government

Coalition partner quits govt panel

NEW DELHI, Apr 10: A party considered a crucial partner in India's ruling coalition quit a government panel Friday, in a move seen as a precursor to support, reports AP.

withdrawing vital legislative The decision brought calls by opposition groups for a new

Without parliamentary support from the All India Anna Dravida Munnethra Kazhgham Party, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government would lose its majority, unless other groups decide to support

The party, which had already guit the Cabinet on Friday left a multiparty panel that guides government policy.

Opposition parties plan a no-confidence vote when Parliament meets again next week. Vajpayee's Cabinet says the government will manage to stay in power.

The Tamil Maanila Congress Party suggested Sonia Gandhi, leader of the main opposition Congress Party, is the "right person" to take over if Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist-led coalition falls.

It was the first public endorsement of Sonia, the widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, as a possible contender

to be prime minister. Even Communist leaders, longtime opponents of Congress, said Sonia Gandhi's party was in the best position to lead a new coalition government. Sonia has not decided whether she wants to join efforts to form a new government,

Vajpayee came to power last year with the help of 18 other regional and national groups. "Let anybody try as hard as they can, this government will not go," federal Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde said Friday as Vajpayee's troubleshooters try to woo lawmak-

much less lead it.

ers from opposition parties. AFP adds: The survival of India's Hindu nationalist-led coalition government depended solely on political fence-sitters. newspapers said here today.

"Small is powerful," The Times of India headlined an editorial "today, it is the fence-sitters who hold the casting vote." the newspaper said.

"These parties will decide both the survival of the present BJP-led government as well as the composition of its alternative," it said, naming parties with 15 seats between them in the 545-member parliament.

Newspapers, however, said the smaller political groups will first have to resolve their differences before giving a verdict on the fate of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's frag-

ile coalition. The comments came as Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP wooed three minor opposition groups in a desperate attempt to fill up lissures which have developed following a rift with its largest ally, the AIADMK.

The 13-month-old coalition has 280 members in parliament, which reconvenes on April 15. It will lose its tenuous majority if the AIADMK with 18 MPs quits the alliance next week as expected.

The AIADMK has withdrawn its two ministers from the Cabinet in protest over December's sacking of India's naval chief, and Friday it also pulled out of the coalition's policy coordination committee.

The main opposition Congress party, led by Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, is expected by most analysts to form a new government if Vajpayee failed to garner new support, and several smaller groups including the two Communist parties have already pledged to back to

Four KLA men killed

Mission fails to secure release of 3 US soldiers

BELGRADE, Apr 10: A Cypriot envoy is blaming the ongoing NATO bombing campaign for his failure to win release of three US soldiers, saying he had expected Washington to ease off on attacks while his mission was in Yugoslavia, reports AP.

Spyros Kyprianou, current speaker of the Cyprus Parliament, was expected to return home Saturday after failing to persuade President Slobodan Milosevic to free the Americans, who were seized March 31 along the Macedonian border.

NATO jets continued air strikes throughout Yugoslavia during the two nights Kyprianou spent in Belgrade. The visit coincided with Orthodox Easter celebrations. "The intensified heavy

days and made my humanitarian mission more difficult," Kyprianou told reporters Friday after his meeting with Milo-Kyprianou said he had re-

bombing of the last couple of

ceived no assurances from NATO that the attacks would ease up during his mission.

manded the unconditional release of the three servicemen, Staff Sgt. Andrew A Ramirez. 24, of Los Angeles; Staff Sgt Christopher J Stone, 25, of Smiths Creek, Mich; and Spc Steven M Gonzales, 21, of Huntsville, Texas.

In Kukes, Albania, major fighting between Serbs and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) on the Kosovo-Albania border stopped overnight, after four KLA rebels were killed, the OSCE said today.

"The shelling is not continuing at the moment," said Pier Gonggrijp of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) after a day of clashes Friday near the village of Tropoja in northeastern Al-

"There are four KLA fighters who have been brought to the morgue. We still have no information on injuries," he told AFP from the OSCE's local office in the region.

