

Turmoil to force Saddam out : Bush

Huge casualties as MIGs attack rebels in Karbala

DAMASCUS, Mar 28 : An Iraqi opposition leader said that two Iraqi government planes attacked rebel positions in southern Karbala governorate on Wednesday killing and wounding many people, reports Reuters.

"Two MIG-23 warplanes attacked areas controlled by the rebels in Karbala governorate today killing and wounding

many people," Shi'ite Opposition leader Ayatollah Taqi al-Mudarrisi said in a statement.

There was no independent confirmation of the report which, if true, would constitute a violation of a provisional Gulf war ceasefire agreement between Iraq and the United States.

Revolts against President Saddam Hussein broke out in Iraq's Shi'ite muslim south and Kurdish north after a US-led multinational alliance routed his occupation army in Kuwait at the end of last month.

White House spokesman Martin Fitzwater reiterated US policy that fixed-wing planes would be downed if they fly in Iraq but excluded helicopters unless they threatened the Al-Ills.

The Mudarrisi statement said the crew of a second Iraqi

helicopter loaded with poison gas defected to southern rebels.

"An Iraqi air force helicopter was assigned to bomb rebel-held areas in southern Iraq with poisonous gas but its four-member crew refused the orders and joined the rebels at a certain place in southern Iraq," the statement said.

The Mudarrisi statement said Karbala town, north of Basra, and surrounding villages were subjected to "pass killings by troops of the Republican Guard because its people took part in the revolt against Saddam."

It said the army began two days ago to burn homes and districts where the revolt against Saddam erupted about four weeks ago.

"They are also destroying the houses of any person who

took part in the fighting," the statement said.

The statement said over 100,000 people had so far fled to Iran and Turkey since the uprising began.

Jaafar Mohammed of the Islamic Action Organisation said in another statement the Iraqi army was "committing mass killings of wounded people in southern Iraq."

Another report from Maryland adds: US President George Bush today said the turmoil now gripping Iraq makes it unlikely that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein will be able to remain in control of his country.

"It seems unlikely he can survive, Bush told reporters following a medical examination at Bethesda Naval Medical Centre.

Swiss company denies helping Saddam stash billion dollars

GENEVA, Mar 28: A Swiss Trust Company denied on Wednesday media reports that it helped Iraqi President Saddam Hussein place billions of dollars in offshore investments, reports Reuters.

Bruno Buchler, the Swiss Chairman and Secretary of Midco Financial Sa, said there was no connection between his firm and Montana Management Inc, the firm US investigators say built Saddam's financial empire.

