



ISLAMABAD: Benazir Bhutto, son Bilwal and husband Asif Ali Zardari at a family function before indictment of the husband of former Pakistan Prime Minister.

Zardari faces death penalty

ISLAMABAD, Mar 7: Asif Ali Zardari, husband of Pakistan's deposed prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, faces a possible death penalty in a mass murder case as the authorities here have accused him of ordering terrorist attacks on the supporters of a rival political party in August last year, reports UPI. Police said 29 people were killed when unidentified gunmen attacked supporters of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement in three different places in Karachi on August 22. The gunmen, the police said, belonged to Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party and took their orders from Zardari. Zardari is already an accused in a separate kidnapping

and robbery case in which a verdict is expected early next month. Hearing in the mass murder case against Zardari, Syed Qaim Ali Shah, a former chief minister of Sindh Province, Amr Hyderabad Kazmi, a former minister in the Bhutto government, Masroor Ahsan, Ali Mohammad Hingora, MP from Bhutto's People's Party. The prosecution's main witness in the case is Zahid Saeed, one of the accused, who recorded a statement before a magistrate after his arrest saying that the pilot for the terrorist shooting was hatched at the residence of Asif Ali Zardari, who issued the instructions, and later all the terrorists reported back to him.

BRRIEFLY

Fahd meets Major in Riyadh :

Saudi Arabia's King Fahd met in Riyadh late Wednesday with British Prime Minister John Major who had earlier visited newly-liberated Kuwait, Saudi television reported, says AFP. Saudi Oil Minister Hisham Nazer attended the audience but the television gave no details on the topics discussed by the two leaders. In Kuwait, Mr. Major — on the first visit by an Allied leader to Kuwait since fighting ended — met with Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah and said he found damage to the war-ravaged emirate "immensely depressing and distressing." "I saw the appalling sight of that dreadful black cloud that hovers almost as though it's near perpetual night," he said, referring to the smoke from oil well fires set by departing Iraqi troops.

3,700 Iraqi tanks destroyed :

Allied forces destroyed, damaged or captured 3,700 of Iraq's 4,700 tanks in the six-week Gulf war, a senior US officer said Wednesday, reports AFP. US Marine Brigadier General Richard Neal also said the Allies destroyed, damaged or captured 2,600 of Iraq's 3,110 artillery pieces and 2,400 of 2,870 armoured vehicles in chasing Baghdad's forces out of Kuwait. Brig. Gen. Neal, Deputy Director of operations for the US Central Command, said mines and bad weather were hampering attempts to assess battlefield damage a week after the end of hostilities. "That is not the final count," he said.

Army targets in Riga damaged :

Three powerful bombs damaged military targets, including a residence for soldiers and their families, in the Latvian capital Riga governing officials at the Latvian parliament said Wednesday, reports AFP. Nobody was wounded in the explosions one of which destroyed a staircase in a building housing Soviet army officers studying at the Aleksnai Military Academy and their families. A second bomb damaged a bridge leading to the biggest military installation near the capital, in the village of Adajai. The third blast an accommodation used by the Latvian Interior Ministry caused no damage said the Latvian officials contacted by telephone.

Iraq expels foreign newsmen :

All foreign journalists have been ordered to leave Iraq within 48 hours and told by Baghdad not to return for at least 10 days, Cable News Network (CNN) reported Wednesday from Baghdad, says AFP. CNN correspondent Peter Arnett said he had been told that he and his colleagues had been told to leave Baghdad by Friday 0700 BST. Mr. Arnett said no reason for the decision had been given, but he speculated it could be linked to the appointment of Ali Hassan Al-Majid, a cousin of President Saddam Hussein, as Minister of the Interior. Mr. Majid has a reputation of being a hardliner.

