

### Said Hajarian Reformist survives assassination bid in Tehran

TEHRAN, Mar 12: Said Hajarian, a leading reformist politician and newspaper chief, was shot and seriously wounded Sunday in an attack in central Tehran, the official news agency IRNA reported, says AFP.

The agency said he had survived the attack by two men on a motorbike and doctors said his general condition was satisfactory, but he was still in a coma.

## Both India, Pakistan should agree not to deploy N-arms

Experts' observation

ISLAMABAD, Mar 12: Given the deep mistrust between India and Pakistan, the best option would be their agreeing tacitly, if not formally, not to deploy nuclear weapons that are ready for action on short notice, experts from Pakistan and abroad say, reports IPS.

Both countries have declared they are building sizeable nuclear arsenals, and extremely expensive missiles. India's 'Draft Nuclear Doctrine' commits it to a huge, open-ended arsenal with capabilities on land, sea and air.

Pakistan on Feb 3 announced it had set up an effective 'nuclear command and control' structure thus indicating movement towards nuclear weapons induction and deployment.

India and Pakistani officials exchanged no fewer than 13 nuclear threats, whether directly or indirectly during the 10-week long conflict in Kargil last summer, which began just a year after their nuclear tests of

May 1998.

Anti-nuclear experts fear that since "no nuclear command and control system (in the world) has ever experienced the need to function under nuclear attack, there are great unknowns about what effectiveness means or what it requires under nuclear attack."

The 'Command and Control of Nuclear Weapons' in South Asia seminar, end-February, was organised by the Institute of Strategic Studies and the Islamabad Council of World Affairs, and participants included US, British, and Russian experts.

Participants agreed that the scope of the nuclear command and control (C-3) issue will depend on whether India and Pakistan deploy operational nuclear forces ready for action on short notice. If such nuclear forces are not deployed, the near term requirements are comparatively manageable, they said.

"If deployment proceeds, the

full range of C-3 requirements would have to be developed," says a consensus statement from the seminar.

Agha Shahi, former foreign minister, noted that Pakistan's military ruler Gen Pervez Musharraf has made it clear that Pakistan will use nuclear weapons only as a last resort if its security is threatened.

However, he said "last resort would be difficult to precisely define, given the asymmetry in conventional as well as nuclear arms of Pakistan and India and Pakistan's lack of geographical depth."

