

BRIFFLY

Baghdad targetted : The US dominated multinational coalition, whose stated goal was to free Kuwait, began that effort by attacking the Iraqi capital of Baghdad to deprive Saddam Hussein's forces of strategic capabilities, the White House said, reports AP.

Reporters asked presidential spokesman Marli Fitzwater Wednesday night (early Thursday GMT) why the United States was striking Baghdad if its objective was to free Kuwait. "The President said the response would be swift and massive," he replied. "We believe that freeing Kuwait requires attacking the Iraqi forces and their command and control capabilities and apparatus. There are many practical reasons why we have to attack Baghdad for those purposes."

President George Bush himself said later in a broadcast speech to the United States: "Our goal is not the conquest of Iraq. It is the liberation of Kuwait."

Tornado's key role : Britain's night flying Tornado bombers are likely to have played a key role in the allied attack on Iraq on Thursday, reports from London says.

Airport sources in Bahrain said low-flying British Tornado bombers took off shortly after the attack began.

Britain has three squadrons of 12 Tornado ground-attack bombers and a squadron of Tornado fighters in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

The Defence Ministry confirmed that British forces went into action with the multinational coalition but refused to give operational details or any report of possible casualties.

Britain has almost 35,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen in the Gulf theatre.

UK forms war cabinet : Prime Minister of Britain John Major set up a war Cabinet Wednesday and troops, light tanks and armed police patrolled London's Heathrow Airport, the busiest international airport in Europe, reports AP.

British officials halted announcements of Major's telephone conversations with US President George Bush, citing the need for secrecy as the likelihood of war with Iraq increased.

The British leader, in office six weeks, assembled a war Cabinet to meet frequently for decisions about the war. It consists of Major, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and Defence Secretary Tom King, an aide said. The full 22-member Cabinet meets once a week.

Home Secretary Kenneth Baker, touring the airport under heightened security against Iraqi-inspired terrorist attacks, said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has "made it clear that if he has the capability and the opportunity, he will attack the allies wherever they are."

China worried : China said on Thursday it was worried and concerned by war in the Gulf and called for restraint from both sides, reports Reuters.

The official New China News Agency in Beijing said China wanted both sides to show restraint "so that the international community can find peaceful means to solve the conflict."

It quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as again calling on Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.

The spokesman said China has clearly stated its opposition to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait since the beginning of the Gulf crisis and urged Iraq to pull out of Kuwait unconditionally... the agency said.

Soviet troops on alert : All forces in the south of the Soviet Union have been put in a state of high military alert because of the Gulf war, chief of the Army General Staff Mikhail Moiseyev announced in Moscow on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Moiseyev told the official Tass news agency: we are watching closely the development of the situation in the middle East.

Tass said President Mikhail Gorbachev was due to make a televised statement to the Soviet people on the fighting shortly.

NATO to defend Turkey : Ambassadors from the 16 countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on Thursday reaffirmed their "determination" to defend Turkey, the only NATO country with a border with Iraq, NATO's Secretary General, Manfred Woerner, said from Brussels, reports AP.

He said, the ambassadors expressed their "solidarity and support for the enforcement of the United Nations Security Council by those whose forces are engaged in the region."

He also expressed his "earnest hope" that hostilities be brought to conclusion as soon as possible, consistent with the full implementation of these resolutions.

NATO has sent over 40 warplanes to Turkey.

Israel's hope : Israel hopes for a "total and rapid success" of the US-led alliance that attacked Iraq early Thursday, the Israeli Foreign Ministry said, reports AP.

"Israel is not involved in the Gulf war," the ministry said in a statement. But it "monitoring developments closely."

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had vowed that Tel Aviv would be his first target in the event of war. But Israel has not been attacked, more than five hours (0000 GMT) after hundreds of allied planes bombed Iraq.

The Foreign Ministry said it hoped for a "total and rapid success" of the allies, and that all their soldiers would return home "safe and sound."

Major loses lead : Prime Minister of Britain John Major's ruling Conservatives have lost their lead over the opposition Labour Party and they now stand neck and neck, according to a new poll, reports Reuters.

An ICM poll published in Thursday Guardian newspaper said Labour and Conservatives polled 43 points each.

This represents a sharp setback for the conservatives, trying to build on a lead they established over Labour when John Major replaced Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in November 1990. Some polls showed the Conservatives suddenly up to nine points ahead of Labour towards the end of November.

