

BRIEFLY

US can end arms race: Israel: Only the United States can end the Middle East arms race, Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens said in Jerusalem Saturday, reports Reuter.

"If we want to end the arms race in the region, then the arms dealers have to reach agreement that they will stop selling arms to the region."

"If the United States is not prepared to do that — the United States is today perhaps the major seller of arms to the Middle East — if it is not ready to lead such a process then it won't happen", Arens told army radio.

Saddam's credibility zero: Bush: The credibility of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is "zero," US President George Bush declared Hamilton Saturday, adding that it would be "very difficult" to come to any agreements with him, reports AFP.

Mr Bush, meeting here with British Prime Minister John Major, was commenting to reporters about a declaration in Baghdad by Mr Hussein that an insurrection in southern Iraqi towns had been crushed, and that a new government would be formed soon to rebuild Iraq.

But the allied forces in the Gulf region — some of them still in southern Iraq — did not want to renew warfare against Iraq and "none of US want to move forces into Baghdad," Mr Bush said.

Rajiv begins poll campaign: Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, escorted by thousands of supporters, drove through this stronghold of a rival party Saturday to begin his election campaign for the job he lost 15 months ago, reports AP.

He was greeted with a massive reception arranged by his Congress Party, the richest and biggest in India. Hundreds of cars, trucks and jeeps followed Gandhi's open convertible as he drove from the airport to the center of Bhopal to address a rally.

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star, Rajiv Gandhi's India's star," supporters shouted through loudspeakers atop some of the trucks.

The Caravan took 45 minutes to cover the first 6 kilometers (4 miles) of the route, which was lined by flag-waving supporters.

Combodian troops pushed back: Cambodian guerrillas on Saturday stronghold pushed government troops further back from a near the Thai border in some of the fiercest fighting in the area this year, a rebel spokesman said in Bangkok, reports AP.

The guerrillas pushed Cambodian government forces to about 18 kilometers (11 miles) southeast of the stronghold, Thmar Puok, said Ok Seret Sopheap, military spokesman for the Khmer People's National Liberation Front.

About 6,000 government troops began attacking Thmar Puok, the centre of the rebels' zone of control in the west, last Saturday. Sopheap said 7,000 to 8,000 guerrillas were defending the area.

The government had advanced to about 13 kilometers (eight miles) from the stronghold, but were pushed farther back in fighting this morning, Sopheap said.

Resignation of Roh demanded: About 10,000 students hurling firebombs and rocks clashed with riot police in downtown Seoul on Saturday in the largest protest this year demanding President Roh Tae-woo's resignation over a bribery scandal, reports AP.

Shouting "Down with Roh Tae-woo," the students poured out of back alleys and occupied a 10-lane boulevard leading from Seoul Railway Station to the city center. All traffic on the road came to a standstill.

Squads of helmeted riot police rushed to the area, firing barrages of tear gas that filled several blocks. Students countered with hundreds of firebombs.

Students scattered in a dense fog of choking gas, but regrouped in back alleys and charged back. Police reinforcements arrived in buses.

Many students were seen taken away, but the total number was unknown.

5 Tigers killed in Lanka: Security forces have intensified their search for Tamil separatist guerrillas, killing five more militants, in separate clashes in northeastern Sri Lanka, a military spokesman in Colombo said Saturday, reports AP.

The spokesman said bitter fighting was reported mainly from the east where government troops have been hunting for guerrillas of the dominant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Security forces Friday shot dead three LTTE rebels in the eastern port district of Trincomalee, the spokesman said, while troops killed another rebel as he tried to escape from army custody in neighbouring Batticaloa district.

Reform not top priority, says Kuwaiti Prince

KUWAIT CITY, Mar 17: Kuwait's ruling family is committed to moving towards democracy, but security considerations and not political reform are the top priority, the country's Crown Prince told a group of US senators here Saturday, reports AP.

"Our country is not divided into ruler and ruled people," said 61-year-old Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, who is also Minister of Administration and Prime Minister.

The prince said the royal family, headed by Emir Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, saw democracy as a "commitment and an obligation" but added that "work in the political field" would have to come third — after taking care of the country's post-war security situation and reconstruction.

"We hope you will understand and that greater

freedom will be given to Kuwaiti citizens," responded senator John Warner, a republican from Virginia.

Opposition sources said meanwhile that the senators had also met with 35 members of the pro-democracy movement here, six of them deputies in Kuwait's last parliament, which was dissolved in 1986.

