US citizens asked to defer non-essential travel to India

WASHINGTON, May 23: The State Department Wednesday urged Americans to defer all non-essential travel to India. citing the potential for violence there following the assassination of former Premier Rajiv Gandhi, reports AFP.

"The situation remains tense throughout India, with some violence breaking out sporadically," the Department said in a travel advisory.

The US Embassy is recommending that US citizens residing in India stay indoors as much as possible to avoid getting caught up in violent incidents, the statement said.

It added that, due to continuing political unrest, travel to the states of Asaam and Jammu and Kashmir should be postponed. The Department also said American travellers should exercise special caution in the northern state of Punjab.

Meanwhile, leading US newspaper Wednesday mourned the death of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and wondered what direction Indian politics would now take.

The New York Times, re

calling that the assassination of Indira Gandhi - Mr Gandhi's mother - did not spell the demise of democracy in India. said "there is reason to hope it (democracy) will respond sturdily now.

The influential daily noted that the best way Indians could punish Mr Gandhi's assassins was to vote for "skilled and temperate leaders," adding as a consolation that India today possesses such candidates.

Striking a more pessimistic note, the Washington Post noted that Mr Gandhi's Congress Party has in the past been overly interested in keeping or attaining power. allowing the country to slip into a "bloody-minded kind of religious fanaticism."

It indicated that the current general elections have been marred by violence on unprecedented scale - 185 killed since voting Monday, and expressed the hope that Mr Gandhi's death might shock the people of India "to see where their present path is taking them."

US Vice President Dan

200 Iraqis want to leave country, seek US visas

BAGHDAD, May 23: At least 200 Iraqis, able to leave their country for the first time in almost a year, have visited the Polish Embassy seeking visas to the United States, the Polish ambassador said Wednesday, reports AP.

The ambassador said the visa-seekers were being turned away for the time being. Between 20 and 50 Iraqis a day have stopped by the embassy to inquire about visas. said Ambassador Krzysetof Plominski.

Poland agreed May 14 to represent US interests in Iraq. Washington-Baghdad ties were severed after Iraq invaded Kuwait Aug 2. A US-led multinational army ousted Iraq at the end of February.

"Some have visa proceedings ready, but they are outdated. Many applications expired a long time ago.

Plominski said in an interview that his staff was turning away Iraqis hoping to go to the United States without allowing them to file applications.

"We don't accept applications for the time being because we don't have instructions," he said. "So we tell them to wait and come back

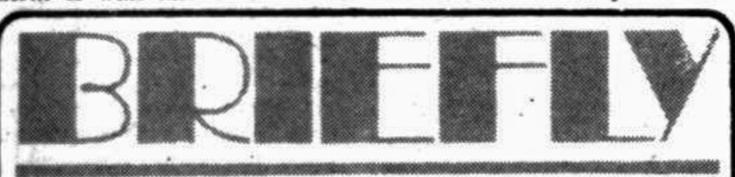
may be next week." President Saddam Hussein's government on May 15 began allowing Iraqis to travel abroad for the first time since the Gulf crisis started last August.

But several restrictions including the amount of money Iraqis can take out of the country and required proof that they have completed their military service - make foreign travel no more than a dream for most. Further, few countries were expected to issuc visas to Iragis.

Kabul accepts UN plan to end war

ISLAMABAD, May 23: The Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan accepted a United Nations plan on Wednesday to end the country's 12-year-old civil war and asked rebels to cooperate in its implementation, reports Reuter.

"The Afghan government supports the peace plan en-· tirely." official Kabul radio said about an appeal made by UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar on Tuesday.



US Congress okays \$556m for Kurds: The US Congress approved on Wednesday a 556 million dollar spending bill to meet initial costs of US relief efforts for Kurdish refugees in Iraq and sent it on to President

George Bush for signing, Reuter reports from Washington. The bill provides 235 million dollars to replenish State Department refugee and disaster accounts, with the money expected to come from interest earned on foreign contributions to the costs of the Gulf War.

