

Former premier of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari (C), wearing a neckbrace and using a walking stick comes out after court proceedings inside the central - AFP/UNB photo jail, Monday.

Indian Parliament session begins today

Gujral may face demands to force out his party boss

NEW DELHI, Apr 29: Barely a week into office, Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral will face demands to force out his party boss and challenges to his budget when parliament meets Wednesday, reports AP.

Gujral, who assumed office last week after a 21-day squabble for leadership, easily won a vote of confidence during his first parliament session last week. But meetings this week, called to consider the national budget, were likely to be much more contentious.

The new prime minister got his first political jolt over the weekend, when federal police announced they were ready to prosecute the head of his Janata Dal Party for corruption. The center-left Janata Dal has 45 of the 178 seats held by the governing United Front's coalition partners in the 545-member lower house of parliament.

The Central Bureau of Investigation, similar to the FBI, has named Laloo Prasad Yadav. president of the Janata Dal and Chief Minister of Bihar state, in an investigation into the misuse of government animal welfare funds. Yadav, who had denied any wrongdoing, faces a seven year prison term if con-

Gujral's Rural Areas and Employment Minister Chandraded Prasad Varma, another

Janata Dal leader, also is among the 56 people the CBI wants to prosecute in the fraud case. Regional leaders of the Congress Party, a key United Front ally, also have been im-



Other parties in the United Front have called on Yadav to resign from politics. He has refused, saying that merely naming him in a corruption case does not establish his guilt.

"The scam presents the Gujral government with a major source of embarrassment. But it also presents it with an oppor-tunity," the Indian Express newspaper said in an editorial Tuesday.

Guiral, famed for his integrity and honesty, will be pressured to distance himself from Yadav. But he may also be under pressure to repay a politi-cal debt — Yadav is believed to have been instrumental in persuading the United Front to nominate Gujral as its compromise candidate for prime minister.

Scandal won't be the only point of contention during the parliament session, expected to last several days. Gujral may struggle to get his budget passed without the help of former finance minister P. Chidambaram, one of India's most articulate spokesman for freemarket reforms.

Chidambaram's Tamil Manila Congress party refused to join Gujral's Cabinet after its leader was passed over for the prime minister's post.

Gujral has decided to stick with Chidambaram's proposed spending plan for the fiscal year that started April 1, a budget that was praised by business leaders for reducing taxes and further opening the economy.

But leftists parties within the United Front have said they will try to persuade Gujral to spend more on social programmes.

Chemical weapons ban treaty goes into effect

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 29: The worldwide treaty banning chemical weapons takes effect at midnight New York time Monday (0400 GMT Tuesday). 180 days after the 65th country - Hungary - ratified it, the United Nations announced, reports AP.

As of late afternoon Monday, 87 countries had ratified the treaty, including the United States which did so last Thursday. Cuba was expected to be-come the 88th late Monday or Tuesday, a UN official said.

The pact bans the use, development, production or stockpil-ing of all chemical warfare agents and requires the destruction of existing stockpiles over the next decade.

The United States and Russia are the only two countries that acknowledge they have chemical weapons.

Taliban won't destroy statues of Buddha

ISLAMABAD, Apr 29 Afghanistan's Taliban Islamic government said on Monday it would not destroy two worldfamous giant statues of Buddha, after an international outcry against reports that they were threatened, reports Reuter.

"Taliban won't destroy the sculptures at Bamiyan," the government's embassy in the Pakistani capital Islamabad said in a statement.

India likely to deploy troops in Bihar

NEW DELHI, Apr 29: India will rush federal troops to eastern Bihar state because of fears of a backlash to the possible prosecution of its chief minister in a corruption scandal, a newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

The Stateman quoting Home Ministry sources here said paramilitary soldiers would be deployed in the crime-prone state because of worries that political turmoil in Bihar could lead to violence there.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Sunday said it would prosecute state Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, two of his cabinet colleagues and a federal minister from Bihar in a multi-million-dollar financial scandal.

Yadav, who is also the president of the largest party in India's ruling coalition government, has refused to resign from his political posts and has warned his party supporters would "take the issue to the streets."

Yadav, an influential politician, has also said he would "govern Bihar from prison" in case the CBI arrested him.

