

International

US, UK ask top HR official to assess reports of massacre
UNSC considering arms embargo against Yugoslavia

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 11: An arms embargo against Yugoslavia was under review Tuesday by the UN Security Council in the wake of last week's bloody crackdown against ethnic Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo, reports AP.

The US and British representatives on the council also urged the top UN human rights official to visit the region to assess reports of massacres.

"We think the violence should stop, we're talking about deaths of many people, and the international community is working together to find a strong response," US Ambassador Bill Richardson said during a break in the council meeting.

Richardson and British Ambassador John Weston said they would emphasize a total arms embargo if there are no improvements within ten days.

"If there is no improvement during that time, we will return to these measures with increased emphasis," Weston said. "So we all hope that the message will be received loud and clear."

At an emergency meeting in London on Monday, world powers called for an arms embargo against Yugoslavia and threatened to freeze its assets unless Belgrade halts the violence in Kosovo and starts talking peace.

Apparently buckling to the pressure, Serbia for the first time Tuesday appeared to attach no conditions to opening talks with Albanian leaders.

The police action of the past week was "exclusively aimed at fighting terrorism," Serbia said. Dialogue is "the only way to improve political processes"

to solve "vital issues."

The plan agreed on Monday by the contact group on the former Yugoslavia — Britain, the United States, Russia, France, Germany and Italy — had four key objectives: justice, international monitoring within Kosovo, regional security and sanctions.

One possible obstacle to an arms embargo came from

China, one of the five permanent, veto-holding members of the Security Council.

"China holds that the question of Kosovo is an internal affair of Yugoslavia," Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said Tuesday. "With no request made by Yugoslavia, it is inappropriate for the UN Security Council to intervene."

He would not, however, say whether China would use its veto on the matter.

The official death toll from last week's violence is 46 ethnic Albanians and six Serb police. The Albanians say at least 80 of their kin died in two police sweeps through the Drenica region. Twenty-five were buried a week ago at a funeral attended by 30,000 mourners.

The sweeps were prompted by attacks on Serb policemen that the Serbs blame on the outlawed Kosovo Liberation Army.

Richardson and Weston both said they hoped Mary Robinson, the former Irish president and the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, would visit the region soon.

Weston indicated that the unrest in Kosovo would translate into an extension for UN forces currently based in neighboring Macedonia.

"We shall have to consider the implications for UN mandates, for example in relation to Macedonia," he said.

Sanctions against Yugoslavia imposed as a result of its war with Croatia and its support of Bosnian Serbs during the Bosnian war were recently lifted after Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic facilitated the election of a moderate Bosnian Serb government.

Netanyahu condoles death of 3 Palestinians
Jordan, Israel announce new beginning in relations

TEL AVIV, Mar 11: After half a year of strained relations, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan said Tuesday they were entering a "new beginning," reports AP.

While admitting there have been real differences, even personal ones, in their relations, Hassan called for a return to normalisation.

"Prime Minister Netanyahu and I have had our differences and Jordan and Israel have had their differences... but we are looking for a new spirit of mutual respect," he said at a joint news conference after meeting with Netanyahu for two hours in Tel Aviv.

Hassan's visit came days after the appointment of a new chief for Israel's Mossad spy agency, thought to be crucial for revitalising sour ties.

In September, a botched attempt by Mossad to kill a leader of the Palestinian militant Hamas group in Jordan led to the crumbling of relations with Israel's only friend in the Arab world.

Hassan's brother, King Hussein, reportedly held then-Mossad chief Danny Yatom responsible for the operations and froze security cooperation between the countries until Yatom was removed. Last week Yatom resigned and Netanyahu appointed a former Mossad deputy with close ties to the king in his place.

"We have had today a new beginning in the relationship between Jordan and Israel," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu aides said the two leaders discussed the stalled Arab-Israeli peace process extensively. A joint statement said they "underlined the

need to achieve tangible progress by implementing agreements reached between Israel and the Palestinians."

The two sides are mired in dispute over Israel's overdue troop withdrawal from more West Bank land.

Still, Netanyahu and the prince sounded cautiously optimistic that progress could be made and hinted that Hassan had brought Palestinian proposals to the Israelis.

In an unusually conciliatory statement at the start of the press conference, Netanyahu acknowledged that "no one has suffered more as a result of the regional wars here than the Palestinian people."

"Thousands have lost their lives, hundreds of thousands of lost their homes, their dignity and their self esteem, families have been torn apart and many thousands have been condemned to live in sub-standard conditions," he said.

