

BRIEFLY

Chinese Gen gets Pak award :

Pakistan President Ghulam Ishaq Khan Tuesday awarded one of the country's top military awards to visiting Chinese General, an official statement said, reports AFP.

The award was conferred on General Xu Xin, the Deputy Chief of General Staff of the people's Liberation Army in recognition of his "personal efforts" to promote relations between China and Pakistan and their Armed Forces, the statement said.

Gen. Xu Xin has been a "sincere and close friend of Pakistan and its army," it said, adding that cooperation between the two Armed Forces had "further strengthened the bonds of friendship that already exist between the two neighbouring countries."

Philippines needs strong leader :

Eduardo Cojuangco, President Corason Aquino's estranged cousin and political opponent, said Wednesday the Philippines needs a strong leader who can pull the country out of crisis and impose law and order, reports AP.

Conjuangco said Mrs. Aquino's successor would "be dumped with a bankrupt corporation and... would have to pick up the pieces and put it back together and make it run once again."

"We need leaders who could organize our people, motivate and inspire them to take on the burden of rebuilding this nation; leaders who could form governments which in turn could impose order and restore stability so that we could live peaceful and eventually prosperous lives," Conjuangco said.

Scuds hit Mujahideen base :

Mujahideen said Wednesday that Scud missiles slammed into guerrilla positions around the besieged garrison town of Khost in southern Afghanistan, killing scores of people, reports AP.

At least 35 Scuds have been launched from the Afghan capital of Kabul in the past week, said Najibullah Lafraye, information minister of the government-in-exile headquartered in Pakistan.

Lafraye said Scud missiles, with a range of 100 to 175 miles (160 to 280 kilometers), landed inside the town limits of Khost and killed scores of civilians. He also said 700 families had fled the town of about 30,000 since the latest guerrilla assault began last Saturday.

Iraq annuls Kuwait's annexation:

The Iraqi Parliament Wednesday annulled its annexation of Kuwait, the Iraqi News Agency (INA) reported, says AFP.

The decision to annex Kuwait was taken August 7, five days after Iraqi troops invaded the oil-rich Emirate. The report was monitored in Cyprus.

Bid to hijack Soviet plane foiled :

A Soviet parliamentarian foiled a hijacking when he grappled with a 20-year-old man armed with a knife and teargas canister who demanded to be flown abroad, Izvestia newspaper in Moscow reported Wednesday, reports Reuters.

The paper said Deputy Nikolai Sazonov, an engineer at the Gijani Kamaz truck plant in Tataria, came to the aid of two stewardesses in the incident aboard a flight from Moscow to Naberezhnye Chelny on March 14.

"Without thinking, Nikolai rushed to the aid of the women and wrestled with the Bandit, who it later turned out was armed with a knife and teargas canister," Izvestia said.

PNG to recruit 5,000 Gurkhas

PORT MORESBY, Mar 21 : Papua New Guinea (PNG) is considering recruiting up to 5,000 Nepalese Gurkhas to set up a National Guard to fight a crime wave in the South Pacific nation, a government document said.

A cabinet submission to the Papua New Guinea government on the establishment of a National Guard said the force should be given a 50 million US dollar annual budget.

The Gurkhas would be recruited from Hong Kong to train youths in military and civic work for the next five years, said the document, which was leaked to local media.

The document said the National Guard should have autonomous financial powers and be headed by a newly created minister for the Interior.

Senior military officials rejected the proposal today, saying it would create a force stronger than the country's defence and police forces, which each number 3,000.

"We are going to fight this, even if it means going to court," a senior defence force officer told Reuters.

"What is the motive behind setting up a paramilitary force outside the constitutionally established defence and police

forces? We are going to train these people who may form the nucleus of an armed uprising later," he said.

Prime Minister Rabbie Namaitu said last Thursday he wanted to set up a National Guard, in which youths aged between 13 and 19 would spend one year gaining military and civic training, as part of a series of measures to combat crime.

Other measures announced by Namaitu included a nine-hour night curfew, which comes into effect on Thursday, reintroduction of the death penalty and tattooing of criminals.

Papua New Guinea Forest Minister Karl Stack, who made the submission to cabinet, said on Wednesday the government would need to seek foreign aid to help finance the National Guard.

The proposed commander of the National Guard, ex-Defence Force Commander Ian Graville, told Reuters on Wednesday he had been given four weeks to draw up details of its establishment.

Under the plan, 1,200 Gurkhas could be recruited in the first year to train 18,000 conscripted youths.

