

US, India greet Sharif for polls victory

WASHINGTON, Feb 5: The United States on Tuesday congratulated former Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif on his electoral victory and pledged to work with him to improve bilateral ties, reports AP.

Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) won at least 134 seats in the 217-member National Assembly, while Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) had only secured a dismal 17 seats as counting continued.

"Should he (Sharif) indeed form the next government of Pakistan, the United States government will work with him cooperatively to strengthen our relationship with Pakistan," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

Despite accusations from at least one party of vote-rigging, the State Department said international observers did not notice any significant irregularities.

Sharif, an industrialist, said his top priority would be to create a climate to attract foreign investment and has called for a review of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan.

The State Department spokesman asserted that the United States has a "continued interest in strengthening cooperation" with Pakistan to en-

73 Israeli troops die as 2 choppers collide

TEL AVIV, Feb 5: All 73 Israeli soldiers on board were killed when two helicopters packed with troops and ammunition collided over the Israeli-Lebanon border, Army Chief of Staff Amnon Shahak said today, reports AP.

"I have the great sadness to announce 73 dead in the collision of two helicopters" on Tuesday, Shahak said at a press conference in Tel Aviv.

"This is the worst accident in the history of the army," he said.

Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai told the press conference he had named an independent commission of inquiry into the accident to be headed by David Ivry, a former air force chief and long time director general of the Defence Ministry.

General Eitan Ben-Eliah, head of the air force, said the two helicopters, a version of the US-made Sikorsky, had landed in northern Israel to pick up troops to be carried into Israel's occupied buffer zone in southern Lebanon.

Another report says, Lebanese Shiites living in areas controlled by Hezbollah guerrillas fired shots into the air to rejoice at Tuesday's mid-air crash between two Israeli helicopters which killed 73 soldiers.

News of the accident, the worst catastrophe in Israeli military history, was announced by Muezzins from mosques across villages in South Lebanon near Israel's self-declared "security zone."

"God has responded to the wish of Muslims because it is the night of destiny," said one Muezzin, referring to a key Muslim religious event towards the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

"We asked that they throw themselves against each other and that the winds destroy their planes, and God has heard us," the caller to Muslim prayers said.

In the town of Baalbek, a Hezbollah stronghold in eastern Lebanon, news of the crash was greeted by automatic weapon fire which lasted around half an hour. In some villages, sweets were distributed as a sign of joy.

Hezbollah television Al-Manar was the first to announce the accident and was subsequently inundated with telephone calls from viewers offering their congratulations.

Strong quake kills 38 in Iran

TEHRAN, Feb 5: Two powerful earthquakes struck several villages in northeastern Iran on Tuesday, killing at least 38 people and injuring more than 30, Iranian television reported, says AP.

Twelve villages in the Khorasan province were destroyed by the two quakes, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

A magnitude-5.4 quake hit the villages of Quchan, Esfarayen, Shirvan, Sabzevar and Neyshabur at 1:24 pm (0954 GMT). Forty minutes later, magnitude-6.1 quake hit the area, IRNA and Iranian television said.