One of the former parliamentarians, Khalid Sultan, told journalists after the meeting that they had told the senators they wanted to see Kuwait become a constitutional monarchy.

"We explained to them that we want to see a restoration of the 1962 constitution and political reforms that can come in the future shaped like a constitutional monarchy," Mr Khalid Sultan said.

The businessman, who was active in the civilian-aid side of the resistance during the Iraqi occupation, also said he believed the majority of Kuwaitis were in favour of wider democracy, and that the opposition saw the imposition of martial law as "unconstitutional."

The Emir of the tiny oil-rich sheikhdom declared three months of martial law when the country was freed late last month, saying the move was needed to restore the security situation.

Mr Khalid Sultan said the constitution stipulated that the parliament needed to sit before martial law was declared, and voiced another persistent opposition demand, that a coalition government be formed before elections are held.

Who is in the government when elections are held "is very important," he said.

"We want to ensure that no anti-democratic element influences the outcome."

Plea to reject Baghdad's authority as riots rock Iraq
Rebels form 8-man body to run Iraqi govt

BEIRUT, Mar 17: Iraq's leading Shi'ite Muslim dignitary has called on Iraqis to reject the authority of Baghdad and instead pay allegiance to a special committee of religious leaders, reports AFP.

In a statement received here Saturday from the Iraqi city of Najaf, scene of a Shi'ite rebellion against government forces, Ayatollah Abul Kassem al-Khoei said Iraq was undergoing a "critical period" during

which it was necessary to reestablish order and stability and avoid chaos.

To this end, he said, a committee of eight religious leaders had been formed. He appealed to his followers to obey the new committee, which would be charged with handling public affairs.

In his statement, Ayatollah al-Khoei also called on the population in areas affected by the fighting to pick up bodies in

the streets and bury them. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, in his first public speech since his defeat at allied hands in the Gulf war, Saturday said the rebellion in Iraq's mainly Shi'ite south had been crushed.

Thursday, Mohammad Bagher al-Hakim, the head of the Shi'ite opposition in exile in Tehran, said 1,000 people had died in fighting in Najaf. And Saturday an Iraqi oppo-

sition group in London said Iraqi troops had killed thousands in the south, and accused the forces of bombing the road from Najaf to Karbala with napalm.

The Ad-Daawa Party rejected President Hussein's statement that the uprising had been quelled in the south, saying that fighting continued in the north, the centre and the south of Iraq with increased intensity.

Also in London, the exiled Shi'ite dignitary Imam Sayed Hussein al-Sader, said that President Hussein's speech, which also promised democratic reforms, was a pack of lies and false promises which no one can trust.

The Iraqi leader was a butcher who only knows how to rule through terror and torture, he said.

The Imam called for Mr Hussein's resignation and the formation of a provisional government that would prepare for elections.

Reuters from Nicosia adds: Iraqi television, following up an address to the nation by President Saddam Hussein yesterday, broadcast a second evening programme of eyewitness accounts of riots rocking the country, reports Reuter.

The Iraqi news agency INA, in a report monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said a student identified rioters as army deserters, criminals and people with a history of criminal offences. It did not say when the disturbances took place.

The student from the town of Shatra, in south-eastern Iraq, said that his sisters were raped at home and that people were dragged from their homes and killed in front of their children.

holy city of Karbala. Another said he took part in attacks on government and military buildings, killing people and burning houses.

INA said one rioter, a student from Baghdad, told Saturday how he joined the Rancorous groups in return for money and moved to Karbala province.

There he and "bands of infidelity and aggression" stole from homes, robbed people of property and money, INA added. This is in addition to carrying out robberies against government institutions and shops in Karbala, INA said.

Saddam said yesterday a revolt in Iraq's mainly Shi'ite south was over but unrest was continuing in the Kurdish north.

A report from US-held Iraq says: Civil war still grips Basra, turning Iraq's second city into a valley of death according to refugees reaching a US army post inside Iraq.

But, they add, President Saddam Hussein's army has retaken most of the southern port-city from Muslim Shi'ite rebels.

Saddam said in a speech to the nation Saturday that his forces had crushed a Shi'ite revolt in the south, which he said was backed by neighbouring Iran, and vowed to defeat a Kurdish rebellion in the north.

This is effectively disputed in claims by emigre opposition groups commenting on an uprising that began on March 1 two days after Gulf allied forces drove Saddam's troops from occupied Kuwait.