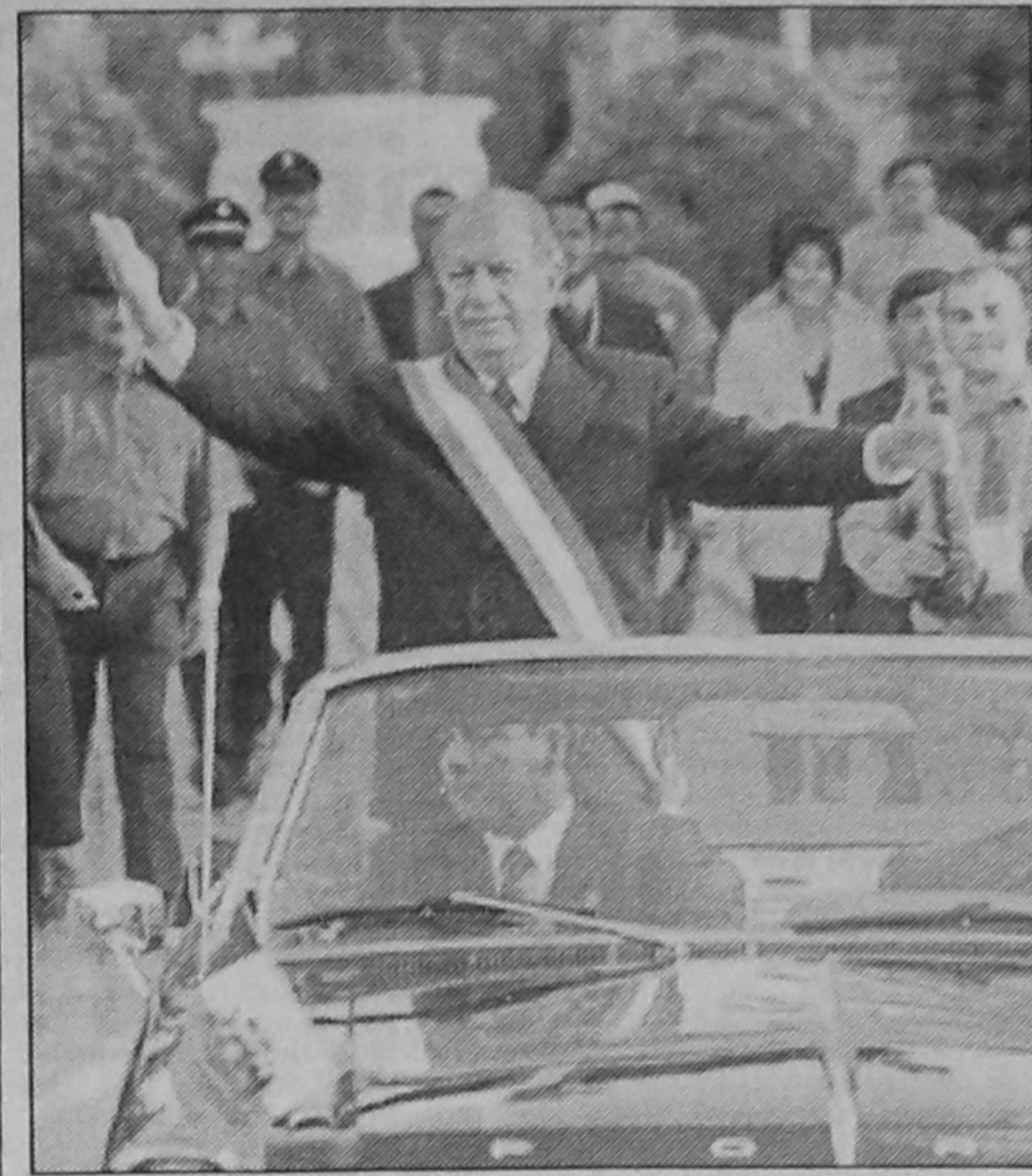
He said that some experts, including Dr Tanvir Ahmed Khan, ISS chairman and former foreign secretary, think that a policy of ambiguity may be best for Pakistan's security interests while others favour an open declaration by both countries of the size of their nuclear arsenals, their deployment and the circumstances in which they may be used.

"Pakistan may well be confronted with a hair-triggered alert situation. A launch on warning system would elude both countries of a 2 to 10 minutes flight time for a missile. The risk of a nuclear strike by miscalculation or unauthorised use would therefore be very high," Shahi observed.

But Sir Michael Quinlan, former British Undersecretary Defence, maintained that any use of nuclear weapons has to be related to ending the conflict not to winning it.

In deterrence, he said, it is vital to know at what point there would be a nuclear showdown — the other side should be clear where the lines are drawn which, if crossed, would provoke a nuclear strike. Any C-3 system would be quite expensive.

Dr Rodney Jones, president of Policy Architect, US, however, said there were simpler, less costly C-3 systems like that erected by the West.



The new President of Chile Ricardo Lagos waves to supporters from a motorcade after taking the oath of office Saturday in Santiago. The moderate leftist Lagos, 62, became Chile's new president in a ceremony marked by the absence of his long time foe, ex-strongman and senator for life Augusto Pinochet.

### Lagos sworn in as new Chilean President

VALPARAISO, Chile, Mar 12: Ricardo Lagos has been sworn in Chile's first socialist president in nearly three decades, promising to fortify a young democracy and help those left out of its legendary free-market expansion, reports AP.