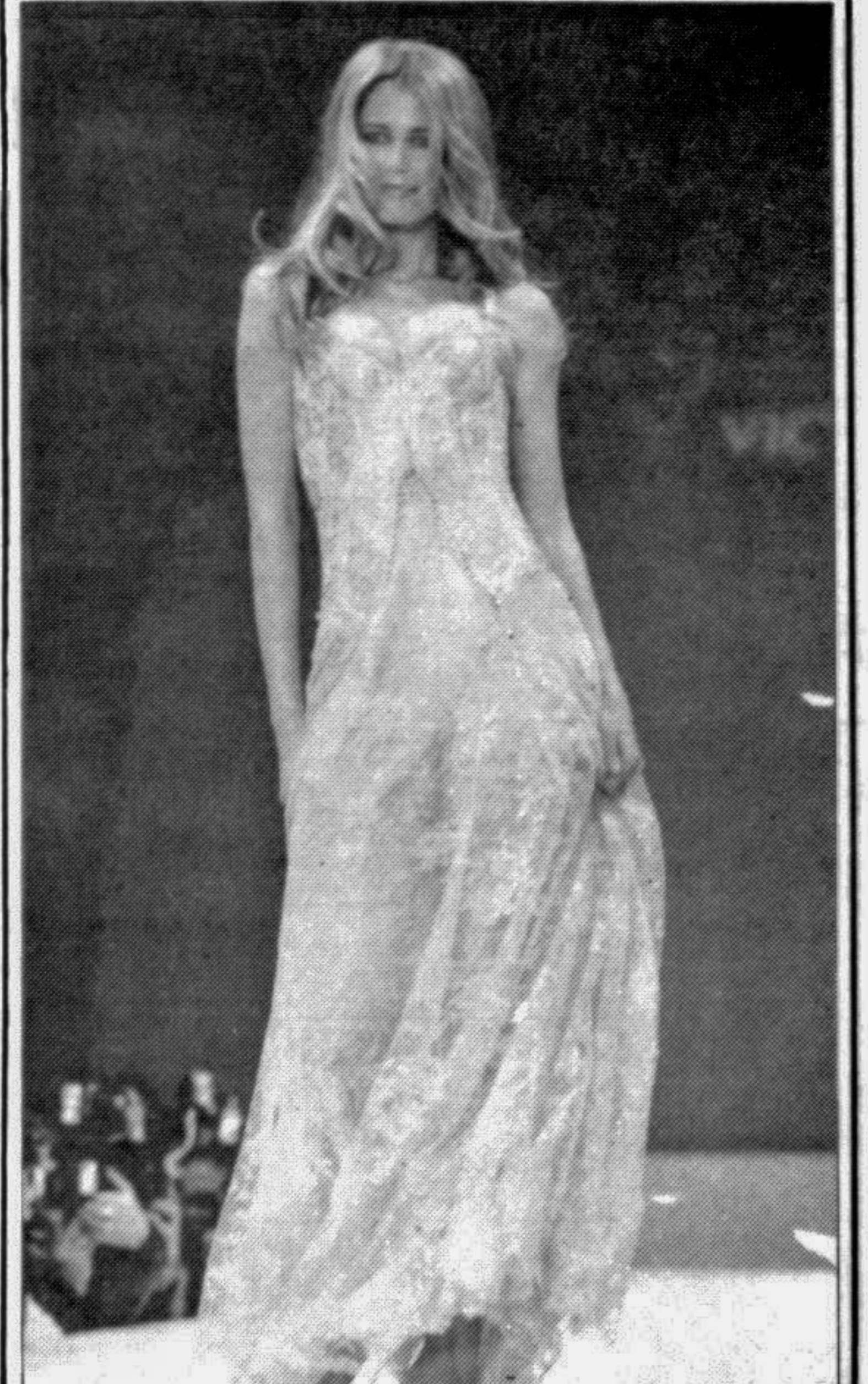
Their epicentre was outside Bojnurd, about 580 kilometers (360 miles) northeast of the capital Tehran.

IRNA said 35 people were killed and hundreds injured. There was no explanation for the discrepancy in the casualty figures.

Bojnurd Governor Hassan Movahedian told IRNA that 35 villages in the area had suffered varying damages as a result of the two quakes.

He said the quakes had also damaged and blocked roads in the area and that relief workers were busy pulling bodies from underneath the rubble.

Off the Record



Supermodel Claudia Schiffer wears a gold lame swimsuit with gold lace and a lace long skirt during the Victoria's Secret 1997 Spring Revelations Fashion Show in New York Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo

White House an 'awe-inspiring' place to live for Hillary

WASHINGTON: It's home to more than one mouse. And the place "can be a little creepy." But Hillary Rodham Clinton says the White House is still an "awe-inspiring" place to live, reports AP.

The first lady of the United States, appearing on "The Rosie O'Donnell Show" Monday, assured O'Donnell that the White House curbs its rodent population with "humane" traps. "Until we get really tired of them. And then: it's nuke them," Mrs Clinton said, with a laugh. "I mean, it's whatever you can do."