Lithuanian guard wounded in troops' shooting

MOSCOW, Mar 21: Soviet "black beret" commandos opened fire on small bus carrying Lithuanian border guards, wounding at least one, the Lithuanian government press office said Wednesday, reports AP.

Meanwhile, nearly 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) away in Georgia, Georgian and Ossetian groups that have been fighting pitched battles with shells, grenades and machine guns agreed to a ceasefire, the Soviet news agency Tass reported Wednesday.

However, there were also reports of continued violence in the South Ossetia section of Georgia, with a nurse and a boy injured in an attack on a clinic. Twenty-five Ossetian bus passengers reportedly were taken hostage.

The shooting in Lithuania began when the Lithuanian bus approached a roadblock set up by the "black beret" troops on a street in Vilnius and refused to stop. The jeeps chased and fired at the bus until it stopped.

The fighting in South Ossetia has cut off the region's capital of Tskhinvali, leaving it without power or communications with the outside world. The Interior Ministry spokesman said the Ministry had arranged a meeting between leaders of the Georgian and South Ossetian paramilitary groups who agreed to the ceasefire.

The fighting was sparked when Ossetian activists moved to separate their homeland from Georgia.

Tehran, Riyadh to restore ties next week

NICOSIA, Mar 21 : Iran and Saudi Arabia said Wednesday they will restore diplomatic relations next week, a move likely to raise Tehran's standing in the Gulf and promote regional security, reports AP.

Simultaneous announcements in Riyadh and Tehran said ties between the Gulf's two largest countries will be reestablished Tuesday.

The announcement followed a surprise meeting Monday in Oman between Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Saud al-Faisal.

Tehran radio also said the two sides agreed on the number of Iranian pilgrims who will be allowed to visit holy cities in Saudi Arabia on the June Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage.

The broadcast, monitored in Nicosia, did not give details. But the state-run Tehran Times said Monday that Riyadh had agreed to allow 110,000 Iranians to make the pilgrimage, more than double the number allowed under a Saudi quota.

Oman, which mediated the Tehran-Saudi rift, said the early resumption of ties was "a very important step on the road to fruitful cooperation among all regional states for the sake of stabilizing security and peace in the Gulf region and for mobilizing wider efforts for inter-Islamic cooperation."

The agreement coincided with Tehran officially reopening its embassy in Amman, ending a decade of acrimony with Jordan, and underscoring Tehran's commitment to mending relations with its Arab neighbours.

Earlier this month the Iranians exchanged interest sections with Egypt, condemned by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian spiritual leader, for its ties with Israel.

Rebels destroy food reserves : US accused of bid to starve Iraqis

BAGHDAD, Mar 21 : An Iraqi Cabinet Minister said Wednesday that rebels had destroyed strategic food reserves, and accused the United States of trying to starve it by continuing an eight-month-old economic embargo, reports Reuters.

Trade Minister Mohammed Mehdi Saleh also told a Baghdad news conference that scores of government officials had been killed by Shi'ite Muslim and Kurdish rebels against President Saddam Hussein.

This was the first official reference to the Kurdish rebellion in the north, where rebels claim to control all of Kurdistan Province except the city of Mosul.

Saddam said last Saturday that his troops had crushed a separate rebellion in the south, mainly by Shi'ite Muslims, but there have been subsequent reports of continued fighting in several towns.

"All belongings of the Ministry of Trade, of foodstuffs and

other materials were destroyed, burned or looted in the southern governorates and in Kurdistan," Saleh said.

"The acts of sabotage, looting and fires is the third chapter in the aims of the American-Zionist aggression against Iraq," he said.

"It started with the economic blockade, followed by the military aggression and then the acts of sabotage."

The United Nations Security Council imposed a trade ban on Iraq shortly after its August 2 invasion of Kuwait.

Iraq, suffering chronic food shortages, is now calling on the Council to lift the blockade.

"The west's pretext for imposing the blockade is no longer valid after Iraq withdrew from Kuwait," Saleh said.

"Why is the blockade still in force? The aim is clear. It is to destroy and starve the Iraqi people because they are outside American imperialist hegemony."

"Could the British or American people accept that their children remain without milk for eight months? This contradicts the simplest human rights," he said.

Saleh criticised US and European media for describing the rebellion as an uprising by the people to topple the regime.

"Their (rebels) aims are clear. It is to loot and destroy the foodstuffs of the people and destroy government institutions and hospitals that serve the people," he said.

"All food stores, including grain silos were completely destroyed and they can no longer be used as storage houses."