Lagos, a 62-year-old lawyer who won national fame a decade ago fighting Gen. Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, pledged to curb a powerful military still staunchly loyal to the former military ruler.

"This is a fiesta for democracy," a smiling Lagos, wearing a dark suit and red tie, said Saturday. He took his oath Saturday in the Congress building in this port city as leaders from Europe and the Americas looked on and applauded.

After the inauguration, he flew to Concepcion, 564 km south of here. Addressing thousands of flag-waving supporters, he promised a major effort to fight poverty.

Poverty and destitution will always be evils that must be eliminated," Lagos said.

He said his quick trip to Concepcion was aimed at showing that his will be a government for all Chileans — one that will pay attention to the problems of the provinces.

## BRIEFLY

### US, UK jets pound S Iraq:

US and British warplanes attacked targets in southern Iraq on Saturday, injuring eight civilians, the official Iraqi News Agency reported, AP says from Baghdad.

The agency did not specify the nature of the targets hit or their location, but it said the planes flew over sites in the provinces of Basra, Dhiqar, Muthana, Najaf and Missan.

### Accident claims 4 in Vietnam:

Four people were killed and 19 others injured when an overloaded mini-bus collided with a truck in the southern province of Dong Nai, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

Four people including two children died on the spot, provincial police told AFP, adding another seven were in critical condition. The 12-seat mini bus carrying 23 passengers crashed into an on-coming truck on the South-North National Highway about 80 km north of Ho Chi Minh City early Saturday, they added.

## Chinese envoy warns India against Karmapa

NEW DELHI, Mar 12: India should ensure that the January escape of a teenage high Lama from Tibet is not used "by some forces" for political activities against Beijing, Chinese Ambassador to India Zhou Gang said today, reports AFP.

Zhou told the Press Trust of India that the escape of the 17th Karmapa Lama should not be "utilised to obstruct friendly relations between India and China."

When asked if Beijing had reservations about the Karmapa Lama being allowed to stay in India, the envoy said: "It is quite early at this stage to comment."

Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, has warned India it has a moral

obligation to allow the

Karmapa Lama to remain here. In an interview to the BBC World Service's "Hard Talk" programme Saturday, the Dalai Lama said "refusing the Karmapa Lama refuge in India would be 'morally wrong' and many Tibetans would be 'gravely disappointed' by such a decision."

The Karmapa's arrival in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala — seat of the exiled Tibetan government — was embarrassing for New Delhi which is keen to improve ties with Beijing but has traditionally offered refuge to tens of thousands of Tibetans.

Zhou said Chinese authorities had no idea of the Karmapa Lama's plans to flee to India.

## Italian navy intercepts ship carrying 300 migrants

ROME, Mar 12: The Italian navy has intercepted a Ukrainian-registered ship carrying 300 illegal immigrants off the south coast of Italy, reports AFP.

The 'Meek' was brought into Reggio di Calabria early Sunday, where port authorities confirmed that the vessel was carrying 297 people, including 45 women and 90 children.

The immigrants were of Turkish, Iraqi and Afghan origin, and were in good health, the same source said.

The vessel left Ukraine a week ago and water and food supplies on board had virtually run out by the time the ship docked.

## 'Pakistani terrorism causing security problems for India'

NEW DELHI, Mar 12: Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani today said Pakistani-sponsored terrorism had created major security problems in the country over the last 20 years, the Press Trust of India reported, says AFP.

Advani, the cabinet number two in India's Hindu nationalist-led coalition government, said arch-rival Pakistan was fuelling insurgency since it could never tackle India's military might in a full-scale war. "There was a time when the centre (New Delhi) did not have to do much about law and order

which is the responsibility of respective state governments," Advani told parliamentarians in the northern town of Ghaziabad, which borders New Delhi.

"However, since early 1980s, the internal security of the country has deteriorated due to terrorism sponsored by Pakistan," he said.

"Pakistan thought it cannot win a direct war with India and so it developed a new strategy to infiltrate militants to destabilise the country. Bomb blasts and other activities were engineered to create terror."