Arabs win European support :

eight Arab allies in the anti-Iraq coalition won European support for a post-war Gulf peacekeeping force but drew criticism from Iran, reports Reuter. Britain, France and three European Community foreign ministers welcomed the security plan announced on Wednesday by Egypt, Syria and the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). But Iran, the strongest Gulf country after Iraq's crushing defeat by the US-led coalition last week, said the security pact would harm all regional states. Iran, which stayed neutral in the six-week war against its former enemy, says regional security is exclusively the job of Gulf States and it wants to play a role.

Kuwaitis await govt reform :

Kuwaitis who suffered under Iraq occupation are putting the ruling Al-Sabah family on notice that promised elections are only the first step in a long list of needed reforms, reports AP. "The Kuwaitis paid a lot for this crisis. Now they are very aware that we need solutions to build a strong Kuwait," said Dr. Saad Al-Hashim, dean of education at Kuwait University. Forced to fend for themselves when their leaders fled, many Kuwaitis who stayed behind are no longer willing to put up with the governing monarchy. "The royal family is a symbol of Kuwait. They should be there, but the people of Kuwait should rule now," said Safa Jafar, a 30-year-old Kuwaiti woman who helped smuggle weapons past check points.

Fahd vows strict Islamic rule

RIYADH, Mar 7 : King Fahd of Saudi Arabia has vowed that his country will remain faithful to strict Islamic Teachings Governing social and political life in the Kingdom, reports AFP. "I proclaim in the name of God that the Islamic religion will continue to be the basis and foundation" for Saudi political activity. Saudi Arabia throughout the Gulf crisis has been denounced by Iraq and certain Islamic groups in Arab countries for having allowed hundreds of thousands of Western forces—notably from the United States—to deploy on its territory. The presence of the non-Muslim troops—including women soldiers—was seen by many analysts as heralding changes in the Kingdom's austere Islamic traditions. "The fate of all tyrants is inescapable," he added.

Mahatma is a semicolon in history, we're not even comma: Shekhar

NEW DELHI, Mar 7 : Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, who resigned after less than four months in office, said in an interview broadcast Thursday his political future is secure, reports AP. "The future is quite secure for me, but security of my future is not the security of India's future," he said in an interview to PTI-TV. The interview was recorded a few hours after Chandra Shekhar resigned Wednesday, accusing Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party of constantly manipulating his minority government. The resignation has set the stage for mid-term national polls, the second India will face in a 1-12 years. Chandra Shekhar will remain prime minister until President Ramaswamy Venkataraman announces the elections, likely to be held in May. Wednesday's developments ended weeks of an undignified show of power by the Congress Party, which had propped up Chandra Shekhar's 54-member Janata Dal-Socialist Party in Parliament with 211 members. All major Indian newspapers Thursday made scathing attacks about the Congress Party's actions. "Adopting a Pavlovian technique of harassment followed by forgiveness, the Congress has been driving the government to a state of nervous collapse," Indian Express, a national daily said. "What is it that Mr Gandhi wants out of what seems to be reasonable men as childish pranks," the independent newspaper asked in a front-page editorial. The Hindu, a conservative Madras-based daily, said in its front-page editorial: "The humiliating paces it was put through by its supporting party... left absolutely no room for this government to believe that it was an independent and credible entity." Chandra Shekhar's resignation was precipitated after the Congress Party boycotted Parliament for the second day Wednesday over the alleged surveillance of Gandhi's New Delhi house by two policemen from the neighboring state of Haryana. The Congress Party demanded the dismissal of the government of Haryana, which is run by the Janata Dal-Socialist Party. To dramatize their point, Congress Party legislators stayed away from Parliament's Lower House, leaving the government powerless to push through even minor votes. "I thought it was better to resign than to accept something that was not proper," Chandra Shekhar said in the television interview. But, he said, he has no regrets about quitting. "No person is a full stop (period) in history. Even great people like Mahatma Gandhi are semicolons. We are not even commas," he said. "I am quite satisfied about my political future," he said. He said he would not have liked the country to face elections so soon, "but we don't have any alternative." Election seem a virtual certainty because Chandra Shekhar's cabinet and all major parties want them. The president's post is largely ceremonial, and he nominally follows the Cabinet's advice. Constitutional experts say that since the Congress Party has not formally withdrawn support, Chandra Shekhar's government still has the authority to ask the president to call elections. Chandra Shekhar took office Nov. 10 after he formed the Janata Dal-Socialist Party with a breakaway group from former Prime Minister V.P. Singh's Janata Dal Party.