On a serious note, she said her time in the White House has been all but overwhelming.

"It is really awe-inspiring to walk through the White House, especially at night," she said. "You just feel like you're summing up the spirits of all the people who've lived there and worked there and walked through the halls there."

"It's neat — can be a little creepy," Mrs Clinton said. "You know, they think there's a ghost."

(She also sang a duet with O'Donnell in the segment taped last week in New York.)

Moderate drinking good for health!

DALLAS: A drink or two a day may put a spring in your step. Researchers have linked moderate drinking by men with a one-third lower risk of arterial disease that squeezes blood flow to the legs, reports AP.

The alcohol apparently helps keep arteries open by increasing levels of the "good cholesterol" in the blood.

The findings echo those of previous studies suggesting that moderate drinking reduces the risk of circulatory disease in the brain and heart.

Many doctors, however, are uneasy with the notion that drinking can be good for your health.

"This is not a situation where if a little is good, more is better," said the study's lead author, Dr Charles H Hennekens of Harvard Medical School. "Nondrinkers shouldn't start drinking and occasional drinkers shouldn't increase their alcohol intake."

The findings were published in Tuesday's issue of *Circulation*, a journal of the American Heart Association.

3 cousins of Saddam placed under house arrest

NICOSIA, Feb 5: Three cousins of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein have been placed under house arrest, an Iraqi source in the region said Tuesday, only days after reports that Saddam's first wife and two daughters were also under house arrest, reports AP.

The three cousins were named by the sources as General Abed Hassan al-Majid, Lieutenant General Maher Abed al-Rashid and Fadel Safih al-Azawi.

General Abed Hassan al-Majid had complained about the assassination in February last year of two of Saddam's sons-in-law, Hussein Kamel Hassan and Saddam Kamel Hassan.

The pair were killed along with their brother Hakem and father Kamel Hassan al-Majid after first defecting to Jordan and then being persuaded to return to Iraq.

General Abed, the assassinated pair's uncle and brother of their father, has been confined to his farm in Kasba al-Hueijah between Kirkuk and Saddam's home town, Tikrit, said the sources.

The general, who had been the assistant director of the intelligence service, had acted as an intermediary between the Iraqi president and Hussein Kamel Hassan, who along with his brother and their wives had defected.

The general last visited them in Amman in January 1996, a month before they voluntarily returned to Iraq and were slain.

Saddam's cousin Lieutenant General Maher Abed al-Rashid, who is the former father-in-law of Saddam's son Quesay, has been put under house arrest in Alam north of Tikrit.

Quesay broke with al-Rashid's daughter, who now lives with her father. The lieutenant general is considered a hero of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War.

Milosevic ready to recognise opposition victories

BELGRADE, Feb 5: Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic moving to quell the biggest threat yet to his authoritarian regime, said Tuesday he was prepared to acknowledge opposition victories in disputed elections, reports AP.

But opposition parties which have staged 11 straight weeks of massive protests against Eastern Europe's last communist-style strongman said their rallies would continue, at least for now.

One opposition leader, Vuk Draskovic, said his forces would press on for deep reform on a range of issues like the state strong hold on the media.

Another, Zoran Djindjic, said the pro-democracy rallies would continue until the opposition had actually taken over

BRIEFLY

Top Russian chopper designer dies:

Mark Vainberg, who played a leading role in the development of military and civilian helicopters, has died at age 59, officials said Tuesday, AP reports from Moscow.

Vainberg died at a Moscow hospital on Monday immediately after he was admitted with acute heart pain, according to a spokeswoman for the Mil Moscow Helicopter Plant, which he headed. Vainberg has had a history of heart trouble, said the spokeswoman, who didn't want to be identified.

US military team in Cambodia:

A United States military team has arrived in Cambodia to conduct a search and recovery operations for the remains of American servicemen missing since the Vietnam War, the US Embassy said yesterday, AFP reports from Phnom Penh.