Reuter adds: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telephoned Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to express his sorrow over the killing of three Palestinians by Israeli troops on Tuesday.

The Prime Minister asked Arafat to pass his condolences to the families' Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

The Prime Minister said that Israel is undertaking a thorough probe in order to clarify the circumstances of the incident," it said.

"The Prime Minister told Arafat that Israel is interested in peace with the Palestinians... Arafat told the Prime Minister that he also shares the will to advance the peace process."

"Israeli soldiers shot three Palestinians dead at an army checkpoint west of the West Bank town of Hebron in disputed circumstances."

The army said troops opened fire when a Palestinian truck suddenly veered out of line at the checkpoint, striking and wounding a soldier.

Palestinian witnesses said one soldier opened fire after a second had already waved the vehicle through the checkpoint.

Tribal feud
Gunmen kill 12 in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Mar 11: Gunmen opened fire on a van carrying celebrants home from a wedding in northwest Pakistan, killing 12 people and wounding eight, the state-run news agency reported Wednesday, reports AP.

More than a dozen gunmen opened fire on the van Tuesday evening as it passed near the town of Nowshera, about 120 kilometres (75 miles) north of the federal capital, Islamabad, the Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

Twelve people died instantly in a hail of bullets. Eight others were rushed to nearby hospitals, the report said.

Authorities linked the attack to a personal feud, not the religious and ethnic violence wracking Pakistan, the report said.

Blood feuds are common in Pakistan's rugged Northwest Frontier province, where Nowshera is located.

Maoists kill 6 in Bihar

GAYA, Bihar, Mar 11: Six people including a school headmaster, were killed by banned Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) activists in extremist-hit Gaya, Nawada and Chhatra districts of central and south Bihar, officials Tuesday said.

Gaya District Magistrate, A R K Srivastava, told PTI that heavily armed MCC men surrounded Raksa village under Guru police station Monday night and gunned down two persons.

Police suspect the victims were killed for defying the MCC to boycott Lok Sabha polls.

A Nawada report quoting District police chief, Wasrudin Ahmed, said three beheaded bodies were recovered from different places under Hisua, Govindpur and Akbarpur police stations today.

The victims were reported to have been abducted by the MCC from their villages and done to death.



Moving carefully with the help of a black walking stick Prince Charles, the 49-year-old heir to the British throne, visits the Princess of Wales Hospital at Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan Tuesday. The Prince is recovering from laser hole surgery on his right knee at a hospital in London Monday. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

King Fahd's condition stable: Saudi Arabia said yesterday King Fahd, who was admitted to hospital earlier this week for tests on a gall bladder infection, did not need surgery and his condition was reassuring, Reuter says from Dubai.

The kingdom's Royal Court denied US reports that the monarch, 76 had undergone surgery. "A responsible source at the Royal Court has denied news agencies reports that the custodian of the two holy shrines, King Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz, has undergone a surgical operation," it said. "In a statement to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the source said that the king's health is reassuring and does not require any surgical operation."

Bush renominated in Texas: Republican George W. Bush was easily nominated for a second term, a race that many predict will be a practice run for a presidential bid in 2000, AP says from Austin.

State land commissioner Garry Mauro, a friend of President Bill Clinton who ran both of his presidential campaigns in Texas, was unopposed in the Democratic primary on Tuesday. Bush was declared the winner of the Republican primary with 119,798 votes, or 97 per cent, with 2 per cent of precincts reporting. First-time candidate R C Crawford, a highway contractor, had 3,989 votes, or 3 per cent.

Ex-Soviet defector dies in US: Arkady Shevchenko, the highest-ranking Soviet diplomat to seek asylum in the United States, was working on a book about the Soviet Union's foreign policy establishment when he died quietly in a Washington suburb, the head of a group that helped defectors said Tuesday, AP reports from Washington.

Considered the CIA's top catch of the 70s, Shevchenko defected in April 1978. When he announced through his attorney that he would not go home, Soviet officials claimed he was being held in the United States under duress. "It's really a shame that someone who contributed so much to this country and to the West in general had such an unfortunate and lonely end here," said Bill Geimer of the Jamstov Foundation.

New Miss USA crowned: Miss Massachusetts Shawnae Jebbia has been crowned the new Miss USA, capping the 47th annual pageant, AP says from Shreveport.