The CBI has accused Yadav and 55 other politicians and bureaucrats of siphoning 271 million dollars from a government fund set up two decades ago to subsidise cattle feed in Bihar.

India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) and other political rivals of Yadav have called a general shutdown on May 3 to demand his ouster

Analysts say action against Yadav could spell trouble for Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's fragile coalition government, which comprises 13

centrist and leftist parties. Yadav heads the centrist Janata Dal (People's Party) which has 46 of the ruling coalition's 180 members of par-

liament on its rolls. "The law and order in Bihar already merited extra forces, but the new development has been taken into consideration," the Stateman quoted a senior official as saying in the Home Ministry, which plans to deploy troops in Bihar.

3 killed in Paris chopper crash

EVRY, France, Apr 29: Three people died and one was seriously injured when a privatelyowned helicopter crashed southwest of Paris, police said today, reports AFP.

The accident involving an Alouette II aircraft, happened Monday night in a forest at Verrieres in the essonne department. The crash site was found this morning.

The helicopter was reported missing Monday evening. A police search was launched but called off in the early hours, before being resumed this morn-

Leghari arrives in China: Pakistan President Farooq Ahmed Leghari arrived in Beijing yesterday for a two-day working visit at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin, AFP reports from Beijing.

Leghari was accompanied by Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan and minister of commerce, industries and investment Muhammad Ishaq Dar. The two presidents were scheduled to hold talks later yesterday. Pakistan has enjoyed considerable Chinese patronage in the past, and China is currently completing the installation of the Chashma nuclear power plant in Punjab.

Dengue claims 47 in Indonesia: An outbreak of dengue fever has claimed 47 lives in the past two months in the east Kalimantan province capital of Samarinda, the Indonesian Observer reported yesterday, AFP reports from

Jakarta.

the paper the "epidemic has been partially caused by the recent damp and humid weather in which mosquitoes thrive." He said 29 people had died in March from the disease in the province, in the Indonesian region of the island of Borneo, and 18 in April.

The head of the local health department, Dr H M Nuh, told

ROK chopper crash kills 3 aboard: South Korean helicopter crashed yesterday killing all three crew members, an official at Dong Ah Construction Industrial Co Ltd., Reuter reports From Seoul The helicopter, owned by Dong Ah, crashed around 11:40

AM (0240 GMT) about 50 km (30 miles) south of Seoul. Police were investigating, the official said. Gunman kills 1 in US: A masked gunman

opened fire and killed a bank teller during a robbery, authorities said, AP reports from Thousand Oaks. The gunman and an accomplice escaped Monday with an

unknown amount of cash from the Western Financial Bank in this city about 40 miles (65 kilometres) northwest of Los Angeles. "The suspects entered the bank and shot one of the tellers execution-style without provocation," said Ventura County Sheriff's Deputy Bob Brooks.

Thai PM postpones Myanmar trip: A scheduled trip to Myanmar next month by Thai Prime Minister Chawalit Yongchaiyudh has been postponed, Myanmer military authorities said in a statement received yesterday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

"The postponement was due to the request made by the Myanmar side because the initial proposed date for the Thai PM's visit was not mutually convenient," a military official said in a faxed statement. Thai officials were not immediately available to comment on the reason for the postponement of the trip, which came a week after the United States announced it was clamping economic sanctions on Myanmar.

8 executed in China: Eight people including a man who forced women into prostitution have been executed in the southern Chinese city of Shantou, it was reported yesterday, AFP says from Hong Kong.

The eight-criminals were sentenced for crimes including murders, armed robberies and fraud, the China-backed Ta Kung Pao daily said. They were taken to an execution ground in Shantou, in the southern coastal province of Guangdong, immediately after their death sentences were upheld on appeal.

4 die as fire breaks out in Thailand: A fire killed four people living above a shop on the southern outskirts of Bangkok yesterday, police said, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

The fire broke out in the early hours of the morning in a four-storey building where about a dozen workers were sleeping on upper floors, police said. Two people who jumped to safety were taken to hospital with serious injuries, police said.