The Americans, who occupy one-fifth of Iraq, have warned Saddam against using aircraft or poison gas to crush regional rebellion.

It's the valley of death, lamented an old Iraqi as he arrived from the Basra area at the US control point known to

US troops as checkpoint crusader, just 35 km (22 miles) from Basra.

They are shooting with cannons on homes, he (Saddam) killed many of us cried the old man.

"There are many hurt", said his companion. "It's the Republican Guards" he added, referring to attacks by Saddam's trusted and best-equipped force.

An Iraqi opposition leader said in the Syrian capital Damascus that rebel forces were preparing to march on Saddam's stronghold in Baghdad.

Mohammed Hussein al-Tajer of the Shi'ite Islamic action organisations aid government troops loyal to Saddam were reinforcing their positions on the outskirts of Baghdad.

Another opposition group, the Tehran-based Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) said rebels seized the city of Kut, capital of the southern province of Wasit, Saturday morning, a few hours before Saddam spoke, the Iranian news agency IRNA reported.

The agency, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation quoted refugees who arrived Saturday in Iran as saying the provincial towns of Jassan and Zorbatyeh had also fallen to the popular forces.

Iranian television quoted refugees as saying fierce fighting continued Saturday in the Shi'ite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala and also in Khanaqin, near the Iranian border.

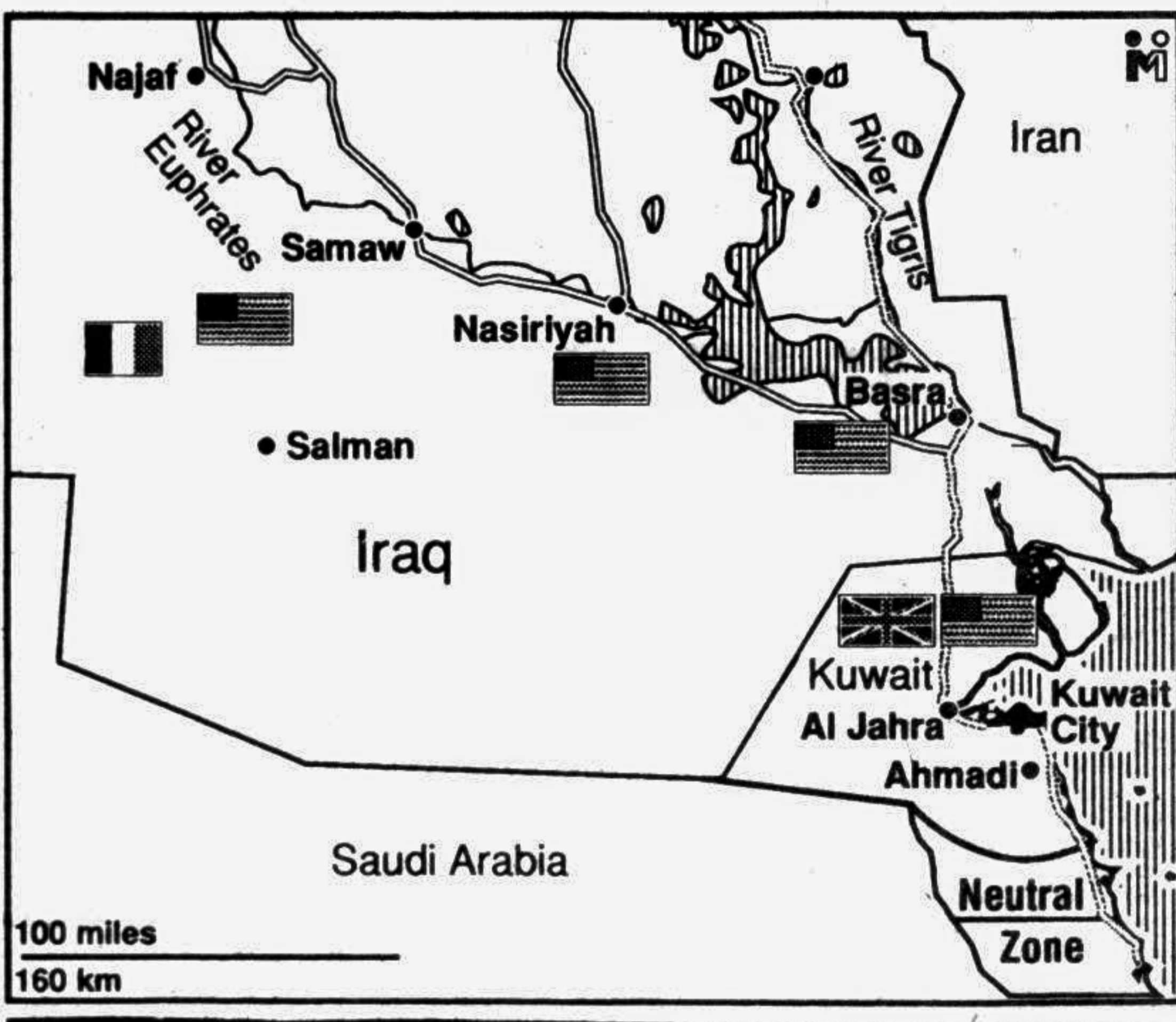
The television report said Iraqi government forces had completely lost control of the situation in those cities.