Miss Jebbia, 26, of Mansfield, Massachusetts, replaces Brandi Sherwood, the former Miss Idaho who took over for last year's winner, Brook Lee. Miss Lee gave up the title when she was crowned Miss Universe last May. Miss Jebbia beat out second runner-up Melanie Breedlove, Miss Missouri, and first runner-up Shauna Gene Gambill, Miss California, on Tuesday night.

Chernomyrdin, Gore hold talks: US Vice President Al Gore and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin held talks on Tuesday on a full range of bilateral concerns including the thorny issue of Russian missile exports to Iran and Caspian sea oil pipelines, Reuter says from Washington.

Launching the 10th in a biannual series of Gore-Chernomyrdin commission meetings the two sides hailed their five-year partnership which has tackled some of the most sensitive subjects on the post Cold War US-Russia agenda. In a letter read by Gore US President Bill Clinton praised the commission for advancing concrete practical joint projects that have touched the lives of the people of Russia and America and brought our two great countries closer together.

Cuba to get UNDP aid: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said Tuesday Cuba would receive 1.45 million dollars over the next three years through a UNDP aid project to support economic modernisation and reform, Reuter says from Havana.

The money will help to provide training and experts for state institutions directly involved in economic reforms in the communist ruled country, including the Central Bank of Cuba and the ministries of economy and planning, Finance and prices and labour and social security. The agreement on the UNDP assistance programme was signed in Havana on Tuesday by UNDP representative Ariel Francois and Cuba's Deputy Minister for foreign investment and economic cooperation Raul Taladrá.

Pathfinder finally declared dead

LOS ANGELES, Mar 11: After more than five fruitless months, NASA scientists declared the Pathfinder spacecraft officially dead after a last-ditch attempt to communicate with the little rover and lander that made history last summer, reports AP.

Up to the final "time of death" at 1:21 PM local time, they held out hope that they could communicate once more with the comatose craft that likely had long ago succumbed to the cold and dust of the martian winter.

This is sort of the end of the end. This is an actual goodbye," said Richard Cook, the mission manager.

Ben Toyoshima, the flight controller who spent three hours Tuesday looking for a flicker on his computer screen,

took the loss in stride. There was a kind of a sadness, but there was also a sense of closure," he said. "There was a sense of pleasure amongst the flight team because we did everything we started out to do — juring the course of the mission."

He said Pathfinder did seem to go gently, compared with the Mars Observer that disappeared unexpectedly in 1993.

The final chapter of the 266 million dollars mission came as engineers and scientists in the control room at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena waited in vain for even a fledgling radio signal indicating that the spacecraft was still alive.

Protest against Pinochet

SANTIAGO, Mar 11: Violent protests broke out in Chile's capital on Tuesday as students throwing rocks and left-wing activists demonstrated against former dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet, reports Reuter.

Police fired water cannons at demonstrators who rampaged through the heart of Santiago's downtown financial district, chanting slogans against Pinochet, 82 in protest at his retirement to take up a life-long unelected seat in the senate.

Local television showed police firing tear gas in the direction of the demonstrators who grouped at the headquarters of the National Trade Union Organisation, known as the CUT.

Protesters fled in various directions in the city centre's pedestrian zone, chased by riot police brandishing batons.

One officer, his plastic shield smashed by a rock had blood streaming down his cheek several demonstrators were bundled into the back of armoured police vehicles, witnesses said.

Pinochet who ruled Chile with an iron fist between 1973 and 1990 after taking power in a military coup, retired as commander-in-chief of the army on Tuesday after 24 years in the post.

S'pore's first attempt on Everest

KATMANDU, Mar 11: A Singaporean expedition left Katmandu on Wednesday for Mount Everest to begin its first attempt on the world's highest mountain, reports AP.