The 18-member team, which arrived Monday, will begin searching this week in the northeastern province of Kratie and later move on to six other provinces, the embassy said, adding that Cambodian military officials would be assisting. The operation is expected to last 32 days and "plans to investigate as many as five cases as an recover as many as two cases," the embassy said.

2 US sailors held in Japan:

Two American sailors were arrested Wednesday for allegedly assaulting a Japanese man after he saw them trying to break into a car in southern Japan, police said, AP reports from Tokyo.

Police in Nagasaki prefecture, or state, identified the two sailors as seaman William Eugene Plummer, 20, and seaman Carl Russell Albee, 20. Both were assigned to the USS German-town at the US Navy's Sasebo base. Their hometowns were not immediately available. The police arrest report said the two were trying to steal a tool kit from a car parked behind a hospital on the night of Nov. 20, 1996, when they were seen by the victim, Hirozo Maruo.

China 5th popular tourist destination:

China has become the fifth most popular tourist destination in the world, receiving more than 26 million visitors in 1996, an official report said Wednesday, AP reports from Beijing.

Chinese tourism officials predict more than 40 million foreign visitors in 1997, continuing the trend that helped China to displace Britain as the world's No 5 destination, after France, the United States, Spain and Italy, the newspaper China Daily reported.

Sanford Meisner dies:

Sanford Meisner, an actor, director and innovative teacher whose students included Gregory Peck, Grace Kelly and Robert Duvall, has died. He was 91, AP reports from Sherman Oaks.

The Brooklyn-born son of Hungarian immigrants died Sunday at his Sherman Oaks home on Sunday, in the arms of his adopted son Julian Martin, 41. Meisner studied as a pianist at The Damrass Institute of Music, now the Juilliard School, before making his way into theater. Disillusioned with popular acting techniques, he began teaching what he called an "American approach" at The Neighbourhood Playhouse in New York in 1935. A year later, he became the school's director.

Gunmen attack HR team in Rwanda: 4 killed

KIGALI, Feb 5: Gunmen ambushed a UN human rights team Tuesday in a Hutu stronghold in southwestern Rwanda, killing four people in the third attack on international aid workers in recent weeks, reports AP.

Two human rights monitors, a Briton and a Cambodian, and two Rwandan local employees were shot dead. A fifth person, an interpreter, was wounded.

In Geneva, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Jose Ayala Lasso condemned the killings and ordered monitors working in the western part of the country to evacuate to Kigali. There are 139 UN human rights monitors in Rwanda, about half of them in the field.

These deaths demonstrate once again the urgent need to work in order to ensure respect for human rights and to establish in Rwanda a climate of peaceful relations among all communities," he said.

The monitoring operation, which began after government-sponsored genocide resulted in the deaths of 500,000 people in 1994, is intended to investigate claims of human rights abuses among Rwanda's 7 million people.

From April to July 1994, gangs organised by the extremist Hutu government engaged in the bloody slaughter of minority Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus who supported dialogue rather than conflict.

At the United Nations in New York, Secretary-General Kofi Annan was said to be shocked by the killings. His spokesman said all those attacked had been traveling in clearly marked UN vehicles.

The Briton and the Cambodian were carrying out a routine human rights investigation near Karengera, 180 miles (290 kms) southwest of Kigali when fired on by unidentified assailants, officials said.



Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto (L) along with her mother Begum Nusrat Bhutto leaves Islamabad airport Tuesday. Benazir faces the worst-ever polls defeat of her political career. — AFP/UNB photo

'New Pak govt shouldn't use Kashmir issue to shun talks with India'

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Pakistan's newly-elected government should not use the Kashmir issue to shun talks with India, a leading politician said here today, reports AP.

Mouvi Iftikhar Hussain Ansari, a Muslim minister in the Kashmir state government, said newly-elected Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif should live up to his pledge of seeking dialogue with India.

He said "talks between India and Pakistan should be without conditions."

"Every elected government in Pakistan desires talks with India after elections but later they back out. Sharif should not back out."

Ansari, the Minister for Housing and Development and a leader of a fundamentalist Muslim group, said negotiations between the two South Asian arch rivals should have begun long ago.