Floods claim 3 in Russia: At least three people have died and more than 1,000 have been evacuated because of flooding in the Krasnoyarsk region of western Siberia, ITAR-Tass news agency said on Monday, Reuter reports from Moscow.

Tass said blocks of ice had built up in a dam on the Yenisei river, making the water rise by more than 10 metres (30 feet) and flooding houses up to their roofs. Rescue teams evacuated more than 1,000 people on Sunday and Monday and several hundred more had fled their homes to seek safety in the hills, it

If Tories defeated in polls Cabinet will persuade Major to stay on as opposition leader

LONDON, Apr 29: The most senior members of Prime Minister John Major's Cabinet will seek to persuade him to stay on as opposition leader until the autumn if the Tories are defeated in Thursday's election, the Financial Times reported Today, says AFP. The paper quoted "one of his

closest Cabinet colleagues" as saying: "Both from his and the party's point of view, in the event of a defeat he should stay. If not, his legacy would be internecine warfare. He noted that this was the

"clearest indication to date that

ministers are as preoccupied

with the Tory succession as by the contest with Labour.' The Tory source told the paper that Major "Will want to hand over the party in reasonable shape," adding that if there were a summer leadership elec-

tion "it would tear the party

For several years the Conservative Party has been bit terly divided between "Eurosceptic" and pro-European Union factions.

All opinion polls predict a heavy defeat for the party in the May 1 vote, and speculation has been mounting as to who would replace Major if he stepped down after a Labour victory.

Meanwhile, opposition Labour leader Tony Blair is expected to break with tradition and move his family into Number 10 Downing Street if the party wins Thursday's election. Labour sources said yesterday.

This would be the first time that a prime minister with young children - there are three in the Blair family - lived in the central London residence and premier's office.

Blair, his wife, Cherie, and their children could have the pick of a number of central London residences owned by the government. They could also choose to remain at their home in Islington, north London.

But the Labour leader, if he wins on May 1 as predicted in all opinion polls, is to move into the house occupied for the past six-and-a-half years by Prime Minister John Major and his wife Norma, sources

A spokesman for Blair however later described comments about the Labour leader's postelection plans as "inaccurate, unhelpful and inappropriate."

The 10 Downing Street flat is described as a "modest" abode with four bedrooms, a sitting. room, dining room, kitchen and two or three bathrooms.

Financial Times joins newspapers backing Blair

LONDON, Apr 29: With days to a national election, it's not just the electorate that is swing-. ing toward the main opposition Labour Party, reports AP.

Some newspapers are, too. Britain's respected business daily, the Financial Times, came out for Tony Blair's new Labour Tuesday, snubbing the governing Conservatives, party of big business, because of its counterproductive approach to Europe.

"This year, the issue for the business community is whether Britain can remain constructively engaged in Europe during what will be a crucial period for the European Union's economic and political future," the newspaper said.

"If this is the question, there is only one answer. The Conservative party has reached a point which makes it all but impossible for its leaders to implement rational policies towards Europe."

"By default, that opens the door to Tony Blair and Labour," it said.

Less than a ringing endorsement, as the paper itself

"The closer .. Blair has got to power," the less impressive he has appeared," it sniffed.



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein cuts his birthday cake on Monday, in Tikrit. Iraq marked the leader's 60th birthday with lavish celebrations and tributes. - AFP/UNB photo

Russia steps up security along Chechen border

MOSCOW, Apr 29: Russian forces stepped up security Tuesday along the border with the breakaway region of Chechnya after gunmen attacked a police post and a bomb shattered a railway station in southern Russia, reports AP.

The Interior Ministry said more troops were being deployed at border crossings after about 20 gunmen shot up a police post early Tuesday. wounding two police officers. The gunmen retreated to Chechnya after the attack, offi-

Officials in the southern Russian city of Pyatigorsk said Tuesday that the death toll from a bomb explosion at the city railway station Monday had increased to two after a 15year-old girl died overnight. Authorities blamed the attack, which also wounded 16 people, on Chechen separatists, who claimed responsibility for a similar attack last week.

President Boris Yeltsin was briefed on the security situation, his office said. The train station in Pyatig-

orsk, a resort in Russia's Northern Caucasus, was heavily damaged in the explosion near the ticket, windows, officials said.

