

Probe into Singapore plane hijacking on 26 followers of Benazir detained

KARACHI, Apr 2: Pakistani authorities have detained 26 followers of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto during investigations into the hijacking of a Singapore airliner by four Pakistanis last week, police said, reports Reuters.

US to resolve dispute over Pak N-plan

WASHINGTON, Apr 2: The United States is committed to resolving a dispute over Pakistan's nuclear programme that has forced Washington to halt aid to Islamabad, Under Secretary of State Robert Kimmitt said on Monday, reports Reuters.

"I think the Pakistan government is committed to trying to work our way out of this impasse. We certainly are," said Kimmitt, who is the State Department's third-ranking official.

The United States halted aid to Pakistan last September when President George Bush said he could no longer comply with a US law requiring that he certify that Islamabad did not have a nuclear device.

Pakistan had received about 600 million US dollars a year and was the third-highest recipient of US assistance after Israel and Egypt.

Kimmitt made his comments on the US Information Agency's Worldnet Television programme, answering questions from journalists in Pakistan and India.

formally arrested and more than 20 held for questioning in the past four days in the southern province of Sind, as Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and government members continued trading accusations on the issue.

The hijackers, who were killed by Singapore commandos in a rescue operation last Wednesday, had demanded the release of Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari and six other PPP members from Pakistani jails.

The PPP denies any link with the March 26 hijacking of the Singapore Airlines Airbus.

But several government ministers have blamed the clandestine Al-Zulfikar organisation that they say is led by Bhutto's brother Muraza from his exile home in Syria.

PPP spokesmen have accused the government's intelligence bureau of masterminding the hijacking in a bid to discredit the PPP. The government denies the charge.

A government committee headed by Interior Minister Shujaat Hussain is due to report its findings by Wednesday.

Nobody has yet claimed the hijackers' bodies and local newspaper reports said at least two men named among the four were actually alive.

The investigation will be "a total farce" without identifying the hijackers, Bhutto's mother Nusrat told reporters on Sunday.

Indian scene A battle for poll symbols

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: A battle of poll symbols is on between some Indian political parties as the country prepares for another poll to elect a new lower house of parliament, reports Xinhua.

India's election commission sources has told reporters that the commission began hearing from April 1 cases relating to disputes over symbols following splits in a number of political parties.

Symbols are particularly crucial in an Indian election because nearly half of the electorate are illiterate and most of the voters only cast their votes for the symbols rather than the candidates. Hence the fight for the symbols has been pre-empted almost every election in the country since the first general elections in 1952.

Using the hand symbol, the Congress (I) swept the 1980 and 1984 general elections, but lost majority in the 1989 elections. Previously, the party used the cow and calf symbol which was frozen by the election commission after the party split in 1978.

Indian diplomats in Burma accused of aiding rebels

BANGKOK, Apr 2: A senior member of Burma's military junta has accused Indian diplomats in Rangoon of having financially supported anti-government activists two years ago, radio Rangoon said Monday, reports AFP.

The accusation was made Monday by Major General, Khin Nyunt, Secretary of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) — the official name of Burma's ruling military junta — the official radio said in a dispatch monitored here.

WASHINGTON, Apr 2: Here is the list of 52 "front" companies and 37 middlemen identified by the US Treasury Department as part of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's worldwide financial and arms trading network, reports AP.

FRONT COMPANIES:

1. Admincheck Ltd., London.
2. Advanced Electronics Development Ltd., London.
3. Al-Arabi Trading Co. Ltd., Baghdad.
4. Al-Rafidain Shipping Co., Bombay, India.
5. Arab Petroleum Engineering Co. Ltd., Amman, Jordan.
6. Arab Projects Co. SA Ltd., Amman (also offices in Beirut, Lebanon and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia).
7. Arab Trans Trade Co. SAE, Alexandria, Egypt.
8. Archi Centre I.C.E. Ltd., London.
9. Architeconsult Ltd., London.
10. Associated Engineers, England (no city listed).
11. A. T. E. International Ltd., formerly known as RWR International Commodities, London.
12. Atlas Air Conditioning Co. Ltd., London.
13. Atlas Equipment Co. Ltd., London.
14. A. W. A. Engineering Ltd., London.
15. Banco Brasileiro-Iraqiano SA, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
16. Bay Industries Inc., Los Angeles.
17. Dominion International, England (no city listed).
18. Endshire Export Marketing, England (no city listed).
19. Euromac Ltd., Northwood, England.
20. Euromac European Manufacturer Center SRL, Monza, Italy.
21. Euromac Transport International SRL, Monza, Italy.