Hundreds killed in Basra fighting Crack commandos deployed on Baghdad streets

AMMAN, Mar 7 : Iraq has put crack commandos on the streets of Baghdad and thrown up checkpoints outside the city in a sign of fear that rebellion in the provinces could spread to the capital, reports Reuter. Red-betted Republican Guard special forces took to the streets last weekend. Their presence an ominous reminder to city residents embittered by war of the response to any show of poen opposition to President Saddam Hussein. Travellers on the road to Jordan on Wednesday were stopped at the edge of Baghdad by nervous soldiers and subjected to a thorough search. Two more checkpoints followed within five km (three miles). Witnesses saw seven trucks of troops enter the city centre on Monday across the Al-Ahrar bridge over the Tigris river. Senior members of the ruling Baath Party, whose headquarters was bombed by Iraq in air raids on the last night of the Gulf War, have also been placed on alert, informed sources say. The security crackdown coincided with reports outside Iraq that Saddam's trusted Republican Guard were crushing a revolt among majority Shi'ite Muslims in the south and in northern Kurdish towns following Iraq's rout in the Gulf War. Another report from Safwan (US-held Iraq) adds : Government forces were reported closing in on rebel's hold up in Iraq's second city of Basra, but emigre opposition leaders on Wednesday urged them to fight on, report Reuter. Five days street fighting have killed hundreds, according to refugees reaching this border town. The army loyal to President Saddam Hussein appeared to be in control of the city "except for small pockets of resistance," said a British resident of Kuwait who had just spent nearly two months in Basra's largest jail. Borek Matthews, 58, said that unless resistance fighters received outside help they stood no chance against the heavily-armed Saddam loyalists backed by the elite Republican Guard.

Refugees described the revolt as a Shi'ite Muslim uprising against the rule of Saddam who is a Sunni Muslim from northern Iraq. Some said Iran was helping the rebels. At the same time the Tehran government publicly pledged not to interfere in the conflict and urged other states in the region to keep their hands off. In Beirut, an Iraqi opposition leader urged the rebels to fight on until Saddam falls and called for a mass uprising and Amara.

In their support. "I urge the insurrection to continue until Saddam's regime falls," said Mohammed Taqi Musarressi, head of the Islamic Action Organisation (IAO). The Islamic Action Organisation is a pro-Iranian Shi'ite Muslim fundamentalist group and one of the opposition factions in the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI). Some 250 Iraqi dissidents, including Shi'ites, Kurds, communists, former military commanders and dissidents

from the ruling Baath Party, are due to meet on Sunday in Beirut. In a separate statement, the IAO said a bloody confrontation was under way in Iraq and many Iraqi soldiers had joined the revolt, which had spread to eight towns and cities including Baghdad. It urged the world and especially the Lebanese people to do all they could to contribute to a speedy victory for the rebels. The Tehran-based Sairi denied reports that Saddam's forces had retaken Basra.

Rajiv declines to form govt, calls for polls

NEW DELHI, Mar 7 : The resignation of India's 4-month-old government almost enabled former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to move out of the shadows and get old job back without a general election, reports AP. Gandhi's Congress Party holds the largest number of seats in a hung Parliament and was in line to be asked to form the government after Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar's resignation Wednesday. But party leaders meeting at Gandhi's home rejected the possibility and called for elections. "Congress has always taken the position that it will like to come back to power by the people's mandate," party spokesman M.J. Akbar said. "That position remains the same."