"It is a bit late that they have decided to start a political dialogue. They should have thought about it earlier," he said.

Sharif was elected Prime Minister of Pakistan on Tuesday in a landslide victory in which his party crushed that of former premier Benazir Bhutto.

The Kashmir region has been wracked by a Muslim separatist rebellion against Indian rule since 1989, leaving around 17,000 people dead. India and Pakistan have fought two wars over the Himalayan region since their independence from Britain in 1947.

An official spokesman of the Kashmir government also called for the start to a dialogue between the two rival neighbours.

He added: "Pakistan should understand the futility of the gun culture and stop abetting terrorism in Kashmir."

The current Kashmir state government was elected last year after seven years of central rule from New Delhi.

The polls were boycotted by Muslim separatist militants who claimed they were a sham.

India regularly accuses Pakistan of supplying arms to Kashmir's separatist militants.



Iraqi President Saddam Hussain (L) visits his eldest son Uday February 4 in a Baghdad hospital where he is being treated following an attempt on his life in December. The 33-year-old Uday is partially paralysed and reportedly needs an operation on his spine. — AFP photo

Egypt seeks to replace lost great library of Alexandria

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt, Feb 5: The Great Library of Alexandria, the faber seat of ancient learning that was consumed by fire centuries ago, is rising again, reports AP.

Egypt's government hopes the new library will become a leading research center in the region and spark a revival of this faded Mediterranean city.

"The old library was a beacon for Alexandria, and it radiated all over the world," said Mohsen Zahran, the project director. "We want the new library to be a modern-day beacon for cultural and social and economic development."

More than 2,200 years ago, the Great Library housed a collection of a half-million manuscripts. Scholars there created geometry, charted the stars, made a map of the known world that served for centuries and came up with the idea of "leap year."

The Ptolemy dynasty, which ruled the city after its founding by Alexander the Great in 332 BC, was said to be so ardent in finding new texts for the library that it confiscated the books of everyone arriving at the port.

Work started in January on the superstructure of its replacement, a huge, circular, glass-and-concrete building to be known by the historical name Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

The \$174 million project is being built with backing from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and other institutions and countries. It is expected to open at the end of 1998 with a modest collection of 200,000 titles.

Eventually, it could hold 8 million books focusing on the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Arab world.

It also will have a science museum, an institute of calligraphy, a school for librarians and a special room for preserving the precious few papyrus manuscripts surviving from ancient times.

No one knows the exact location of the old library, except that it was part of the Royal Court of the Ptolemys. They ruled Egypt from the death of Alexander in 323 BC until the reign of Queen Cleopatra, which ended in 30 BC.

The new library, by accident, turns out to be on just those grounds, archaeologists say. Construction crews found a garden of the Royal Court while laying the foundation for the new 13-story library.

The building was designed by the Norwegian firm Snohetta to look like a rising sun as a symbol of hope for this city of 4 million people.

But some Alexandrians believe the money being put into the library is misdirected.

Mohammed Awad, an architect who heads a group seeking to preserve the city's historic sites, worries that Egypt doesn't have the resources to develop a great library.

"It's nice to think big, but what are the realities of the situation?" he asks. They haven't yet raised all the money they need for construction. And where are the funds going to come from to build and operate the collection?

He argues a more important project is drawing financial and trade institutions back to the city.

"Alexander the Great's vision was for Alexandria to have an international role, and it can have it again," Awad says.

The Macedonian conqueror's successor, Ptolemy Soter, is usually credited with building the Great Library. But scholars still debate how the building came to its fiery end.

Some say the early Christians burned it in their 4th century campaign against paganism. Others blame the Arabs, who conquered Egypt in the name of Islam in the 7th century.

Mostafa el-Abadi, an Egyptian professor of classics, points at Cleopatra and Julius Caesar. He says Caesar helped Cleopatra in her war with her younger brother in 48 BC by burning the brother's ships in Alexandria's port and speculated the fire spread to the library.

The new library should be less vulnerable. It is to have the latest technology in fire detection and extinguishing systems.