Move to smash Iraqi military might US names 89 cronies of Saddam, freezes assets

WASHINGTON, Apr 2: The Treasury Department says it has identified 52 "front" companies in Saddam Hussein's worldwide financial and arms trading network, reports AP.

The department also named 37 individuals, none based in the United States, whom it said acted as middlemen for the Iraqi government in using the companies to hide billions of dollars that Saddam's family skimmed from Iraq's oil revenues. The front companies were used to buy weapons, tools, spare parts and raw materials for Saddam's war ma-

chine, officials said. The United States moved on Monday to shut down Iraq's secret international network of arms traders and financial firms in a bid to block Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from rebuilding his country's military.

The Treasury Department said it had frozen the assets of the 52 businesses and 37 individuals it named as Iraqi agents in a step that could lead to the use of the money to pay reparations for the Gulf war.

The Treasury named more than 30 companies based in

Britain. Others are located in Egypt, Brazil, Germany, Italy, Honduras and the United States.

The Treasury said US companies and citizens are prohibited from doing any business with Iraqi front companies and middlemen without the department's permission. Convictions of violating the prohibitions could mean criminal penalties of up to 12 years in prison and 1 million dollars in fines.

Civil penalties of up to 250,000 dollars also may be imposed, the Treasury said.

"We want the network exposed and we want it neutralized," Treasury Deputy Secretary John Robson said at a news conference.

"We are putting the world on notice that when you deal with them, you deal with Saddam."

Robson added there are "many more cases that are under investigation," but he declined to give details.

Two US companies, Bay Industries Inc., an engineering firm in Los Angeles, and Matrix Churchill Corp., the American machine tools subsidiary of a British Corporation, were allegedly involved.

There were no answers to repeated phone calls to Bay Industries in Santa Monica and no immediate comment from Matrix Churchill.

A spokesman for Britain's Department of Trade and Industry said the government "is aware of the investigation. We've seen the results of the investigations."

He said the government would examine the conclusions "and if it subsequently proves that any company trading in the UK has broken UK law, we would seek to take appropriate action."

The spokesman, who commented on condition of anonymity, said Matrix was not under Iraqi control.

Treasury agents seized the assets of Bay Industries on March 22, along with those of Anees Wadi and his wife Shamsaban al-Hayderi, Wadi controls Bay Industries, and the government alleged that all three had helped Saddam procure arms for Iraq.

front for Saddam to disguise the flow of technical expertise and items from the United States to Iraq, a Customs official said at the time.

The Treasury also listed Iraqi Airways offices in Los Angeles; Southfield, Michigan and New York City as being among the front companies. It has been illegal for US citizens to fly on Iraqi Airways since President George Bush instituted an embargo and asset freeze against Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait last Aug. 2.

Robson said cooperation from friendly foreign governments had been "good," but he declined to be specific.

"Worldwide cooperation will help eliminate this network," he said.

The department also identified 160 merchant ships owned or controlled by the Iraqi government. It said US companies and citizens are prohibited from using the ships, subject to the same penalties as for doing business with front companies and agents.

Monday's announcement was part of an investigation by the US and Kuwaiti governments into Iraq's worldwide financial network. The probe found that Saddam, who took power in 1979, is one of the world's richest men.

The investigation determined that the Iraqi President's had family skimmed 10 billion dollars in oil profits since 1981 and had used the money to buy pieces of companies in Europe and the United States, a US government source said last week.

Iraqi investors working for Saddam have purchased nearly 1 billion dollars in shares of publicly traded legitimate companies, including French media giant Hachette SA, according to the chief investigator, Jules Kroll.



AKRA, IRAQ: Kurdish nurses in the People's Dispensary in the northern Iraqi village of Akra stitch the hand of a Kurdish child injured during an assault of Iraqi troops recently. — AFP/UNB photo