Saleh said food losses included more than 70,000 tonnes of flour, 61,000 tonnes of rice, 40,000 tonnes of sugar, nearly 4,000 tonnes of cooking oil, 3,160 tonnes of powdered milk for babies, and 272 tonnes of tea.

He said only Jordan, among

a handful of Arab countries that sympathised with Baghdad, had sent adequate food supplies to Iraq during the blockade.

Iran, he added, had sent only two truckloads of food, including some powdered milk whose consumption dates had expired.

AFP from Nicosia adds : Iraqi troops crushed an anti-government revolt in the central town of Khanaqin, Iraqi radio reported overnight, as rebels said they had captured a key oil city further north.

The United States warned Iraq against using helicopters to attack insurgents, saying such operations would be considered a threat to coalition forces.

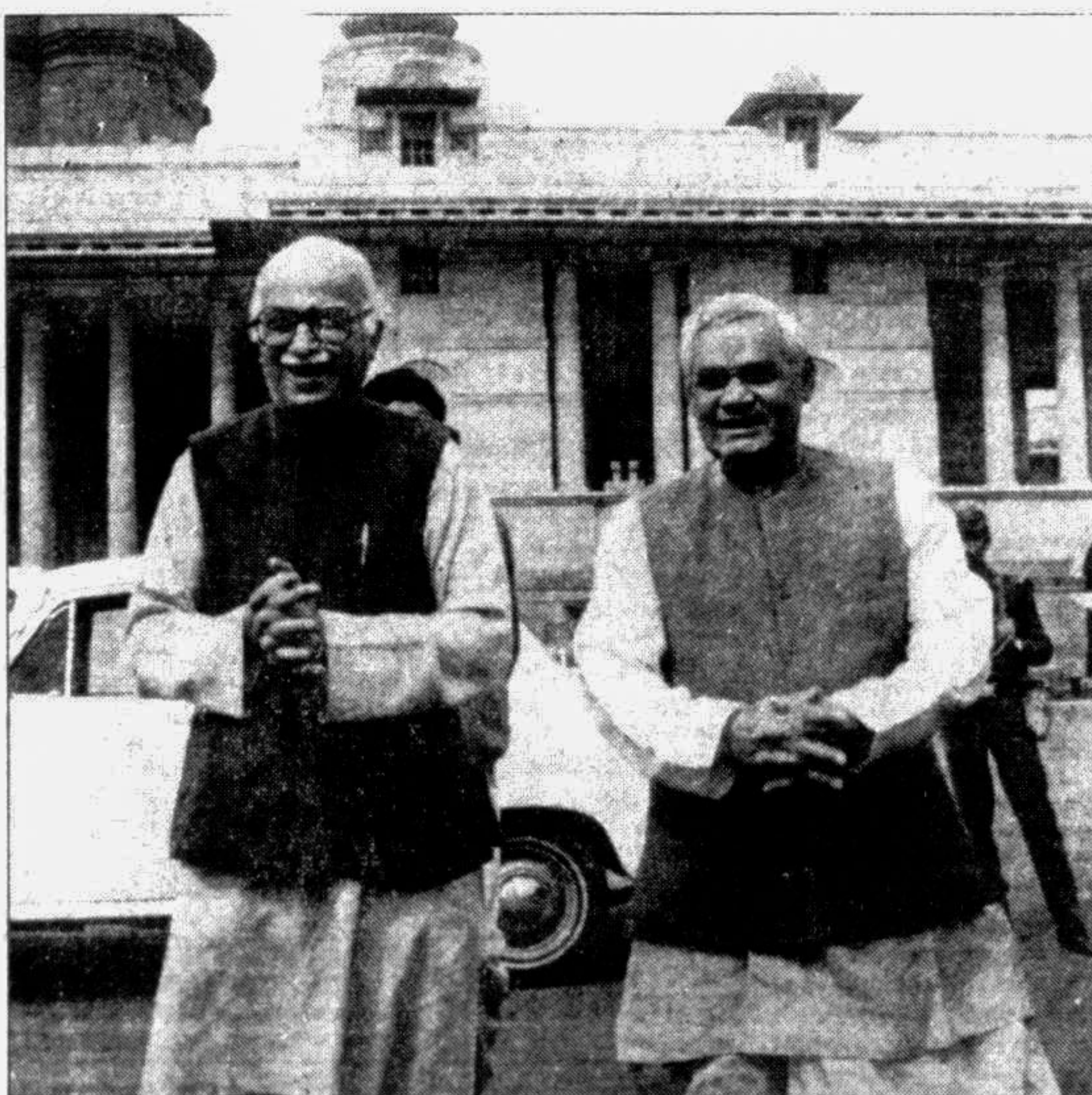
The International Committee of the Red Cross reported dire food shortages in Iraq and United Nations Under-Secretary General Amrithi Ahlissari, who has just toured the country, spoke of "dramatic" humanitarian conditions there.