Refugee aid accounts have been strained not only by the Iraq crisis but also by disasters in Bangladesh and elsewhere. The bill provides 320 dollars for military relief operations.

UN may monitor truce in Angola: The United Nations may take part in monitoring ceasefire conditions and the elections process in Angola, diplomats said Wednesday, reports AFP from New York.

Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar sent a letter to the Security Council proposing the extension of the UN observer mission already deployed in Angola to monitor the conditions of the rebels putting an end to the country's 16year civil war.

The observer force was to conclude its mission July 1 after monitoring the withdrawal of some 50,000 Cuban troops from the country as agreed upon in the December 1988 accords signed in New York between South Africa, Cuba an Angola which also granted independence to Namibia.

Rajiv's death a crude blow: OAU: The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim said on Wednesday the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had robbed Africa of a committed friend, reports Reuter from Addis Ababa.

In a message to Indian President Ramaswamy Venkatarman, Salim said Gandhi's death was a "terrible and crude blow" to India and the World.

"We in Africa knew Gandhi as a great friend and dependable ally as evidenced in his unfailing support for the legitimate causes of the African peoples," Salim said.

Britain, Albania restore ties: Britain and Albania are to restore diplomatic ties after a gap of nearly 50 years, the Foreign Office announced Wednesday, reports AFP from London.

The decision was taken after talks held on May 13 between British officials and visiting Albanian Foreign Minister Muhamet Kapllani, Foreign Office Minister of State Douglas Hogg said.

Nine killed in Sind gunbattle: Nine people were killed in a gun battle between Pakistani police

and bandits on Wednesday in the Southern Province of Sind, police said, Reuter reports from Hydrabad. They said four policemen and five bandits died in the twohour battle outside the Northern Sind town of Larkana

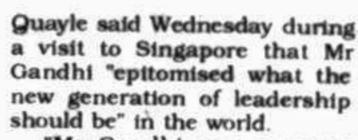
following a police raid on a bandits' hideout. Bandit's, who frequently kidnap people for ransom, are still holding three Chinese engineers they abducted 11 days ago from an electricity project site near the Western Sind town of Dadu.

Suharto for Israel's existence: Indonesian President Suharto ruler of the world's largest Muslim population, said on Wednesday for the first time that

any Middle East peace settlement must guaranty Israelie existence, Reuter reports from Jakarta. He made the remarks in a meeting with US Vice President Dan Quayle, State Secretary Murdiono told

reporters. "The President stressed that a settlement in the Middle

East as a whole will only be possible if the Palestine issue is solved fairly," Murdiono said.



"Mr Gandhi was a person who fought for economic development and progress and had a strong commitment to democratic values," Mr Quayle said in a preface to a speech at the Pacific economic cooperation conference.

"India has lost a great leader. The world has lost a great leader," Mr Quayle added.

US President George Bush said Tuesday of Mr Gandhi: This was a man to whom I felt very very close. This is a tragedy", the US House of Representatives observed a minute of stlence Tuesday in memory of the murdered politician.



NEW DELHI: Paramilitary police baton charge angry mourners May 22 outside Teen Murti House where the body of slain former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi lies in state following his assassination the previous night by a powerful bomb blast. Photo - AFP/UNB

Rajiv reached meeting venue 90 minutes behind schedule

Wires, battery found strapped in woman bomber's body

MADRAS (India), May 23: Police are exploring the possibility that a woman suicide bomber was responsible for the assassination of former Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi. the Press Trust of India said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Police sources here said investigative teams were checking whether an unidentified woman, whose head was blown 50 feet away by the explosion. that killed the former Premier had a bomb wired to her.

The sources said the theory was one of several being investigated by a high level team but no conclusion had been drawn

The sources said the initial belief that the bomb was in a garland or bouquet of flower presented to the former Premier, 47, who died instantly in the explosion Tuesday night, appeared to have been discounted when the suspected basket was found in-

It could have been two bombs or one, said the sources.