Another report from Nicosia adds: Iran urged Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's government Saturday to surrender to the will of the people and issued a warning to it about Shi'ite Muslim shrines at Najaf and Karbala, Iranian television said.

The television, reporting on a meeting of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, did not specify the nature of the warning about the shrines which are in an area rocked by an anti-Saddam revolt.

The violation of the sanctity of the holy sites in Najaf and Karbala was condemned and a warning was issued to the Iraqi government in that respect, the television said in a report monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Key Iraqi cities rocked by strife



Former PM faces challenge at home

Brother terms VP Singh as politically unreliable

NEW DELHI, Mar 17: Former Prime Minister, Mr VP Singh's elder brother, Mr Sant Bux Singh, plans to challenge him in the Lok Sabha polls because he considers the Janata Dal leader is politically unreliable and totally unfit to hold the top political office, reports PTI.

Mr Sant Bux Singh, who is contesting from Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh, in the coming election said a great harm that Mr VP Singh did was dividing the country into castes and sub-castes.

He said there was no wave in favour of any party so far and people were still formulating their views where rising prices and deteriorating law and order situation would be crucial factors.

"Mr VP Singh will have to answer on these accounts as after the 1988 elections, for most of the time he was Prime Minister and Mr Chandra Shekhar just got four months," he said.

The last time my younger brother Vishwanath came and requested me and out of love and affection I agreed not to contest. This time I am determined to fight because he has neglected the constituency," Mr Sant Bux Singh said.

"I nurtured the constituency for 25 years. I have been chosen to Lok Sabha twice in 1967 and 1971 on Congress tickets and in 1977 I lost like all Congressmen," he said adding that it was he who had made Fatehpur famous.

Stressing that Mr VP Singh should contest from either Allahabad or Phulpur (his original constituencies), Mr Sant Bux Singh said "the past performance of Bhai (VP Singh) has been very poor. He has a callous attitude and is not a very reliable politician".

Deprecating Mr VP Singh's attitude during the anti-Mandal Commission agitation, Mr Sant Bux Singh said bhai should have taken a cue from Mahatma Gandhi who had suspended his agitation following the Chauri Chaura incident in the face of stiff opposition from Pt Nehru and Sardar Patel.

"My brother is very self-centred. In fact, Mr Rajiv Gandhi is not one tenth as self-centred as VP Singh," Mr Sant Bux Singh said.

Describing himself as an old socialist who was even imprisoned for his beliefs, Mr Sant Bux Singh said "VP Singh has no ideology."

A great harm that VP Singh did was dividing society on caste lines and not just on religious basis, he said.

Referring to Mr Rajiv Gandhi's performance as Prime Minister, Mr Singh said "it was not bad. It was not his performance but the alleged scandals that brought about his downfall which have not been proved so far in spite of Mr VP Singh saying that he could prove it in 15 days."

The economic progress under Mr Rajiv Gandhi was much more as compared to Mr VP Singh's 11-month rule, he said.

When asked which party he would join, Mr Singh said he had not decided either way. "I have been a Congressman till 1989 and Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar is my old class fellow."

Mr Sant Bux Singh said on a personal level he had no differences with Mr VP Singh and "I had spoken to his wife and son even a couple of days ago as bhai is not well."

No the poll prospects of the Congress (I), Mr Sant Bux Singh said "he was not an astrologer but on the plank of stability they could secure a majority."