Probe into US citizenship programme launched sation applications became

over the chairmanship of the 53rd commission of ESCAP Monday.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, Apr 29: The US Justice Department inspector general opened an investigation Monday of alleged mismanagement, misconduct and illegality in the Immigration and Naturalisation Service's citizenship programme, reports

The Citizenship USA programme was the immigration service's vehicle for naturalising more than 1 million people between September 1995 and October 1996. The immigration service has

been under attack for allowing 180,000 foreigners to become citizens without waiting for the results of FBI background checks. Nearly 11,000 of the new

citizens had felony records, but criminal conviction, even on a felony charge, is not an automatic bar to citizenship. An ongoing audit has discovered 168 cases of improper naturalisation. Republicans in Congress alleged the process was rushed in

aliens as possible in time for the November 1996 elections and that Vice President Al Gore's office may have played a role in that. Inspector General Micheal Bromwich said his investiga-

order to naturalise as many

tion will focus on development of the programme in Washington and its implementation in the field. "We will be investigating al-

legations that an initiative that was designed for the commendable purpose of cutting down the backlog of naturali-

something different along the way ... the respects in which it may have gone off the rails," Bromwich said. He said the probe would be

Shah A M S Kibria, Minister of Finance, Government of Bangladesh, who is leading the

Bangladesh delegation to the 53rd session of ESCAP now being held in Bangkok, takes

headed by Special Investigative Counsel Alan W Tieger, a veteran prosecutor who for the last 2 years has prosecuted war crimes for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Tiger-fear grips S'pore island

SINGAPORE, Apr 29: It may sound like the stuff of urban legend, but Singapore authorities are taking seriously talk of tigers at large on one of the city state's outlying islands, reports Reuter. State television and the

Daily Straits Time newspaper said today that police has warned residents of Pulau Ubin, located between the main island of Singapore and the coast of Malaysia, to stay indoors a night. Police have also advised the

public to keep away from the island, the Straits Times said. The warnings came after

quarry workers and an island resident separately reported spotting animals that looked like tigers. Although some three mil-

lion people are crammed into Singapore's 648 sq km, Pulau Ubin has just 600 residents, and large patches of swamp, jungle and remnants of old rubber plantations.

Qian meets Albright

CHAIRMAN

- AFP/UNB photo

WASHINGTON, Apr 29: Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen met Monday with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to lay the groundwork for an exchange of summit visits beginning later this year, reports AFP.

But their talks, which yielded an agreement on navy stopovers in Hong Kong, were clouded by allegations that Beijing tried to illegally influence last year's US general election.

DPRK rejects food aid offer from Vietnam

HANOI, Vietnam, Apr 29: Impoverished North Korea has rejected an offer of free rice from Hanoi and will not allow Vietnam to settle an old debt with rice, a Vietnamese government spokesman said Tuesday, reports AP.

North Korea, which aid officials say could face a famine in months, sent Deputy Prime Minister Kong Chin-tae to Hanoi earlier this month to appeal for 30,000 tons of rice on credit, a Finance Ministry official said.

But Vietnam balked when Pyongyang insisted on dictating the terms of the aid, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Vietnam then proposed paying of an earlier debt to Pyongyang with an undisclosed amount of rice. But North Korea demanded hard currency instead, the official said.

Move to reform state-controlled monopolies in Russia

MOSCOW, Apr 29: President Boris Yeltsin moved Monday to reform Russia's huge gas, electric, rail and telecommunications monopolies and end the old Soviet practice of cheap housing and utilities, reports

Yeltsin signed a sweeping decree aimed at reducing prices and stimulating investment but stopped short of dismantling the so-called "natural monopo-The state will retain control

over these monopolies and will keep their national supply networks intact, First Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov said at a news conference announcing the decree.

Yeltsin has set reform of natural monopolies as a priority of his recently revamped government. Nemtsov, a young reformer, was brought to the Cabinet specifically to deal with that reform.

"Those who support mo-

nopolies in this country are defending corruption and the deepening of economic crisis," Nemtsov said recently. The International Monetary

Fund, which has granted a 10 billion dollars loan to support Russian reforms, says reform of the monopolies - aimed at setting up a wholesale market and rationalising prices - is a condition for the continuation of its financial backing.