List of Iraqi agents

22. Falcon Systems, England (no city listed).
 23. Geodesigns, England (no city listed).
 24. Investcast Precision Castings Ltd., London.
 25. I. P. C. International Ltd., England (no city listed).
 26. I. P. C. Marketing Ltd., England.
 27. Iraqi Airways, Baghdad (also offices in New York; Los Angeles; Southfield, Mich.; London; Moscow; Rome; Tokyo; the Netherlands; Vienna, Austria; Dhaka, Bangladesh; Rio de Janeiro; Beijing; Prague; Czechoslovakia; Copenhagen, Denmark; Frankfurt, Germany; Casablanca, Morocco; Warsaw, Poland; Tunis, Tunisia; Ankara, Turkey; Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Sanaa, Yemen and Belgrade, Yugoslavia).
 28. Iraqi Allied Services Ltd., England (no city listed).
 29. Iraqi Freight Services Ltd., England (no city listed).
 30. Iraqi Reinsurance Co., London.
 31. Iraqi State Enterprise for Foodstuffs Trading, Colombo, Sri Lanka; and Calcutta, India.
 32. Iraqi State Enterprise for Maritime Transport, Bremen, Germany; and Amman, Jordan.
 33. Iraqi Trade Center, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
 34. Keencloud Ltd., London.
 35. Matrix Churchill Corp., Cleveland, Ohio.
 36. Meed International Ltd., London.
 37. Pandora Shipping Co. SA, Honduras (no city listed).
 38. Petra Navigation & International Trading Co. Ltd., Amman (also offices in Aqaba, Jordan; Cairo and Baghdad).
 39. PMK-QUDOS (Liverpool polytechnic), England (no city listed).
 40. Rafidain Bank, Baghdad (227 branches in Iraq; also branches in Manama, Bahrain; Cairo; Amman, Aqaba and Mafraq, Jordan; Beirut; Abu Dhabi; Sanaa and London).
 41. Rajbrook Ltd., England (no city listed).
 42. Reynolds and Wilson, England (no city listed).
 43. S. M. I. Sewing Machines Italy SPA, Italy (no city listed).
 44. Sollatek, England (no city listed).
 45. Technology and Development Group Ltd., London.
 46. T. E. G. Ltd., London.
 47. T. M. G. Engineering Ltd., London.
 48. TNK Fabrics Ltd., England (no city listed).
 49. Trading & Maritime Investments, San Lorenzo, Honduras.
 50. U.I. International, England.
 51. Unimas Shipping, Alexandria, Egypt.
 52. Whale Shipping Ltd., Basra, Iraq.
- INDIVIDUALS:
1. Abdul Hussein Abbas, Italy (no city listed).
 2. Kaasim Abbas, Italy (no city listed).
 3. Trevor Abraham, England (no city listed).
 4. Rasem Ahmad, Amman.
 5. Walid Issa Ahmad, Iraq (no city listed).
 6. Adnan Talib Hassim Al-Amiri, London.
 7. Dafir Al-Asawi, Iraq (no city listed).
 8. Laila N. S. Al-Dajani, Amman.
 9. Nadim S. Al-Dajani, Amman.
 10. Salad Al-Dajani, Amman.
 11. Safa Haji J. Al-Habobi, London.
 12. Abdul Mutalib Ali, Germany (no city listed).
 13. Peter Francis Allen, Stoughton, England.
 14. Akram H. Al-Ogaily, London.
 15. Joaquim Ferreira Amaro, Rio de Janeiro.
 16. Ahmad Armoush, Amman.
 17. Ali Armoush, Amman.
 18. Fouad Hamza Aziz, Rio de Janeiro.
 19. Ali Ashour Dagher, Surrey, England.
 20. Jum'a Abdul Fattah, Amman.
 21. Michael Brian Hand, England (no city listed).
 22. Paul Henderson, Coventry, England.
 23. Hana Paul Jon, London.
 24. George Jume'an, Amman.
 25. Fadel Jawad Kadhum, London.
 26. Robert Kamar Khoshaba, Maidenhead, England.
 27. Abdul Kader Ibrahim Mohamed, Beijing.
 28. Karim Dhaidas Omran, Iraq (no city listed).
 29. Khalid Mohammed Raouf, Rio de Janeiro.
 30. Roy Ricks, Benfleet, England.
 31. Rogério Eduardo Schmitt, Rio de Janeiro.
 32. Gilberto F. Sim, Rio de Janeiro.
 33. Francisco Antonio Souza, Rio de Janeiro.
 34. Jeanine Speckman, England (no city listed).
 35. Aktham Tall, Amman.
 36. A. Arnaldo G. Taveira, Rio de Janeiro.
 37. Yousuf Zahran, Amman.

BRIEFLY

Saddam chairs cabinet meet:

President Saddam Hussein chaired Monday the first meeting of the new Iraqi cabinet appointed last month to oversee the rebuilding of the country, the Iraqi News Agency INA said in Nicosia, reports AFP.