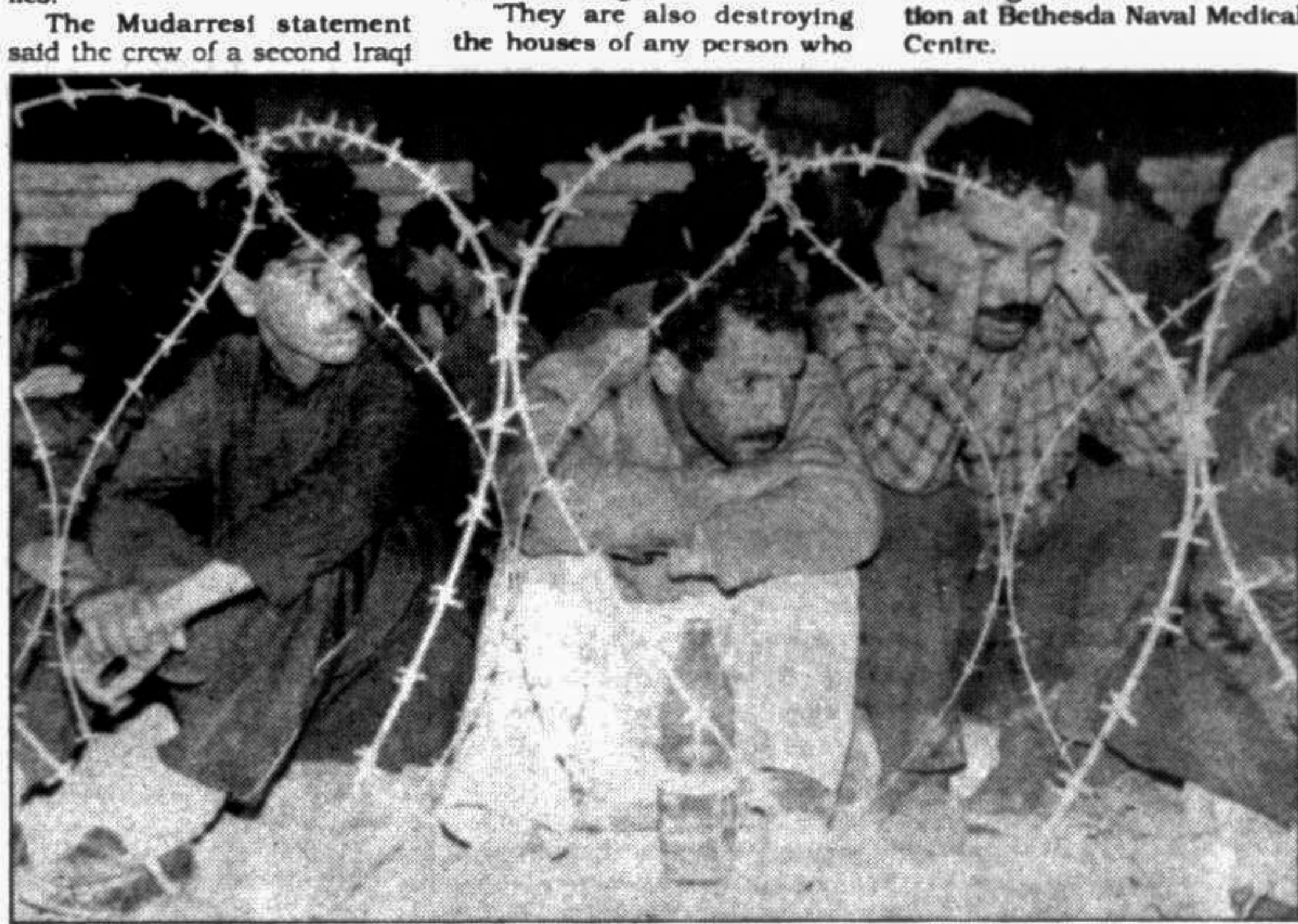
"It's just a coincidence, Buchler said when asked why Montana has given Midco's Geneva address as its own."

He said he thought the company wanted a European base. We are a Swiss company, financing investments for Swiss, he added.