The massive explosion at the entrance to a political rally in the Tamil Nadu state town of Sriperumpudur left another 16 dead and 50 injured. Suspicion has focused on the bomber or bombers being members of a Sri Lankan Tamil militant group.

PTI later quoted unidentified Home Ministry sources as saying they also believed the assassination was the work of a suicide bomber, adding that one reason for the theory was that the injuries had all been to the upper torso.

The sources speaking in the capital, also reportedly told the agency they believed the possibility of a timing device being hidden in the area was remote, because Mr. Gandhi had reached the meeting venue 90 minutes behind schedule.

However, "nothing could be

said for sure about the nature of the blast." PTI said, adding that the suicide bomb theory would involve the explosive being strapped to the person's

Reuter adds: The assassin of former Indian leader Rajiv Gandhi may have been a woman suicide bomber, the Pres Trust of India (PTI) said on Wednesday.

Spokesman for the government and for Gandhi's Congress party have said a bomb was concealed in flowers handed to the former Prime Minister as he arrived to address a rally at Sriperumpudur. 40 km (25 miles) from the southern city of Madras. PTI, quoting Interior Min-

istry sources, said investigators into the blast which mutilated Gandhi's body almost beyond recognition on Tuesday night were revising the official the-

It said the nature of Gandhi's injuries, plus a failure to link some remnants of women's clothing to any of the victims so far identified, supported speculation that the bomb had instead been



NEW DELHI: Rahul Gandhi (L) walks with sister Priyanka, son and daughter of slain former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, May 23 at Indira Gandhi International Airport upon Rahul's arrival from the US to Photo -AFP/UNB attend the funeral of his father.

British dailies flay Cong bid to woo Sonia into politics

LONDON, May 23: The British press was shocked Thursday by the invitation extended by bosses of the Indian Congress (1) party to Sonia Gandhi to succeed her assassinated husband as party leader, reports AFP.

The Times (conservative) said: "The decision was taken with astonishing speed, clearly in an attempt to prevent leadership contenders from jostling for position." The Congress (1) move

"Looks opportunistic, even by the standards of India politics". The Independent, a right-of-centre daily, said.

For the Guardian, a left-ofcentre paper, the choice was evidence of the "Paucity both of policies and personalities which would give it (the party) the confidence to seize the chance for a new start."

The Financial Times, the main business daily, said: "Congress seeks sympathy vote for Sonia Gandhi."

Residents of Orbassano, hometown of Sonia Gandhi, widow of India's slain former Prime Minister, were in shock Wednesday after news of the murder broke,

"She is a women of great courage but her task is staggering," Giuseppe Martoccia, Mayor of this town of 24,000 inhabitants in the northwestern Piemont region. said, referring to her election to the helm of the Congress (I) Party less than 24 hours after the death of her husband.

"She was a little girl raised to respect others", Orbassano Priest Don Giuseppe Allanda said of Sonta Gandhi. "And still today she cares a lot about the warm and open man." orphans."

He recalled her late father, an industrialist as "A very

"Her mother is a devout woman and helps the poor of her own free will," he added.



NEW DELHI: A recent file photo of Sonia Gandhi, wife of slain Congress (I) Party leader former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The Italian-born widow, Mrs Gandhi, was unanimously elected president May 22 of her husband's Congress (I) Party in a meeting by the Congress Working Photo -AFP/UNB Committee.

woman who approached him. The investigators had also found wires, a spring and a battery apparently made in Britain, the agency said.

PTI from Madras says: The AIADMK General Secretary. Jayalalitha, said Thursday that anti-national forces were responsible for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Condemning the assassina-

tion, Jayalalitha, who is now in Krishnagiri in Dharmapuri district, said in a statement that she was at a loss for words to describe the crime committed by forces which also assassi- nated Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi.