In a report monitored in Nicosia, INA quoted the new Prime Minister, Saadoun Hammadi, as saying the cabinet would give priority to the reconstruction of "everything that has been destroyed by aggression and the saboteurs."

The former was a reference to the US-led war against Iraq, the latter to Kurdish and Shiite rebels.

New Kuwaiti cabinet soon:

Kuwait's Prime Minister and Crown Prince, Sheikh Saad al-Abdulla al-Sabah, said he would announce a new Kuwaiti cabinet in the next few days, Kuwait radio reported Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The radio said Sheikh Saad told the London-based al-Hayat Arabic-Language daily newspaper that a date for parliamentary elections — the main demand of the Emirate's opposition groups — had not yet been set.

He said the Emir, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, would decide on when to hold such elections.

But the Crown Prince said he himself would announce a new cabinet "in the coming few days."

Hindus, Muslims clash: 10 hurt:

At least 10 people were injured when Hindus and Muslims clashed Monday and later fought police in a New Delhi suburb, witnesses said in New Delhi, reports AFP.

Police used tear gas to disperse the rioters after being heavily stoned by both Hindus and Muslims in a dispute over the route to be taken by a Hindu religious procession.

The trouble erupted when police told Hindus not to pass through a densely populated Muslim-dominated district in the eastern suburbs, witnesses said.

New govt in Zaire named:

Zaire named a new government that will lead the country to multiparty democracy after 25 years of autocratic rule under President Mobutu Sese Seko, reports Reuters from Kinshasa.

Prime Minister Mulumba Lukoji, who was appointed earlier this month, will be sworn in on Monday along with a 51-member cabinet, national radio said.

The new transitional government includes some ministers from smaller opposition groups. But the five main opposition groups refused to take part in talks on the makeup of the new administration and were not given any cabinet posts.

'89 coup leader held in Manila:

A leader of the 1989 coup attempt that almost toppled Philippine President Corason Aquino was arrested while visiting his parents for the Easter holidays, police said Monday in Manila, reports Reuters.

"For the people," shouted discharged Navy Captain Juancho Sabban, raising a clenched fist as police presented him to reporters in Manila.

National Police Director-General Cesar Nazareno said Sabban, 34, was seized while riding a bicycle on Sunday near his parents' home in Tuguegarao, some 210 miles (340 km) north of Manila.

15 newsmen flee Iraq:

Fifteen Western journalists covering fighting between Kurdish rebels and government forces in northern Iraq fled into Turkey on Monday, a Turkish official said in Diyarbakir, Turkey, reports Reuters.

But the official, who asked not to be named, said he could not confirm a report that 14 other journalists, one of them wounded, were trapped on the Iraqi side of the border and hiding from advancing Iraqi troops.

Thirteen Western journalists have crossed from near Semdinli town in the southeastern Hakkari province, on the same route used by most Iraqi refugees, the official in the provincial capital of Diyarbakir told Reuters.

US to carry out N-test:

The US Department of Energy said Monday that it would be carrying out a nuclear test in the Nevada desert on Wednesday, AFP reports from Washington.

Spokesman Darwin Morgan said the test, code-named Bexar (pronounced "bear") was scheduled for 9:00 am local time (1700 GMT).

He declined to give any details of the size of the test.

Soviet launches satellite:

The Soviet Union has launched a radar satellite capable of scanning the earth at night and through clouds, and is especially adept at photographing oil spills, a US space service official said Monday in Washington, reports AFP.

Launching the satellite, known as Almaz-1, puts Moscow in direct competition with the French spot and the American landest satellites.

"It is not quite as good as spot and not quite as bad as landest," said Art Dula, President of Space Commerce Corp. a Texas-based firm that markets Soviet spaceservices.

US to withdraw 20,000 troops from Iraq

NEW YORK, Apr 2: The US army plans to withdraw 20,000 troops from southern Iraq, nearly a quarter of its combat forces there, starting in about two weeks, the New York Times reported Monday, reports AFP.

The Pentagon would neither confirm nor deny the report.

90 p.c. Georgians vote for freedom

TBILISI, (Soviet Union), Apr 2: More than 90 per cent of Georgia's electorate voted "Yes" to independence from Moscow in a referendum, bluntly challenging President Mikhail Gorbachev's plans for keeping the union of 15 Soviet republics, reports Reuters.

Georgian authorities said on Monday that provisional results of Sunday's poll, not including the capital Tbilisi, showed 92.61 per cent of the southern republic's 3.4 million electorate took part. Of those, 99.01 per cent voted "Yes" to independence — meaning that more than 90 per cent of the eligible voters wanted a break with Moscow.