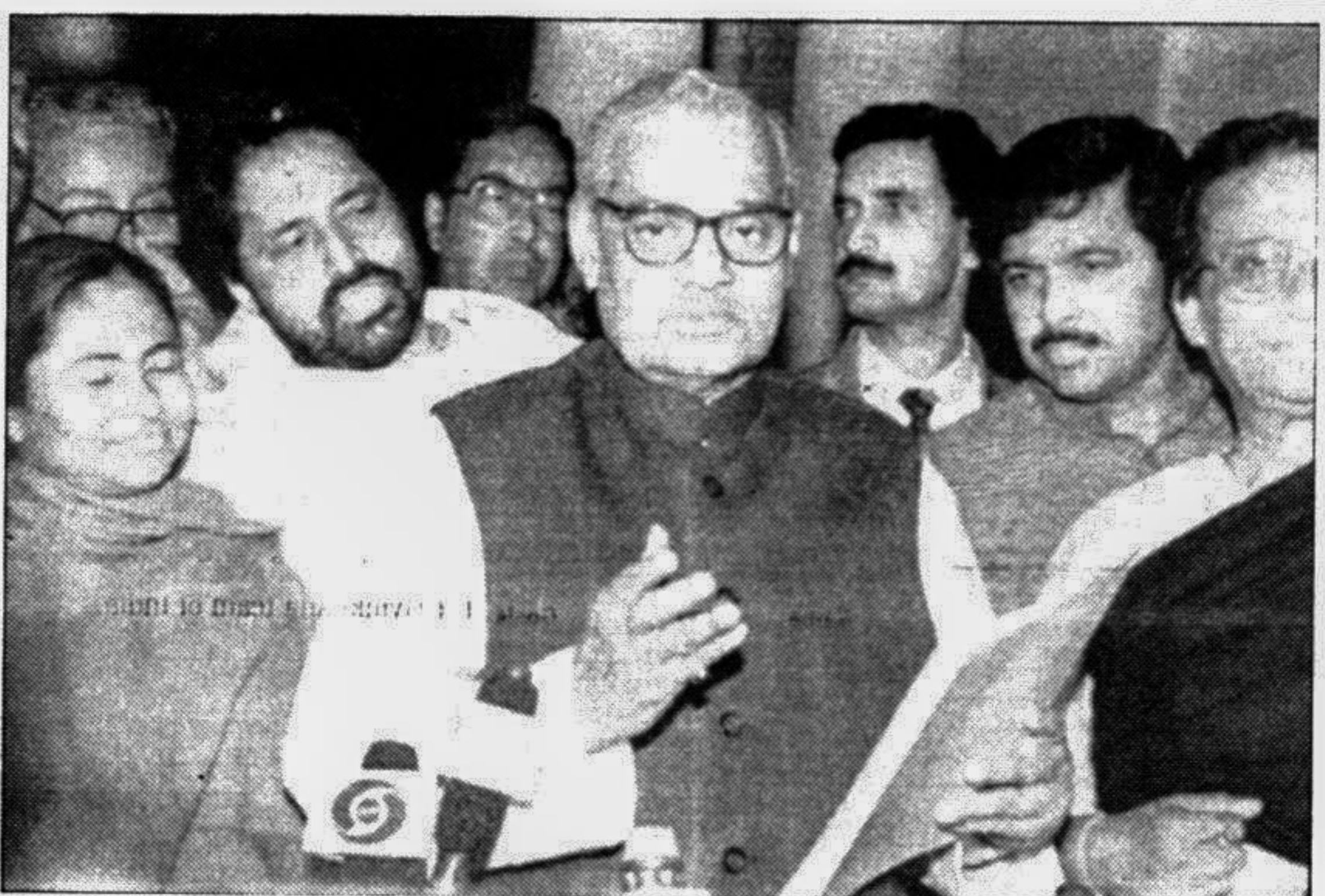
David Lim, 33, a computer executive from Singapore, and a team of cameramen flew to Lukla, a town 2,800 meters (9,240 feet) high to acclimatize themselves for next month's climb.

"The main aim of our Everest expedition is to broaden the interest of mountaineering within Singapore," Lim said in an interview.

Singaporeans have less than 10 years of alpine experience. Last year, Lim and his team climbed Mount Cho-Oyu, 8,201 meters (27,060 feet) high to test their capabilities and equipment.

"We want the sport to develop and gain support in our country and the only mountain that people know is Mt Everest," Lim said.

Lim and his team have been training since Dec 1994 when the idea was first drawn. Since then they have climbed smaller peaks in Nepal, New Zealand and the Swiss Alps.



Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the prime ministerial candidate for the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, reads a letter from Indian President K R Narayanan inviting him to form the next government, at his residence, Tuesday. — AP/UNB photo

10 Janpath-focus of Indians', international attention

NEW DELHI, Mar 11: If Number 10, Downing Street is London's most famous address, then 10, Janpath has come to symbolise power and authority to India's political establishment, or at least its oldest political party, reports India Abroad News Service.

Located in the heart of the capital's privileged neighbourhood, 10, Janpath spells awe, fear and hope for the 113-year-old Congress party which once again saw its bid for power being frustrated at the hustings last month.