Alia postpones poll : Albanian President Ramiz Alia announced Wednesday that he was postponing the country's first free postwar elections until March 31, the official news agency ATA, monitored in Belgrade reported, says AP.

Mr. Alia announced the decision at a meeting between the ruling Communist Party and opposition parties in Tirana, the agency said.

The opposition parties, comprising the Democratic Party, the Republican Party and the Ecology Party, had been pressing for a postponement of the elections, initially set for February 10, to give themselves more time for the election campaign.

Yeltsin predicts crisis : Russian President Boris Yeltsin stressed that "violence against law and the Baltic people will provoke a crisis in Russia and among Russians living in other republics," reports IAN.

He said this in an address to Russian servicemen in Moscow in the Baltic republics following January 13 events in Lithuania.

Upon his arrival in Estonia on January 13, Yeltsin said "using Russian servicemen against citizens in other republics runs counter to the resolution of the extraordinary congress of the Russian Federation and is illegal."

He called on the Russian people living in the Baltic republics to remain calm and "solve all problems through negotiations rather than fighting."

Final report on Pak polls : International observers have said the October elections in Pakistan that ousted former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto were free and fair but the group also urged electoral reform in Pakistan, reports AP.

In its final report, the 40-member team from the National Democratic Institute dismissed charges by Ms. Bhutto of massive vote rigging but noted serious irregularities in pre-election preparations and ballot counting.

It's an on-going operation: Major Iraqi troops given no pause to regroup

LONDON, Jan 17: British Prime Minister John Major said today that allied forces operations against Iraqi targets were continuing and early indications were that they had been very successful, reports Reuters.

Major, speaking to reporters, said there could be no pause "to allow Iraqi forces to regroup."

He said "a very large and continuing" operation had been launched and "early indications are it has been very successful."

Major made his first public comment outside his official 10 Downing Street residence after a briefing by Defence Secretary Tom King.

Major said that he was "not yet aware of any British casualties."

The Gulf war began when hundreds of U.S. British, Saudi and Kuwaiti warplanes attacked Iraqi targets early today.

Major said great care was being taken to minimise possible civilian casualties.

Asked if there would now be a pause in military operations, Major said that if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "was prepared to start withdrawing from Kuwait then that is a separate matter but at the moment this is an ongoing operation."

"I am not prepared to risk the lives of British forces, and I am sure the other commanders feel the same, by a pause that would allow Saddam Hussein to regroup his forces..."

Major said a final decision on using force was taken on Tuesday. He would not be drawn on how long war might last.

Major said of today's raids :

"Thus far the assessments are that a considerable amount of damage has been done. But they are very preliminary assessments."

He hoped it was clear to Iraq that it could not win and that it would swiftly leave Kuwait.

Major confirmed he had not slept and had an open line to the White House. There had

been "very considerable consultations throughout the night."

AFP adds from Dhahran: Fighter-bombers, air refueling jets, jamming planes and aircraft designed to destroy Iraqi air defenses were just part of the massive allied attack on Iraq's military early Thursday.

They took off from bases in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in

the Gulf, which were not identified for security reasons.

A squadron of U.S. fighter-bombers, loaded with bombs and fuel tanks for the long trip north, took off from the largest U.S. airbase in central Saudi Arabia, according to correspondents.

"This is history in the making," said Col. Ray Davies, 44 who watched the fighter pilots take off, the first group leaving at 12:50 a.m. (21:50 GMT).

At least four U.S. F-15 fighter planes took off from an airbase in eastern Saudi Arabia.

In addition, about half a dozen KC-135 refueling jets roared over the Saudi capital, Riyadh, in the first wave of the attack.

More than dozen U.S. air force F4-GS, the so-called Wild Weasels designed to knock out Iraqi air defenses, shot into the moonless night at 1:26 a.m. (22:26 GMT) from a Gulf airbase, correspondents said.

An hour later dozens of maritime F/A-18 fighter-attack jets, accompanied by Brower jamming and intruder fighter aircraft, left the same base.

