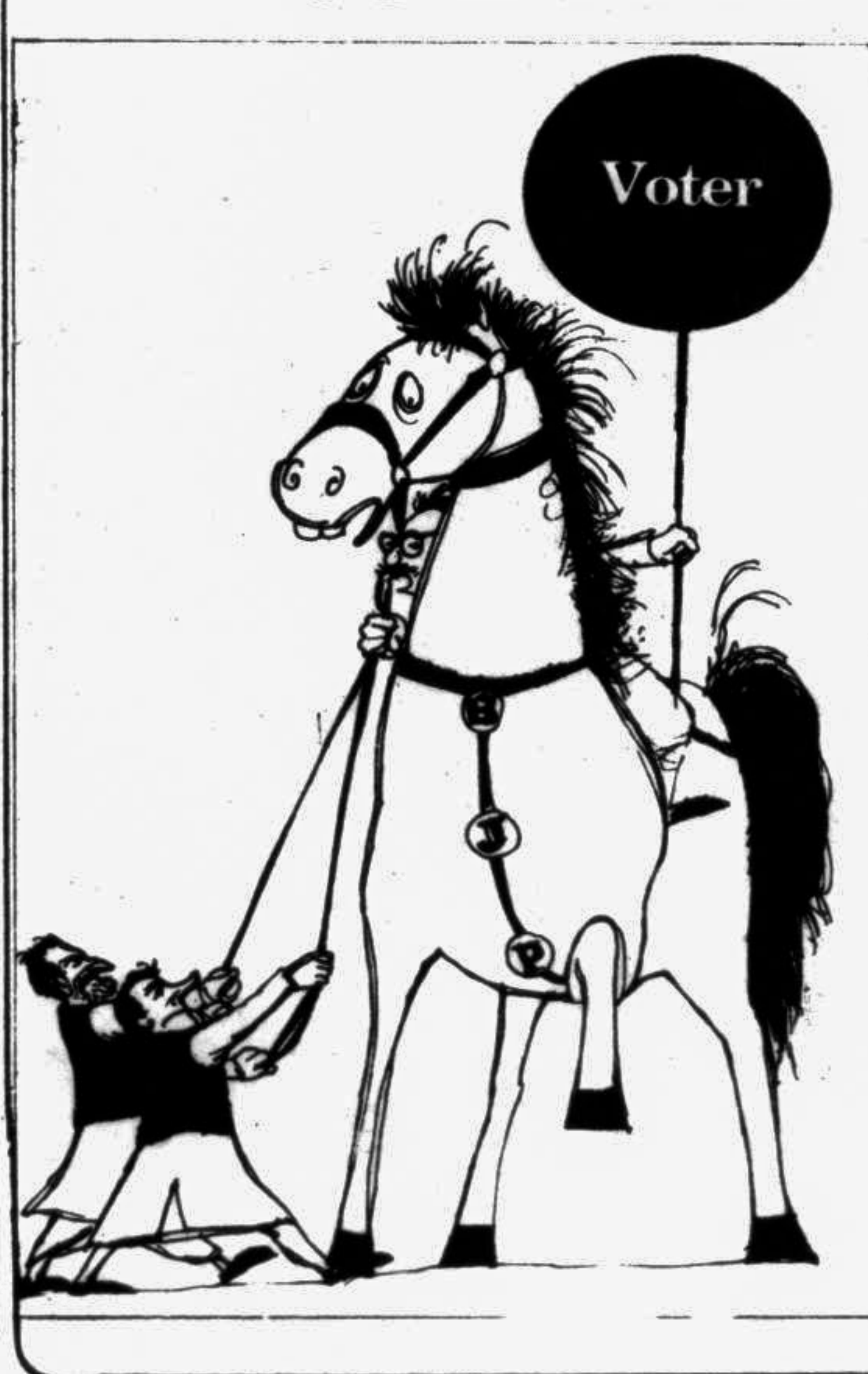
But the unified leadership of the intifada cautioned that the PLO was still the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people", and urged a solution to the Palestinian question based on UN resolutions.

Saturday's strike marked the 40th month of the intifada, which erupted in December 9, 1987.

US Secretary of State James Baker has offered to meet Palestinian representatives during a 48-hour visit here starting today (Monday).

NF MPs threaten to quit en masse

Rajiv, Shekhar on road to reconciliation?



NEW DELHI, Mar 10: Efforts were underway Saturday to bring about a rapprochement between the ruling Janata Dal (S) and Congress (I) even as the Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar said Saturday night that a mid-term poll was inevitable, reports PTI.

A telephonic conversation between Rajiv Gandhi and Chandra Shekhar Friday night set off speculations about a possible patch up and prompted an appeal by the National Front to the President, R Venkataraman, "not to succumb to manoeuvres" of the Congress (I).

The Front would consider en masse resignations of its MPs if the President did not dissolve the Lok Sabha, the former Prime Minister, VP Singh said in Salem.

On the other hand, Chandra Shekhar told reporters in Lucknow that there was no move from his side to put off mid-term elections though there were such moves in certain other quarters.

The Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar, Saturday said a mid-term poll was "inevitable" under the prevailing circumstances.

The Prime Minister was talking informally to reporters at the Amausi Airport here while on a brief personal visit to the state capital.

He said that he understood that the situation was not "conducive" for holding mid-term elections but there was no alternative under the pre-

valing circumstances.

Asked whether he foresaw any unity between the Janata Dal (S) and the Janata Dal, Chandra Shekhar said nothing was "impossible" in politics and added that he did not oppose any move in the healthy growth of democracy.

He also said he had not taken Congress (I) President Rajiv Gandhi into confidence before tendering his resignation because Gandhi was not present in the Lok Sabha at that time.

Asked to comment on reports of the Congress (I)'s continued support for the UP and Gujarat government, he said: "It is very good of them."

Two ruling Janata Dal(S) Chief Ministers, Mulayam Singh Yadav of UP and Chimanbhai Patel of Gujarat, whose governments survival depends on the Congress(I) met the President with the plea that time was not yet ripe for a mid-term poll.

Yadav and Patel, who have emerged as key players in the patch up effort along with the Commerce Minister, Dr. Subramanian Swami, have met both Gandhi and Chandra Shekhar in the reconciliation bid.

The former Prime Minister VP Singh Saturday said the National Front would consider en masse resignations of its MPs if the President R Venkataraman did not dissolve the Lok Sabha.

Off the Record

An irate Benazir in court

KARACHI : Former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto leapt to her feet in court and shouted demands for an inquiry into allegations that imprisoned activities of her party had been tortured, reports Reuter.

"I want the court to put on record statements of torture," Bhutto shouted after several prisoners said they had been beaten and electrocuted while in custody.

"We want a judicial inquiry into their torture." Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, and 14 activities of her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are charged with killing 29 people on August 22. This was 17 days after President Ghulam Ishaq Khan sacked her government amid accusations she denies of large-scale corruption.

Bhutto repeatedly tried to draw the attention of Karachi's anti-terrorist court to the prisoners' allegations of torture. At one point she leapt to her feet and told Judge Nabi Sher Junejo: "I, as a former Prime Minister of Pakistan, demand, that the court record the statements of torture."

All the accused, apart from Zardari and a Senator, were brought to the tiny courtroom in chains and leg irons. "Police have tortured me and given electric shocks on my legs," said Zahid Saeed as he showed the courts a bandaged ankle.

"There is pus in the wounds". Saeed has filed a petition in the Sindh High Court alleging he was tortured in an effort to force him to implicate Zardari and the former Chief Minister of Sindh province, Syed Qaim Ali Shah, in the massacre.

Rajiv still looks like apprentice

NEW DELHI: A decade after Rajiv Gandhi ventured into the intrigue of Indian politics, he still looks "like an apprentice beside veterans such as former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, diplomats and political analysts say, reports Reuter.

"We were surprised he resigned," Gandhi admitted cheerfully after Shekhar quit in fury at being stranded in Parliament this week without the majority Gandhi's Congress Party had promised him.

Congress was left facing polls which it has tried to stave off since it agreed to prop up Shekhar's tiny Janata Dal (socialist) government last November.

Diplomats voiced amazement at how Gandhi, heir to a political dynasty and Prime Minister for five years until 1989, had lost out on a deal which should have given him power without responsibility — and an unshakable grip on Shekhar.

Congress walked out of Parliament on Tuesday accusing Shekhar's party of sending policemen to spy on Gandhi's home.

Shekhar had already announced the policemen's arrest and promised any inquiry Congress wanted.

Bemused political analysts said a faction of Congress seemed to have pushed for the walkout without thinking through the consequences, aiming merely to rally the party and distance it from any unpopular government decisions.

"It was not part of (Gandhi's) game plan. He just wanted to put Shekhar under increasing pressure," said Lal Krishan Advani, whose political skills have elevated his own Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to a serious challenger to Congress votes.

'Where's my bicycle' SRINAGAR (India): "Where's my bicycle?" four-year-old Fady Imtiaz asked his mother when she came home on Friday from 10 days in captivity as a hostage of separatists in Indian-ruled Kashmir, reports Reuter.

When Naheed Imtiaz, 29-year-old daughter of a prominent local politician, was abducted in Srinagar by three masked men, relatives told her son she had gone away to by him a bicycle.

Her father, Saifuddin Soz, said his daughter, who is pregnant with her second child, had finally arrived 15 hours after her release was announced.

Imtiaz arrived home to a tearful reception from women relatives in Srinagar, heart of an anti-India revolt that erupted 14 months ago in the once-idyllic Kashmir valley.

She appeared to be in shock and spoke in whispers to her son. Family members refused to let her talk to journalists who crowded into a bedroom of the family home to see her.

Cattle rustled by snake NEW DELHI: Cattle herders who tethered their cows to a fallen tree trunk in the dark were surprised to wake up in the morning to find their cattle and the tree missing, the Statesmen newspaper reported Saturday, says AP.

The herdsman launched a search in the jungle and found their frightened herd being pulled along by what they had thought was the thick piece of wood.