The sole occupant of the simple whitewashed bungalow, with a large lawn surrounding it, is today the focus of national and international attention.

The expressions "10, Janpath desires" or media headlines like "10, Janpath chalks out plans" signal power and authority for a woman who holds no formal office, political or otherwise. Sonia Gandhi, Italian-born widow of slain former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, is today emerging as one of the powerful personalities in the country even though her party has virtually given up hopes of forming the next government in India after a hung electoral verdict gave an edge to an alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

After 83-year-old Congress

party president Sitaram Kesri unexpectedly announced yesterday his decision to resign, Sonia Gandhi is expected to take over the reins of the party that has been led by her husband, mother-in-law and two generations before her.

Sonia's influence on the Congress was reflected in the lead story in The Telegraph newspaper of Calcutta which said on March 10: "Reduced to a rubber-stamp and bypassed by 10, Janpath, a bitter Sitaram Kesri today resigned..."

While Kesri has publicly expressed the wish that Gandhi should be the commanding figure in the party, privately he is upset at the way the 52-year-old Gandhi has come to dominate party affairs ever since she agreed to campaign for the party in January.

Sonia barnstormed the country, addressing nearly 140 public rallies and crisscrossing 60,000 kilometres over six weeks. Though hundreds of thousands of people came out to hear her all over the country, in real terms the gain for her party was just in a handful of seats. Congress party strategists acknowledged that her campaigning had resulted in far fewer seats than they had expected but those who swear by her charisma say but for her the party would have been routed.

Newly elected MPs made a beeline for 10, Janpath and there was hardly any of the 141 newly elected lawmakers who had not paid court to her.

Though Kesri did not divulge any reason for his sudden resignation, it was obvious that he was peeved at Sonia Gandhi's backseat driving of the party even though she held no formal position in any of its top bodies.

"I am a common Congress worker but even a Congress worker's sentiments can be hurt," Kesri said. "You all know what had happened during the past one and a half months."

He, however, denied that he was under pressure to submit his resignation and said he had not spoken to Sonia Gandhi about it. "Why do you think that I left Mrs Gandhi everything?" he shot back.

Now that Sonia Gandhi is preparing for a more official political role, possibly as the president of the party, 10, Janpath could come to acquire much greater clout.

Guarded by crack commando units of the Special Protection Group, which protects serving and retired prime ministers and their families, 10, Janpath's significance and attraction could even rival 7, Race Course Road, the official residence of the Indian Prime Minister.

While they had waited for help, those who survived used their hands to dig out the dead. Old men encircled the arriv-

Troops destroy 5 LTTE boats: 30 killed

COLOMBO, Mar 11: At least 30 members of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed and their five boats including one with radar destroyed by the Sri Lankan navy in a five-hour sea battle on the northeastern coast Tuesday, reports Xinhua.

Navy fast attack craft engaged the rebel convoy at Pulmodai coast after intercepting messages from the radar boat believed to be bounding for a rebel base camp at Mullaitivu, Dialay news reported today.

The newspaper quoted navy sources as saying that there were no serious casualties on the navy side and only four navy sailors were slightly injured.

The navy believed that the rebel convoy was heading for a target near Mullaitivu where government forces had been engaged in heavy fighting with the rebels, the paper said.

The Tamil rebels have been fighting for 15 years with government troops in a bid to establish a separate state in the

north and east of the country. Earlier AP adds, a Tamil rebel boat packed with explosives exploded in Sri Lanka's main navy base early Wednesday, sinking a gunboat and killing at least 10 people, military officials said.

The boat, manned by five suicide bombers, was intercepted and attacked by a navy patrol gunboat as it tried to slip into Trincomalee harbor. The rebel boat exploded, destroying the gunboat along with it, said military officials who asked not to be named.

Naval warships recovered the bodies of five sailors and were hunting for another two who were missing.

Officials said the rebels were targeting the large warships anchored in the eastern port of Trincomalee, 230 km (140 miles) north east of Colombo.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam often deploys suicide bombers to strike at military and economic targets.

Biggest student protest held
Suharto sworn in for another term

JAKARTA, Mar 11: Determined to lead Indonesia past economic disarray and into the next century, President Suharto was sworn in for another term Wednesday as students held the biggest protest yet against his long rule, reports AP.

Virtually unchallenged for the last three decades, the 76-year-old president faces a surge of calls for democratic reform as well as a dispute with foreign lenders who doubt his commitment to overhauling Indonesia's sick economy.