Exchanges of heavy and light weapons fire began at dawn Friday near the village of der area near Tropoja and Kamenica, an OSCE spokesman said. The fighting had still been continuing late Friday.

The Serbian media said NATO hit and incapacitated a Serbian television transmitter near Pristina overnight as attacks continued over Kosovo and the Belgrade region where several detonations were heard.

Five explosions shook Belgrade late on Friday as thousands of volunteer "human shields" turned out to protect potential NATO targets in the Yugoslav capital, the Serbian media reported.

The blasts occurred between 11.34 and 11.40 pm (2134 and 2140 GMT) Friday as NATO warplanes flew over the city. The blasts came some three hours after air-raid sirens sounded.

In Macedonia, UN workers started collecting evidence and testimony from refugees for possible war-crimes trials against Yugoslav officials. In Albania, aid workers said dozens of children had ridden

UN warns against fighting in East Timor

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 10: The United Nations warned on Friday it could not organise a ballot on the future of East Timor unless fighting stopped in the former Portuguese

colony, reports Reuter. "Clearly it is not possible to hold these consultations in an atmosphere charged with fighting," Jamsheed Marker, the UN mediator for East Timor told reporters in reference to a ballot planned this summer in the territory.

"That has to stop. That is a prerequisite. It is something we have told all sides and in particular the Indonesian government and they are aware of that," he said after talks with East Timor independence leader Jose Ramos Horta.

Indonesian and Portuguese officials including their foreign ministers will come to New York on April 21-22 in an effort to complete and autonomy package for east Timor that its residents can either accept or

The United Nations is to organise what Marker called consultations," a method for ascertaining the views of the Timorese, which will be some kind of a ballot.

If the autonomy plan is rejected as expected Indonesia has offered independence to the

tion not recognised by the Untied Nations. Marker said he had expected violence, such as the massacres of villagers on Tuesday by anti-

ballot nears. keepers, despite Portugal's call for their use, but said there would be some kind of a United Nations presence in East Timor along with arrangements for a

"All one can point out to all the parties concerned is that they should try and keep cool and not get provoked into playing into the hands of the people who don't want a settle-

Marker also met the Portuguese and Indonesian UN ambassadors. Portugal's chief envoy, Antonio Monteiro, said he told him, "Does Indonesia control or not control the country?

visit Indonesia next week. would "give the right message."

Militiamen are accused of massacring at least 25 villagers

Niger parliament dissolved

NIAMEY, Apr 10: Rebel soldiers who assassinated Niger's President Ibrahim Bare Mainassara appeared to be in charge in the West African state today, official sources said, reports Reuter.

Prime Minister Ibrahim Assane Mayaki announced the president's death on Friday in a radio broadcast in which he also said Parliament had been dissolved and political activity suspended.

Although Mayaki appears to have taken interim charge of the country, official sources said soldiers who carried out the attack were the ones calling the shots. Some official sources said,

Mayaki had been notified of Mainassara's death by soldiers who asked him to remain at home and await orders. The statement he made on radio was said to have been dictated by soldiers.

There was an uneasy quiet in the capital Niamey after the assassination of Mainassara at the city's airport in a salvo of gunfire from members of his

own Presidential Guard.

The president had been preparing to fly to the interior on a trip that had not been previously announced.

Under Niger's constitution, which has not been suspended, the prime minister has no powers to dissolve Parliament and is not even the head of government in the strong presidential system. It was not clear who would succeed Mainassara.

The dissolved Parliament had been packed with Mainassara's supporters, the opposition having boycotted general elections in November 1996 in a dispute at the root of a prolonged political crisis in Niger.

That boycott was part of opposition protests over Mainassara's own disputed election four months earlier. He had locked up rival candidates and sacked the Elections Commission midway, through the poll a handpicked commission later declared him elected.

Officials said Mayaki went to military headquarters for a meeting with top officers before he briefed foreign ambassadors

in Niamey on Friday's events.