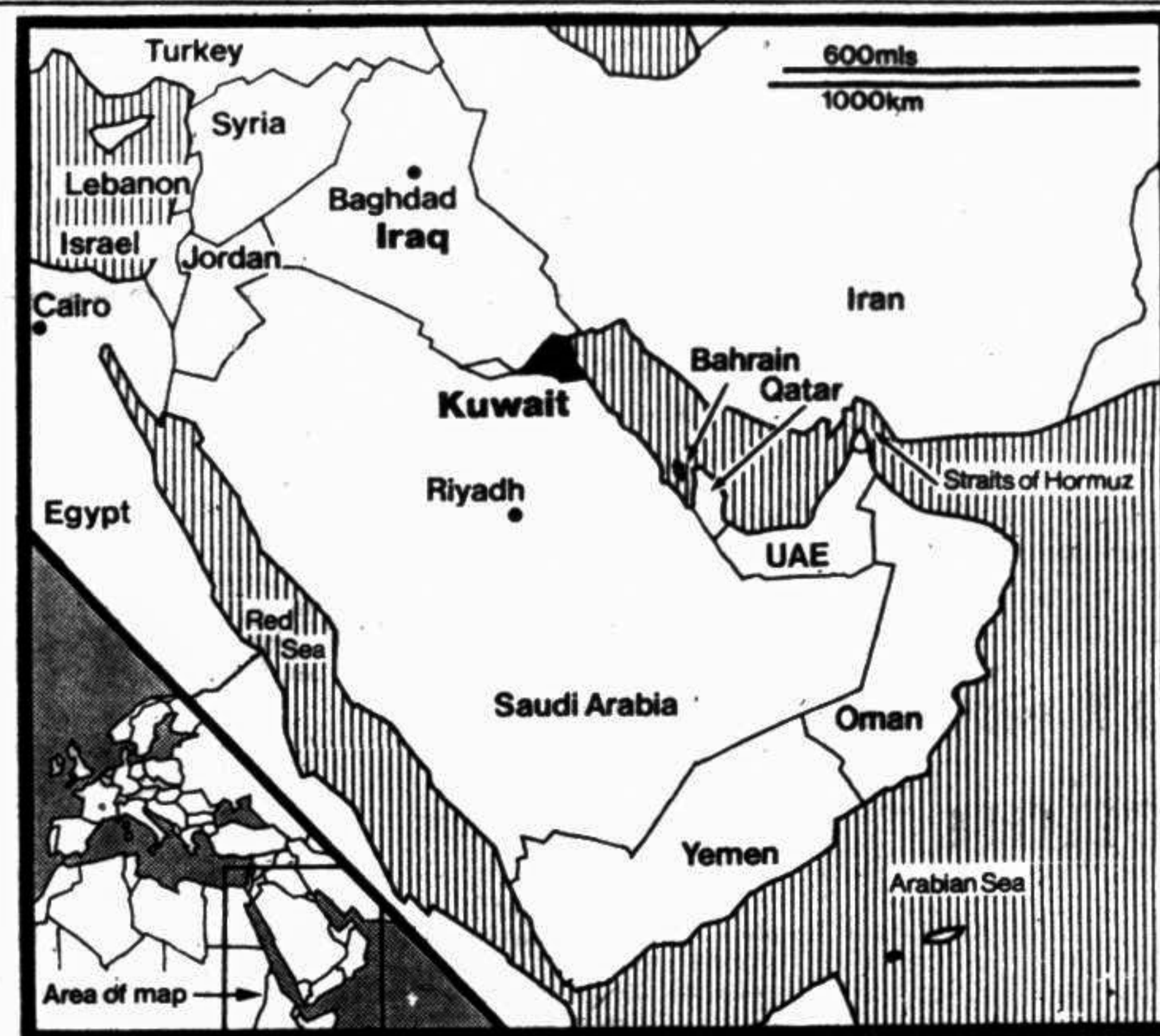
British military officials said Royal Air Forces Tornado GR1 aircraft attacked military targets in Iraq and returned safely.

For security reasons, allied military officials ban reporting on specific locations of bases and troops.

Last Friday, the White House said Desert Shield had cost the United States 10 billion dollars through December 31. Officials said 6 billion dollars had been repaid by allies and 2 billion dollars in further repayments are expected.



US pilot in night goggles in action



War with Iraq to cost US \$86 b

WASHINGTON, Jan 17: War with Iraq could cost the United States from 28 billion to 86 billion dollars, depending on the turns of military uncertainties, according to a congressional report, says AP.