India and Pakistan have fought three battles, apart from a de facto war in the disputed state of Kashmir last year. India blames Pakistan for fuelling a Muslim militant drive in Kashmir which has claimed more than 25,000 lives since 1989.

Islamabad denies the charge but extends moral and diplomatic support to the unrest.

Advani said India was fully geared to "defeat Islamabad's evil designs," adding Pakistan would "lose its proxy war like it lost all the direct wars."



US Vice President and Democratic presidential hopeful Al Gore (R) and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley laugh as they march Saturday in a St. Patrick's Day parade in Chicago.

## Gore, Bush eyeing polls, money, maps & potential running mates

WASHINGTON, Mar 12: Triumphant in the primaries, Al Gore and George W. Bush, are testing messages, raising cash, counting electoral votes and considering potential running mates for what promises to be a hard-fought presidential election, reports AP.

"I think Gore came out of the process strengthened and Bush came out of the process weakened. And that probably puts them on equal ground," said Chicago-based Democratic consultant David Axelrod, expressing the view shared by analysts in both parties.

Republican consultant Ed Gillespie of Washington predicts "an incredibly tight election" and said "both of them have a lot of work to do in the next eight months."

In the span of an hour, former New Jersey senator Bill Bradley conceded defeat Thursday to Gore and Arizona Sen. John McCain bowed to Bush — leaving only the collection of delegates in one-sided primaries to clinch their nominations.

In a quick pivot, Gore and Bush began planning for the fall election. The polls Bush and Gore emerged from primary fights in a dead heat for the presidency. National polls released after their Super Tuesday landings showed the pair even in both head-to-head matchups and in public perceptions of their political skills.

In actual voting, exit polls showed that Californians, given a choice between Bush or

Gore, selected the vice president over the Texas governor 51 per cent to 44 per cent. His panics, an emerging force in national politics, chose Gore by more than a 2-to-1 margin in the state.

Though not binding, the balloting was closely watched because California is the biggest electoral prize in November. Gore almost certainly can't win the presidency without the state's 54 electoral votes, analysts say. Republican advantages elsewhere make the state slightly less critical for Bush.

The Map: It takes 270 electoral votes to be president. If Bush can win states claimed by 1996 Republican nominee Bob Dole, he starts with a base of 156.

## 6 detained over Lanka suicide bombings

COLOMBO, Mar 12: Sri Lankan police have arrested six people in connection with a devastating suicide bomb attack and a shooting spree that killed 29 people in the capital Colombo, officials said today, reports AFP.

Police detained the suspects after recovering some documents from the eight suicide bombers who were shot dead or detonated explosives strapped to their bodies during orgy of violence that started Friday and ended Saturday.

Officials said the suspects were being questioned to establish if they were directly linked to the daring attack blamed on the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas.

### Suicide probe gets underway

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan investigators were today trying to piece together how Tamil rebels infiltrated a high security area to carry out a deadly suicide attack that left 29 people dead and 75 wounded.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) may have been trying to carry out a high-profile assassination but were discovered before they could ambush a ministerial motorcade.

However, the rebels still went on a shooting spree after staging a suicide bombing and fought commandos overnight until eight members of the suicide squad were either killed or blasted themselves to pieces by Saturday morning.



British film director Sam Mendes poses with his feature film director's award at the 52nd Annual Directors Guild of America (DGA) Awards in Los Angeles Saturday. Mendes won for his film "American Beauty".

## New security alert against Hamas in Israel

JERUSALEM, Mar 12: Israel put its security forces on high alert today, fearing attacks by the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas. Internal Security Minister Shlomo Ben Ami said on state radio, reports AFP.

Ben Ami said several members of a Hamas cell broken up by police on March 2 were still at large, "and we have taken the necessary measures."

The radio said police feared they were in possession of two or three suitcase bombs ready to be detonated against Israeli targets.