US ambassador Charles O Cecil told Reuters the prime minister declined to answer questions on details of the attack on Mainassara such as the fate of the presumed assailants.

In his broadcast announcing Mainassara's death Mayaki said only that the president had been killed in an "unfortunate accident" police and witnesses at the airport earlier reported the attack by soldiers.

In the morning of Friday, an unfortunate accident resulted in the sudden death of the president of the republic, Mayaki said after hours of confusion in the capital.

In Washington the United States said Mainassara was assassinated by members of his presidential guard but did not disclose the source of the information.

Witnesses said at least three other people died in the attack - Mainassara's chief of personal staff, Colonel Mamadou Moussa, a bodyguard and a senior regional official.

bicycles alone across the moun-Padesh and then spread to the tainous border to flee Serb The United States has dewhole northeast Albanian bor-

A man wearing a military jacket holds a portrait of Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic during a protest rally against NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia in front of TV Belgrade headquarters in downtown Belgrade Friday. - AFP photo

US wants deeper cooperation with

Pakistan on counter terrorism

By Syed Talat Hussain

Palestinian State

Mubarak asks Arafat to delay declaration

TOKYO, Apr 10: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has today, reports Reuter.

lay the date of the declaration." Mubarak said in an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun prior to his trip to Japan. " agree that it should be delayed for some time.

Cairo that if the Palestinians decided to postpone the declaration of an independent state, that the delay should not be longer than five to six months.

"It would be suitable to delay the declaration of independence for two to three months after the May 4 deadline for expiration of interim self-autonomy from Israel." Mubarak told the

Mubarak begins a three-day trip to Japan on Sunday. On Thursday, Japanese For-

eign Ministry officials said that Arafat hinted during his visit to election on May 17. Arafat told Japanese Prime

Minister Keizo Obuchi that all countries he had recently visited voiced support for Palestinian self-rule and urged him

A Japanese official quoted painful decision and it is not an easy decision to make but I hope we will be able to make a deci-

repeatedly said he retains the right to declare an independent Palestinian state on May 4.

BUILFILY

Chilean Cardinal Raul Silva dead: Cardinal Raul Silva, Henriquez, an outspoken defender of human rights during Chile's past military dictatorship, died Friday, Roman Catholie church authorities said. He was 91, AP reports from Santiago.

Silva's criticism of militant leftists and rightists made him one of the leading Roman Catholic church figures in Latin America during the late 20th-century. His outspokenness on human rights made the Church a leading opponent of Gen. Augusto Pinochet's military regime which seized power from an elected government in 1973.

Former Tongan PM dies: Former long serving Tongan prime minister Prince Fatafehi Tu'ipele-hake died in Auckland yesterday, Royal Palace sources said, AFP reports from Auckland.

The death of Tu'ipelehake, younger brother of King Taufa'sahau Tupou IV, has not been officially announced in Tonga. He had been severely ill since retiring in 1991 and lived at 'Atalanga, the royal residency in Essom, Auckland,

US military satellite launched: A Friday eight months after a similar rocket exploded seconds after take off, the air force said, AFP reports from Washington. The rocket blasted off from Cape Canaveral carrying a defense support programme satellite which will be integrated into a network that detects missiles, space lunches and nuclear explosions. The August 12 explosion of a Titan IV rocket just 41

cal short circuit, the air force said. 6 Malaysian students drown: Six schoolchildren drowned and six more were missing when a passenger boat they were on collided with another boat and cap-

seconds after liftoff was found to have been caused by an electri-

sized, a news report said Saturday, AP says from Kuala Lumpur. The collision occurred in the eastern Malaysian state of Sarawak, about 300 km from the state capital of Kuching, on Friday evening, Bernama news agency said. Four bodies were fished out of the river in the remote area on Borneo island and two more were found trapped in the boat, police said.