The projection by the Congressional Budget Office, issued Wednesday shortly before the outbreak of war, said a conflict in the Gulf would cost from 17 billion to 35 billion dollars this fiscal year -- depending on its length and the severity of U.S. losses. Fiscal 1991 runs through Sept. 30.

The costs for future years would range between 11 billion and 51 billion dollars, depending on the extent to which spent ammunition and lost equipment is replaced, the agency said.

The CBO cautioned that its estimate should be taken as only a "rough guide" to Opera-

tion Desert Shield's actual cost.

"The duration and intensity of a war would influence costs significantly, but no one can be certain about how long or how intense a Persian Gulf war be," the agency wrote.

CBO's lower cost estimates assumed the war would last less than a month, fought mainly with U.S. air power.

American losses were assumed to include about 3,000 dead and wounded troops, 200 tanks about one-tenth of the tanks there and 100 aircraft, about 8 percent of the planes.

The higher, more pessimistic projection assumed fighting lasting up to six months, with repeated ground attacks. Losses were estimated at 45,000 dead and wounded, 900 tanks and 600 planes.

US briefs UN after blitz

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 17: After launching an allied attack on Baghdad, the United States early Thursday promised that Iraq can avoid further punishment by beginning a complete, unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait.

U.S. Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering made that vow in a private meeting with the Security Council, according to a text of his statement obtained by The Associated Press.

Pickering told the other 14 ambassadors in the consultation, which ended shortly after midnight, that "we hope to bring hostilities to conclusion as soon as possible, consistent with the full implementation of the U.N. Security Council resolutions."

"Iraq can avoid further destruction by unconditional, immediate and complete withdrawal from Kuwait," Pickering said.

"Although coalition forces are striking military and strategic targets in Iraq, our goal is not the destruction, occupation or dismemberment of Iraq," he added. "It is the liberation of Kuwait."

Pickering warned Iraq that its government would be held responsible for any acts of terrorism against America or its allies, or for the destruction of the Kuwaiti oil fields.

In light of the plans of Iraq and groups acting on its behalf to conduct terrorism against American targets throughout the world, we seek your cooperation in enhancing the security of our citizens and facilities," he told the other Security Council members.

U.S. President George Bush

called Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar before war-planes blasted Baghdad to tell him allied forces were about to enforce the U.N. resolution demanding that Iraq pull out of Kuwait.

Pickering and his counterparts from Britain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which spearheaded the attack, informed other Security Council members of the steps their countries had taken Wednesday.

There was no official public Security Council session, and none was scheduled for Thursday. The Security Council Resolution 678, passed Nov. 29, authorized U.N. members of use "all necessary means" to drive Iraq out of Kuwait if

Baghdad did not withdraw by Jan. 15. The attack came 17 hours after the deadline expired.

It was the first time since the Korean War that members of the United Nations launched a military attack against a state that has defied U.N. resolutions.

Just 24 hours before the attack, Perez de Cuellar appealed to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops, promising that if the retreat began, no country would attack Iraq or its forces.

He also promised that the nations of the world would promote a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement, including addressing the Arab-

Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question, a key Iraqi demand. Baghdad never replied to the offer.

Outside U.N. headquarters, about 5,000 protesters rallied against the war. Police sealed off the avenue and side streets leading to the building to hold back the crowds.

The U.S. ambassador declined to speculate about a possible cease-fire, saying "we are in the process of implementing U.N. resolutions and we believe we should continue until Saddam Hussein complies."

The Secretary-General's spokesman, Francois Guitiani, said Bush notified the Secretary-General "of the attack at

about 2300 GMT, or 50 minutes before it began."

Another report from Geneva adds: The International Committee of the Red Cross appealed Thursday to the Gulf belligerents to respect minimum standards of humane conduct in war to which they are bound.

Even before bombs began falling on Iraq early Thursday, the humanitarian agency said it was ready for an outbreak of hostilities between Iraq and the U.S. organized force in the Gulf.

Fighting "could result in immeasurable suffering for the civilian population," ICRC President Cornelia Sommaruga warned.



IRAQI FRONT — President Saddam Hussein (right) talking to Iraqi soldiers and civilians on January 15 at one of the fronts some hours before the expiry of the UN ultimatum for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. — AFP/UNB photo.

Off the Record

from Agencies

Too early to write Benazir off

LONDON, Jan 17: Benazir Bhutto, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, flew into London Wednesday and said it was too early to write off her political career.