Four men from the cell, said to be planning simultaneous suicide attacks in Israeli cities, were killed and one arrested in the Arab town of Taibeh north

of Tel Aviv during a day-long police siege of a house.

Police were posted Sunday in large numbers in key areas like shopping centres and bus stations, patrolling and checking identities, while urging the public to be vigilant.

The army also set up roadblocks, notably on roads coming the Palestinian-controlled West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The radio said Palestinian police were cooperating with their Israeli counterparts.

Hamas is strongly opposed to the peace accords between Israel and Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation, and has carried out numerous attacks on Israeli targets, killing dozens of civilians in suicide and other operations.

## Taiwan keeps wary eye on China ahead of polls

TAIPEI, Mar 12: Taiwan said today it saw no signs of any Chinese military war games to intimidate voters ahead of next weekend's presidential polls but was keeping a wary watch on Beijing, reports AFP.

In a news program aired by the state-run Chinese Television System, Defense Minister Tang Fei said he did not see "China preparing to resort to force" in settling its 50-year dispute with Taiwan.

"The information we have suggests they are not going to stage a large scale military exercise over the next week," Tang said, as candidates continued to solicit backing in islandwide campaigning for Saturday's elections.

Tang contrasted the current

tensions with the situation four years ago when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) lobbed ballistic missiles into the shipping lanes off the island to scare voters not to back President Lee Teng-hui, then seeking another four-year term.

"Despite the bad weather, in 1996 the PLA held several live-fire war games targeting Taiwan," he recalled.

"This time they have exercised restraint, at least for now."

But he said the military would not relax its vigilance "because national security must not be ignored."

Tensions between Taipei and Beijing escalated after Beijing hardened its position toward the nationalist island, warning

in a 'White Paper' that Taiwan must hold reunification talks or face an invasion.

The two sides of the Taiwan Strait have been separated since Mao Zedong's communist forces drove the nationalists here in 1949 at the end of a civil war.

On Thursday Chinese President Jiang Zemin called on the mainland's armed forces to be constantly aware of the need for combat readiness, noting a strong military would guarantee reunification with Taiwan.

And Taiwan's government agency which formulates policy towards the mainland has not ruled out the possibility of Chinese military manoeuvres after the polls.

## India craves moon to crown its bumpy space odyssey

NEW DELHI, Mar 12: India's national space agency, which saw its maiden satellite launched into orbit after eight years hard work in 1983, is now looking at a moon mission to stamp its mark in the global space community, reports AFP.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which is tinkering with a rocket engine for its glitch-ridden Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) project, says an unmanned lunar mission could be launched by 2008.

ISRO spokesman S. Krishnamurti, however, said the agency had yet to receive a green light from the government.

"There is no approved project. However, some preliminary discussions have taken place between ISRO engineers

and Indian scientists on the feasibility of a lunar mission," the spokesman said.

Studies on a possible rocket have focused on the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), which is already capable of carrying a 1,250-kilogram (2,750-pound) payload 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) above the earth.

"A lunar mission can provide impetus to science in India, a challenge to technology and, possibly, a new dimension to international cooperation," said an upbeat ISRO Chairman K. Kasturirangan.

"It can also serve as a test bed for future missions which could be undertaken by India to explore outer space in the new millennium."

Indian scientists have been debating the voyage since 1997

and last October they held their first public brainstorming session on "scientific objectives, trajectories, conceptualisation of spacecraft and the capability of Indian launch vehicles to undertake the mission," an ISRO source said.

Spokesman Krishnamurti said either of India's two launch vehicles could be modified to reach the moon's orbit, but scientists who have worked with the rockets sounded a note of caution.

"It would be a tall order," said a former senior ISRO systems scientist who had worked on the GSLV — a rocket designed to put a 2,000-kilogram (4,400-pound) satellite some 36,000 kilometres (22,320 miles) in space.