Referring to BJP's chances, he said on the Ram Janma Bhoomi issue, they had been able to divide society on communal lines. "But for them

backing of people exists, he added.

Mr Singh did not rule out the possibility of a hung parliament as there was no wave in favour of any political party so far.

The Temple issue, Mr Singh said, should be solved on the basis of dialogue and all were agreed that a temple should be built, "but the question is where is the site of Lord Rama's birth."

How long they ruled

Chandrashekhar, who became the eighth prime minister of India in November last year, has now the dubious distinction of being in office for the shortest period of time — just 117 days! In the process, he surpassed the previous lowest of 170 days of the late Charan Singh during 1979-80. Another prime minister whose tenure did not last one full year was VP Singh who was ousted by the Shekhar-Devi Lal group last year.

Just for the record, the elder statesman Jawaharlal Nehru had the honour of occupying the post for the longest duration of 16 years and 286 days, while his daughter Indira Gandhi holds the feat of regaining the coveted post after being in the wilderness for three years from 1977 to 1980.

It now remains to be seen whether Rajiv Gandhi who became the youngest prime minister in October, 1984, after Indira Gandhi's assassination, can step into the shoes of his mother by making a comeback in the days to come. Of the eight prime ministers who ruled the country so far, four are no more — Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi and Charan Singh. It may be noted here that Desai was the oldest prime minister in office, at the age of 81, when he occupied the seat in 1977.

No.	Name	Date of Death	Period of Prime Ministership	Duration
1	Jawaharlal Nehru	May 27, 1964	15-8-1947 to 27-5-1964	16 years and 286 days
2	Lal Bahadur	Jan 11, 1966	9-6-1964 to 11-1-1966	1 year and 216 days
3	Indira Gandhi	Oct 31, 1984	24-1-1966 to 24-3-1977	11 years and 59 days
4	Morarji Desai	-	24-3-1977 to 28-7-1979	2 years and 128 days
5	Charan Singh	May 20, 1987	28-7-1979 to 14-1-1980	170 days
6	Rajiv Gandhi	-	31-10-1984 to 3-12-1989	5 years and 32 days
7	VP Singh	-	2-12-1989 to 7-11-1990	340 days
8	Chandra Shekhar	-	10-11-1990 to 6-3-1991	116 days

Note: Gulzarilal Nanda was acting PM twice — from May 27 to June 9 in 1964 and January 11 to 24 in 1966, while VP Singh was caretaker PM for two days on November 8 and 9, last year.

Compiled by Star Foreign Desk

Off the Record

Don't drink, US troops told

DAHRAN, Mar 17: US military commanders have barred up to half a million American soldiers in Saudi Arabia from eating

drinking or smoking in public during daytime in compliance with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, reports Reuter.

Muffled cannon booms traditionally fired after sunset each day of the holy month, indicated fasting would begin in Saudi Arabia Sunday.

"We're trying to make all servicemen aware (of Ramadan)," a US military official said on Saturday.

Asked if he expected any friction between American servicemen and Saudis he said, "That's what we're trying to preclude."

US military officials said, a notice detailing Ramadan rules have been circulated to all American military commanders after talks with Saudi authorities.

A copy of the US military notice obtained by Reuter warned soldiers not to eat, drink, smoke or play music in public including while driving their vehicles during daylight hours.



RIYADH: No more music for US troops including women soldiers during the month of Ramadan.

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Manila to protect Imelda Marcos

MANILA: The government will provide security for former First Lady Imelda Marcos if she returns to the Philippines, National Security Adviser Rafael Ileta said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

"If something happens to her, it will be our responsibility," he told reporters. A senior cabinet member said on Thursday the government might allow former President Ferdinand Marcos's widow to return home as early as next month after five years of exile in the United States to face trial on corruption charges.

Asked if there were groups that might want to harm Mrs Marcos, Ileta said: "We cannot say for sure because some groups may want to embarrass the government."

The Marcos couple fled to Hawaii in 1986 after the former strongman was toppled in a popular revolt. He died in Honolulu in 1989.

President Corazon Aquino's government has accused the Marcoses and their business associates of stealing up to 10 billion dollars from the economy during Marcos's 20-year rule. State lawyers say they are ready to file graft charges against Mrs Marcos once the government allows her to return.

Mrs Marcos denies that her family enriched itself while in office. She was acquitted by a New York jury last year of racketeering charges arising from the alleged theft of more than 200 million dollars from the Philippine treasury.