Floods kill 9 in Colombia: At least nine people died in flooding and landslides caused by heavy rains, the government's disasters office reported, AP says from

Eight were killed Friday when a ravine gave way and came crashing down on homes in Inza, a town 320 km southwest of Bogota in Cauca state, said disasters chief Monica Yamhure. Dozens of families have evacuated the zone with Red Cross assistance, she said.

WASHINGTON, Apr 10: President Bill Clinton will present

the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the top US civilian award, White House said on Friday, re-

Clinton had already announced Kohl would receive the award but had not announced the date for the White House ceremony.

16 years in power.

Mass grave found in Jaffna

COLOMBO, Apr 10: The discovery of at least nine skeletons at a sports ground in Sri Lanka's embattled northern town of Jaffna has raised fears of more mass graves in the region, officials said today, reports AFP.

Six skeletons were dug out from the Duraippa stadium in Jaffna on Thursday, a day after three were found at the same place, local officials said by telephone.

Jaffna District Judge AE Ehananthan has ordered forensic tests on the bones which some officials believe could belong to people who had died or were killed about 10 years ago.

The latest discovery came as the authorities were investigating an alleged mass grave in the Jaffna peninsula where some 400 to 600 Tamils extra-judicially killed are believed to be buried.

Epidemic of viral influenza sweeps parts of Nepal: 820 killed

KATHMANDU, Apr 10: An epidemic of viral influenza and other diseases sweeping parts of Nepal has claimed 820 lives in the past two months, medical authorities were reported saying today, says AFP. The northwest districts of

Kalikot and Jamla were the worst affected with 483 dead and more than 25,000 requiring treatment, the state-run RSS news agency said quoting the epidemitology and disease control division. In nearby Dailekh, the

deaths of 82 people were at-

tributed to measles and viral

influenza and in Gorkha, to the west, 54 persons died of measles or diarrhoea In the 14 worst affected districts of Nepal, 31,914 people have been affected by viral influenza, malnutrition, asthma, pneumonia, diarrhoea and measles, the report said.

Disease Control Division Director Mahendra Bahadur Bista said the outbreaks were now under control with the dispatch of medical teams and medicines to the affected areas.

to former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on April 20, the ISLAMABAD. Apr 10: A group of important US officials ports Reuter. this week concluded a quiet but significant visit to Pakistan

The group was headed by Permanent Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South

> The group members had meetings both at the technical level and at the general policy level with representatives of law enforcement agencies, the interior minister and more importantly with the Punjab Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who has become the Nawaz Sharif government's main man in dealing with the Americans

> which focused on one of the

topmost issues on Washington's

policy in South Asia - terror-

the visit as part of the "series of periodic consultations with Pakistani officials on questions of regional and international terrorism". Pakistani sources, however, confirm that the discussions with the American visitors focused on specific US terrorism concerns emanating from what Washington's perceives as the vast network of terrorism across the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan with international connections. "This visit was not about Osama bin Laden only". The man is still a major

worry for Washington, but he is not the only worry. "This part of the world - Afghanistan. Pakistan and Central Asian Republics — have become in US point of view, both safe havens and transit camps of terrorists of all types and kinds. US wants to monitor this arc of crisis more closely and wants our help in this regard," a

highly placed Pakistani offi-Officials are tight-lipped about what this co-operation means in practical terms. Some do drop broad hints, however, about the scope of co-operation on counter-terrorism with the US to mean "sharing information with Washington on regular basis about the movement of marked men and preventing local groups, essentially religious and sectarian parties. from becoming a smoke screen for internationally wanted terrorists to carry out their opera-

As part of this co-operation Pakistani officials say, Washington is willing to give Pakistan technology, necessary know-how and active guidance on how to track down dangerous criminals and terrorists. During the American visitors meetings with Pakistani officials and politicians, the increasing sectarian violence in Pakistan was also discussed.