"The nation can take this no more," she said and appealed to the people to rally together to put down the evil forces.

Javalalitha said she wanted to rush to Madras on hearing the news, but was advised to remain at Krishnagiri by officials as the situation was surcharged and road blocks had been put up at several places.

The AIADMK will observe a seven-day mourning during which partymen have been directed to suspend election campaigning and@maintain calm.

Amitabh receives Rahul back home

NEW DELHI, May 23: Rahul Gandhi, the teenage son of India's assassinated former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi returned home Thursday from the United States via Britain and France to attend his father's funeral, reports AFP.

The 17-year-old Harvard student, who flew back on an air France flight from Paris, politely declined to answer questions from reporters at the airport, where he was met by sister Priyanka.

"I am sorry I don't believe want to say anything." Rahul said as he was escorted out of the Indira Gandhi

International Airport by securitymen and his slain father's best friend, Amitabh Bachchan, a film star-turnedpolitician.

Rahul, who was kept under a heavy guard while waiting for connecting flight for New Delhi in Pairs, walked up to his sister and left for home after briefly embracing her. The funeral of Gandhi, slain

in a bomb attack Tuesday in southern India, will be held AP adds: Friends of Rahul

Gandhi, son of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, tried to comfort him when he learned of his father's assassination.

"We're all supporting him. I know it's got to be hard," said Shikha Sethi, co-president of the South Asian Association at Harvard and an acquaintance of Gandhi's.

Sethi said Rahul Gandhi was a sophomore at Harvard, and that he flew to India Tuesday Gandhi's friends had gath-

ered to be with him after he learned his father had been killed, said Sethi. "Everyone tried to reach out

to him," Sethi said.

Rajiv's killing a case of natural justice : JKLF RAWALPINDI, Pakistan, May

23: The killing of Rajiv Gandhi was a case of "natural justice", the chairman of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) in Pakistan said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Death may cause realignments

NEW DELHI, May 23: The death of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was likely to force realignment of forces in India's intensely personal politics arena, reports

Gandhi's death came as india was engaged in divisive and bloody general election, which his Congress party was forecast to win. Now the murder has unravelled all the theories and consigned predictions to the trash bin.

The stunned Congress leadership met Wednesday to seek a new leader. They elected Gandhi's 43-year-old widow Sonia as a party President.

Tapping the politically inexperienced widow was clearly a move to exploit the sympathy of the nation. Two months after Indira Gandhi was slain. her politically inexperienced son won a massive election victory, and Congress swept 92 per cent of the seats in pariament.

Gandhi's murder "is bound to change popular opinion in favour of the Congress the party is bound to steamroll to a major victory," political writer D P Kumar said in the Calcutabased Statesman newspaper.

But it was not clear if the Italian-born widow would remain party leader if Congress returns to power. She has show no political ambition nor interest beyond campaigning for her husband. A weak President might lead

to disarray in the party, or arouse the suspicions of the public that Mrs. Gandhi is being manipulated.

That could determine its claim that with its strong leadership. Congress is the only party that can united this vast and fragmented country. That has began the main platform of

india is beset by deadly

ethnic insurgencies and religious and caste struggles. The immediate beneficiary any breakdown within Congress would be the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party

which barnstormed from the

political fringes to emerge as

Congress's main challenger.

Janata Dal blasts security

NEW DELHI, May 23: The Janata Dal today criticised the security lapses leading to the assassination of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and said the moral responsibility for this tragic security failure developed directly on the Prime Minister. Mr. Chandra Shekhar, reports

The Dal spokesman, Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy, said it was evident that the powerful time device which snuffed out the life of Mr. Gandhi, detonated near the podium.

The security precautions that should be taken in respect of a VVIP's meeting do require a thorough and foolproof search of the stage and its surroundings. The failure to clear the meeting place of such murderous devices was too glaring to be ignored," he said.