"The referendum shows how strongly we feel about independence, but achieving it is another matter," Oudja Khundadze, a spokesman for Georgia's Parliament, said.

"It will be very difficult now for Gorbachev to keep Georgia in the Soviet Union. We might be the first or on of the first to leave."

Probe into corruption in Burma's army rejected

BANGKOK, Apr 2: Junta strongman Suchinda Krapoon has firmly rejected calls for an inquiry into rumoured corruption among high-ranking military officers, press reports said in Bangkok Monday, AFP reports.

Since grabbing power in February, the military has come under increasingly strong criticism from former MPs, university lecturers and students, who have called a special inquiry to investigate alleged corrupt activities among senior military officers.

But General Suchinda, the Army Chief and the Vice Chairman of the National Peacekeeping Assembly (NPA), the name of he Junta, described the idea of a special committee to scrutinize incomes and assets of high-ranking officers as

"unnecessary". "You kids don't know anything. Civil servants are already watched by the CCC (Counter Corruption Committee)," Gen. Suchinda told reporters Sunday while golfing at the prestigious Chulachomkila a Military Academy in Nakhon Nayok.

The General added that to be promoted to certain senior posts in the Armed Forces, such as Army Commander-in-Chief, the officers concerned are required to submit an account of their assets to the CCC before assuming their positions.

Off the Record

An Easter bonus for the homeless

LOS ANGELES: Comedian Steve Allen, actress Tyne Daly and 'Jeopardy' game show host Alex Trebek were among more than a dozen celebrities who helped serve early Easter dinners Saturday to about 5,000 homeless people, reports AP.

The star-studded volunteer force dished out honey-baked ham and gravy, mashed potatoes, green beans, corn, rolls and apple pie at the downtown Los Angeles Mission.

Other shelters serve Easter dinners on Sunday, so this mission decided to do it a day before and give the homeless an opportunity for two holiday dinners, said mission spokesman Michael McKee.

The mission has 100 beds and serves about 650 meals daily.

A new 125,000-square-foot facility is under construction, McKee said. It will have 300 beds and a women's shelter and will serve about 2,000 meals a day. It is scheduled for completion by summer's end.

And now a job fair

BEIJING: A job fair was held here which allowed job seekers to meet with units seeking employees in Beijing, reports Xinhua.

The fair, sponsored by the Beijing Personnel Exchange Centre, attracted thousands of Beijing residents.

Li Shurong, one of the organizers, said that some 226 units from Beijing, including state-owned, collective, foreign-funded enterprises, as well as state organs, participated in the fair.

The participating units need over 2,600 employees in such areas as computer operations, management, translation, accounting public relations, sales promotion and technical personnel.

28,700 dollar joke

TOKYO: A joke that prompted a San Francisco-bound United Airlines (UAL) jet to return to Tokyo in February has cost a Japanese businessman about four million yen (28,700 dollars), reports Reuters.

A UAL lawyer said Tuesday a 48-year-old businessman had agreed to pay the amount out of court.

On February 13, when the UAL flight was almost halfway across the Pacific Ocean, a man told a flight attendant he had a bomb hidden in his air-stick bag.

"This is a bomb, this is a bomb," he said in English. Too late, he told the flight attendant it was only a joke. She had already notified the Captain who, aware of the threat of Gulf war-related terrorism, had immediately turned back to Tokyo.

Total cost to UAL was estimated at some 80 million yen (\$75,000 dollars) but the airline accepted an apology and agreed not to seek further damages. The settlement was enough only to cover hotel expenses for the passengers, the lawyer said.

"He sent a very sincere apology letter. UAL does not have any intention of making money out of it," said lawyer Keiichi Nishikido. "As far as we are concerned, everything is settled."

Not so for the police. Police have charged the man, Hiromu Kato of Osaka, with violating anti-hijacking laws. Prosecutors have not yet indicted him.

Champagne stolen

NICE (France): Thieves broke through the roof of a nice supermarket at the weekend and got away with 2,000 bottles of champagne, large quantities of spirits and hi-fi equipment, after twice setting off alarms in the nearby security firm, police said, reports AFP.

They said that security guards who responded to the alarm bells did not have keys to enter the premises, and seeing no signs of trouble from the outside they did not pursue the matter.

After preparing their loot, the thieves broke open a door and loaded up a vehicle without being seen.

The robbery, which took place during the easter weekend, was not discovered until staff arrived on the premises on Monday.