The head of the World Health Organisation, Hiroshi Nakajima, disclosed after a trip to Iran that he had seen Iraqi refugee children with burns out of use of napalm by Iraqi government troops against rebels.

Doctors treating the children have not yet confirmed the origin of the wounds, but insurgent groups have accused troops loyal to President Saddam Hussein of using napalm, chemical weapons, phosphorous bombs, Katyusha rockets and missile to quell the unrest.

Iraqi radio, quoting a senior official from the ruling Baath Party in Baghdad, said Khanaqin was now "secure and safe" after troops seized it in battles with Shi'ite rebels.

"Popular forces" and the "will of the masses" crushed the anti-government insurgents, the report said, adding that "mobs" had destroyed property, looted and burned food stores and damaged the general hospital.



New Delhi : BJP leaders LK Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee outside the Rashtrapati Bhavan after meeting the President R Venkataraman.

Saddam lied to me about invasion plan : Glaspie

WASHINGTON, Mar 21: Ambassador April Glaspie said Wednesday Iraqi President Saddam Hussein lied to her in denying he would invade Kuwait, and the US mistake was that "we did not realise he was stupid, enough to go through with the attack, reports AP.

Breaking an eight-month public silence with bluntly undiplomatic language, the American envoy told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that she had repeatedly warned the Baghdad government that its grievances against Kuwait would have to be settled peacefully.

And in a meeting with Sad-

dam on July 25, he sounded conciliatory and asked her personally to deliver to President George Bush the message that Iraq had no intention of invading its oil-rich neighbour, she said. A week later Iraqi troops stormed into Kuwait.

"It was deliberate deception on a major scale," Glaspie told a packed hearing of the Senate Committee. She added that Saddam had made "an extraordinary miscalculation."

Glaspie has been pummeled by man analysts and Democratic politicians for statements to Saddam that they say could be seen as giving a go-ahead to invade Kuwait. In particular, they have cited an

Iraqi transcript in which she is quoted as saying the United States had "no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait."

But Glaspie disputed the accuracy of the transcript, saying it was selectively edited, and committee Democrats seemed to accept that.

Glaspie said the United States may have been lulled by the prevalence of border disputes between Arab countries without major wars and by the knowledge that other Gulf states were poised to make concessions to Iraq on the disputed Ramallah oil fields

Jovic withdraws resignation

BELGRADE, Mar 21 : Yugoslav President Borisav Jovic withdrew his decision to resign, easing the country's worst crisis since World War II, reports Reuters.

His announcement, five days after he said he would quit, gave back to the ruling collective presidency the power to make decisions and cleared the way for urgent crisis talks among the country's top leaders today.

Jovic, a Serbian Communist, accepted a vote by the Parliament of his native republic, Serbia, to reject his resignation.

"It's up to you to decide and I respect any decision you make," Jovic, 63, told the Communist-dominated Serbian Parliament, which had elected him to the presidency.

Jovic triggered a constitutional crisis by saying he would resign last Friday when he failed to persuade the eight-member presidency to accept army plans to impose emergency measures after months of tension in the multi-ethnic country.

Rival republics rejected Jovic's request despite several days of anti-Communist demonstrations in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, and clashes with police which left two dead and scores injured.

Three other members of the presidency — the highest constitutional body and commander-in-chief of the army — quit or were removed after his resignation, stripping it of a quorum and its decision-making powers.

Off the Record

Noriega finds God

MIAMI: Toppled Panama-nian strongman Manuel Antonio Noriega, who is in a US prison awaiting trial on drug-trafficking charges, seems to have found God, according to a baptist newspaper, reports Reuters.

The Florida baptist witness reported in the edition dated March 21 that Noriega, whose trial is scheduled for June 24, has become a born-again Christian.

"A tiny new testament sent through the mail opened the door for two southern baptist evangelists to lead Manuel Noriega to profess faith in Christ," said the article.

Evangelists Rudy Hernandez and Cliff Brannon have visited Noriega four times at the Metropolitan Correctional Centre, Near Miami, and a group of baptist pastors has been praying for him, the church newspaper said.

Brannon and Noriega have corresponded since the former dictator entered jail in January 1990 and Noriega has been studying the scriptures.

When Noriega surrendered in January 1990 following the US invasion of Panama that toppled him from power, stories abounded about his interest in voodoo. He was said to wear red underwear to ward off evil spirits.