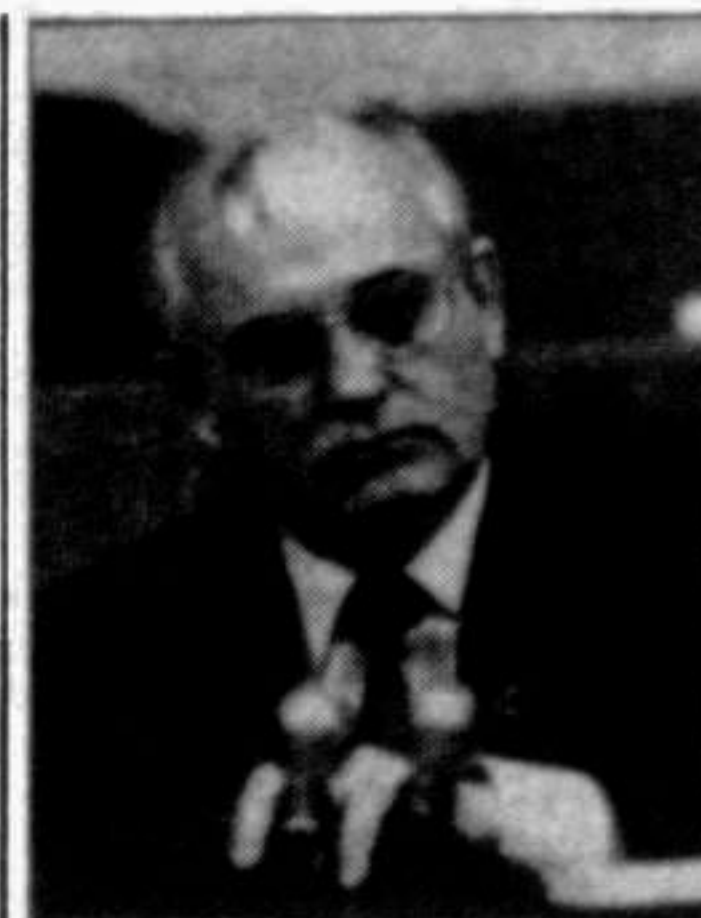
But Buchler did say that Midco had been set up in 1982 with 2.1 million Swiss Francs (1.4 million dollars) of Iraqi capital.

He also confirmed that Abdul Satter Ali al-Abdullah, an Iraqi who investigators say was a Montana Director, was also President of Midco for more than two years.

Midco's incumbent President and Vice-President are both Iraqis based in Baghdad, Buchler has not seen them since July.



SOUTHERN IRAQ: Some of the 600 Iraqi POWs kept at US military check point near the city of Safwan in southern Iraq March 26. The 600 demoralized Iraqi soldiers crossed to US occupied territories to turn themselves in as Saddam Hussein's loyalists attacked, and retook a string of southern cities from rebel control. — AFP/UNB photo



Gorbachev admits mistakes

MOSCOW, Mar 28 : President Mikhail Gorbachev has accepted that several mistakes have been made during his rule but strongly defended his policies of Perestroika and Glasnost saying there was no way back, reports PTL.

In a Soviet TV interview Tuesday night Mr. Gorbachev perhaps for the first time admitted that it was a mistake to have rejected what worked from the past before creating new mechanisms.

It was inexpedient to 'reject what still worked, before creating new effective mechanisms' Mr Gorbachev said adding that 'I am not trying to avoid responsibility'.

In a spirited defence of his politics, Mr. Gorbachev said 'it was possible to reach the gains of Perestroika with less damage.'

One lakh asylum-seekers likely to swamp US

WASHINGTON, Mar 28: A new immigration unit that Attorney General Dick Thornburgh promised would streamline the review of refugees' political asylum claims will be swamped by unprocessed cases when it opens next week, a government memo says.

The corps of 83 specially trained asylum officers, spread among seven Immigration and Naturalisation Service offices, is significantly smaller than what the agency estimated was needed to the job, according to a memo obtained by the Associated Press.

"Financial considerations alone drove the adoption of this number," said the memo by Deputy INS Commissioner Ricardo Inzunza.

If additional officers were not hired and trained "backlogs will continue to grow at politically unacceptable rates," Inzunza wrote in the Dec. 28 memo to Commissioner Gene McNary.

Since then the backlog of unprocessed applications for political asylums has increased from 97,000 to more than 108,500, according to INS figures.

The asylum unit was created last summer under regulations the Attorney General issued to "ensure that those

who seek the protection of this country encounter a fair and sensitive legal process."

Political asylum applications have been handled by INS district directors who consulted with the State Department.

Critics have charged that these officials were distracted by other duties, hostile to the refugees claims, and were too susceptible to political considerations raised by the State Department.

Inzunza noted that since a temporary group of 117 asylum examiners began work last fall, the time to process each application "has been significantly slower than hoped for."

A 20 per cent increase in asylum applications during the current fiscal year plus the settlement of a major lawsuit over refugee rights will add another 125,000 applicants to the pool, Inzunza said.