Mr Reddy said it should be noted that Tamil Nadu was under rule of the central gov-

The spokesman said there was an imperative need to conduct an impartial investigation into the incident. To remove all possible doubts, a panel of three sitting judges of Supreme Court should go into the episode and submit its findings in a fixed time-frame",

Off the Record

Queenmania grips Dallas

DALLAS: Queen Elizabeth II arrived in Dallas on Tuesday after a visit to the Alamo River, where Texans fought for their independence from Mexico, reports AP.

The first British monarch to set foot on Texas soil, the queen and her husband. Prince Philip, arrived from San Antonio shortly past noon on the next-to-last leg of their three-day sweep through the state. To the strains of "The Yellow Rose of Texas" and the

theme from the television show "Dallas," the royal couple was introduced to Dallas "Mayor Annette Strauss and Mayor Kay Granger of Fort Worth. As the Queen moved down the receiving line along a red carpet, 7-year-old Jasmine Evans presented her with a yellow

and blue flower bouquet. "I really love it," said Kathy Chiv. a 14 year-old Dallas Girl Scout, among hundreds of schoolchildren on hand. "I have had some instruction on how to act here from our Girl Scout

leader." The Queen's visit was not without controversy. Two black members of the Dallas City Council, upset over a Dallas redistricting map they say is unfair to minorities, urged the

picketing of events during the Queen's visit. In San Antoio earlier Tuesday, hundreds of well-wishers waved Union Jacks to welcome the queen and her husband. They arrived at Kelly Air Force Base in the morning and

were whisked off to the Alamo for a brief tour of the Lission where an outnumbered Texas regiment was wiped out by Mexican soldiers in 1836 during the war for Texas independence.

Great Britain was one of the first European nations to recognize the fledgling republic of Texas 51 years ago. The couple rode a barge along the San Antonio River through downtown before seeing La Villita, a historic village,

then meeting with local dignitaries at the Institute of Texan Cultures. In Austin on Monday, Gov. Ann Richards and former first lady Bird Johnson toasted the monarch at a formal reception and dinner for 240 people at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library

and Museum, located to the University of Texas campus. The queen was scheduled to visit Houston after leaving

Allies loot 'priceless object': Iraq PARIS: Iraq has asked the United Nations cultural agency

UNESCO to help it recover "priceless object", it says were

looted by allied forces which occupied the country after the

Gulf War, UNESCO sources said on Wednesday, reports They said Haziz Al-Hajj Ali Haidar. Iraq's representative on UNESCO's executive board told members at the organisation's Paris headquarters that antiquities had been looted from 11 Iraqi provinces, including the birthplace of the Biblical

Prophet Abraham. Museums had been robbed in the north and the south of the country, he said. Some objects had already been returned through the United Nations but property was still missing.

Iraq had give a list of items to Federico Mayor, the Director General of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and called on the agency's committee for the restitution of cultural property to help get the antiquities back.

The committee's powers are limited to providing good offices for the return on disputed objects generally between museums.

And now 'X-ray' spectacles in HK

HONG KONG: Hong Kong, home of the gadget, has now come up with an unusual optical aid, a pair of "X-ray" spectacles that reach parts in censored pornographic films that the authorities would rather people didn't see, reports Reuter.

Hong Kong's television and entertainment licensing authority routinely censors films shown in cinemas and those which are sold or rented in hundreds of video stories. Pornographic videos on legitimate sale or rental routinely

have the more intimate parts of the human anatomy electronically blurred, but video retailers now offer optical decoding devices at between 300 to 700 H. K. dollars (38,50 to 89.75 US). The device, which looks like a pair of night vision goggles,

"Unblur" the censored area. Legislator Peggy Lam, a veteran legislator who once burned pornographic books in a public protest, called for the devices to be banned and said: "One would be able to see the human

parts that they are not supposed to see." There's one drawback for potential censor-busters-while the device unscrambles the censored bits, the rest of the

screen becomes optically blurred.