### Voting begins in Spain

MADRID, Mar 12: Polling stations opened across Spain at 9:00 a.m. (2:00 pm BST) for general elections in which 34 million eligible voters will decide between giving the centre-right government a second four-year mandate or handing power back to the left-wing opposition, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar's Popular Party is considered the favourite in the polls by a small margin over an alliance comprised of the Socialist Party and the communist-led United Left.

Voter surveys conducted before a blackout in the final week of campaigning suggested the Popular Party would gain a few more deputies than the 156 it currently holds in parliament — but not enough to assure an outright majority in the 350-seat house. Meanwhile, the Socialists, led by Joaquin Almunia, figure they can close the three-to-five percentage-point gap with the Popular Party, particularly after having struck the last-minute deal with the communist-led United Left.

## Tigers miss targets, but keep fear alive

COLOMBO, Mar 12: The human bomb is the most lethal weapon in the armoury of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels, but after a series of the legendary suicide missions has misfired, there are fears even deadlier tactics will be employed, reports AFP.

A strike force of eight members of an elite suicide squad of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam failed in their most recent assassination mission but caused enough mayhem to leave 20 others dead and 75 wounded in the capital Colombo.

The attack that started on Friday evening and went on until the following dawn saw an unprecedented number of suicide bombers, known as 'Black Tigers', taking part in a single operation, a police source said. He said the use of eight

bombers may have been prompted by three failures since the guerrillas' abortive attempt to assassinate President Chandrika Kumaratunga on December 18 at an election rally here.

Kumaratunga escaped with an eye injury but 26 others were killed and over 110 people wounded when a woman detonated explosives strapped to her body as the president prepared to leave the gathering.

Then on January 5, another woman staged a suicide bombing outside the office of Kumaratunga's mother, Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike.

The authorities said the attack in which 11 people were killed may have been intended for a senior minister driving through the area.

The rebels failed again on March 2 when they mounted an attack on the top military commander in the northeastern district of Trincomalee, Colonel Piyal Abeysekera. Instead, they killed his driver.

"Perhaps it is because of this string of failures that they deployed a large group of suicide bombers for a single operation on Friday," a police official said at the scene Friday.

He said the rebels could have scored a bulls eye if not for a vigilant resident who alerted police to gunmen hiding in the undergrowth near the main road leading to the national parliament building.

A government statement Saturday said all eight members of the attack force, who were either shot dead or committed suicide by later detonat-

ing explosives strapped to their bodies, were Black Tiger bombers.

The guerrillas have not claimed responsibility for the attack but suicide bombing has been the trademark of the LTTE since July 5, 1987, when about 40 soldiers at an army camp in the north of the country were killed in the first such attack.

Unlike their counterparts in the Middle East, Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger suicide bombers are not motivated by religious beliefs but by their unquestioning loyalty to Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Prabhakaran, 45, is Sri Lanka's most wanted man, but for his band of highly committed guerrillas he is a charismatic leader and by all accounts a great military strategist.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair, his wife Cherie (R), acting President Vladimir Putin (2nd R) and his wife Lyudmila (L) before a performance at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg Saturday. Blair and Putin attended the opening at the Mariinsky Theatre of "War and Peace," an opera by Sergei Prokofiev.

## Blast claims 80 in Ukrainian coal mine

KIEV, Mar 12: A methane gas explosion ripped through a coal mine in eastern Ukraine on Saturday, killing 80 miners, reports Reuters.

Local news media said the accident, at the Barakova mine in Luhansk region, was Ukraine's worst for at least two decades.

President Leonid Kuchma and Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko both cancelled pending trips abroad because of the accident. Yushchenko sent officials from Warsaw to launch an investigation.

"Eighty dead in the final figure," Volodymyr Sherbinin, deputy head of the Emergency Ministry's regional headquarters in Luhansk, told Reuters. "Another five are in a serious condition and two are in an intermediary condition."

The regional head of the industrial safety, Olexi Vishnevsky, said rescuers had recovered all the dead and injured after combing the entire area of the blast.