His lawyer, Frank Rubino, was not available for comment but recently told reporters that Noriega takes time from trial preparation to read a Spanish-language Bible.

Rubino and prosecution spokesmen told the paper Noriega's reported conversion would not affect legal strategies.

Schwarzkopf gets praise from Soviet counterpart

LENINGRAD (USSR) : Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, allied commander in the Gulf War, is receiving praise from an unusual source, the long-time superpower adversary the Soviet Union, reports AP.

Marshal Dmitri Yazov, the Soviet defense minister, told reporters in Leningrad Wednesday he admired the American general's battlefield prowess.

"There is a lot we can learn from the organization of coordination of states with different national languages and weapons in executing

one goal. I can tell that a great skill had to be shown by Gen. Schwarzkopf and his staff officers in simultaneous control of US, French, Syrian and Egyptian troops," Yazov said.

Yazov defended Soviet-made weapons that Iraq used in the war, but said Soviet forces could borrow techniques from the US-led allies. He listed the use of cruise missiles, massive use of aircraft, radioelectronic suppression of enemy troop command and control systems and massive use of the navy, strike aircraft carrier units and missile defense ships.

The defense chief elaborated on comments about the performance of Soviet-made military hardware he made to a Soviet legislative committee in early March.

He said the Soviet-made Scud missiles Iraq used against Israel and Saudi Arabia — largely knocked out by US Patriot missiles — date back to the 1960s and burn kerosene.

"The Soviet army ended use of those kerosene-fueled missiles...It's no problem to hit such a missile with a Patriot. So it makes no sense to evaluate other types of Soviet missiles based on Scuds," Yazov said.



When the first woman general stocks freezer

from Addy Tan

MANILA : Elvella R. Mendoza calls herself a typical housewife. She cannot be — not when she is the first woman general in the Philippines.

Asia's first woman President, Corason Aquino, herself a former housewife, recently pinned one star on Mendoza's shoulder, capping more than 32 years of military service. For the last ten Mendoza has been chief nurse of the Philippines military.

The long road up the rigid hierarchy, Mendoza confesses, has been a balancing act between career and family. She has managed a home for three children, despite a job that has taken her constantly away from the family to inspect far-flung hospitals and on frequent training trips abroad.

It is simply a question of time management, Brig. Gen. Mendoza says matter-of-

factly, snapping a salute when any of her all-female staff enters her office in Camp Aguinaldo, headquarters of the armed forces.

As Chief Nurse, she manages nearly 400 nurses — nearly a "battalion" — in 31 military hospitals throughout the Philippines.

She admits planning and administration are her forte. She advises the armed forces Chief of Staff in formulation policies on military nursing. She calls herself a "structure" person.

The Deputy Chief Nurse, Lieut. Col. Victoria Vidal, thinks Mendoza's promotion is a milestone for women in the military: "She is trail-blazing. Everything else will be easier."

Before Mendoza, the highest rank a woman soldier had reached was full Colonel. She is the only woman among 120 generals. The office of the Chief Nurse has

been agitating since 1985 to have a woman promoted to star rank.

"I didn't compete with females," Mendoza emphasises. "I competed with males because there's only one criteria in the military — exemplary service and leadership."

She graduated in nursing from a central Philippines college near her home province of Antique and joined the armed forces in 1958.

She recalls: "Since young, I wanted to serve. I wanted to save lives. If a patient is in serious condition, I do not easily give up. I was trained in nursing school never to say 'I can't do it' but 'I'll try my best.'"

It is with satisfaction that she claims no patient has ever died during her shift. "I pray a lot," she confesses. Like all young recruits who must be given a hardship

post, her first such assignment was two years in Jolo, the Muslim stronghold in the Sulu Archipelago. That was long before Jolo was razed in vicious fighting in the Muslim secessionist war in the early Seventies.

Another two-year stint in Marawi City, also a Muslim area in Mindanao, followed before she returned to Manila to work in the hospitals.

She met and married Hermilio Mendoza, a lawyer with the armed forces, now a Colonel.

He has always been one rank lower than his wife because he joined the military later. A wife of higher rank presents no problems in the home. "He's used to it," Mendoza laughs. "He doesn't interfere with my work, we complement each other. He is very supportive."

He was proud when she was promoted general.

She is looking forward to a quieter life soon when she retires at the age of 56. That is when she can watch more television and do more light reading (a favourite is The National Geographic). Also she wants to talk to her orchids more. —GEMINI NEWS



General Mendoza: Her husband is a colonel