At least four major decisions in recent weeks, including the refusal to offer refueling facilities to US military aircraft flying to and from the Gulf, were taken by Chandra Shekhar's government at the behest of the Congress, Indian newspapers reported. The other decisions included the dismissal of the Tamil Nadu state government, the postponement of the annual budget and the sacking of Foreign Minister Vidya Charan Shukla and four other ministers. In the end, the parting of ways between Chandra Shekhar and Gandhi was bitter. The prime minister ac-

public display of ruling by proxy. cused the Congress Party of betraying his trust, and said its actions were manipulative and irresponsible. Gandhi aides said the support extended to Chandra Shekhar was an experiment and predicted their party would win the next elections. "No other political party other than the Congress can provide a stable government," party spokesman Akbar said. "All these mishmash experiments only create instability, confusion, economic mismanagement and various forms of non-governance." Gandhi, a 46-year-old former airline pilot, is heir to the political dynasty of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, both former prime ministers.

Off the Record

A nation of apples, pears

SYDNEY : The muscular, bronzed Australian male and his nubile, bikini-clad companion are endangered species, reports Reuter. As Australia, dubbed the lucky country because of its laid-back lifestyle, becomes more affluent, its inhabitants are changing shape. A visit to Bondi beach today will reveal that the typical Aussie Adonis resembles a beach ball, while his venus often looks more like a beached whale in her undersized swimsuit. "The image of the fit, healthy, suntanned Australian has been based on a slim period of history — the fifties — and it can no longer be supported," said Gary Egger, head of the centre for Health Promotion and Research. "People are not eating any more (food) but because of technology and mechanisation they are exercising a lot less and are getting fatter," he said. "Men are genetically pre-disposed to putting weight on at the waist and women around the hips, so we now have a nation of apples and pears." The National Heart Foundation says 60 per cent of Australian men and 50 per cent of women over the age of 35 are overweight or obese, as are one quarter of children under 16. Medical researchers say Australians have achieved their rotundity by putting on two or three extra kilograms since the 1960s without a corresponding increase in height.

Now Canadian women do it !

OTTAWA : Women across Canada are being charged with a dramatically large number of crimes than was the case 30 years ago, Statistic Canada reports, says PTI. In a report on women and crime, the official agency says that in 1962, only eight per cent of adults charged with crime were women but last year that figure was 15 per cent. And whereas 843 women were charged with violent crimes in 1962, last year that figure was 9,912. In the same period last year, violent crimes relating to men were 90, 153, rising by 72, 173 as compared to 1962, a ninefold increase as compared to women. Statistics report says that all told, women are generally charged with less violent and less serious crimes than men. For example, last year, 40 per cent of the women charged were for shoplifting, and among those sent to jail for Federal offences only 3 per cent were women. "Although a relatively few number of women are crime suspects, their involvement in crime has increased substantially over the past three decades," the report said.



The Congress-I is using Chandra Shekhar as a political duster that can be discarded at any time —VP Singh



THEY AGREED TO DISAGREE? Chandra Sekhar and Congress-I President Rajiv Gandhi exchanging greetings before a closed-door meeting in New Delhi one day before the Indian Prime Minister resigned.

US asks Thai junta to restore civilian government

WASHINGTON, Mar 7 : US officials on Wednesday called on leaders of Thailand's military coup to quickly restore civilian government but said the United States wanted to maintain close ties to Bangkok, reports Reuter. Thailand has long been a close friend and ally of the United States and remains so today. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon said at a hearing of the House of Representatives East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee. "It is on that basis that we have and will continue to urge that process to return democratic government in Thailand

be as rapid as possible. The actors taken by the military leaders since the coup are in this direction. It appears that the national peacekeeping council recognises that an early return to democratic, civilian government in Thailand is necessary," he said. The United States suspended all military and economic aid to Thailand after the February 23 coup. But a Defence Department official said Washington wanted to maintain strong security ties. "It is important to understand that we do not seek to degrade the security relationship with Thailand."