Under the settlement announced in January, the Justice Department agreed to reconsider the requests of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees who were denied political asylum since 1980. Another 350,000 refugees who never applied may also be given the chance to seek asylum.

Lawyers representing the refugees contended that the State Department had improperly injected political considerations into the decisions. They noted that Central Americans were granted political asylum at much lower rates than people fleeing Communist government.

Refugees must prove that if they returned to their country they would likely face persecution. Salvadoran refugees were often ruled ineligible on the ground that they were fleeing poverty rather than political persecution.

Human rights activists contended this view was fostered by US support of the Salvadoran government, which is battling left-wing rebels.

The 6 million dollars INS has earmarked for the asylum programme this year is far less than what other nations spent. Arthur C. Helton, director of the refugee programme for the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in New York, noted. Ten countries in Western Europe, including France, Britain and Germany, together spend 5 billion dollars a year. Canada spends 80 million dollars annually, Helton said.

45,000 Iraqis flee into Iran

GENEVA, Mar 28: Over 45,000 Iraqis have fled into neighbouring Iran to escape fighting in the south of their country, the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

The Geneva-based agency said they were mainly Iraqis, with a few refugees from other nations who were being repatriated by the International

Organisation for Migrations.

UNDRO, which a week ago put the number of people fleeing the rebellion in southern Iraq at 30,000, called the increase 'dramatic'.

Turkey, which borders Iraq to the north had also witnessed a steady increase in the number of refugees. UNDRO estimated their present number at 4,500.

Off the Record

Schwarzkopf wanted to act like Romans

WASHINGTON, Mar 28: Allied Gulf Commander Norman Schwarzkopf says he wanted to annihilate Iraq's armies as Hannibal once crushed the Romans but US President George Bush pulled him up short, reports Reuters.

In a television interview with David Frost scheduled for broadcast this evening, the US Army General also said Baghdad's ceasefire negotiators "suckered me" into letting Iraq keep flying the helicopters it is now using against Shi'ite and Kurdish rebels.

Discussing Bush's decision to stop the ground war after four days on February 28, when the goal of ousting Iraqi forces from Kuwait had been won, Schwarzkopf recalled that the allies were pounding the fleeing Iraqis "and it was literally about to become the battle of Cannae, a battle of annihilation."

The Carthaginian General Hannibal, one of Schwarzkopf's military heroes, encircled an entire Roman army at the village of Cannae in 216 B.C. and cut it to pieces.

"Frankly, my recommendation to Bush had been, 'You know, continue the march,'" Schwarzkopf said. "I may, we had them in a rout and we could have continued to reap great destruction on them. We could have completely closed the door and made it a battle of annihilation."

"And the President made the decision that we should stop at a given time, at a given place that did leave some escape routes open for them to get back out and I think it was a very humane decision and a very courageous decision on his part."

He said historians would second-guess Bush forever and critics were already complaining that the allies failed to destroy Iraq's Republican Guard and other units entirely.



Menem's wife finds it unbearable

BUENOS AIRES: The wife of President Carlos Menem, Zulema Yoma, asked a court to grant her a divorce decree from her husband, he spokeswoman said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The action has been long awaited by Argentines who have witnessed the unusual spectacle of having Menem martial disputes played out publicly when the President banned his wife from the Presidential Palace.

Ms Yoma told reporters she felt "obliged to take this action because the situation had become unbearable" and for her own personal peace and that of her children.

She said she would be filing for a fault divorce on the grounds of her husband's infidelity.

She rejected a mutual consent divorce which could be finished in several months, instead opting for lengthy and, undoubtedly controversial, court, process that could last year.

Indian polls scene

Parties launch headlong into electioneering

NEW DELHI, March 27 : The major political parties have virtually launched their campaigns to woo voters by chalking out poll planks and strategies amid indications that the mid-term Lok Sabha elections will be held in the last week of May, report agencies.