In his most pessimistic assessment yet, Suharto told an electoral assembly that Indonesia would never again enjoy economic growth like that enjoyed over the last 25 years. He said international aid was welcome but not the sole path to recovery.

That will clearly help our effort, but the key of success is in our own hands," said Suharto, who is wavering on reforms required by the International Monetary Fund in exchange for up to 43 billion dollars in loans.

Nearly 10,000 students, meanwhile, rallied for democracy as well as better handling of the economic crisis on a campus in the city of Yo-

gakarta, shouting "Bring down prices, bring down Suharto."

"They keep protecting Suharto," Nurhadi, a rally organizer, said of the People's Consultative Assembly, which awarded Asia's longest-serving leader a seventh, five-year term.

"We're not afraid of protesting," read one banner at the rally at Gadjah Mada University. Security forces have tolerated peaceful student rallies on campuses in recent weeks, although they have warned they will snuff out any unrest.

Nine people were arrested Tuesday at a protest forum in Jakarta, where political rallies have been temporarily banned. Yogyakarta is 260 miles (420 kilometers) east of the capital.

The student rallies pose no threat to Suharto's firm grip on the government, which has reached an impasse with the IMF as it struggles to stem high prices and unemployment.

We will never enjoy again economic growth such as we have experienced for more than the past quarter of a century," Suharto said after he took the oath of office, raising his hand as a Muslim clergyman held a copy of the Koran above his head.

Her home collapsed. The air was filled with the sounds of people screaming.

"I screamed and screamed and cried for help, but everywhere people were dying. No one could help me," she cried. Her voice got louder and louder as she recalled the events.

"What is the value of this life?" she sobbed. "Everyone is dead. I am all alone. I wish I was dead."

Afghan villagers devastated by quake struggle to survive

GHANJ, Afghanistan, Mar 11: Three-year-old Zeraya had to cling to her grandmother's back as they trudged through the snow to visit her parents — buried in a communal grave for victims of last month's terrible earthquake, reports AP.

Each grave is marked by a simple wooden spike and holds four of five bodies. More than 1,000 residents died when the February 4 earthquake ravaged this mountain village in northern Afghanistan.

In all, 5,000 people in the region died and 30,000 others were stranded in subfreezing temperatures, with very little food and only the clothes they could dig from the rubble to warm themselves.

After weeks of slogging supplies in by donkey caravan, truck and plane, the International Red Cross and the United Nations say they are now confident the survivors have enough to get through the winter and start over.

The sick and injured of Ghanj were on their own for two weeks before aid workers finally made their way through a snow-clogged mountain pass to reach them.

Zeraya lost her entire family, except for her grandmother, who argued with the arriving doctors who wanted to take the youngster to a clinic in Rustaq, barely 20 kilometres (12 miles) away, for treatment.

For nearly two weeks the elderly woman, who gave her name only as Bibi, had nursed the girl. But a gaping wound in the child's leg had begun to fester and the doctors feared gangrene would set in.

Still Zeraya's grandmother resisted. "Please, my granddaughter... Bibi cried. "She is all I have left. Don't take her."

Dr Mohammed Hatif, head of the aid mission that reached Ghanj, pleaded with Bibi, warning that Zeraya could lose her leg. Finally the woman agreed and the two of them were flown by helicopter to Rustaq, where Red Cross doctors operated on the child.

Just 2 miles (3 kilometres) from the epicentre of the 6.1 magnitude quake, Ghanj lies in ruins. Barely a house escaped undamaged.

While they had waited for help, those who survived used their hands to dig out the dead. Old men encircled the arriv-

ing aid workers, everyone speaking at once, all wanting to see the horrific details. They said they had to carry the bodies on their backs to the outskirts of town where a new graveyard was dug on the side of the hill.

Rotting animal carcasses lay scattered throughout the village. The doctors urged residents to bury the animals because of the threat of disease.

"We have no time to worry about the animals. We are still trying to bury our people," said one old man, who gave his name only as Mohammed.

Stray dogs roamed the devastated village eating the carcasses, growling at anyone who came near. Bibi Zahid Nazaw lost her

entire family — husband and five children. She had just stepped out of her home to pray when the earthquake struck.

She had knelt in prayer when the ground shook and "there was big explosion. It was like some giant kicking the mountain," she said.

Her home collapsed. The air was filled with the sounds of people screaming.

"I screamed and screamed and cried for help, but everywhere people were dying. No one could help me," she cried. Her voice got louder and louder as she recalled the events.