But the mostly hard-line State Duma, parliament's influential lower house, generally favours maintaining certain Soviet-era economic features like the monopolies, and has repeatedly asked Yeltsin to abandon plans for their restructuring.

The Duma went on its spring vacation Monday, and hardline legislators were not immediately available for comment.

Yeltsin's decree calls for

stimulating competition in order to bring down production

The government plans to retain its 40 per cent equity stake in natural gas monopoly Gazprom and will work to strengthen · its international position and boost its share

But Gazprom will lose its monopoly right to develop new deposits, which instead will be allocated at open tenders, and will offer equal access and competitive rates on its pipeline network to all produc-

"The main goal is to ensure reliable supplies of gas to consumers and to lower prices." Nemtsov said. The decree calls for the gov-

ernment to maintain its 51 per stake in electricity cent monopoly Unified Energy System (UES) and to preserve a national electric-supply sys-

Generating companies will be allowed to sell directly to large consumers on a regulated national wholesale market. Once a competitive market is created, regional electric companies will be allowed to sell new shares. Nemtsov said.

A separate Yeltsin order signed Monday calls for selling off a 49 per cent stake in Svyazinvest, the national telecommunications holding company. The government will keep its remaining 51 per cent stake in Svyazinvest.

The first tender is expected to be held in May, with a 25 per cent stake on offer to Russian and foreign investors. The minimum bid is 1.2 billion dollars, although Nemtsov said he expects the actual price to be higher. For railways, he said, the

order aims to reduce rates.

stimulate traffic and ensure

railway companies pay their

taxes. Nemtsov noted that railways will remain stateowned. Separately, Yeltsin on Mon-

day signed a potentially controversial decree that will force Russians to pay higher prices for housing and utilities. The Russian government has long subsidised housing and services such as electricity, gas and water. Yeltsin's adminis-

tration is looking to cut back on such expenses — now amounting to 100 trillion rubles (16.7 billion dollars) annually — at a time when the government is short of cash. However, millions of Russians are struggling to make ends meet. Officials like

basic services could provoke Yeltsin's plan envisions a gradual rise in the prices of public housing and utilities. Russians, who now pay just over

Moscow's powerful Mayor Yuri

Luzhkov say higher costs for

one-fourth of the costs, will be paying in full by the year 2003, Nemtsov said. In Soviet times, rents on

state-owned apartments and the costs of public utilities were extremely small. But expenses have grown substantially since the Soviet collapse, and many Russians — especially pensioners - complain that most of their income goes to cover housing and basic services.

Pensioners interviewed by Russia's NTV network said they were already spending most of their meager income on housing and utilities. But Nemtsov argued that the burden would be eased under a programme to help low-income households, including pensioners.

If the government cuts back on subsidies it can expect strong opposition from the Communists and other hardliners who control the State Duma.

First US-Russian joint spacewalk begins Michael "Rich" Clifford walked KOROLYOV, Russia, Apr 29:

Astronauts Jerry Linenger and Vasily Tsibliyev on Tuesday began the first joint American-Russian spacewalk, emerging from the Russian Mir space station for a five-hour mission, reports AP.

Russian space control said the walk had begun on schedule and the two astronauts were fine. It was the first spacewalk for Linenger, and the first time an American astronaut has used a Russian-made spacesuit on a mission.

The two astronauts will install equipment outside the station for experiments on building new spacecraft. They will also gather the contents of a cosmic dust collector left out-

side by previous brews. In March 1996, while the space shuttle Atlantis was docked with Mir, American astronauts Linda Godwin and

outside to install several experiments. It was the first American spacewalk outside a station in 22 years. When the Atlantis docks

with the Mir in May, it will bring Linenger's replacement, astronaut Michael Foale, who is scheduled to spend 4 and half months on board the station. Americans are scheduled to be aboard the Mir continuously to gain expertise needed for the new international space station. The spacewalk comes amid

concern about the safety of the aging Russian space station. Linenger and his two Rus-

sian colleagues have had to contend with a fire, leaking antifreeze fumes, broken oxygen generators and problems with the carbon dioxide removal sys-