Parties hoping to win the elections on planks ranging from stability and secularism to 'roti' and Ram have started forging alliances and seat adjustments.

The National Front (NF) and the Left parties decide to field all sitting candidates and began talks on seat sharing. They have decided to launch their election campaign on March 18 at Patna on the main plank of defeating the forces of communalism, seperatism and those working against the secular basis of the democratic polity. The plank was decided at the CPI-M headquarters here on Wednesday.

The NF is likely to contest about 400 of the 543 seats in the coming Lok Sabha election, with its largest component, the Janata Dal, fielding some 240 of them, Dal sources said. The remaining seats will be contested by the Left parties, and other parties like the Peasants and Workers' Party in Maharashtra with which seat adjustments are possible.

Sources said it had not yet been decided if the NF and

Left parties would have a common poll manifesto, though they could issue a statement of their common objectives. Like in the 1989 elections, the two formations would campaign jointly.

Dal leaders said the only seats where the party and its allies had to decide which party would contest which seat were the 90-odd ones that



BOMBAY — Indian electioneering is now the focus of all newspapers. A cartoon in the daily Independent here shows Rajiv Gandhi, VP Singh, Chandra Sekhar and L. K. Advani in the scramble.

Burmese military rulers create 'Alice in Wonderland'

BANGKOK, Mar 28: Burma's military rulers are creating an "Alice in Wonderland" world of political machination to prevent any weakening of their ruthless grip on power, a foreign resident of Rangoon said Wednesday, reports Reuters.

"It is perfectly clear that the military rulers are determined not to transfer power in the foreseeable future to any form of democratic government", he told reporters.

Human Rights abuses were worsening in a country that international rights groups regularly accuse of killings, torture and mass arrests, the foreign resident, who asked not to be identified, said.

At least one prominent opposition figure had been tortured to death, he said.

"The picture is one of continuing gloom and tragedy," he said, adding that the number of people being detained was increasing.

Burma's best-known political detainee, Aung San Suu Kyi, showed no signs of yielding to government pressure to resign from the National League for Democracy, he said.

The League won an overwhelming popular mandate in General Elections last year but the ruling supreme law and order restoration council (SLORC) refused to hand over power.

SLORC supporters now dominate the league and late last year the party agreed to help military rulers to draw up a new constitution.

The foreign resident, a well-informed observer of Burmese politics, said SLORC

had created so many obstacles to a real transfer of power that genuine league members would never have chance to take a role in government.

Its rules and regulations were so all-pervasive that it could deny a national assembly seat to anyone it chose to, he said, adding it was like the fantasy world of "Alice in Wonderland", the assembly has yet to be established.

SLORC had managed to neutralise about a quarter of the 396 league members who won assembly seats last year, the foreign resident said. Some were in jail and others on the run.

He identified the opposition figure who died under torture as U Maugh Kho, a trade union organiser and league member who won election to a Rangoon

seat in the assembly.

"Someone obviously made a mistake" and allowed relative to see the body, which showed clear signs of abuse, the resident said. "Usually people are just told prisoners have disappeared."

"I think what's happening in Iraq now is a sad case. To answer your question on whether we have responsibility towards it I would say no. We always said our main target was to free Kuwait. What's happening in Iraq is up to the Iraqi people," he said.

"I don't think we should get involved in Baghdad. We always made sure that we never entered any main city, not even a village," he added.

Prince Khalid said he thought Saddam was "violating every human value on earth" and the Allies had not expected him to use helicopters to attack his own people when the two sides agreed on preliminary ceasefire terms on March 3.

Major survives no-confidence vote

LONDON, Mar 28 : UK Prime Minister John Major easily survived a vote of no-confidence in parliament on Wednesday night, reports Reuters.

Major, who replaced Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister only 120 days ago, faced charges of incompetence over government plans to scrap a hated local tax, known as the poll tax, only a year after it's introduction.