The alleged attempts on the life of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by sectarian militants were also broached in meetings which saw "considerable unanimity of views" between the two sides, officials say, Offi-

cials also confirm that Wash ington wants Pakistan to exercise tighter control over those areas of its territory about which, in US assessments, are being used to impart training to militants. While Pakistan's concerns

on the issue of terrorism are less clear and less pronounced, US has a clear view of the nature of threat it perceives from terrorism in this part of the world. Washington does not buy the Taliban's claim that Osama bin Laden has left Afghanistan and insists that it has credible intelligence reports that the Saudi millionaire continues to plot to kill US citizens. Washington also believes that Pakistan does have considerable clout with the Taliban which it has not used to help them deal with Osama bin Laden.

A more broad terrorism concern which US officials express revolves around the Taliban themselves. They have been trying to convince Pakistan that its closeness with the Taliban has no pluses, only negatives. Another US worry centres on smaller religious and militant groups which are the blow-back of the Afghan Jehad against the Soviets.

Already outfits like Harkatul Ansar and Jamaat ul Furqa are found on the US list of terrorist outfits. Increasingly other sectarian groups too are beginning to catch US attention because of their militancy and for the fear that some of them might hide in their ranks terrorists the US is trying to

The rich getting richer, younger & faster

LONDON: Britain's millionaires are getting younger, richer and quicker at amassing their wealth than ever before, according to an annual survey of the nation's richest 1,000, reports AP.

The Sunday Times newspaper, which has published the list

Britain's richest 1,000 people has climbed to 114,829 billion pounds (183,726 billion dollars), from 108,525 billion pounds (173,640 billion dollars) in 1998.

markets," said Philip Beresford, the report's author. Beresford said there were increasing numbers of younger

people who launched successful businesses joining the elite who qualify for the list if they are worth at least 21 million pounds (33.6 million dollars) "They are getting richer, younger, and faster, and this will

A case of mistaken identity

said on Friday his prayers had worked miraculously to secure his release. But it also helped that the abductors had got the wrong man, reporter Reuter. Satya Brata Ganguly, chief executive of battery maker Exide

was kidnapped. He told a news conference that his captors said they had kidnapped the wrong person; they apologised and gave him

Industries, showed up at home late on Thursday a week after he

Earlier, he said, he was kidnapped soon after he went for his usual morning walk in south Calcutta. He said he was beaten up, put in a car and confined to a small room after a long drive. The abductors demanded 20 million rupees, but Ganguly said

I have not done anything in my life for which I should be punished like this."

The prayer was answered the next day. He was blindfolded and taken to "the boss," who said: "Mr Ganguly, I am very, very sorry that we have picked up you instead of somebody else. It is our mistake. We apologise for that. I can assure you that we will not take (any money) from

you or your family and I will release you.' Ganguly said he was offered food and medicine and put on a train to Calcutta.

Manila ready to resume peace talks with rebels

MANILA, Apr 10: The government said it was prepared to resume peace talks with Communist rebels today, a day after guerillas released the first of the five military and police officers they are holding captive. reports AP.

President Joseph Estrada suspended the talks and cancelled safety guarantees for rebel negotiators after New People's Army guerillas abducted army Brig. Gen. Victor Obillo and his aide, Capt. Eduardo Montealton on February 17 in southern Davao City.

Obillo is the highest-ranking military officer seized by the rebels during their 30-year insurgency. The rebels also seized separately police Inspector Roberto Bernal in the northern Bicol

region and an army sergeant in a southern province. Bernal was released Friday by the rebels, who promised a group of priests and a senator that they will free all their captives by April 19.

Luis Jalandoni, chief peace negotiator for the Marxist um-

brella, National Democratic Front, said in a statement that the rebels plan to release the army sergeant on Sunday, Obillo and Montealton on April 16, and a long-held soldier by April 19.

Estrada has said that talks

would be resumed only after all the captives are freed. With the safe release of the government military and police personnel now underway, the government peace panel is preparing for the resumption of

the peace talks," chief govern-

ment negotiator Dewey Dee said

in a statement.