Ms. Bhutto repeated her claim of vote-rigging in October's general elections and this month's national by-elections, which saw her Pakistan People's Party soundly defeated -- and said she was fighting for electoral reform.

"I believe that without electoral reform democracy will be meaningless," Ms. Bhutto told reporters at London's Heathrow airport after her flight from Karachi.

"Most certainly it too early to write me off just yet," Ms. Bhutto is making her first trip outside Pakistan since Aug. 6, when President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed her government -- charging that widespread corruption and political ineptitude had paralyzed parliament.

The 37-year-old leader of the left-leaning PPP maintained Wednesday that recent elections had involved "such widespread rigging that it made a mockery of the people's right to franchise."

Aides said Ms. Bhutto, who is travelling with her son Balawal, 2, and daughter Bakhtawar, 11 months, will spend a few days in London before travelling to the United States where she will give a series of lectures.

Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, 38, and a member of parliament, has been jailed in Karachi since early October for alleged involvement in the kidnapping and extortion of a British businessman.

Pig heart in a human !

SAVANNAH, (Georgia) Jan 17: A pig's heart could be transplanted into a human before the end of the decade, a prominent organ transplant researcher said on Wednesday at a conference of the American Heart Association.

Dr Jeffrey Platt of the University of Minnesota told heart specialists that using pig hearts rather than the hearts of species more closely related to humans, such as monkeys, would offer important advantages.

He said researchers had learned a lot about the immune system of both pigs and humans since the tragic death in the mid-80s of baby Fae who died after receiving a transplanted Baboon heart in southern California.

Plant said viruses such as AIDS could be spread via transplants of organs from closely related species such as monkeys but this would not pose a problem in species that are distantly related.

Another advantage of pig hearts would be that they come in a variety of sizes, "and not only sizes suitable for adults."

Female killers rare

OCALA, (Florida) Police say a prostitute has confessed to stalking highways in central Florida and killing seven middle-aged men over the past year.

The woman, identified as Aileen Watrous, 34, was arrested a week ago on an unrelated charge, said a police spokesman here.

"She worked as a prostitute ... to lure her victims," the spokesman said. "I think it was her hatred for men," he said referring to a possible motive.

LTTE uses 3 ships to ferry arms

COLOMBO, Jan 17: An opposition politician informed the government Sunday that three cargo vessels owned by Tamil rebels were being used to ship arms to the island, reports AP.

Laksman Jayakody, a leading opposition member of Parliament from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, one of Sri Lanka's major political parties, said "the three ships -- Cholan, Cheran and Elizabeth -- owned by the LTTE, have been carrying arms to the island for the past couple of months."

Jayakody said he has given details about the ships and their operations to the government.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is the most powerful and major Tamil separatist group fighting for an independent homeland for members of their minority ethnic community in the north and east.

Jayakody, a former deputy defence minister, said the ships carry cargo to Asian ports and are registered in Singapore and Malaysia.

Local newspapers reported earlier this month that a ship carrying arms for Tamil rebels was detained by Malaysian port authorities.

Jayakody said the ships carrying arms for the rebels could be dropping anchor in the northern seas off Sri Lanka territorial waters and then transferring the arms to smaller fishing boats.

"It is a simple exercise. Once the vessels are registered cargo carriers they have a right to ply shipping routes anywhere," said Jayakody. They can "legally drop anchor off any lonely coast," he added.

A Defence Ministry spokesman who did not wish to be identified said the information given by Jayakody is being thoroughly investigated.

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 18, the 18th day of 1991. There are 347 days left in the year, reports UNB.

Highlights in history on this date:

1520 - King Christian II of Denmark and Norway defeats Swedes at lake Asunden and subsequently conquers Sweden.

1701 - Brandenburg's Frederick III is crowned Frederick I, King of Prussia.

1913 - Greek and Turkish naval forces battle off Tenedos Isle.

1915 - Japan issues secret ultimatum to China regarding rights in Shantung and Manchuria.

1918 - Russian Constitu-

tional Assembly opens in Petrograd.

1952 - Anti-British riots break out in Egypt.

1963 - Government of Charles de Gaulle in France insists that Britain be barred from European Common Market.

1968 - United States and Soviet Union agree on draft treaty to control nuclear weapons.

1973 - United States and North Vietnam announce that negotiators will meet to complete text of peace pact.

1976 - France expels at least 40 Soviet officials on grounds they have worked as spies.