The Opposition Labour Party's motion "that this house has no confidence in her majesty's government in the light of its inability to rectify the damage done to the British people by the poll tax" was rejected by 358 to 238.

Labour had no chance of winning the no-confidence vote. But the debate gave it a chance to exploit conservative disarray over the issue.

Major gained stature and respect for his role as a World leader during the Gulf war but his leadership has since been undermined at home over the issue of local government finance.

During the debate, he defended a 4.5 bn stg plan to slash the level of 1991 poll tax based both on the number of adults in a household and the value of the property.

Major must call a general election by mid-1992 and it had been thought he might set a date as early as June

BRIEFLY

2,000 Iraqis at US checkpoint :

More than 2,000 Iraqi refugees flooded a US military checkpoint Tuesday, part of a growing tide escaping food shortages and chaos in southern Iraq, reports AP from Safwan.

The refugees, many crammed into the back of trucks and sitting atop their belongings, included about 500 Iraqi soldiers, said US soldiers at "Checkpoint X-Ray," a makeshift collection of tents and tanks several miles (kilometers) inside Iraq.

One Iraqi soldier was a Brigadier general, the soldiers said.

Many refugees said they fled Samawa, a southern town held by anti-government rebels until President Saddam Hussein's troops recaptured it about a week ago.

The refugees say a mostly Shi'ite Muslim uprising that began last month in the aftermath of the Gulf war has faltered, and Saddam's soldiers now control all major cities and towns in southern Iraq.

ANC exiles airlifting starts :

The airlift home of some 40,000 African National Congress (ANC) exiles resumes Tuesday when a charter plane takes off from Lusaka with people on board, organisers in said Johannesburg reports AFP.

In a statement Wednesday, the Inter-organisational National Co-ordinating Committee for the repatriation of South African exiles (NCCR), comprising mainly the ANC and anti-apartheid clerics, said the returnees had all received indemnity from the white minority Pretoria government.

An ANC spokesman said the plane had been chartered by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

Emergency in Colombia :

Colombia has declared emergency measures along its pacific coast and on its borders with Peru and Ecuador in an effort to control an outbreak of a cholera epidemic that has killed more than 600 people in Peru, reports Reuters.

The Ministry of Health declared a red alert on Tuesday in some of the poorest regions of the country after six people were treated for the disease in the town of Tumaco, 56-km (350 miles) southwest of Bogota.

Four people were treated on Wednesday, bringing to 12 the number of victims in Colombia since the epidemic began there two weeks ago. No deaths have yet been reported.

Nepal prepares for polls :

The Nepali Congress Party, one of two partners in Nepal's ruling coalition, announced candidates Tuesday for all 205 seats in the May 12 parliamentary elections, reports AP.

The candidates include Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai, who will contest from Katmandu constituency, the party said.

Bhattarai led last spring's pro-democracy movement which resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy-dominated government. The Nepali Congress and the United Left Front, a coalition of communist parties, formed an interim government, which is to continue in power until the elections.

12 killed in Punjab :

Twelve persons, including three militants and two police head constables, were killed in Punjab since Tuesday night, reports PTL from Chandigarh.

Security forces nabbed four militants while one person was kidnapped during this period.

An Amritsar report said three suspected militants were gunned down in an encounter with security forces near railway gate in Shivala Bhatan locality in Amritsar.

The encounter took place when security forces were conducting searches for militants responsible for the shootout in Makboolpura locality there on Monday.

15 shot dead in Alexandria :

At least 15 people were gunned down in could blood Wednesday when Zuhus in combat uniform burst in on a general vigil in Alexandria and opened fire with automatic weapons, police and witnesses said reports AFP.

Twelve people were killed on the spot and three more died on the their way to hospital police said.

Eighteen others were being treated for gunshot wounds in clinics and hospitals near the violence wracked black township bordering Johannesburg's luxury northern suburbs.