Before Estrada suspended the talks, they had been stalled for months due to a conflict between the two sidespanel insisted on implementing agreement according to the constitution, but the rebels said they wanted to do it based on their own revolutionary justice sys-

Dee said both sides "must clarify the mutually acceptable principles and objectives for the conduct of the talks."

Kohl to receive top US award

Kohl was defeated in German elections last September after

> Asia. E Gibson Lanpher and also included Michael A Sheehan. Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the Department of State who also has served on the National Security Council Staff besides other staff mem-

on significant issues.

US official sources describe

Iraq. Discussion on the proposals will continue for weeks.

But there was no sign the council was moving toward any agreement. Russia, China, France want stringent sanctions against Iraq greatly reduced or lifted entirely as an inducement to arms inspectors returning to the country while the United States and Britain

The UN inspectors have not been allowed to return to Iraq since mid-December US-British bombing air strikes. In Friday's council discus-

oppose this.

with Canada's UN envoy Robert Forwer saying his government accepted the panels' recommendations The disarmament panel concluded that most but not all

of Iraq's weapons of mass de-

tarian issues suggested easing

but not lifting economic sanctions, imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, by allowing foreign investments in its oil industry and some agriculture export commodities.

Peter Burleigh, the chief US delegate, called Baghdad's rejection "unfortunate" while Slovenian Ambassador Danilo Turk said the strong language in Iraq's report was unhelpful. Ambassador Celso Amorim of Brazil, who chaired all three

panels, told reporters, "I don't think we should make too much of initial reactions, the important thing now is for the council to be able to shape a new approach - based on the examination of the three panels taken together". "The net result of the rec-

ommendation is disappointing and falls short of the goal which we should have been clearly recognised and recommended, namely putting to an end to the prolonged regime of sanctions" Baghdad's memo



Hollywood legend Elizabeth Taylor smiles as she holds a news conference in London Friday, where she is due to be given fellowship of the British Academy for her many years in the film industry. - AFP photo

800,000 people in East Timor, which it invaded in 1975 and annexed a year later in an ac-

independence militiamen, to intensify as arrangements for a

He turned down UN peace-

If not, then let someone else in." Monteiro said he hoped Stanley Roth, a US Assistant Secretary of State, who plans to

outside a church on Tuesday,

advised Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to delay the declaration of an independent Palestinian state until at least July, a Japanese daily reported "There are tremendous pressures on Arafat to somewhat de-

Mubarak said in the exclusive interview conducted in Tokyo that he would not declare an independent Palestinian state before Israel's general

not to declare statehood before the Israeli general election, the officials said. Arafat as telling Obuchi that "for Palestine, it is a very

sion that will satisfy everyone." The Palestinian leader has

Off the Record

for 11 years, would not release details of the ranking in advance of the report's publication this weekend. But the newspaper revealed that the combined wealth of

"Everyone is getting much richer because of booming stock

only increase with the growth of the Internet," Beresford said.

CALCUTTA: An Indian businessman freed by kidnappers

some packet money and put him on a train to Calcutta.

he could not afford more than 200,000 rupees. "I did lots of prayers and meditation. And I was praying to guruji (his spiritual master) all the time please save me because

Iraqi rejection of UN report irks Security Council members

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 10: Several Security Council members expressed disappointment on Friday that Iraq had rejected recommendations from UN panels without waiting for the 15-member council to discuss them, reports Reuter.

"Why doesn't Iraq wait and see what comes out?" British

Ambassador Sir Jeremy Gren-

stock said. "It's the result of

what happens in the council that should be of interest to Baghdad in a 24-page memorandum circulated on Thursday, attacked proposals from three panels set up by the council to evaluate Iraqi disarmament sanctions and the fate of Kuwaiti prisoners and looted

Iraq said the panel's reports put new labels on discredited policies and gave its enemies a pretext for aggression. The panels were a modest attempt by a sharply divided council to reach a common po-

property after Baghdad's 1990

sition on its polices toward

invasion of the emirate.

sions several members favoured some sanctions relief

struction had been dismantled and advocated inspections as part of a new monitoring sys-Another panel on humani-